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**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 10/31/11

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 10/31/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Clock Ticking on Senate Bill to Overhaul NCLB**

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

October 31, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/11/02/10esea\\_ep.h31.html?tkn=XMRf2c5tKbmC5SA5Wq9xFXbElpSodtworyw&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/11/02/10esea_ep.h31.html?tkn=XMRf2c5tKbmC5SA5Wq9xFXbElpSodtworyw&cmp=clp-edweek)

*Legislation may be derailed by competing priorities*

Leaders of the Senate education committee still aim to push a bipartisan revision of the much-criticized No Child Left Behind Act through Congress by year's end, in time to stave off the Obama administration's move to offer states waivers of parts of the nearly decade-old law.

That appears to be a tall order, given the short and crowded legislative calendar, polarized political climate, and lack of consensus within the K-12 community on issues—such as accountability and teacher quality—at the heart of the law, the current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The next stop for the bill, sponsored by U.S. Sens. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and Michael B. Enzi, R-Wyo., is a hearing Nov. 8 before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee.

Despite a 15-7 committee vote [Oct. 20](#) approving the bill, the measure to reauthorize the ESEA faces a range of opposition, much of it centering on changes to accountability provisions involving specific subgroups of students, including minorities, English-language learners, and students with disabilities.

Civil rights groups, some state schools chiefs, and business leaders are concerned that those changes would amount to a watering down of the core goals of the NCLB law, which sought to shine a spotlight on groups of students whose lagging achievement was often masked by higher performance overall at the school or district level. The Obama administration has also expressed concerns about how the Senate bill deals with accountability.

“Increased flexibility at the state and local level is consistent with the administration's policy on waivers,” U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in an [Oct. 17 blog post](#) on the Department of Education's website. “However, it is equally important that we maintain a strong commitment to accountability for the success of all students, and I am concerned that the Senate bill does not go far enough.”

For their part, GOP lawmakers are likely to seek changes further scaling back the federal role in education, including stripping language from the bill that would require states to focus on schools with the largest achievement gaps among students in various subgroups and their peers.

*Floor Obstacles*

But the Senate legislation also is garnering praise from some advocates who were initially skeptical.

The [American Association of School Administrators](#), which less than two weeks ago urged Congress to slow down on reauthorization, is now pleased with the direction the legislation is taking, said Noelle Ellerson, the group's assistant director for policy and advocacy, although the AASA has not endorsed the measure.

"We like the way it's going," Ms. Ellerson said. In particular, she gave a thumbs-up to the legislation's focus on the bottom 5 percent of schools in terms of student achievement, and its plan to scrap the NCLB law's signature yardstick—adequate yearly progress, or AYP—in favor of allowing states to show still-to-be determined "continuous improvement" in student outcomes.

But if lawmakers try to get the measure on the floor of the Senate before Christmas, they will face a major time crunch.

Members of Congress are struggling to reach agreement on a series of spending bills for fiscal year 2012, which started Oct. 1.

And the so-called "supercommittee," a bipartisan panel of 12 lawmakers tasked with making long-term recommendations for the nation's fiscal health, is slated to present its plan to Congress before Thanksgiving. Those proposals are expected to set in motion a fierce battle over budget-deficit reductions, which could eat up even more time in the legislative calendar.

Some political analysts see the potential for the ESEA legislation to hit President Barack Obama's desk before December 2012.

"There are not huge policy differences on the major issues" among Senate lawmakers, said Vic Klatt, a longtime aide to Republicans on the House education committee who now serves as a principal at Penn Hill Group, a government-relations firm in Washington. "You can see a path to getting this bill done within this [session of Congress]. The question is whether they can work out the politics."

If and when senators take up the ESEA reauthorization bill, debate is certain to include issues central to K-12 educators—including accountability for student achievement, ways of increasing teacher quality, and methods of turning around poorly performing schools.

But Charlie Barone, the director of federal legislation for Democrats for Education Reform, a political action group based in New York City, said it could also get bogged down in issues that many may consider tangential to the ESEA, including school prayer, condom distribution in schools, and military recruitment on campus. Mr. Barone is opposed to the ESEA legislation.

"There's all types of monkey business when an education bill comes to the floor," Mr. Barone said. That prospect might make Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., the Senate majority leader, reluctant to bring the measure up for a vote, said Mr. Barone, who served as an aide to Rep. George Miller, the top Democrat on the House education committee, when the NCLB law was drafted in 2001.

### *Streamlining*

Like a measure approved by the House education committee earlier this year, and like the Obama administration's own ESEA reauthorization proposal, the measure approved last month by the Senate committee would seek to consolidate a number of Education Department programs.

In place of smaller, more targeted programs, the bill would create broad baskets of funding aimed at improving high schools, boosting literacy instruction, and bolstering student health and safety.

The literacy language, in particular, would provide for comprehensive instruction beginning in early childhood. That would help refocus the federal role in reading, which has been lacking since the elimination of funding for NCLB's troubled Reading First program, said Susan Frost, a former Education Department adviser during the Clinton administration, who now serves as a vice president at the Sheridan Group, a Washington government-affairs firm.

Overall, the Harkin-Enzi legislation would eliminate authorizations for more than a dozen programs, including education of gifted and talented students, Ready to Teach, and character education.

During committee consideration, Sen. Robert Casey, D-Pa., added language that would create a fund aimed at providing grants to states to improve financial literacy, foreign-language instruction, environmental education, and other subjects. The "Well-Rounded" fund would consolidate such programs as Teaching American History, Foreign Language Assistance, and Excellence in Economic Education.

Lawmakers also added language authorizing Educational Technology State Grants, which help states provide professional development for teachers in using technology.

The program tally is likely to spark debate as the bill moves forward, said Joel Packer, a principal with the Raben Group, a government-relations organization in Washington.

“The mood is that we should be consolidating programs, streamlining programs, having more-flexible programs,” Mr. Packer said. “Once programs are added, it makes things more difficult, particularly on the Republican side. I think there’s going to be a lot of counting how many programs are repealed and how many new areas we’re concentrating on.”

### *Obama Priorities*

The Senate bill would add new authorizations for the Obama administration’s big education redesign initiatives, including the Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation grant programs. Those programs are likely to be top targets for lawmakers trying to slim down the federal Education Department. The measure also would eliminate a number of smaller programs—such as the Even Start Family Literacy program—that lost their funding in the fiscal 2011 spending bill.

But the bill does include detailed language that describes politically connected programs that lost their funding in the fiscal 2011 appropriations process, making them eligible for new grants. For instance, the bill includes language stating that federal money can go to programs that distribute inexpensive books to low-income children, a spot-on description of the mission of Reading Is Fundamental, which lost its \$25 million federal grant earlier this year.

### *House Action*

Meanwhile, members of the House of Representatives are taking a different tack, breaking reauthorization into bite-size pieces. U.S. Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., the chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, is still working with his colleagues on both sides of the aisle on legislation dealing with accountability and teacher quality, said Alexandra Sollberger, his spokeswoman. Rep. Kline is hoping the committee will consider that measure in the coming weeks, she added. The full House has approved only one bill, which would aim to make it easier to scale up charter schools with proven records of success.

And the House education committee has approved two other bills. One would eliminate more than 40 programs in the Education Department; the other would permit districts to transfer money into—or out of—nearly every federal K-12 program, including Title I grants for disadvantaged students.

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## **In a Standardized Era, a Creative School Is Forced to Be More So**

New York Times

By: Michael Winerip

October 30, 2011

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/31/education/no-child-left-behind-catches-up-with-new-hampshire-school.html?\\_r=1&adxnnl=1&ref=education&adxnnlx=1320063523-h7a/Kw2+YcAL4YLVYwOXRA](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/31/education/no-child-left-behind-catches-up-with-new-hampshire-school.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&ref=education&adxnnlx=1320063523-h7a/Kw2+YcAL4YLVYwOXRA)

DURHAM, N.H. — Every spring, Linda Rief, who is in her 25th year of teaching English at [Oyster River Middle School](#), has eighth graders do a semesterlong “genre” project. They pick a subject area like mysteries, read masters like Agatha Christie, study the writer’s craftsmanship (“Explain how the author foreshadows doom”), then draft their own.

The school’s science students spend two weeks building an underwater robotic vessel. Social studies classes re-enact the Boston Massacre.

They have had time for these things at Oyster River. Students here do so well on state standardized tests — about 85 percent of them rate proficient — there has been little need for test preparation. Ms. Rief said she did 45 minutes — a year.

“The attitude was if we did good teaching and we were passionate and energetic, kids would learn and that would be enough,” said Ms. Rief, who is 67.

No more. Last year, the [No Child Left Behind](#) law, which calls for 100 percent proficiency by 2014, caught up with Oyster River. Under the law’s mandates for adequate yearly progress toward that goal, the school was one of 326 public schools in New Hampshire — 69 percent of the total — deemed to be failing.

This year, Oyster River got serious about test prep. In September the school announced a new motto, “Fill the Box.” Students have been told that their best chance for a high score on the state English test is to use all the blank space allotted for the essay. “You have to write as much as you can,” says Jay Richard, the principal. “People have studied these things.”

The idea that the largest amount of writing is the best writing has just about killed Ms. Rief. “Complete stupidity. We should be using our professional voices to speak up, but there is a fear in teachers and administrators I’ve never seen before,” said Ms. Rief, who in 2000 was named middle school teacher of the year by the National Council of Teachers of English. “A lot of faith we’ve had in ourselves as professionals has been turned aside by the tests.”

The intent of No Child Left Behind was to provide quality education for poor children, mainly in urban areas, but it has taken over everything. By next spring, 90 percent of New Hampshire schools are expected to be labeled as failing.

That may sound 100 percent ludicrous, but it has transformed the academic culture, even in prosperous towns that have long been immune, like Durham, where the University of New Hampshire is located.

The federal secretary of education, Arne Duncan, is a big fan of using state tests to evaluate practically everything — children, schools, teachers, principals — but he could see that matters had gone too far. This fall, he and President Obama invited states to apply for waivers from the most onerous provisions of the law if they adhered to the administration's education agenda.

Under the waivers, the 100 percent proficiency standard is to be eliminated, and most oversight would focus on the lowest-performing 15 percent of schools. In the law's present form, if one subgroup — like special education students — fails to make adequate progress, the whole school fails. Oyster River is a failing school because about a dozen of its 110 special education children did not score high enough. The waiver would give subgroup scores less weight.

New Hampshire officials said they did not know whether they would apply for a waiver, but even if they do, testing will continue to play a large role. Schools would be ranked by their scores (which have a way of turning up in newspapers), and teachers would be evaluated by those scores.

Mr. Richard was a special education teacher himself and has reorganized Oyster River's program in hopes of raising scores. The school used to mainstream the children all day, with a special education teacher working alongside the classroom teacher. Now the children will be pulled from class at times for more individualized instruction.

Will this be better or just different?

"I believe we can do better," Mr. Richard said. "We have to. This is the law."

Ms. Rief described Mr. Richard as "the most positive administrator I've ever worked with."

Even the new focus on test prep here pales compared with what happens in places like New York City and Florida, but the change has been felt in a school system where teachers have long been trusted and given autonomy.

"Suddenly at staff meetings we're talking about brain games," Ms. Rief said, "we're talking about healthy brain food. The week before, we're not giving homework so everyone gets more sleep and rests their brains."

There are posters to remind students of the 12 essential test prep words and posters to raise their Score: Strategies, Complete, Organize, Read, Energize. The test is the New England Common Assessment Program, and some fifth-grade boys are now calling themselves the Necap Ninjas.

While Mr. Richard has urged Ms. Rief to do more test preparation, he has not forced her. "I bug her about this," he said. "But I trust Linda to do what's best."

Ms. Rief said she was sticking to the annual 45 minutes.

Mr. Richard says no one in town has asked him why his school is failing. "Of course not," he said. "People get it."

They do want to know why, if Oyster River is failing, its eighth graders do so well when they get to high school. This year, Oyster River students averaged 1,670 on the three SAT tests, 111 points above the state average and 170 above the national average.

A failing school must form a committee to develop an improvement plan. Over the summer, Mr. Richard met with 10 of his teachers several times. Among the topics discussed were the little things that add up to a better score. "We realized our students weren't looking at the titles on the reading passages," he said. "The title tells you what the story is about; it's really important."

They studied past tests. "Several questions were related to the use of textbooks, and we're a textbook-free school," he said, explaining that his teachers' original lessons are superior to the packaged curriculums. "No wonder they had so much trouble."

While the school improvement committee was meeting, Ms. Rief and two other teachers attended workshops given by Navy engineers from the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. They learned how to build a robotic underwater vessel and will spend two weeks teaching students to build their own.

Ms. Rief worries that a new generation of teachers has been raised on standardized testing and thinks that is the norm. Ms. Rief fears that public schools where teachers are trusted to make learning fun are on the way out. Ms. Rief understands that packaged curriculums and standardized assessments offer schools an economy of scale that she and her kind cannot compete with.

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# Illinois elementary school achievement gap narrowing

Associated Press

By: Staff

October 31, 2011

<http://www.whbf.com/story/15911113/ill-elementary-school-achievement-gap-narrowing>

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) - Illinois' latest standardized test results show that the achievement gap among elementary school students is narrowing, largely because of gains among black, special education and low-income students, the Illinois State Board of Education announced Monday.

The board also said that nine schools flagged for improvement under the decade-old federal No Child Left Behind Act were taken off that status because they made adequate yearly progress for two years in a row. The improvement came even as the state's proficiency benchmarks rose 7.5% over the past two years.

"Our students have shown steady, incremental improvement, and we know that represents solid progress," said Christopher Koch, the state's education chief.

The state board reported that over time, the achievement gap between white and black students has narrowed by 11.4% in math and 7.9% in reading. Since 2006, black students have posted a 14.3% increase in meeting and exceeding proficiency in math and a 13% increase in reading on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test.

Hispanic students also have upped their proficiency on the statewide test, improving by 4.7% in math and 5.2% in reading.

The improvements come as the number of minority students in Illinois' public schools continues to climb, from 36.7% of students in 1997 to 48.6% this year. During that span, the population of the state's low-income students rose from 35.7% to 48.1%.

Among special-education students, the achievement gap between students with an Individual Education Program and those without it narrowed. The number of participants meeting and exceeding proficiency increased by 7.6% in math and 7% in reading over the past five years.

During that time, the number of low-income students meeting and bettering proficiency on the ISAT has risen by 10.8% in math and 10.4% in reading.

Monday's announcement comes as the state works on an application for a waiver from certain requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The state board announced the plan earlier this month, noting that Illinois was falling behind in meeting the increasingly strict performance targets set by the federal law.

President Barack Obama announced in September that states would be allowed to ask the U.S. Department of Education to be exempted from some of the law's requirements under certain conditions, such as enacting standards to prepare students for college and careers and making teachers and principals more accountable.

The federal law passed in 2001 with widespread bipartisan support and much fanfare. It sought to hold schools more accountable for student performance and get better qualified teachers in classrooms while offering school choice and extra tutoring to students attending schools deemed failing.

The Obama administration said it was offering the waivers because Congress has been slow to address various problems of the law.

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## In Idaho, teacher bonuses depend on parents

Associated Press

By: Jessie Bonner

October 31, 2011

<http://detnews.com/article/20111030/SCHOOLS/110300322&template=printart>

*Boise, Idaho*— Parents across Idaho will now play a role in whether or not their child's teacher gets a raise.

Teacher bonuses in more than two dozen school districts statewide will depend to some degree on how well they can engage parents throughout the year, as part of new education changes signed into law earlier this year.

The laws championed by public schools chief Tom Luna carry sweeping changes for Idaho's public schools that include phasing in laptops for high school teachers and students, while requiring online courses.

School districts and public charter schools were also required to develop plans to reward employees who go above and beyond. The teacher pay-for-performance bonuses could be based on a variety of factors, including improved test scores and attendance rates.

A database compiled by the state Department of Education shows schools districts have adopted a mixture of criteria, giving teachers points for everything from student attendance to graduation rates and writing assessments.

The result: A laboratory of pay-for-performance methods in a state that has long debated whether teacher pay should be tied to things like student test scores.

At least 29 school districts statewide have since developed merit pay plans based, at least partly, on parental involvement.

In the central Idaho countryside, Challis schools have set a goal that teachers make contact with the parents of their students at least twice every three months.

"We're a really little town in the middle of nowhere, parents are pretty involved in what's going on, but we wanted to get them more involved in the academic side of the school," said Challis Superintendent Colby Gull.

Of the two required contacts, one can be general, such as a note sent home with every student in their class, while the other contact must be personal, where a parent is informed specifically about their student. That personal point of contact can be as simple as a teacher running into a parent in town.

"In Challis, that happens every time a teacher goes to the grocery store," Gull said.

And that chance meeting would go toward the teacher's merit pay goals.

"As long as they're talking about what's going on in the classroom and the parent is informed about their student," Gull said.

In southern Idaho, up to 70 percent of the potential bonus available to employees at Wendell High School will be based on attendance at parent-teacher conferences. More than 40 percent of parents have to attend the meetings in order for Wendell teachers to earn the maximum bonus and that goal was exceeded this fall.

In the nearby farming and ranching town of Gooding, the school district has a similar plan for seventh through 12th grades, with 25 percent of the teacher bonus based on parent attendance at three conferences throughout the academic year.

In northern Idaho, the Kendrick School District will also base the merit pay bonuses for teachers on how well they involve parents.

"I think it's important to include parents, to engage parents," said Kendrick Superintendent Calvin Spangler.

Some critics of Luna's education changes have questioned the larger role for moms and dads. Their concerns include: Will an educator be afraid to discipline a student because their parents will now have a say in teacher job evaluations, under the education changes.

Spangler counters that since parents will already have input in job evaluations under Luna's plan, why not include them in the merit pay portion.

"If they're going to be involved, we might as well get them involved right now," Spangler said.

But how involved parents are may also be outside the control of teachers to some degree, said Penni Cyr, president of the Idaho Education Association.

"Idaho teachers know that parents are very, very important in the education of their child," Cyr said. "But there also factors that are outside of a teacher's control. So is it reasonable for holding teacher responsible for getting parents to a conference or to withhold pay because parents can't attend conferences for whatever reason?"

About 50 school districts and charter schools have opted not to develop their own pay-for-performance systems but rather to comply with the state's plan, which bases bonuses on standardized test scores. In the 105 districts and charter schools that have developed or are working on their own merit pay plans, teachers will still have to meet statewide goals in order to receive their pay-for-performance bonus.

The bonuses will be paid out during the next fiscal year, which starts in July 2012.

The statewide teachers union has criticized Luna's plan, which shifts money from school employee pay and benefits to help pay for the education changes. The reduced money for employee salaries has resulted in fewer teachers and larger class sizes in some school districts.

This year, the state is shifting \$14.7 million in employee pay and benefits to increase the minimum teacher pay to \$30,000, restore salary increases for teachers who further their education and pay for high school students who graduate early to earn college credits.

Under a proposed budget for next year, Luna wants to use about \$20 million from Idaho's projected budget surplus to replace the funding that would continue to be taken from salaries to pay for new education changes, such as the teacher merit pay.

While critics of the funding formula have argued that Idaho is reducing money for all teacher salaries to award bonuses to a few, that has yet to happen and the projected surplus could allow the state to avoid that altogether, Luna spokeswoman Melissa McGrath said.

"No money has been shifted from salaries toward pay-for-performance, and our proposal for next year would not make that necessary because of recent revenue projections," McGrath said.

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## Opinion: Tennessee, stay the course on teacher evaluations

The Tennessean

By: Bert Matthews

October 31, 2011

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20111031/OPINION03/310310009/Stay-course-teacher-evaluations?odyssey=mod|newswell|text|Opinion|p>

Over the past couple of years, Tennessee has become recognized as a leading state in reforming its education system.

We were one of the first states to win a federal Race to the Top grant, because we were bold enough to pass new laws to change our education system. Tennessee is receiving \$500 million over a four-year period to carry out these bold reforms, which include a new evaluation for teachers designed to improve classroom instruction.

There is an effort under way to eliminate or delay the new teacher evaluation system. That is a bad idea. Performance evaluations are a part of any process to improve. A key part of the evaluation process measures a student's improvement over time.

It's understandable for an employee to be nervous about a new evaluation system. At The Mathews Company, we evaluate our employees each year and use the process to help our people become more effective in their work. It is hard to imagine any business being successful without the regular evaluation of its people.

That's why we need to continue moving forward and not go back to an old system that doesn't meet the needs of today's students. Put plainly, Tennessee's K-12 academic results are poor. We rank near the bottom of the 50 states when it comes to math and English results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), only 27 percent of the class of 2011 achieved a minimum definition of college readiness by scoring a 21 or higher on the ACT, which is also the score students need to qualify for a HOPE Scholarship.

The improvement of our education system cannot wait. Despite high unemployment, there are hundreds of science and technology jobs in Middle Tennessee that remain unfilled because we don't have enough candidates with the necessary skills and knowledge. In the 10-county Middle Tennessee region, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce projects a shortage of 22,000 qualified workers for the jobs that will be created over the next decade. In the global economy, workers are increasingly going to need some kind of education or training beyond high school. But they are going to find it hard to get admitted to college or hired by a company if they lack basic math and writing skills.

Our low academic scores didn't happen overnight, and there are no quick fixes. But we're not going to see any improvement as a state until educators have honest, meaningful and ongoing conversations about performance and how to improve instruction for our students. The new teacher evaluation system creates that conversation.

In 2010, our Tennessee General Assembly had the courage to chart a brighter future for our schools. Businesses, parents and, especially, our schoolchildren are watching and expecting us to stay the course.

*Bert Mathews is president of the Mathews Company and partner, Colliers International Nashville, and is chairman of the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce board of directors.*

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## A weekend interview with former Florida education commissioner Eric J. Smith

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeff Solocheck

October 29, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/content/weekend-interview-former-florida-education-commissioner-eric-j-smith>

*Eric J. Smith left Tallahassee quietly and without public comment, amid speculation that he had been forced out by newly elected Gov. Rick Scott. In the months since, he has kept a low profile, consulting and speaking to education groups. Smith agreed to speak with the Gradebook about the job he did, the work he left behind and his future. As for why he left, well, not so much. He spoke with reporter Jeff Solochek.*

### **The question everybody has is, where are you?**

(Laughs) Well, I've successfully relocated to our home in Annapolis, Md., and that's where we are living now. We were able to sell our house and make the big move.

### **We see you listed a lot as "former Florida education commissioner." I can't believe that's something you're going to be for long, former commissioner.**

(Laughs) Well, I don't like the first part of that -- former. I am doing a fair amount of work around the country with states and so forth, and some districts. I am enjoying that a bit. I don't have any real definite plans at this point of what my next move is going to be. I'm still exploring a lot of options.

### **So you're a consultant right now?**

Basically, I guess you would call it that.

### **When you left, you left quietly. So we don't know what you feel like you had left undone, what you see as doing well, what you see as needing more time or more work. I was kind of interested in hearing your assessment now that you've been separated from here for a little while.**

I think we had four years of very aggressive reform work that I certainly was very proud of and Florida should be very proud of, continuing to lead the nation in a lot of ways in trying to push education forward for our children. What I really saw going forward was a lot of work on the implementation side, getting it right. So I think that, at least from my perspective, not saying there's not more reform that needs to be done or more work that needs to be done in policy issues, because I think there is. But I do think there is a lot of implementation work. A lot of good policy can get lost in the details. ... That means a lot of follow-up on everything from Race to the Top to the educator effectiveness work, all that plus so much more that needs to really be monitored very carefully. That is exciting work for Florida. Some of the strengths for Florida are that it is really blessed with some of America's best superintendents and incredible school-level principals and teachers. I think the implementation work is going to be an exciting time.

### **I've heard a lot of people say they were given no time to start with these new evaluations, that they took place almost instantly after having been approved by the Legislature. Do you think what they're doing now, trying to put them in place while building them, is the right way to handle it?**

Yeah. I think there's never the right time for anything that's new. It always needs more time or less time. I think it is time to move on. Just for logic, having an evaluation system that connects the success of children to the work we do in every aspect of education it just makes sense. So change is hard, it's complicated. In my view, the best way to get after it is just to get after it and work out the bugs as you get involved with the doing and make it a better, stronger system as you move through that process.

### **Can't you get caught up in that, though? Like a teacher who gets a needs improvement and then suddenly they're one step farther down the road toward being dismissed, possibly.**

I think the system that we had had such a massive glitch that I think the work going forward is going to be better for children and better for educators across the board. It will begin to shed some real light on trying to help teachers improve their skill and their work. It has an opportunity to make the profession more professional.

### **Does it create the need for too many tests? Because I've heard districts talk about having testing almost every day of the school year for one grade level or another.**

You know, I started as a teacher 40 years ago. We didn't have state accountability back in those days. But we did give tests every week, in every class as far as I knew. What the change is, isn't more testing, because we've always tested in our schools. It's giving the tests that we give more meaning and more purpose. ...

### **Now that you're not in Florida and you look at it from afar, do you see that Florida is a leader? Or do you see other states that it could learn something from? Where do you put Florida now?**

I think Florida definitely is leading the pack in terms of its effort to reform. What I see that is very very encouraging is that other states are taking up the challenge. That's one of the quiet changes that has taken place nationally, that where Florida has had a history of state-led school reform, a lot of states have not had that. The departments of education have served in a regulatory role of checking and monitoring. Florida didn't take that path 10 years ago. They did implement statewide agendas of reform. What we're seeing more and more is states stepping up with a state purpose. In part that's been encouraged by Race to the Top and

other programs to improve the schools through state action. So I think the heat is on for Florida to continue to push hard and really move into the next generation of reforms that are needed. And I think there are some really exciting ones that are going to be exciting to kids, parents and educators. A lot of work in technology that can be applied more effectively, that can bring about a greatly expanded sense of what a classroom is, that it's not bound by walls and brick and mortar. Through effective use of technology we can be much more aligned with the way that kids do learn today, and we can rather than fighting that use that as a resource to expand learning time and students' engagement in it, individual student personal drive and curiosity to use it. I think there are huge opportunities ahead....

**A lot of this gets caught up in politics. ... How much do you think we can get to do what's right without getting caught up in these battles among who has a stake?**

Education has really got to be a bipartisan agenda. Elected officials that want to make it a political agenda, they need to be taken to task for that because it's not right for kids and it's not right for our country. There is too much riding on this, not only individual children's future. It is about the future of our country. So again it needs to be an effort where both parties find ways to join together around the needs for kids. The more local you get, the more partisan you get around some of the issues. You saw in the last couple of sessions when I was there in Florida you did see issues where leadership from both sides came together. I think both parties do continue to see education as a priority. You have some debates about how best to do that. I think they're probably healthy. But we need to make sure that we keep education as a priority for the state and the country.

**Would you give a little more insight into why you wound up leaving?**

No. (laughs) I think just a lot of factors played into that. It was the right time for me to submit my resignation and just leave. I wanted to make sure I did that at the conclusion of the school year so we got the work of that year wrapped up. I think, as I said in my departure, I needed to give the governor a chance to make decisions about leadership in education and so forth. I think he's done a great job with that. I think Gerard Robinson is a great individual. I knew him before he came to Florida and I've talked to him some since his arrival. He's a person of great integrity and he is a very capable educator that is going to continue to move Florida forward. So I am very pleased with his choice.

**There are some people who still bring out your name whenever they talk about these big superintendent jobs that are still open in Florida. Is there any chance we might see you again some time?**

I doubt that. I do intend to find a way to keep my residence in Florida, but it won't be in the form of a superintendency. I love the state. It has been a big part of my life. We don't know exactly where, but we probably will be relocating in Florida someplace in the very near future.

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## **Controversial Michigan charter school bill OK'd by state Senate**

Detroit Free Press

By: Lori Higgins

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<http://www.freep.com/article/20111028/NEWS05/110280348/Controversial-charter-school-bill-OK-d-by-state-Senate?odyssey=mod%7Cnewswell%7Ctext%7CFRONTPAGE%7Cs>

The Michigan Senate passed six bills Thursday that give [parents](#) more options for their children's education, including one that lifts restrictions on the number of cyber charter schools that can open and the number of students that can enroll in them.

Other bills would provide expanded opportunities for private school students to take public school classes; for public schools to provide programs for private schools, and for public and private students to enroll in both high school and community college at the same time.

The bills, part of a nine-bill package pushed by Republicans, now move on to the House for consideration. The package has courted controversy from the beginning because the crux of the legislation is about expanding charter schools in Michigan.

Sen. Patrick Colbeck, R-Canton, said demand is driving the need to expand cyber charter school options. He said the two existing year-old cyber charter schools -- where students in grades K-12 take all of their coursework online -- have thousands of students on their waiting lists.

"I think it's going to be a game-changer for Michigan and our kids," said Colbeck, who sponsored the cyber charter bill.

But Sen. Hoon-Yung Hopgood, D-Taylor, who spoke out against the bill during debate, said the Legislature is moving too soon. He said the current restrictions were put in place with the intent that they be lifted if, after two years, the schools demonstrated success. The schools opened in 2010, meaning the two-year mark won't be reached until this summer.

"It's really disappointing that we're just going to blow the caps off these schools when we don't have all the information on them," Hopgood said.

Colbeck's bill -- which narrowly passed with a 20-18 vote -- is a companion to a bill that cleared the Senate Oct. 6 that would lift a cap on the number of charter schools universities can authorize; allow charters to open in high-performing districts, and allow community colleges to authorize charters outside their geographic boundaries. Two more bills are awaiting action in the Senate.

As a whole, the bills "remove arbitrary obstacles that will allow parents, students, even educators to have greater options for solving our educational problems," said Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies, a charter advocacy group.

The package has been criticized by many -- even some who support charter school options for parents -- who say the Legislature is moving to expand charter schools without any statewide [quality](#) controls in place to ensure that authorizers and charter school operators with poor track records aren't allowed to open charters.

"We're supportive of expanding choice options for parents but strongly believe that there's a good way to do that. More bad choices don't help anyone," said Dan Varner, executive director of Excellent Schools Detroit, a group pushing for quality schools in Detroit.

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