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**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 7/7/11

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 7/7/11

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### NATIONAL NEWS

## Legislative Momentum Stalls for 'Parent Trigger' Proposals

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

July 7, 2011

<http://leavecharteralone.com/charter-news/legislative-momentum-stalls-for-parent-trigger-proposals/>

### ***Concept intrigues many, but logistics, opposition lead states to go slow***

The momentum behind "parent-trigger" proposals, one of the hottest ideas for overhauling struggling schools, has slowed in statehouses amid political opposition and vexing questions about how those bold plans should be implemented at the local level.

Numerous states this year have introduced parent-trigger proposals, which would allow parents the opportunity to restructure or close academically struggling traditional public schools or convert them to charters.

Most of those proposals, which have drawn varying levels of bipartisan support, have stalled or died, while others have been scaled back significantly. And an effort by parents in California to use the state's landmark parent-trigger law to convert their school to a charter has met with legal and political obstacles. ("Parent 'Trigger' Law Draws Attention, Controversy" Jan. 12, 2011.)

Yet backers of the various state initiatives are hopeful that some of this year's proposals eventually could become law, and they are confident that support for the concept—which is still in its infancy—will grow as the public and policymakers become more familiar with it.

"It's such a novel idea. It's a bottom-up, not a top-down school reform," said Marc Oestreich of the Heartland Institute, a conservative, Chicago-based think tank that supports the proposals. The challenge is "to get people up to speed on what these are all about," he said. "You have to quell those fears before you can move forward."

### ***Statehouse Battleground***

At least three states currently have some form of parent-trigger law: California, Mississippi, and Connecticut, the last of which gives parents a seat on councils that advise school boards on reorganizing struggling schools and other issues. During this year's legislative sessions, at least a dozen states introduced some form of a parent-trigger measure, according to the Heartland Institute, which has advised legislators on the issue. Measures in Arkansas, Colorado, Maryland, and other states failed to advance.

Lawmakers and outside observers offer a variety of explanations for the slow pace.

Some cite the resistance of teachers' unions, which have raised objections to [California's law](#). Others say unresolved controversies in California have made lawmakers in other states cautious. Still others, like Mr. Oestreich, offer a more straightforward explanation: that it often takes several legislative forays until political support solidifies around new or controversial proposals.

Many parent-trigger proposals have been sponsored by Republicans. The Heartland Institute backed the development of model legislation by the American Legislative Exchange Council, an officially nonpartisan organization that supports conservative principles, which ALEC put forward for its 2,000 members who are state lawmakers.

But parent triggers have also drawn the backing of Democrats. In Texas, state Rep. Mike Villarreal, a San Antonio Democrat, is a sponsor of one of the few such measures around the country that have cleared both legislative chambers. It is heading to the desk of Gov. Rick Perry, a Republican. The bill would allow a majority of parents to set in motion a restructuring, closure, or charter conversion at an academically struggling school, with a majority vote—though local school boards are also given a say.

"I was trying to create an opportunity for parents to get involved in turning around a failing school," Rep. Villarreal said. "Too often, parents in these schools feel trapped."

In Ohio, Republican Gov. John Kasich backed a parent-trigger option for academically struggling schools around the state, but lawmakers instead included a scaled-down provision in the state's budget proposal to create a pilot trigger program in the 51,000-student Columbus school system.

### ***Managing Expectations***

Gene T. Harris, the superintendent of the Columbus district, argued that Ohio is not ready for a statewide program, given the unresolved questions about parent-trigger proposals. Chief among those, she said: How would parents know if the available options for overhauling an academically struggling school, such as converting it to a charter, are feasible or represent an improvement over their current situation?

"I don't want parents to get duped or fooled," Ms. Harris said. If parents opt to convert a school to a charter, and "an outside organization says they can perform a miracle," she said, will "they understand that might not happen?"

Despite those reservations, Ms. Harris said she supports the pilot in her district. She said she hopes it will lead to parents, teachers, and others working collaboratively in remaking schools, which would build parent confidence in them.

Ms. Harris, like some state legislators, traced her concerns about parent-trigger laws in part to California's experience, which convinced her that state officials hadn't considered obstacles to making the law work. "It absolutely gives me pause," Ms. Harris said.

California's parent-trigger measure, signed into law by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last year, says that if 51 percent of parents in a persistently failing school sign a petition, they can force a change in the school's structure through one of four actions: converting it to a charter school; replacing the principal and staff; overhauling the budget; or closing the school. Just 75 academically struggling schools in the state can participate.

In December, a group of parents at McKinley Elementary School, in the 25,000-student Compton Unified School District, turned in a petition to their school board asking that their school be converted to a charter. But that petition soon met with opposition and controversy. Critics questioned the validity of some of the signatures; and backers of the charter conversion accused school employees of trying to pressure those who had signed to change their minds. In February, the district rejected the petition, citing concerns over whether it met state laws for petitions, among other reasons.

The parents, who were from a majority Latino and African-American community, sued the district in Los Angeles Superior Court. That case is ongoing, but the judge overseeing it tentatively upheld the district's rejection of the petition because of its lack of a valid date. As an alternative, the parents have moved to support the creation of a new charter school near the site of McKinley Elementary.

### ***Proper Role***

Some critics of parent-trigger proposals say that they would allow mothers and fathers who have a gripe with school administrators or teachers to organize an overhaul of the schools that has nothing to do with academic improvement.

But Linda Serrato, a spokeswoman for Parent Revolution, an organization that supported the Compton petition, disputed that idea, noting that California's law focuses on consistently poor-performing schools. When a majority of parents agree on an academic makeover of a school, she argued, it reflects their depth of commitment.

"Parents don't just sign petitions" without thinking it through, Ms. Serrato said. Critics wrongly assume that "parents aren't doing what's in the best interest of their kids. Parents want to see their kids go to college and to a good career."

That drama has played out as California's state board of education has sought to craft regulations that its members say are

aimed at clarifying how the law should be implemented. Draft regulations address issues ranging from how to determine if petition signatures are valid to the extent to which parent-backed efforts are subject to existing state charter regulations.

Some activists say the law needs more specifics to avoid lawsuits and other disputes, while others have said they want few regulations, said state board President Michael W. Kirst, a professor emeritus of education at Stanford University. Given other states' interest in parent-trigger proposals, he said, the regulations will be closely scrutinized.

The law, as written, is very short and leaves a lot for the board to "flesh out," Mr. Kirst said. For other states, "it really provides a test case of the specifics that arise."

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## More States Defiant on NCLB Compliance

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

July 6, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/07/06/36nclb.h30.html?tkn=QYRF3Nm9FZxGoT%2FztnfEBJLhcBVxa3w8iR8&cmp=ENL-EU-NEWS1>

With big questions still surrounding the fate of the nation's chief education accountability law, states are beginning to put federal officials on notice that they plan to disregard key pieces of the [No Child Left Behind Act](#) if Congress fails to make changes. So far, Idaho, Montana, and South Dakota have notified the U.S. Department of Education that they will stop the clock as the 2014 deadline approaches for bringing all students to proficiency in math and language arts. In separate letters to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, each has said it will freeze its proficiency targets at 2009-10 levels in hopes of limiting the number of schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress, or AYP, and face penalties under the nine-year-old federal accountability law.

Kentucky is taking a different tack and has asked permission to use its own accountability system in place of NCLB. But the Education Department is warning states that flouting the law will not be tolerated, even if Congress fails to rewrite the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#)—the current version of which is NCLB—before the start of the 2011-12 school year.

"If Congress needs more time, our plan B would be to offer relief in exchange for reform to states who desperately want flexibility from NCLB's broken provisions," department spokesman Justin Hamilton said Tuesday. "This will give all states the option of either complying with existing law or participating in plan B. One way or another, we need to enforce the law or change it."

In fact, the department sent Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau a [letter](#), dated July 1, telling her that Montana was out of compliance for not raising its proficiency targets for the 2010-11 school year.

In an interview Tuesday, Ms. Juneau said that since federal officials have been slow in responding, she decided to freeze proficiency targets anyway so the state could remain on track for other deadlines, such as publicizing test results. As of now, she has no intention of reversing course, even if the state is out of compliance.

"We're just moving forward," she said. "Our schools do very well, and they can provide proof through data."

### Feuding Over Flexibility

Although President Obama has said he wants an overhaul of ESEA, Congress is moving slowly. The U.S. House of Representatives is considering several tightly focused bills, while the U.S. Senate has produced nothing and is still informally discussing what a new NCLB would look like.

Mr. Duncan has announced that he will offer waivers to states this fall if Congress does not act—but only if they agree to embrace his reform priorities. He has yet to offer details about what provisions of the law might be waived and what would be asked of states in exchange.

The uncertainty isn't sitting well with some state education chiefs or with some influential members of Congress.

"Idaho, like many other states, does not have the luxury of spending time and limited resources on meeting the rigid requirements of an outdated accountability system," Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna wrote to Mr. Duncan in a June 21 [letter](#). "If Congress and the administration will not act, states like Idaho will."

States aren't the only ones wanting answers on Mr. Duncan's "plan B."

In a June 23 [letter](#) to Mr. Duncan, Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., the chairman of the House education committee, said "any initiative that could exacerbate the frustration and uncertainty facing schools is the wrong direction for our nation's education system." He asked the education secretary for more details on his waiver plan by July 1.

The department apparently didn't meet that deadline. On Tuesday, Mr. Hamilton said, "We are in touch with Rep. Kline's office about the letter and are working to get [a response] to them soon."

Also on Tuesday, Rep. Kline took public note of a new Congressional Research Service report he said "warns of potential legal limits and challenges to the secretary's proposal to grant conditional waivers."

However, from the time Mr. Duncan first raised the possibility of waiving some NCLB requirements, department officials have stressed that the NCLB law allows the education secretary to do so, except in certain limited circumstances.

"As part of this broad authority to waive requirements, the secretary has the authority to set reasonable conditions and limits on these waivers to ensure that the ESEA programs subject to these waivers are carried out in a responsible and effective manner to improve student achievement," spokesman Daren Briscoe said last month as some in Congress questioned Mr. Duncan's strategy.

### High Stakes

Schools that continue missing their AYP targets face an escalating set of sanctions, and each year, the targets get higher. Mr. Duncan, in trying to prod Congress to quickly reauthorize the law, has predicted that when the test scores are all tallied from the

2010-11 school year, 82 percent of them will be labeled "failing."

In Montana, Ms. Juneau said she is freezing performance targets in part because her office simply doesn't have the staff to deal with an increasing number of schools that may face penalties under NCLB.

"Our office resources are better used to continue our work with schools already identified for assistance than to increase the number of schools that cannot be offered the required additional resources," she wrote in her April 25 [letter](#) to the department informing them of her decision to freeze proficiency targets.

For schools in Montana to make AYP, 92 percent of students were supposed to be proficient in language arts in the 2010-11, up from 83 percent the year before; the target for math is 84 percent, up from 68 percent. Test scores have not yet been released.

Ms. Juneau indicated that there was one thing that could get her to revert to those higher targets: if federal officials threaten to withhold money from the state. "I am not willing to put our schools' federal funding in jeopardy," she said.

Indeed, the department's chief method for enforcing the law is withholding money, a potentially powerful weapon at a time when recession-weary states are still recovering. At stake for all states is \$14.5 billion in the coming school year that's governed by NCLB.

South Dakota is using Mr. Duncan's own argument to explain why it's going to freeze its proficiency targets.

In a June 29 [letter](#), state Education Secretary Melody Schopp wrote: "Without making these changes, we believe our accountability system, as it currently stands, would inappropriately label schools as failing. The situation would eventually trigger a number of NCLB-related sanctions that our department simply does not have the capacity to address."

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## New expectation on NC teachers: students to learn

Associated Press

By: Staff

July 7, 2011

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2011/07/07/v-print/2434655/new-expectation-on-nc-teachers.html>

RALEIGH, N.C. North Carolina teachers and principals are likely to have to meet another expectation, one that says students are learning over the course of a school year.

The state Board of Education on Thursday is scheduled to vote on adopting student growth as a new standard on evaluations for teachers and school administrators. The new measure is one of several criteria that evaluates whether educators are effective.

Several measurements can be used to tell whether students are learning over the length of a school year.

Local school districts will be required to measure student growth for all teachers and principals starting with the coming academic year. All teachers must be evaluated annually.

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## Report: Detroit-Area Charter Schools Often Lag

Associated Press

By: Staff

July 7, 2011

<http://www2.wnct.com/news/2011/jul/07/report-detroit-area-charter-schools-often-lag-ar-1186719/>

DETROIT (AP) A newspaper's analysis of recent test data finds that Detroit-area charter high schools are often doing the same or worse at educating students than public schools.

The Detroit News reports Thursday that of 25 charters in Detroit or nearby, six had higher math or science proficiency scores than Detroit Public Schools' average on the most recent Michigan Merit Exam. Most of the others were doing worse than the district.

More charters did poorer in reading and writing, while charters surpassed the Detroit school district in social studies.

Detroit students consistently score well below state averages on standardized tests, and thousands have fled to suburban schools and charters inside and outside the city. The district's enrollment has dropped from 104,000 in 2007 to 74,000 this year.

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## FLORIDA NEWS

### **Maybe the state knows what its doing after all**

St. Petersburg Times

By: Staff

July 7, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/content/maybe-state-knows-what-its-doing-after-all>

As the dust settles from the [latest round of school grades and FCAT scores](#), here's a nugget worth chewing on: The Pinellas schools under the most state scrutiny and oversight made some of the most noteworthy gains.

Woodlawn Elementary went from F to C. Lakewood and Fairmount Park elementaries moved from F to D. And three of the four oversight high schools - Boca Ciega, Gibbs and Dixie Hollins - led the other Pinellas high schools in FCAT gains. (The fourth, Lakewood, saw a slight decline in FCAT points.)

"I think the state was a big help to us," Gibbs principal Kevin Gordon told The Gradebook. Florida Department of Education officials helped the school "really start putting in a sound instructional delivery model. And then to have them behind us, to help push, 'okay, these are the things you need to be working on' made a difference, he said.

The state played a supporting role, said Fairmount Park principal Cooper Dawson. "Initially we thought it was going to be them coming in and saying, 'You do this,' " she said. But "it was more of a let's look together, let's look at your data, where are you putting your efforts, what do you need from the district, what do you need from the state."

Clearly, one or two years does not make a trend. Clearly, the oversight schools have a long way to go. Clearly, the district also contributed support and resources. ("We had four people from the state (help), but we probably had 20 from the district," said Woodlawn principal Karen Russell.)

But so far, doesn't it look like the state - dare we say it? - is helping?

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Oklahoma superintendent Janet Barresi to address administrators**

Oklahoman

By: Staff

July 7, 2011

<http://newsok.com/oklahoma-superintendent-janet-barresi-to-address-administrators/article/3583478>

Oklahoma's [Superintendent of Public Instruction Janet Barresi](#) will deliver her first State of Education address to a group of public school administrators in [Oklahoma City](#).

The annual event is scheduled to begin Thursday morning at the [Cox Convention Center](#) in downtown Oklahoma City.

It will be the first such address for Barresi, a Republican elected in November to replace longtime [Superintendent Sandy Garrett](#), a Democrat who served in the post for two decades.

Several public school teachers have organized a public protest outside of the convention center to oppose budget cuts recently implemented by Barresi and the [Department of Education](#).

Among the programs targeted for cuts is state reimbursement for teachers who achieve National Board Certification.

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### **Editorial: Principals are key to schools' success**

Detroit News

By: Editorial Board

July 7, 2011

<http://www.detnews.com/article/20110707/OPINION01/107070341/1008/OPINION01/Editorial--Principals-are-key-to-schools-%E2%80%99-success>

**New system for low-performing schools must focus on attracting, training best leaders**

As state and Detroit officials initiate a new system to operate the lowest performing schools in Michigan, those who are hired to run the individual schools will determine the plan's success. Strong principals are crucial.

The Education Achievement System, launched by Gov. Rick Snyder and Detroit Public Schools Emergency Manager Roy Roberts last month, will start in Detroit and then move to encompass schools around the state that have consistently failed. The plan aims to direct more money to classrooms by giving principals — with the help of teachers and parents — authority to make all the key decisions in their buildings.

Such autonomy could lead to good results, as witnessed in other urban districts around the country. Yet it also means those

who direct the achievement system are tasked with finding top-flight principals to head more than 30 buildings in Detroit.

This is a challenge. It will take significant work to identify and attract leaders capable of the undertaking — and willing to come to a city that doesn't have the best national reputation.

Plus, turnaround plans aren't anything new for Detroit schools. For this one to work, it's going to take close collaboration among all parties involved, starting with the selection of qualified principals.

The principals should possess several qualities, according to area education experts. First, they need experience, preferably in a comparable urban district. Second, they must have a solid record of results in their respective positions. They also need the leadership skills to build, maintain and motivate a strong team of teachers.

But even the most experienced principals will require some help entering a new school system with a whole new operating model, says Jim Ballard, executive director of Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals.

Think of it as a boot camp for principals. As Ballard points out, the military does a remarkable job of training each soldier, while the same level of targeted instruction is not applied to educators, especially administrators.

Once schools are in the new system, they will remain there for at least five years. They'll have a better chance of improving if leadership is consistent.

Roberts and his team should certainly look to other urban districts around the country that have implemented similar plans with good results. For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina has targeted its lowest performing schools by shaking up staff at the schools. Under new leadership, the culture at these schools has changed, and students are doing better.

Other resources include national programs such as New Leaders for New Schools, which trains new principals to work urban districts across the U.S. While the program is not in Detroit, Roberts could ask the organization to develop a partnership. Michigan has the annual Emerging Leaders Program for aspiring principals led by the College of Education at Michigan State University.

These two programs focus on preparing new principals, but they could likely offer additional guidance.

Principals can't simply be thrown into this new education model and expected to succeed. They'll need intense initial training and ongoing support.

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## Good schools fearful of bad grades in rating system

Indianapolis Star

By: Scott Elliott

July 7, 2011

<http://www.indystar.com/article/20110707/LOCAL/107070379/Good-schools-fearful-bad-grades-rating-system>

Munster High School in Lake County has been ranked one of the nation's best high schools by Newsweek magazine. So why is Principal Steve Tripenfeldas worried? So worried, in fact, he sent a letter to the Indiana Board of Education?

Because under the state's rules, his school is about to receive its "letter grade" state rating -- and it's, gulp, a C.

"Don't let a school that has an (end-of-course exam) passing rate well over 90 percent for Algebra 1 and just under 90 percent in English 10 with large gains be labeled as a C school," he wrote. "Before the letter grades are published, please work to make sure that those letter grades are accurate."

For years, Indiana has laid down a tough penalty on schools that failed to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind law. When the state rates schools, flunking AYP means a two-step demotion on the state's five-category rating scale.

The state board now wants to move away from counting AYP against schools, but new state rules won't come fast enough to help schools this year.

"Can we give ourselves a waiver?" board member David Shane asked at Wednesday's board meeting.

The answer is "maybe."

Indiana's move to A to F letter grades this year when ratings are released July 22 has raised the stakes for the AYP penalty.

The goal of the letter grades is to make state ratings more understandable than the current categories of exemplary progress, commendable progress, academic progress, academic watch and academic probation.

Tripenfeldas' letter expresses the concern of many Indiana educators -- people understand that C means "average." State board members agreed letter grades have changed the landscape.

"I understand the rationale, but at the same time we're working on a flawed system out there," state board member Mike Pettibone said. "Our public is going to think Munster High School is a C high school."

Indiana's ultimate goal is a total overhaul of its school rating system. Beginning next year, there will be entirely new criteria for each rating level -- based on state test passing rates, test score growth and measures of college or career readiness -- to go with the letter grades. That criteria will drop AYP as a measure and eliminate the two-step penalty for missing it.

The problem is, the new criteria are not ready. The Indiana Department of Education<sup>2</sup> is still developing the new rules.

Because state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett and board members are eager to begin using the letter grades as promised, the state's plan was to simply keep the old criteria, including the AYP penalty, for this year, with the A to F labels added.

That's not fair, said Jan Combs, associate superintendent of Lawrence Township Schools in Marion County. Lawrence's Harrison Hill elementary in the past has been penalized for missing AYP. But the new grading scale makes it worse, she said.

"When you hear 'C,' 'D' or 'F' rather than 'academic progress,' 'academic watch' or 'academic probation,' it's a lot more harsh," she said.

AYP, as it was originally designed, was supposed to force schools to focus attention on groups of students that often were overlooked. "Subgroups" whose test score growth is tracked under AYP include ethnic minorities, such as blacks and Hispanics, but also students in special education classes, kids with disabilities, poor children and those learning English as a second language.

For schools with lots of qualifying kids, there can be many subgroups. Tripenfeldas, for example, complained that Munster has 33 subgroups and only one -- a subgroup with 41 special education students -- fell short of the required test gains. Lawrence's Harrison Hill has taken a rating hit in the past when just one of its 29 subgroups didn't make AYP.

This data must be reported to the U.S. Department of Education for schools that receive federal aid, but it's up to states whether they include AYP in their state accountability systems and to what degree it factors in. Indiana law doesn't require AYP to be a factor at all. It's the state board's own rules that put the AYP penalty in place.

That's what prompted Shane's question: If it's the board's own rule, can't the board simply suspend it until new rules are written? Education Department staff said they would research the question.

"We all believe as a matter of policy that we don't want to penalize an 'A' school," Shane said. "We don't want to have AYP dragging good schools down."

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## Charter high schools in Detroit not making grade

Detroit News

By: Mike Wilkinson

July 7, 2011

<http://www.detnews.com/article/20110707/SCHOOLS/107070387/Charter-high-schools-in-Detroit-not-making-grade>

Once touted as a solution to Detroit's public school woes, charter high schools are often doing just about as poorly — and in many cases worse — at educating students and getting them ready for college, a Detroit News analysis of recent test data shows.

Of 25 charters in Detroit or nearby, only six had higher math or science proficiency scores than Detroit Public Schools' average on the most recent Michigan Merit Exam, with most of the others doing worse than the district.

More charters did poorer in reading and writing as well; only in social studies did more charters surpass rather than trail DPS.

The results raise questions about the district's plans to authorize additional charters in its search for improvement and could also renew the debate over whether charters are the answer to the riddle of urban education, where multiple strategies are often producing the same poor results.

"If charters do not outperform the host district, they ought not to have a charter," said Margaret Trimer-Hartley, superintendent of the University Prep Science and Math Middle School in Detroit, a charter school.

One of the largest nationwide charter-schools studies found that nearly half of charter schools do as well as the local public school; more than a third did worse, and just 17 percent did better.

"(The results are) a call to focus on the quality of charter schools," said Dev Davis, research manager of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University, which published the study in 2009. "It's not a panacea. There are no magic bullets in education."

Few dispute that DPS's most recent scores were awful, with students scoring well below the state averages on the ACT and all five subject areas of the Michigan Merit Exam. The district's students' composite ACT score was 15 out of 36, down from the previous two years and well below the state average of 19.3.

Concerns about the quality of the DPS schools and student safety have caused tens of thousands of parents to choose charter schools or leave the city altogether in search of better educational opportunities. In the past decade, DPS has lost nearly 100,000 students as charter schools and suburban classrooms have swelled with the arrival of former DPS schoolchildren.

Charter schools remain an important part of the reforms proposed by the district, though plans to turn over dozens of schools to charter operators, proposed by former DPS Emergency Manager Robert Bobb, have been scaled back to eight schools. The district, however, said it will not hesitate to remove charters that do not succeed.

"DPS knows that charters are one strategy for reform but by themselves are not the answer," said Kisha Verduesco, a district spokeswoman, in a statement. "We have specifically turned to charter operators with proven records of raising achievement. The companies that we are authorizing have raised performance on the ACT/MME at their buildings."

The district has five charter high schools: Aisha Shule/W.E.B. DuBois Prep Academy, Ross Hill Academy and three campuses of the Covenant House Life Skills Center that provide alternative education for homeless children and others.

All had lower ACT scores than DPS and only Aisha Shule, in social studies, outperformed DPS on the Michigan Merit Exam.

According to the Stanford University study, charter schools have the biggest positive impact on students in younger grades but tend to have a negative impact at the high school level.

Researchers are looking into the high school disparity, and Davis said it may be a greater number of them are educating students who would have dropped out otherwise, or that more students moved into the charter schools in high school with already inadequate academic skills.

The study looked at data from 15 states and the District of Columbia; it did not include Michigan. The center recently agreed to study Michigan students in public schools and charters; results are expected in 2012, Davis said.

### **Questions raised**

Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies, said research in Michigan has shown charters routinely exceed DPS on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) tests given to children in grades three to nine.

But he said the relatively poor performance of high school students in charters raises questions. Quisenberry said students perform better the longer they are in charter schools and it's unclear how long the high school students have been in the charter school setting. "These numbers are important, and they should make us concerned," he said.

For Keith Johnson, president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, the test results confirm what he has long suspected: Despite the advantages charters enjoy — they have more control of hiring, can demand greater parental involvement and can send misbehaving students back to DPS — they often have the same trouble educating a largely poor, minority population of students.

"If a charter is going to remain open, it must perform," said Johnson, whose union represents DPS teachers. "If it's consistently turning out poor results, it shouldn't remain open."

### **'In the same boat'**

Educators say DPS and the charters are trying to solve the same problem: overcoming the environment so many children come from, where poverty creates a shaky foundation for success.

"Everybody is pretty much in the same boat," said Doug Ross, CEO of New Urban Learning, which runs University Preparatory

Academy, one of the few schools to consistently outperform DPS. "We can't change the external environment."

Not all charters or Detroit Public Schools are the same, and comparisons can often be difficult. The three Covenant House schools have the lowest scores, but also some of the biggest challenges. And DPS' best high schools, Renaissance and Cass Tech, are open only to the district's best students — and score accordingly. Renaissance had an ACT average of 20.9, Cass Tech 19.2, well beyond the district's overall average.

Likewise, there's a vast difference between Ross' UPA and the Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences, another charter school. University Prep had an ACT composite of 16.5, the Academy of Arts and Sciences 13.8.

What the scores point out is the difficulty both public and charter schools face, and the need for solutions.

"We need more good schools and we've got to get (students) out of low-performing schools," Ross said, "and who cares who governs them?"

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