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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 01/17/12

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### STATE NEWS

#### Editorial: LAUSD without borders

Los Angeles Times

By: Editorial Board

January 16, 2012

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/opinionla/la-ed-laugd-20120116.0.1933983.story>

All too often, a child's ZIP Code is his destiny. In Los Angeles, it is possible to discern from that five-digit number alone not only whether he lives in a safe neighborhood or whether there's a nearby park — poorer areas of the city are notably lacking in public green spaces — but also his chance, and his children's chances, of living in a different neighborhood at some point in the future. That's in large part because such children often attend low-performing neighborhood schools where the likelihood of earning a diploma hovers around 50%, and the odds of upward mobility are worse.

Los Angeles Unified school board President Monica Garcia is now asking whether all that might be changed, not by continuing incremental efforts to improve schools within certain neighborhoods but by eliminating ZIP Codes from the equation altogether. What would happen, she dares to ask, if L.A. Unified simply eliminated enrollment boundaries, so that students who lived in any part of the district had equal claim to classroom seats in any school anywhere in the district?

The practical answer is: chaos. It's unclear how the most popular schools in the most-sought-after neighborhoods would choose among the many students who would no doubt apply for admission. Furthermore, in an area as sprawling as Los Angeles, getting students to their chosen schools could be a nightmare. Bus transportation would make little sense with students from any given area headed every which way, and even if parents had the time and resources to drive their children to school — which many don't — do we really want to put tens of thousands of additional cars on our crowded roads each morning and evening? Parents who pay big mortgages to live near high-performing schools would, of course, be outraged, and many would probably leave the district if their children weren't admitted to a school nearby, which would in turn bleed the district of more enrollment and more money that it can't afford to lose.

Garcia concedes that she hasn't yet thought through the real-life ramifications of the proposal. What she has done, at a time when educational heads tend to be mired in the minutiae — such as how the money will be found to finish the school year — is open a big-sky conceptual discussion about whether society can continue to condemn children to inferior schools because of the happenstance of residency.

The resolution she introduced, which the board is scheduled to consider on Tuesday, would direct Supt. John Deasy to develop a plan to do away with enrollment boundaries. Garcia says that she's not looking to dismantle neighborhood schools and that it's probable that a compromise approach would emerge after any such plan is debated and finally voted on — perhaps offering more choices within smaller areas, or having schools with extra seats extend opportunities to students from outside their immediate area — but she wants to keep the discussion open to all options.

For all the devils in the details, a full debate on open enrollment would provide a new way of looking at educational inequities, and would lend new urgency to the issue. If students had endless options for attending school, racial imbalances in enrollment would begin to even out, without the need for race-based admissions. So would private donations; it's unlikely that one school

would be awash in parent-funded enrichment programs while another couldn't afford a computer for a classroom. Teachers who in the past might have fled inner-city schools for the suburbs would have less reason to transfer. Parents who wouldn't dream of sending their children to a rundown school in South Los Angeles might be forced to admit that it's no more acceptable for other children to have to attend that school.

The classic response to complaints about educational inequities has been that the district has to work harder on providing top-quality neighborhood schools for low-income students. That theory, nice as it sounds, has been as fraught with practical barriers as the idea of open enrollment is. It has been too easy for parents to ignore bad public schools when their children don't have to attend them, and too hard for parents to find good public schools when their income level doesn't buy them housing in more affluent neighborhoods. Garcia's resolution may not solve these problems, but with luck it might open up an overdue discussion across L.A. Unified. Good for her, for raising her head above the fray and thinking big.

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## Federal judge upholds Indiana's school voucher law

Associated Press

By: Staff

January 13, 2012

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/01/13/federal-judge-upholds-indianas-school-voucher-law/>

A federal judge in Indiana has upheld the nation's largest school voucher law and rejected opponents' arguments the measure unconstitutionally uses taxpayer money to support religion.

Marion Superior Court Judge Michael Keele's ruling Friday says the School Choice Scholarship program doesn't violate the state constitution because Indiana isn't directly funding parochial schools. It instead gives scholarship vouchers to parents who can choose where to use them.

Indiana State Teachers Association President Nate Schnellenberger says opponents will appeal.

Institute for Justice attorney Bert Gall calls the ruling a major victory for parents and students. He represented two parents in the lawsuit.

The Indiana attorney general's office had no immediate comment.

About 4,000 children are enrolled in Indiana's voucher program.

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## New York: Invoking King, Gov. Cuomo and Mayor Bloomberg Stoke Fight on Teacher Review Impasse

New York Times

By: Thomas Kaplan and Kate Taylor

January 16, 2012

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/17/nyregion/cuomo-and-bloomberg-on-attack-on-teacher-evaluations.html?\\_r=1&ref=education](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/17/nyregion/cuomo-and-bloomberg-on-attack-on-teacher-evaluations.html?_r=1&ref=education)

Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#) and Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#), each irate that a stalemate over teacher evaluations is endangering federal education aid, fixed their sights Monday on a shared opponent: what they derided as New York State's education bureaucracy.

Both men said the state could no longer tolerate a public school system they said was failing students, invoked the ideals of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and appeared ready for a fight.

At separate observances commemorating Dr. King's birthday, the governor and the mayor ratcheted up their attacks on teachers' unions and school administrators.

Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, declared that "we have to realize that our schools are not an employment program" and vowed to press for the speedy establishment of a statewide teacher evaluation system.

"It is this simple: It is not about the adults; it is about the children," Mr. Cuomo said, drawing loud applause from a mostly black audience at a state convention center in Albany.

Citing the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, the governor lamented that because of failing public schools, "the great equalizer that was supposed to be the public education system can now be the great discriminator."

Mr. Bloomberg, an independent, spoke later at the Harlem headquarters of the Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network, offering an impassioned case for the education proposals that headlined his State of the City address last week, including firing up to half of the teachers in dozens of low-performing schools.

Mr. Bloomberg, whose plans were met with hostility by union leaders and most of the Democrats expected to run for mayor in 2013, said, "Special interests and defenders of the status quo are digging in for a fight."

"Well, let me tell you, I'm ready to fight for our kids; I'm ready to stand up to special interests," the mayor said, adding, "This school system shouldn't be run for the people that work in the school system."

Mr. Bloomberg was greeted with boos as he began to speak to the crowd; some of the criticism appeared to be about education, but some was associated with other issues, including concern over the New York Police Department's practice of "stop and frisk."

Mr. Cuomo, according to people who have been told of his plans, will announce on Tuesday, as part of his proposed budget for the next fiscal year, that he will require the creation of an evaluation system as a condition for school districts to receive a scheduled increase in state education aid.

Local school districts already evaluate teachers, but the reviews are often basic, and poor ones frequently carry few consequences for tenured teachers. In 2010, the State Legislature approved the framework of a new evaluation system that would be more specific and would allow for tougher sanctions against teachers who are rated ineffective, but efforts to put that system in place have stalled in New York City and elsewhere over issues like the appeals process for teachers and the role that student test scores would play in teacher evaluations.

On Monday, Mr. Cuomo vowed to force the evaluation issue to secure the \$700 million that is in jeopardy because New York has not instituted an evaluation system, which it promised to do when it sought money through the federal Race to the Top program.

Under his plan, Mr. Cuomo will effectively order the statewide teachers' union and the State [Education Department](#) to settle a continuing legal dispute over evaluations and to agree to standards for the evaluation system. If they cannot, he will seek to impose an evaluation system as part of the state budget, which must be approved by the end of March, according to an official with direct knowledge of the plan, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because Mr. Cuomo's budget was not yet public.

Once the evaluation system has been set up, either by agreement or by fiat, school districts would have until January 2013 to put it into effect. At that point, the official said, any district that had not done so would lose the promised increase in state education aid.

Carl Korn, a spokesman for New York State United Teachers, said that while the union shared "the governor's frustration over the implementation of the law," tying teacher evaluations to state education aid was the "wrong approach."

"We think supporting teachers and unions in their work is a much better approach," Mr. Korn said.

Michael Mulgrew, the president of the United Federation of Teachers, which represents city teachers, focused his criticism on Mr. Bloomberg. "I believe he's trying to use this as sort of political grandstanding," he said.

Mr. Mulgrew, noting that his union had "no disagreement with the governor over the evaluations," did not object to Mr. Cuomo's tying the increase in education aid to the creation of the evaluation system.

"We're just as frustrated as he is, and I publicly came out and asked him to get involved," he said.

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## Colorado charter-school laws seventh-strongest in U.S., report says

The Denver Post

By: Yesenia Robles

January 17, 2012

[http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci\\_19756038](http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_19756038)

Colorado has the seventh-strongest charter-school laws in the country, a three spot drop from last year, according to an annual rankings report.

The report, released by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, says more about what's new in other states than a weakening of Colorado rules, officials said.

"The differences between our state and other states are a lot of little things that are not explicit in law but are still in practice," said Jim Griffin, president of the Colorado League of Charter Schools. "By any other external measure, the state of our state is at the top of the list."

For example, Colorado law does not require charter-school authorizers to put reasons for denial of a charter school in writing, but in practice — and given the availability of an appeals process — Griffin said all of them do.

According to the report, 10 states lifted caps on the number of charter schools allowed in 2011; seven states improved their rules for district authorizers; and 10 states improved their support for charter-school funding and facilities.

This year, Maine earned the No. 1 spot after passing a law in 2011 allowing charter schools, and after opening its first and only such school.

According to the report, potential areas for improvement in Colorado law include enacting statutory guidelines for relationships between charter schools and educational service providers, as well as developing statutory guidelines to govern multischool charter contracts.

Marking the first time Colorado has wrestled with policy for charter-school authorizers, the State Board of Education last week approved a set of guidelines — taken almost entirely from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers' published best practices.

The guidelines suggest that every school district that accepts charter-school applications should create a clear application process. Authorizers also are directed to give charter schools more autonomy on curriculum and teaching practices, focusing instead on tracking student academic growth.

The approval of those guidelines did not make it into the analysis in the new report but would have bumped Colorado's score up a few more points simply for putting those practices on the books, Griffin said.

Griffin said there isn't anything other states are doing that he would envy for Colorado charters.

"It's one tool, but it's nothing to lose sleep over," Griffin said. "There's rules on paper, and then there's actual life."

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## **Michigan: Editorial: Strong teachers key to student success**

The Detroit News

By: Editorial Board

January 17, 2012

<http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20120117/OPINION01/201170319/1008/Editorial-Strong-teachers-key-student-success>

The art of teaching has existed for thousands of years, but the qualities a great teacher should possess remain elusive and hotly debated. A new study highlights the importance of teachers and how Michigan could do a better, more efficient job of preparing its classroom leaders. Lawmakers and other state leaders should take a look.

The report, from the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, offers worthwhile observations. Gov. Rick Snyder has recognized the importance of training teachers effectively and making sure only the best teachers make it to classrooms. He's asked teaching programs to strengthen their course requirements and requested that the State Board of Education and Education Department raise the bar on teacher certification tests.

As more is demanded of K-12 students, it's reasonable to ask more of their teachers. The CRC study found a good teacher makes a significant difference. Bettie Buss, senior research associate with the CRC and author of the report, says teachers are the most influential factor in a child's education.

And it's one factor that schools can control, unlike a student's home life or family income status. Buss cites research that shows how the quality of a teacher directly affects their students' achievement and their future earning power. For instance, removing the bottom 5 to 8 percent of teachers and replacing them with average teachers could raise the annual U.S. GDP by a full percentage point.

Too many teachers trained in Michigan are exported elsewhere. About 5,000 of 7,500 new teachers — 67 percent — leave for jobs in other states. Because many of these teachers attend public universities, Buss contends limited higher education funding could be put to better use. In addition, the state's 33 approved teaching programs could raise their admission standards, and the state could close low-performing programs. For example, Lake Superior State University has remained on the state's low-performing or at-risk list since 2007, but the program remains open.

Donald Bennion, head of teacher education at Eastern Michigan University, acknowledges the state is pumping out more teachers than it can employ. But he says his program is working with other states, including Arizona and North Carolina, to hire graduates. He also encourages aspiring teachers to consider working in charter schools; the state's new Education Achievement System for failing schools, which launches in Detroit this fall, could offer new opportunities as well. And subjects such as science and math are in demand.

Michigan could benefit from more diversity in teacher training and certification. Most teachers in the state come from teacher training programs. Nationally, one-third of teachers hired since 2005 entered the field through alternative certification programs; in Michigan, it's less than 1 percent. Alternative certification is helpful for attracting teachers with varied academic and professional experience and expanding the number of teachers in specialty subjects such as science and foreign languages. State Education Department leaders should at least ensure alternative certification in Michigan rivals other programs in the country.

Teachers should be the best in class. But in the U.S., that's not the case. Buss cites a report showing only 23 percent of new

U.S. teachers are in the top third of their class. In Singapore, Finland and South Korea, which boast the strongest student performance, all teachers are recruited from the top third. As Michigan develops a model to measure teacher effectiveness in the classroom, state leaders should not overlook how teachers themselves are taught.

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## **Jeb Bush group announces educational priorities for 2012 legislative session (and lawmakers are surely paying attention)**

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

January 16, 2012

[http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news\\_education\\_edblog/2012/01/jeb-bush-group-announces-educational-priorities-for-2012-legislative-session-and-lawmakers-are-surely-paying-attention.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29](http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2012/01/jeb-bush-group-announces-educational-priorities-for-2012-legislative-session-and-lawmakers-are-surely-paying-attention.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29)

Lots of groups (from local school boards to the Florida PTA) publish legislative priorities, wish lists for what they hope Florida lawmakers will, or won't, do when they convene in Tallahassee.

But when it comes to education issues probably no legislative priority list carries the weight of the that from [Foundation for Florida's Future](#).

The foundation was founded by former Gov. Jeb Bush. And with Republicans in power, and Bush having made a name for himself on the national stage as an education reformer, the foundation's suggestions tend to get taken seriously, even if they don't all become law immediately.

So with that background, here are the foundation's 2012 legislative priorities announced Friday:

–Passage of [the parent-trigger bill as a way of “empowering parents”](#). It would let them select an improvement plan for a struggling school and give them the right to see their child's teacher's evaluation and to opt for an online class, if the teacher is deemed “ineffective.”

–[Expansion of the Tax Credit Scholarship program](#), which provides private school vouchers to low-income students. The Foundation wants more money earmarked for the program and more students to be able to participate, even if they were not enrolled in public school previously.

–Increased enrollment in virtual programs. The Foundation wants more students, whether they are now in public or private school or home schooled, to be able to take state-funded online courses. It also wants home-schooled students attending the Florida Virtual School full time to be able to take part in some activities — such as sports and music — at their local public school.

–Protection of school funding, with increases for Florida's “school recognition” program, new state tests, reading programs, struggling school assistance, and bonuses for teachers whose students are successful on AP and IB exams. The Foundation also wants to “provide future funding for a performance pay salary schedule for Florida's educators.”

–Enhancement of State Board of Education authority, so it can intervene in a school the first time it gets an F on the state's annual school report card.

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