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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 1/20/12

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Data Systems in Place, States Should Act On Flood of Student Information, Report Says**

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

January 18, 2012 12:01 PM

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state\\_edwatch/2012/01/now\\_that\\_every\\_state\\_can.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2012/01/now_that_every_state_can.html)

*By: blogger Lesli A. Maxwell*

Now that every state has the tools to track individual students' academic performance over time, the hard work of actually making the hordes of data usable to teachers and policymakers must get moving.

So says the Data Quality Campaign, the nonprofit, Washington-based organization that champions the use of data in education to improve the academic achievement of students. DQC—which released [its seventh and final report](#) last month examining states' progress in adopting what the nonprofit considers to be the 10 "essential elements" of student data systems—is turning its attention now to helping states effectively use their longitudinal data systems.

Today, the DQC is hosting a [national data summit](#) (you can watch it online) with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to highlight what concrete steps states need to take to turn the data collection into information that policymakers, school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers and parents can use to improve student achievement.

"States have undeniably made tremendous progress in collecting quality data, but, simply put, it isn't enough," said Aimee Rogstad Guidera, the executive director of the DQC. "The hard work lies ahead, and we won't meet our educational goals until everyone in education, from parents to policymakers, is empowered to use data to make informed decisions aimed at improving student achievement."

In conjunction with the summit, the DQC is releasing a new report—[Data for Action 2011: Empower with Data](#)—which outlines four "game-changing priorities" for states to follow:

1. Tap a broad range of stakeholders to help determine the key policy issues that will shape how states develop data efforts and put them into practice. The best example, says the DQC: The [Illinois P-20 Council](#).
2. Give clear decision-making authority over student data systems to a governing body that will oversee and be held accountable for thorny issues such as privacy, data-sharing and transparency. The DQC's model state: Maryland for its [Longitudinal Data System Center Governing Board](#).
3. Provide data on how teachers impact student performance to the colleges and universities that trained them. The DQC's exemplar state: Louisiana for the feedback it gives to its teacher preparation programs on how [their graduates are affecting student achievement](#).
4. Judge whether reports on high schools, which include data on important issues such as graduation rates and college-going

rates, are meeting local needs in a timely way. The DQC's pick for best state: Kentucky, for providing [feedback reports on high schools](#) within a year for a graduating class, rather than two years, and breaking down college-going rates and student performance by race and income.

DQC's report also spells out 10 policy actions for states to follow to ensure that their data systems don't just function as repositories for information that doesn't get used. Among them: Linking K-12 data systems with early childhood, higher education, workforce, social services and other agencies; providing funding for the state data systems; creating progress reports using individual student data that give information that educators, parents and students can use to improve student performance; and providing training to teachers and principals on how to read and interpret student data and use it to adjust classroom instruction and make decisions about practices in schools.

The data summit today will also feature Michelle Rhee, the former chancellor of the school system in the District of Columbia; former Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen; and Kentucky Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday.

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## Why States Should Require Online Learning

Huffington Post

By: Tom Vander Ark

January 20, 2012

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-vander-ark/online-learning\\_b\\_1217377.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-vander-ark/online-learning_b_1217377.html)

*Question: What do algebra and online learning have in common?*

*Answer: Most kids would not experience either if not required.*

Graduation requirements translate society's expectations to the young. It's our collective best guess at the knowledge and skills they will need to participate in the society they will inherit. If we did not require algebra, not many students would take it. Low-income, minority, and struggling students would be steered away from advanced math. Setting minimum education requirements promotes equity and participation.

All high school students should take at least one course online while in high school, according to Digital Learning Now!, the state policy project co-chaired by former governors Jeb Bush and Bob Wise. This recommendation, and all 10 Elements of High Quality Digital Learning, resulted from the vigorous discourse of 100 experts.

The recommendation is based on the fact that nearly all young people will learn online after high school, whether it's in college, corporate, or military training. Online and blended learning is rapidly becoming the dominant mode of formal and informal post-secondary learning. High school is a great place to discover learning online.

I'd go a step further and strongly encourage every high school student to take at least one online course each year. The requirement would cost-effectively expand options for students. Every high school student should have access to every Advanced Placement® (AP) course, foreign language course, advanced STEM courses, and dual enrollment courses. Making online learning a graduation requirement would accelerate access to these courses and expand opportunities for our highest-achieving students.

The requirement would also benefit struggling students by creating to good teachers and quality content. In Utah, where students can choose between online and a variety of online options, a group of students switched to Open High last semester to gain access to a great English teacher.

Online learning is growing by almost 50 percent, and more than one million students are taking online courses on a part-time basis where states and districts make them available. Some of this will take care of itself over time as barriers are reduced and access is improved, but in the meantime, it will leave millions of young people not as well-prepared as they should be. Promoting the graduation requirement is, to some extent, an effort to bring up the rear in states slow to create options for students.

Alabama, Florida, and Michigan require students to take at least one course online in order to graduate. Idaho requires two. New Mexico requires a dual enrollment, AP, or online course. Legislation in Georgia (SB 289) and Indiana (SB 179) would add one high school course to graduation requirements.

More broadly on the digital learning front, the Kentucky chief will recommend digital learning legislation in February. The Ohio Digital Learning Task Force will make recommendations in March. Plans to advance digital learning are underway in at least 15 more states.

Taking an online course in high school is a learning experience in the digital age that will prepare students for online learning in college or career where the stakes for success are much higher. A student who learns the study habits, mechanics, and skills of learning online -- using learning management systems, social platforms, email, Web conferencing, and other rapidly growing tools in online courses -- will be better equipped for life after graduation.

Follow Tom Vander Ark on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/tvanderark](http://www.twitter.com/tvanderark)

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## Apple offers software for interactive textbooks

Associated Press

By: Staff

January 19, 2012

[http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2012/01/19/488816ustecppletextbooks\\_ap.html](http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2012/01/19/488816ustecppletextbooks_ap.html)

NEW YORK (AP) — Apple is launching a new version of its iBooks software, tailored to present vivid, interactive textbooks for elementary and high school students on the iPads.

iBooks 2 will be able to display books with videos and other interactive features.

Apple Inc. is also setting up a textbook section in its iTunes store. Among the launch titles will be two high school textbooks — Biology and Environmental Science — from Pearson PLC and five from McGraw-Hill.

They will cost \$15 or less, said Phil Schiller, Apple's head of marketing. Schools will be able to buy the books for its students and issue redemption codes to them, he said.

It's not clear how Apple plans to get the books in front of students, however, since textbooks are subject to lengthy approval processes by states. Also, few students have iPads, which start at \$499.

The company announced the plans Thursday at an event at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

The company also revealed iBook Author, an application for Macs that lets people create electronic textbooks.

Major textbook publishers have been making electronic versions of their products for years. Until recently, there hasn't been any hardware suitable to display the books, so e-textbooks have had little impact. PCs are too expensive and cumbersome to be good e-book machines for students. Dedicated e-book readers like the Kindle have small screens and can't display color.

Tablet computers like the iPad, however, are both portable and capable of showing textbooks in vivid color.

According to biographer Walter Isaacson, company founder Steve Jobs in the last year of his life was working to radically change the textbook market. At a dinner in early 2011, Jobs told News Corp. chairman Rupert Murdoch that the paper textbooks could be made obsolete by the iPad. Jobs wanted to circumvent the state certification process for textbook sales by having Apple release textbooks for free on the tablet computer.

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## STATE NEWS

### Opinion: Don't skimp on school tests

Los Angeles Times

By: Editorial Board

January 20, 2012

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/opinionla/la-ed-test-20120120.0.6377769.story>

*Cutting back on such tests, as Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed, will not improve education. The tests remain key yardsticks of achievement.*

There are plenty of problems with the school reform movement, but the number of standardized tests isn't one of them. The tests are still the most objective and affordable yardsticks of achievement available. They should be improved and the results should be kept in perspective, but there is no evidence that cutting back on them — as Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed — will improve education.

Students in California take more annual standards tests than are mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The state tests students in English and math each year through 11th grade; federal law requires that, in high school, the tests be given just once. California does additional testing in science and history. In his State of the State address Wednesday, Brown called for eliminating some testing. His proposal was light on details, but reducing the number of end-of-year tests would have several downsides and little obvious benefit beyond adding a few instructional hours to the year.

Brown harkens back to an era before "data driven" became an educational catchphrase. He calls for teams of evaluators to visit schools to look for the indicators of quality instruction that fill-in-the-bubble tests can't measure. That's an enticing idea. Like Brown, we're concerned that hardly anyone talks anymore about fostering intellect in schools, or the value of learning for its own sake rather than as a means to getting a job. But team evaluations are complicated and expensive to do right. Education funding is scarce, and putting money into the classroom rather than into administrative functions is more important than ever. Standardized tests are, by comparison, objective and cheap. They also ensure that teachers cover the material in the curriculum; before the era of testing, many teachers would simply ignore required subjects. Evaluation visits couldn't ascertain that.

The problem isn't the number of standardized tests that California gives — most high-achieving nations do even more testing — but the collective national obsession with scores. Test results show, over time, whether students at a particular school are learning required material, and whether performance is improving. They can serve as a guide for how to improve pedagogy. But they are limited measurements in many ways. Policies that punish schools and teachers because of year-to-year declines, or that make teachers' evaluations depend heavily on the scores, are misusing the data.

By all means, let's add other meaningful measures of what schools achieve, if California can afford to do it well. California already is collaborating with other states on devising tests that measure for deep understanding rather than broad and shallow information. Even those tests will give the public only part of the picture, but why do without that part?

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## Georgia's career academies are retooling high school education for 21st century

Atlanta Journal Constitution

By: Laura Raines

January 19, 2012

<http://www.ajc.com/business/georgias-career-academies-are-1308956.html>

When Newton College and Career Academy (NCCA) opened last August, Akilah George and Kyle Wright were among the first 240 students to enroll. An innovative education model, the career academy aligns high school education with community economic development goals to better prepare students for the 21st-century workforce.

The concept has been replicated in 26 Georgia communities, thanks to the Georgia Career Academies Project (GCAP), which provides a vital link among high schools, technical colleges or universities and local businesses.

"The key to Georgia's future economic growth rests squarely on our ability to deliver a highly educated, skilled and motivated workforce," said Ron Jackson, commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia. Each year, GCAP supports that effort by offering grants to launch new academies.

Newton's academy is a partnership of the Newton County School System, Georgia Piedmont Technical College, the local Chamber of Commerce and local government organizations. It aims to improve high school graduation rates, connect students with career paths earlier and give them the skills they need to succeed in the workplace or college.

Career academy students attend half-day, taking career-path courses in engineering, manufacturing, health care, agriculture, business, computer science, and others. Many are dual enrolled in Georgia Piedmont Tech (formerly DeKalb Tech), and will graduate with a high school diploma and college credit.

"This seemed like a great opportunity for students who were interested in a certain career field," said Akilah George, a senior at Alcovy High School interested in law enforcement. She's taking law enforcement and homeland security courses taught by Georgia Piedmont Technical College instructors.

"Coming to the academy was a great choice, because I'm getting a head start on what I want to do," she said. She's earning college credit, meeting high school requirements, going to class with like-minded students and gaining insights from professionals working in the field.

George has applied to Florida A&M University, where she hopes to major in criminal justice and pre-veterinary science to become an animal cruelty investigator.

With a passion for medicine, Kyle Wright decided that taking a certified nursing assistant program could only help him. "Learning medical terminology and getting clinical experience gets my foot in the door of health care," he said.

A junior at Alcovy High, he plans to intern at a hospital this summer, and he hopes to attend the University of Georgia.

"After college, I'd like to join the Air Force and go to medical school," said Wright. "Being a doctor feels like what I was meant to do, and the academy is helping me transition from high school to college." He likes the focus, respect and maturity expected in this learning environment.

James Woodard, principal and CEO of the Newton College and Career Academy, said, "The academy model allows students to take career-related and college-level programs that they wouldn't normally have access to in their high schools."

Students can earn a technical college certificate of credit, complete core courses toward a college degree; participate in hands-on internships and clinical experiences and become certified as Georgia Work Ready.

"When you put all that together, that's a lot of value added to a high school diploma. Our students will graduate with a powerful portfolio of knowledge and skills," Woodard said.

Temporarily housed in Alcovy High School, the academy soon will move into a new state-of-the-art facility that will hold 800 students. "Our difference is that we're focusing on programs that lead to high-skill, high-wage and high-demand occupations and teaching them professional and personal skills to help them succeed in a highly competitive market," Woodard said.

In 12 years, Mark Whitlock has seen more students graduate with the skills to land jobs or go on to college, thanks to the Central Education Center in Coweta County.

"With industries meaner and leaner, using more technology and competing in a global market, they made the case that we needed to do high school education differently in order for students to succeed in a 21st-century workforce," said Whitlock, CEO of the Central Education Center.

The center gives about 1,000 students a year a jump-start on their career paths, and it has become the model for the Georgia Career Academies Project.

"In 2010, the graduation rate for students who came to the academy was 94.8 percent [compared with 80.5 percent at Newnan High]," said Whitlock. Of those dual enrolled, 95.2 percent earned at least one college certificate, and more than 332 participated in internships at more than 150 local businesses.

"I'm proud that our community helped build this concept and that Lt. Gov. [Casey] Cagle has championed it statewide," said Whitlock. "Every community is trying to figure out how to attract more business and industry. To do that, you need to create an attractive workforce."

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## Rhode Island lawmaker promoting virtual education

WPRI

By: Shaun Towne

January 19, 2011

[http://www.wpri.com/dpp/news/local\\_news/providence/providence-rhode-island-lawmaker-promoting-virtual-education](http://www.wpri.com/dpp/news/local_news/providence/providence-rhode-island-lawmaker-promoting-virtual-education)

*Introducing legislation to teach via technology*

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (WPRI) - A local state representative is looking to better educate Rhode Island students in the field of technology.

Rep. Joseph McNamara (D - Warwick, Cranston) plans to introduce new legislation to establish the "Statewide Virtual Education Act," aimed at promoting the use of virtual courses as part of public education.

McNamara believes it's very important to make sure students, from kindergarten to college, are able to extend their learning via technology.

"We need to be ready to ride the wave of virtual learning," said McNamara in a news release. "We need to be moving forward with the way we educate our students, or we and those students will be left behind. As is happening all around the country, we need to utilize the power of technology to remove the constraints of traditional classroom learning and allow students to learn any time, any place and any way they are able."

The bill would issue guidelines for virtual courses, as well as develop a plan for students of all ages to have access to virtual courses.

McNamara, who chairs the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare, says that he introduced the bill because Rhode Island is one of only a few states that has not yet established policies on virtual education.

It also comes in response to [the Department of Education's recent announcement of a proposed pilot program for a "paperless classroom" in one school, where e-books would replace traditional textbooks.](#)

"Schools and school districts should have the freedom to work with teachers, families and students to create customizable learning opportunities that incorporate today's technology," said McNamara. "But the freedom that comes from this type of learning must be accompanied by a clear responsibility to ensure that such opportunities are of high quality and consistent with state standards. This legislation sets that groundwork."

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