

From: [Clare Crowson \(Clare@floridapromise.org\)](mailto:Clare@floridapromise.org) <ClareAF@meridianstrategiesllc.com>

To: [Undisclosed recipients:](#)

CC:

Date: Fri, 9/16/2011 4:05:46 PM

Subject: Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 9/16/11

Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 9/16/11

For more education news, visit www.TheEdFly.com.

NATIONAL NEWS

- 1) [White House details plans for more digital learning](#); Toppo – USA Today
- 2) [An Alternative NCLB \(nee ESEA\) Blueprint](#); Hess – Education Week
- 3) [Some States, Districts Abandoning Performance Pay](#); Fleming – Education Week

FLORIDA NEWS

- 4) [Teachers Union 'Crying Wolf' Over 'Layoffs' as Districts Eye New Salaries](#); Ward – Sunshine State News
- 5) [Camden County High School selected for pilot calculus program](#); Staff – Florida Times-Union

STATE NEWS

- 6) [Arizona approves 75 'empowerment' accounts in voucher-like program](#); Reese – East Valley Tribune
- 7) [Expanded online education plan urged for Iowa students](#); Dooley – Des Moines Register
- 8) [New Jersey: Bergenfield School District to participate in state pilot program](#); Griffiths – Twin Boro News

NATIONAL NEWS

White House details plans for more digital learning

USA Today

By: Greg Toppo

September 16, 2011

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/story/2011-09-16/digital-promise-white-house-education/50419910/1#.TnMpha7GAvg.twitter>

WASHINGTON – The [White House](#) will unveil plans Friday for a research center that aims to infuse more digital learning into the nation's classrooms.

The center, dubbed "Digital Promise," will aid the rapid development of new learning software, educational games and other technologies, in part through helping educators vet what works and what doesn't.

Among the new ideas: a "League of Innovative Schools" that will test-drive promising technologies and use its collective purchasing power to drive down costs.

"Given the power of this technology, the administration believes that we should be doing everything we can to take advantage of it," said Tom Kalil of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. While he acknowledged that games and online learning aren't "a silver bullet for education," he said the Obama administration wants to support "the ways in which technology can really make a dramatic impact on student performance and student outcomes."

A large group of high-tech business and non-profit organizations is supporting the effort, which is being overseen by the U.S. Department of Education. Perhaps the most unusual partner: Valve Corp., developer of the popular *Half-Life* and the *Portal* series of video games. Valve will host a competition for middle- and high-school students and teachers that allows them to create new levels of *Portal* for classroom use. The game is finding a second life in classrooms as teachers modify it to teach physics.

The idea for the center — its official name is the National Center for Research in Advanced Information and Digital Technologies — first emerged a decade ago. A handful of foundation leaders urged former [Federal Communications Commission](#) chairman Newton Minow and former [NBC News](#) president Lawrence Grossman to create an organization that would help schools figure out how to use the Internet and other technologies to help students learn.

The pair wrote a 2001 book, *A Digital Gift to the Nation*, but they had to push for seven more years for the center to take shape. Congress didn't approve funding until 2008.

Since 2001, digital communication has exploded. A decade ago, there was no Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, and few teachers even communicated with families through e-mail.

"It's hard to believe what's happened in 10 years, technologically," said Minow, who along with Grossman will co-chair the center. "

was a different world."

Today's announcement comes 50 years after Minow delivered his often-quoted speech in which he called television "a vast wasteland."

Minow now says he's excited about the promises of digital technology in school.

"Our country has so many problems," he said, "but I think that the answer to many of them is found in education."

[\(Back to top\)](#)

An Alternative NCLB (nee ESEA) Blueprint

Education Week

By: Rick Hess

September 15, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2011/09/another_set_of_nclb_nee_esea_blueprints.html

Yesterday, several key Senate Republicans announced [a five-bill package](#) laying out their vision for overhauling No Child Left Behind (nee ESEA). The proposals offered by Senators Lamar Alexander, Richard Burr, Johnny Isakson, and Mark Kirk sketch a dramatically leaner federal role than does the Obama administration's "ESEA blueprint" (which itself represented a big step back from NCLB circa 2001).

The GOP proposals would retain strong federal requirements regarding transparency, annual assessment, and disaggregation of data; that Title I dollars be used to serve low-income children; and that states take steps to address their worst-performing Title I schools. But they would streamline the Title I plans that states submit to the Secretary of Education for approval, put an end to NCLB's ill-conceived and paper-driven "highly qualified teacher" provisions, provide immense flexibility when it comes to spending Title II and Title IV dollars, have Washington stop requiring states to label every school as making or not making "adequate yearly progress," and get the feds out of the school improvement business.

One key Republican Senate staffer explained, "The administration gave us a blueprint. We think this is reflective of [that] in a way Republicans can support. The quiet conversations need to speed up. States and school districts need relief now and we have an obligation to act. Here's where we want to be. It's time to put up or shut up. We're saying, 'Here's how we'd fix NCLB, how would you do it?'"

The accountability bill would instruct states to establish college-career standards, without telling them what that entails. It would continue to require annual assessments in reading and math in grades three through eight, and once in high school, as well as in science, and it would maintain disaggregation reporting requirements. States would be required to maintain a uniform system of accountability, which could incorporate growth rates or graduation rates or other measures, and to identify at least the lowest performing 5 percent of Title I schools. The law would require states to use one of six turnaround models for those schools (a modified version of the four current models, a rural model which offered leeway, and one that states could devise with an okay from ED).

The Title II and Title IV consolidation doesn't entail overall cuts, though that'll provide little relief to the DC lobbyists and association who love their pet programs. States and districts would be able to shift Title II and Title IV dollars back and forth, and to move those dollars into Title I, but--unlike in the House Republicans' flexibility proposal--Title I dollars could not be shifted elsewhere.

The proposal consolidates based on fiscal year 2011 spending levels, collapsing 59 programs into two pots and give states and districts near-total leeway in spending those funds. The new Title II would total about \$3.3 billion and would include all the various programs that currently sit in Title II, including those that are academic or involve professional development (e.g. programs for smaller learning communities, libraries, advanced credentialing, women's educational equity, history programs, and so forth). The Title IV pot would total about \$1.5 billion for programs related to student safety and health (block granting current programs for alcohol abuse, mental health, physical education, combating domestic violence, and so on... and, oh yeah, the historic whaling program is here too).

The charter bill is modeled almost entirely on the House's just-passed charter bill, except that it will also allow charter management organizations to compete directly for federal funds. Right now, only states or districts can compete for those funds; under this provision, a CMO like KIPP could compete for direct federal grants.

In a clear shot at Secretary Duncan's [much-maligned plan](#) to announce "conditional waivers," the Alexander/Burr waiver bill would clarify section 9401 of NCLB to make clear that it is intended to provide a state-driven waiver process and not a vehicle for imposing new administration policy requirements. As one GOP Senate staffer explained, "The Secretary can issue waivers or set up a peer review process, ensure that states still do what they should be doing, and deny a waiver if he reasonably thinks it won't improve student achievement...but he can't attach conditions that couldn't win legislative support."

Remember how that vaunted edu-bipartisanship melted away in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio this year when Republicans pushed forward with, well, Republican reform proposals? Once again, Democrats for Education Reform were [quick to blast](#) the Republicans charging that they would "set education reform back by more than two decades." Charles Barone, DFER director of federal policy, accused Alexander et al. of "capitulat[ing]" to the "education establishment" and "pull[ing] the rug out from under parents and state

and local advocates across the political spectrum."

DFER archly opined, "Whose bidding [the Senators] are doing here is unclear. But it is surely not that of groups like the Children's Defense Fund, the National Council of La Raza, [or] the U.S. Chamber of Commerce." I can't decide whether I find it funnier that DFER expects Republicans to do the bidding of the Children's Defense Fund, or that they're now complaining that Republicans *aren't* doing the bidding of the Chamber of Commerce.

Turns out that those who chided conservatives for critiquing the Obama administration's edu-proposals for violating the "historical bipartisanship" don't have any such concerns about Democratic attacks on GOP proposals. That was all just posturing. This is a useful reminder that Democrats for Education Reform--swell people who like children and dogs--are, well, *Democrats*, who ultimately prefer a more expansive federal role than do most conservatives. (Note that StudentsFirst's Michelle Rhee, often depicted as the rightmost of the Democratic reformers, [embraced](#) the President's newest edu-stimulus proposal.) Nothing wrong with any of that, but let's stop imagining that big, serious disagreements about the role of Washington are going to melt away when it comes to schooling--or that anyone should expect conservative policymakers to obediently embrace DFER's agenda.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Some States, Districts Abandoning Performance Pay

Education Week

By: Nora Fleming

September 16, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/09/16/04pay_ep.h31.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/09/16/04pay_ep.h31.html?tkn=VVOFOBYfjUQtPHjGysT4rqQT%2FIL28CQ%2Fv3cO&cmp=clp-edweek)

[tkn=VVOFOBYfjUQtPHjGysT4rqQT%2FIL28CQ%2Fv3cO&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/09/16/04pay_ep.h31.html?tkn=VVOFOBYfjUQtPHjGysT4rqQT%2FIL28CQ%2Fv3cO&cmp=clp-edweek)

Two competing pressures—decreased finances and rising policy interest—have left the future of performance-based teacher compensation uncertain.

A dicey fiscal climate and research that has shown limited impact have led some states and districts to scale back, abandon, or change their fledgling merit-pay programs, causing observers to wonder what the next few years will hold for compensation systems that link teacher pay to student achievement.

Just this summer, Texas officials squelched funding for the country's largest merit-pay program, from \$392 million to \$40 million, blaming the state's deficit. And New York City wiped out its \$56 million schoolwide program, citing disappointing research results. Yet new examples are also springing up, largely because of increased federal funding for performance pay and state and federal legislation encouraging, and in some cases requiring, alternative-compensation schemes.

Still, there may not be a "trend" to predict the future of such programs, said Matthew Springer, the director of Vanderbilt University's [National Center on Performance Incentives](#), in Nashville, Tenn., and an assistant professor of public policy and education.

"The next couple of years will be very telling [because of] local/state revenue shortfalls as well as the possibility of the federal funding well running dry, and the research evidence, to date, hasn't been overwhelmingly positive," Mr. Springer said in an email. "At the same time, it is critical districts/states do not lose sight of the fact that current compensation practices are incredibly inefficient."

Abandoning Programs

While increasing attention has gravitated toward the evaluation and compensation practices for teachers, specifically in shifting from traditional salary models tied to experience and education levels to merit-pay systems that factor in a teacher's impact on student achievement, some say the interest in performance pay could be faddish and short-lived.

The journal *Education Next* [reported](#) this spring that only 500 out of 14,000 districts had merit-pay programs. Two of the largest programs in the country were also dismantled this summer.

The 90 percent reduction of Texas's [District Awards for Teacher Excellence](#) program, which provided one-time bonuses linked to performance reviews, will mean the number of teachers receiving bonuses could decline from 180,000 this year to 18,000 within the next two.

The program is a victim of the state's budget deficit that led to some \$4 billion in cuts to school funding overall, state officials say, and not lack of support for merit pay.

A Texas Education Agency official says the program was thought to be successful, based on research conducted by the National Center on Performance Incentives in 2010. Nevertheless, the agency said it doesn't expect teacher performance to suffer from the significant decline in bonuses.

Some Texas districts have had more favorable results than others, however. In Houston, criticism emerged that the district let too many teachers qualify for bonuses, yielding minimum impact on teacher performance. The state reduced Houston's share for teacher bonuses this year by \$13.9 million. Now it will use that as an opportunity to rework its program, said Jason Spencer, a spokesman for the district, tightening the eligibility criteria, but making the overall bonuses high.

But both state and district teachers' union members worry that the merit-pay programs themselves are a waste of money and do little to improve teacher performance.

"Right now, our teachers can't work any harder or do any more. Our teachers are already working longer hours with bigger classes and are still expected to perform at a higher level," said Rita Haecker, the president of the [Texas State Teachers Association](#). "We tend to disagree that people perform better with a reward. We think people perform better when they feel supported in their job and are paid a living salary."

Other states are also abandoning performance pay. According to the Denver-based [Education Commission of the States](#) Alaska's three-year program recently ended, mainly because of friction with local unions. Iowa's program was also eliminated.

And money isn't the only reason some places have backed off performance pay.

In July, the Santa Monica, Calif.-based RAND Corp. released a [study](#) of New York City's merit pay program that found no substantial impact on teacher, student, or school performance. The district later announced it would discontinue the three-year program.

The RAND study adds to a growing body of research that has found limited effects of merit pay, such as one conducted on Nashville teachers last year.

The research is not abating, either. [Mathematica Policy Research](#) has been commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education to assess the 2010 round of [Teacher Incentive Fund](#) grantees over the course of their grant cycle. It is unknown whether the first round of grantees, awarded in 2006, will continue their merit-pay programs after their five-year grants expire at the end of this year. TIF requires districts to institute performance pay based on student achievement.

Coming on Board

A number of states and districts are still moving forward with plans or pilots for new merit-pay systems, and others have maintained them through innovative or hybrid models even though they face limited finances and have yet to prove significant statistical impact. Some of those efforts stem from increased federal support for merit pay. A provision in the Race to the Top program requires states and districts to change their teacher-evaluation practices and encourages them to be tied to salary. In addition, funding for the Teacher Incentive Fund has been increased from \$99 million to about \$400 million within four years, giving states and districts the opportunity to try new ways of paying teachers.

Indiana, Michigan, Utah, and Idaho, for example, have all looked at implementing or expanding performance pay in their states within the past year alone. And some places that even have a prior history of ineffective merit-pay models are still trying to put new systems in place.

According to Kathy Christie, the chief of staff at the ECS, many of the earlier state and district programs were unsuccessful because the incentives were too small or the models were untested. The new systems may have different effects, she said, because many have tried to increase incentives and strengthen criteria and evaluation practices.

"We could have seen the first generation of performance-pay systems, and perhaps we'll start seeing [a new generation of systems] that are more robust, more meaningful, and have an impact on recruiting people to the teaching profession," Ms. Christie said. She pointed to Florida as one example.

Since the 1970s, Florida has tried a number of models with limited success. The voluntary nature of its last performance-pay effort found only 5 percent of the state's districts participating. Still, Florida is trying again.

Its winning Race to the Top application in 2010 included a proposal to implement teacher salary increases linked to student performance, and this past year, the state legislature passed a law that will require districts to put new salary schedules in place for teachers by 2014-15, linked to recently revised state teacher-evaluation practices.

Under the new plan, 50 percent of a teacher's summative evaluation will be tied to student performance, and, based on locally negotiated teacher contracts, teachers can earn increases if they are deemed effective or highly effective. Payouts to teachers will be determined by each district. The tighter a district's budget squeeze, the more likely raises will be low, or nonexistent.

Kathy Hebda, Florida's deputy chancellor for educator quality, said the state is optimistic the program will be more effective than Florida's earlier merit-pay plans, given lessons learned from the past. The new system uses salary increases rather than one-time bonuses, which will provide more incentive to teachers Ms. Hebda said. The new evaluations will also provide all teachers, regardless of subject matter, the potential for performance-based salary increases. (In earlier models, the incentives focused more on teachers who were able to be evaluated through student assessments in core subjects.)

The Florida teachers union has already come out against these efforts and has threatened legal action.

Virginia is also moving in the direction of state-supported merit pay. Using a combination of state and federal funding, Virginia is implementing a pilot program this year. An incentive package was offered to 169 schools listed on a "hard to staff" list, that will provide bonuses to teachers in those schools that receive exemplary ratings on the state's new evaluation system, which links 40 percent of the teacher's evaluation to student growth on state tests, among other measures.

The state is also developing improved evaluation systems that link student performance to teachers, said Charles Pyle, the education department's communications director, and it hopes the pilot program will encourage more districts to restructure their compensation practices. Twenty-five schools accepted the state's offer this summer.

Ohio Gov. John R. Kasich, a Republican, has gotten behind a proposed merit-pay system for his state, too. While a number of the state's Race to the Top districts are already implementing some form of performance pay, the governor's proposal this past spring for a new state-supported teacher-compensation system would have all other districts implement some sort of performance-based pay for teachers by 2013-14, based on their respective collective bargaining agreements.

Even the new models are controversial.

"There has been a tendency to avoid some of the evidence of what works because it doesn't fit the popular narrative," said Rob Wei, the director of field programs, for the American Federation of Teachers. "We need to design systems that drive instructional improvement that lead to increased student achievement. Many of the recent attempts have shown that this is not happening."

Future of Merit Pay

Several large urban districts have adopted performance pay the past few years and have kept them going despite limited supportive research, disagreements with local teachers' unions, and declining finances. The varied incentivized compensation models some districts have implemented, which take into account more than student test scores, and, in some cases, do not rely solely on state or district funding, may be the right direction, say some analysts.

Denver's [Professional Compensation System for Teachers](#), or ProComp, one of the oldest surviving merit-pay programs, is a joint effort between the teachers' union and school district and uses local taxes for funding. ProComp factors teacher education level and skills, as well as evaluations and student achievement, into account in determining salary increases and bonuses.

In the District of Columbia's [IMPACT-Plus](#), supported through private dollars, teachers can earn higher bonuses based on the school they work in and the subject matter they teach, in addition to their students' test scores. And Baltimore's teacher-contract system adopted last year, allows teachers to earn annual salary increases tied to student performance, as well as such factors as

professional development and teacher evaluations.

Mr. Springer of Vanderbilt's performance-incentives center said that many of the existing programs add on incentives or bonuses rather than redesign compensation practices in ways that could potentially yield greater results and cost less. He estimates 80 percent of districts' operational expenses go toward outdated educator compensation systems, that aren't linked to student academic outcomes.

Whether districts and states test innovative compensation strategies given the available resources, he added, "will likely be dictated by interest group politics and if the system can amass adequate ... knowledge to design and operate them."

[\(Back to top\)](#)

FLORIDA NEWS

Teachers Union 'Crying Wolf' Over 'Layoffs' as Districts Eye New Salaries

Sunshine State News

By: Kenric Ward

September 16, 2011

<http://www.sunshinestatenews.com/story/teachers-union-crying-wolf-over-layoffs-districts-eye-new-salaries>

Sunshine State News ArchivesHide

The state teachers' union was "crying wolf" when it claimed that "thousands" of school workers would be laid off this year, says the head of the Florida School Boards Association.

"The Florida Education Association was incorrect about layoffs. They're crying wolf," said FSBA president Wayne Blanton. "Very few districts have laid anyone off."

Blanton's comments confirm an earlier Sunshine State News survey that found few districts following through on threatened terminations.

The FEA did not respond to Sunshine State News' request for comment.

Despite widespread complaints about budget shortfalls, the vast majority of the state's 67 districts have found ways to keep their teaching and supports staffs intact.

For example, Broward County School District mailed nonrenewal letters to 1,447 teachers last May.

By the end of the school year, the district reported just "117 teachers placed on layoff due to lack of full-time vacancies in their subject areas."

Displaced instructors have since been absorbed and the district says it currently has "over 150 vacancies in mathematics, science and special education."

Dozens of smaller districts, such as St. Lucie County, report no staff reductions in either their teaching or nonteaching ranks.

In fact, St. Lucie has even approved across-the-board 3 percent pay increases for all its workers to offset the new state requirements for employee retirement contributions.

Though suffering from one of the worst real-estate collapses in the country -- and commensurately lower property tax revenues -- the St. Lucie district was also able to reduce its tax rate.

Collier County also has increased teacher compensation, and Pasco County is considering a hike.

Andrew Spar, president of the Volusia Teachers Organization, said, "We believe the district can do something to help employees and still have cash reserves."

In Polk County, two charter school systems -- McKeel and Lake Wales -- approved offsetting raises.

Most districts, however, are still negotiating contracts, which have been complicated by the inauguration of merit-pay programs this year.

Max Schmidt, executive director of the Florida School Labor Relations Service, said it's "too soon in the process" to say how many districts will adjust salaries.

"They still don't know what they're doing as far as the bottom line is concerned," Schmidt said from a meeting of education leaders in Tampa on Thursday.

Turning the FEA's layoff claims on their head, at least one local union official is blaming "excessive hiring" for a paucity of teacher

pay raises.

"Pinellas County's teachers are suffering in part because school district leaders have failed to adequately address nine years of declining enrollment," the head of the teachers' union was quoted as saying in the St. Petersburg Times.

Kim Black, president of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association, said the district for too many years has allowed schools to hire at a rate that outpaces student need.

"If you can't even afford the people you already have, why are you hiring more?" Black asked.

Statewide K-12 enrollment is projected to increase by a bare 0.47 percent to 2,654,454 students this year, according to the Office of Economic and Demographic Research.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Camden County High School selected for pilot calculus program

Florida Times-Union

By: Staff

September 16, 2011

<http://jacksonville.com/news/georgia/2011-09-16/story/camden-county-high-school-selected-pilot-calculus-program#ixzz1Y7O3xdbY> September 16, 2011 - 06:29am

Camden County High School selected for pilot calculus program

The College Board has selected Camden County High School to participate in an advanced placement calculus pilot program.

Deeming it an innovative high school, the board selected Camden from among all the nation's high schools, said Beverly Strickland, a Camden County school system spokeswoman.

The program will be offered to the high school's students and teachers via the Internet, video lessons and other educational activities provided by the College Board, she said.

"This program is unique because the makers of the [advanced placement] exam are preparing this pilot curriculum and allowing our students access to this program," high school Deputy Principal Heath Heron said.

Based on College Board research, the program is based on three calculus foundations. If students master those concepts, they are expected to score a 3 or higher on the advanced placement exam. Most four-year colleges give high school students credit, advanced placement or both on an advanced placement exam score of 3 or better.

The College Board is a non-profit association representing nearly 6,000 colleges, universities and schools. It reaches more than 7 million students, 23,000 high schools and approximately 3,800 colleges annually. The association leads efforts to improve access to and readiness for higher education.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

STATE NEWS

Arizona approves 75 'empowerment' accounts in voucher-like program

East Valley Tribune

By: Michelle Reese

September 15, 2011

http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/arizona/article_9176139e-dfed-11e0-85cb-001cc4c03286.html

The Arizona Department of Education approved 75 "empowerment savings accounts" for students with disabilities to attend private schools this fall. The accounts total just over \$1 million.

The state Legislature created the voucher-like program in the spring. Applicants had to be students who qualify for special education services in areas such as autism, language delays or visual impairment, and who have attended a public school in the previous school year for at least 100 days.

Students are awarded funding that totals 90 percent of the money a public school would have received had the student enrolled there. On average, schools receive between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per student, though special education students are funded more because of the services they require.

Proponents say the savings accounts will help save tax dollars, since they would not be enrolled in a public school and they do not receive 100 percent of the funding.

The lowest account awarded this fall was about \$1,900. The highest was \$28,000. The average was \$13,600, according to the education department.

The funds can be used to pay for private school tuition, pay for home school curriculum, or fund tutoring or other services. Funds leftover can be used for post-high school expenses.

The next round of applications will be due in November for the spring semester.

State lawmakers previously set up school vouchers for special education and foster care children, but the state Supreme Court said that program was unconstitutional. Unlike vouchers, proponents say, the savings accounts can be used to fund a variety of educational expenses.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Expanded online education plan urged for Iowa students

By: Sheena Dooley
Des Moines Register
September 16, 2011

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20110916/NEWS/309160053/1004/NEWS02/Expanded-online-education-plan-urged-Iowa-students>

Iowa students would have greater access to online courses under a proposal that significantly expands the state's virtual class offerings.

A committee of educators and business leaders presented the Iowa State Board of Education on Thursday with recommendations for expanding Iowa Learning Online. The program, which now has 625 students, offers 13 courses for high school credit to Iowa students.

The group's proposal calls for adding to the program over three years. The state would increase the courses it offers, while boosting enrollment to 5,000 students. The growth would allow students to take online courses full or part time, while providing them access to classes their school might not offer.

Leaders estimate the recommendations would cost just more than \$6 million over the three years. Money would come from tuition and state funds. Committee members said they are looking at possibly charging districts upward of \$300 per semester hour, although students in other states with online schools typically only pay \$150, said Gwen Wallace Nagel, an Iowa Department of Education consultant.

Currently, Iowa offers its online courses free.

The state board made online learning one of its top priorities this year. The proposed expansion also fits into Gov. Terry Branstad's plans to overhaul the state's education system, spurring innovation in teaching to better meet the needs of technologically savvy students. Online courses also provide students with more flexibility and base success on what students learn rather than how much time they spend in the classroom.

Board members applauded the group's work, although some said they wanted to increase enrollment faster than what is outlined in the plan.

"Twenty-five other states have more students than we do in virtual learning," said Max Phillips, state board member. "We need to learn, but we don't need to go slow, because our students are already behind."

Wallace Nagel said she is open to enrolling more than 5,000 students outlined in the proposal. Doing so would require more money from the state as well as flexibility from lawmakers to hire staff and buy software and other equipment. She said it would take at least six months to set up the needed infrastructure to support the growth.

The state would purchase programs from other states that have successful online schools.

Leaders plan to gradually expand online courses to middle and elementary schools. Also, they hope to eventually share courses with other states, Wallace Nagel said.

State education officials will meet with Jason Glass, Iowa's education director, to discuss how to proceed, said Kevin Fangman, a department deputy director.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

New Jersey: Bergenfield School District to participate in state pilot program

Twin Boro News
By: Erin Patricia Griffiths
September 15, 2011

The [Bergenfield](#) school district has been chosen by the state Department of Education as one of 11 districts that will be participating in a teacher evaluation pilot program this year.

The program, Excellent Educators for New Jersey (EE4NJ), will begin to evaluate teachers based upon "multiple measures" of teacher practice and student performance, according to a news release issued by the Department of Education.

[Bergenfield](#) was one of 31 districts that applied to the program and was selected to participate in the pilot, which will be used statewide in 2012.

"New Jersey's teachers have a unique role in shaping students' lives by equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in college and the work force," Gov. Chris Christie said in a Sept. 1 news release, "and every New Jerseyan is cognizant of the great work being done in the classrooms across our state."

"The pilot district program we are moving forward with today will help to develop fair and meaningful evaluation systems that finally recognize and celebrate great teachers, and provides teachers at all levels with the support they need to constantly improve," he added.

Approximately \$1.1 million in grant funding will be divided up among 10 of the districts. Newark, which is the 11th participating district, will be funded through a separate grant, officials said.

State Commissioner of Education Chris Cerf attended the Sept. 1 staff's opening day in [Bergenfield](#) for the 2011 faculty convocation.

[Bergenfield](#) Schools Superintendent Dr. Michael Kuchar said Cerf wanted to "acknowledge and recognize the work of the faculty and staff for their contribution toward the dramatic rise in student achievement in the Bergenfield schools."

"The [Bergenfield](#) public school district is continuing to build upon its success as one of the fastest-growing school districts in the State of New Jersey," said Kuchar.

The program is the result of a New Jersey Educator Effectiveness Task Force that was created last year by Christie and released a report with a new outline for improving the teacher evaluation system in place.

According to the State Department of Education, the pilot system contains the following core principles:

- * Teachers should never be evaluated on the basis of a single consideration, such as test scores much less a single test, but on the basis of multiple measures that include both learning outcomes and effective practices, with approximately 50 percent associated with each.
- * Where applicable, the component of the evaluation based on "learning outcomes" should include, but is not limited to, progress on objective assessments such as NJ ASK. In untested grades and subjects, for example, student achievement might include a focus on student work or locally determined criteria.
- * To avoid penalizing teachers who work with our highest-need students, evaluation criteria should favor student progress and not absolute performance.
- * To give teachers meaningful information to help them develop, the prior system of binary ratings (either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory") will be replaced by a four-tiered system, including "ineffective," "partially effective," "effective" and highly effective.'
- * Districts should provide a direct link between the results of the evaluation and professional development opportunities to help teachers at all levels continuously improve.
- * To assure consistency and fairness, plans should address inter-rater reliability – solving for the problem of differences in how individual evaluators review teachers across schools and districts.
- * Any personnel consequences connected with evaluations remain a matter of local decision and applicable state law and are not an element of the pilot program.

"On the whole, current teacher evaluation systems across the state are not as meaningful as they should be," Cerf said in a news release.

"Many teachers do not receive yearly evaluations," he said, "and most systems fail to measure the most important outcome of teacher practice – student performance."

[\(Back to top\)](#)