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NATIONAL NEWS

9 States Win Race to Top Early Learning Grants

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

December 16, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/12/states_win_race_to_top_early_l.html

Nine states will share \$500 million in Race to the Top [early learning grants](#), the U.S. Department of Education confirmed this morning.

They are: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington. They will get grants ranging from \$50 million to \$100 million, based on the state's student population, to significantly improve early-education programs in their states. North Carolina was ranked No. 1 by the outside peer reviewers who judged the competition. California, by at least [one account](#), was the surprise dark-horse winner. A must-read New America Foundation [blog post](#) also agrees that California—and even North Carolina—were surprises.

"Investing in early learning is one of the smartest things we can do," U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said during the White House announcement of the winners this morning. "I'm confident these nine states will lead the transformation."

Duncan added that there were far more stellar applications than he could fund, and he and others in the Obama administration indicated they would like to fund more states if they can. And indeed, it seems the Education Department will get another \$550 million in Race to the Top money in fiscal 2012, according to a [budget deal](#) just reached by congressional negotiators. However, later in a conference call with reporters, Duncan would not commit to using that money for early learning, saying he didn't know yet what the focus of future competitions would be.

Six of the nine state early-learning grantees are repeat Race to the Top winners, so they're only adding to their bounty (and to the long list of obligations and promises they must live up to): Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island.

Do these states have the capacity to implement two big education overhauls, one of their K-12 systems, and the other of their early education programs? Duncan noted, in response to a question during a media call about Delaware, that this competition was judged independently of any other. "I have tremendous confidence in Delaware's leadership," he said this afternoon. "None of this is easy. It takes significant change."

The winning nine states emerged from a [field of 37](#) competitors for early-learning grants.

"This is absolutely the missing puzzle piece for our work in Rhode Island," Commissioner Deborah Gist, whose state won a bigger Race to the Top grant last year, told my colleague Lesli Maxwell at this morning's White House event. Rhode Island will likely get \$50 million.

Notably missing from the winners' circle: Colorado, which was considered a front-runner by some to win. If you'll remember, it was a favorite to win last year's big Race to the Top competition, but lost out to other states considered less reform-y, such as Hawaii and New York. That's a double ouch. The New America Foundation [is also surprised](#) that Pennsylvania and Oklahoma weren't winners, either.

To win, states [had to craft](#) rating systems for their programs, appropriate standards and tests for young children, and clear expectations for what teachers should know.

The grants are made possible through an additional \$700 million Congress set aside for the Obama administration's Race to the Top brand in the fiscal 2011 budget deal reached earlier this year. While \$500 million went to early learning, the other \$200 million was [offered to the nine finalists](#) that did not win last year's \$4 billion general education-reform competition. The finalists, [seven of which chose to apply](#) for a small piece of the \$200 million consolation prize, had to pick a part of their original application to pursue, with a special emphasis on the STEM, or science, technology, engineering, and math, subjects. Those winners could be announced as early as next week.

Interestingly, the early-learning winners don't largely reflect the [predictions of the New America Foundation](#), which detailed the frontrunners and laggards in an August [analysis](#). Of the 11 frontrunners, only three won: North Carolina, Maryland, and Ohio.

"I'm happy that people finally understand that child care is education," Flora L. Gee, the director of the Greenbelt Children's Center, told my colleague Lesli. Gee helped her state, Maryland, prepare its winning application.

There was no talk of the losers at today's White House event.

"This early learning challenge will redefine the future of early childhood education in this country," said Linda K. Smith, the deputy assistant secretary for early childhood development under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which partnered with the Education Department in running the grant competition. "We now have a foundation in place for moving forward."

You can read the winning state's applications (and all applications, for that matter) [here](#).

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House Republicans Likely to Write Own NCLB Bill

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

December 16, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/12/house_republicans_may_write_ow.html

GOP lawmakers on the House education committee are likely to write a Republican-only version of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

U.S. Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., the chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, said today that the committee has been working for months on a bipartisan rewrite of the law, but lawmakers haven't been able to reach agreement.

Here's his statement:

Since the start of the 112th Congress, education reform has been a top priority for the committee and my Republican colleagues. We convened 11 hearings and invited dozens of witnesses to describe the challenges and opportunities facing the nation's schools. My colleagues and I also spent months engaged in bipartisan talks on the way forward for reform of the elementary and secondary education act. There were several areas where we forged new agreement, but others in which we ultimately could not come to a consensus. The urgency to reform the law has not changed. I look forward to a robust debate once legislation is introduced in the coming weeks.

A Republican only bill is a big departure from the way that ESEA reauthorization is typically crafted—it's one of the few bills that is almost always bipartisan. In fact, the current version of the law, the No Child Left Behind Act, passed by overwhelming bipartisan margins back in 2001.

Kline and Rep. George Miller, of California, the top Democrat, had been talking about a bipartisan approach this time around. But it looks like the two sides are just too far apart to go that way when it comes to sticky issues at the heart of the law, such as accountability, advocates said.

The House education committee, which is breaking up the renewal into bite-sized pieces, has a mixed record so far when it comes to bipartisanship. The panel was able to craft a bipartisan bill on [charter](#) schools. But two other pieces of legislation, one offering districts [funding flexibility](#) and another [eliminating](#) more than 40 programs, were only supported by GOP lawmakers.

A partisan ESEA bill in the House would be a big deal, because it would dim the chances that reauthorization would get done before the end of President Barack Obama's first term.

For one thing, further Senate action may depend on the House. U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, the chairman of the Senate

education committee, which passed its own [version](#) of the ESEA renewal earlier this year with some Republican support, has [said](#) he won't seek to advance the bill until the House approves a bipartisan product.

In fact, here's what Harkin had to say about the House's inclination to do a GOP bill:

Given that the HELP Committee was able to come to bipartisan agreement on a strong bill to reauthorize ESEA, I sincerely hope Chairman Kline will reconsider his decision to not pursue a bipartisan bill. There is widespread agreement that No Child Left Behind needs to be fixed for the sake of our nation's children, and I hope we will not abandon the longstanding tradition of bipartisanship when it comes to the education of our kids. Without a bipartisan bill coming out of the House, I believe it would be difficult to find a path forward that will draw the support we need from both sides of the aisle to be able to send a final bill to the President that advances education for America's students.

For another thing, at least until after the election, the finished ESEA product will need to get through the Republican House, the Democratic Senate, and be signed by President Obama to become law.

If Congress can't get its act together, the administration's waivers will become the main vehicle for fixing the controversial law. And the waivers themselves have faced a lot of pushback on Capitol Hill.

Miller, for one, is not very happy about the partisan direction. Here's a statement from him:

I have communicated to Chairman Kline my disappointment that he has chosen to go the partisan route. Partisanship means the end to NCLB reform in this Congress. Bipartisanship is the only successful way forward. The Senate has moved a bipartisan bill out of committee. The House could do the same if it had the political will to do so. Our nation's children deserve a real process for achieving consensus, not partisan political games.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan also said a GOP-only bill isn't the way to go.

Education reform requires all of us - parents, teachers, students, and elected officials from both sides of the aisle - to come together and do the right thing for kids. Our children only have one shot at a good education, so it's disappointing to hear that some Members of Congress may let partisan politics stand in the way.

And some advocates are weighing in.

"We are sad and disappointed," said Kate Tromble, the director of legislative affairs for the Education Trust, which advocates for poor and minority kids. "ESEA has always been bipartisan. Moving forward in a partisan direction breaks with all tradition."

UPDATE: A Senate Republican aide pointed out that, while ESEA has always been bipartisan, the measure hasn't always garnered the overwhelming support NCLB did back in 2001. For instance, in 1994, an renewal bill was approved in the House that had the support of most Democrats and 45 Republicans. But 124 GOP lawmakers voted no. Here's the [vote](#).

"That's hardly some grand bipartisan victory of process," the aide said. "Who's to say that a partisan bill that moves through the House under Republicans couldn't garner similar levels of Democrat support?"

That certainly seems possible in this case. During consideration of the Senate's ESEA measure, GOP lawmakers found common ground with Democrats (and the National Education Association) on issues including giving states more leeway in turning around their lowest performing schools, and teacher evaluation. Similar dynamics could emerge in the House.

But, at the same time, party members often defer to the ranking member on a committee. So getting Democratic support could be tougher if Miller really doesn't like what Kline puts forward. Should be interesting to watch.

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States Creating New Districts to Steer 'Turnarounds'

Education Week

By: Christina A. Samuels

December 14, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/12/14/14authority.h31.html?tkn=QPQFzKSn%2FUqg%2FDRpKIMmfHpDtJoFe2DCASLN&cmp=clp-edweek>

If the job of a traditional superintendent is hard, imagine the complexities involved in building a school system from scratch—especially one composed of schools with some of the most intractable educational challenges.

That's the task facing education leaders in Michigan and Tennessee, which are building special districts to take over low-performing schools this year and next.

And it may become the job of more school leaders, as states work to enact wholesale changes in groups of struggling schools, rather than taking on one school at a time or directly managing established districts.

Both Michigan and Tennessee are drawing on the experiences of Louisiana's [Recovery School District](#), which took responsibility

for most of the schools in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2005 and which now includes schools from other districts across the state.

Unlike the managers of previous state interventions in low-performing districts, the leaders heading "turnaround" districts in Louisiana, Michigan, and Tennessee are working in new, state-created districts that pluck schools from their home districts and put them under an entirely different management structure.

Proponents of the idea argue that removing schools from the bureaucracy of the traditional school district—and, to some extent, from the bureaucracy of direct management by the state—frees those schools to create new and innovative programs to meet students' needs. But experts in administration say these new district-management models may require a new breed of leader—one who has the skill to navigate local political waters in districts that may be distrustful of state efforts and deal with state leaders who may exert pressure to get positive results quickly.

"This is innovation within certain parameters," said Kenneth K. Wong, the director of the Urban Education Policy Program at Brown University, in Providence, R.I. District leaders are expected to show results and have some freedom to achieve them, he said, but they also have to be directly accountable to a state school board or to the governor for outcomes.

"Right now, it is yet another challenge for our leadership pipeline," Mr. Wong said.

Eschewing Ideology

Paul G. Vallas, the best-known of this breed of leader, spent four years overseeing Louisiana's Recovery School District, the oldest of the new special turnaround districts. In the Recovery District, many schools were turned over to charter managers, while others were directly managed by the new entity.

Mr. Vallas said that educators who lead these special districts can't be ideologues, wedded to one particular model of school improvement over another. They have to focus on involving the community in the reforms. And they also have to be committed to returning the schools to their traditional districts, he believes.

"If [school leaders] know the schools are coming back, there's going to be a greater willingness to be supportive of the state-intervention process," Mr. Vallas said.

In Michigan, John Covington, picked as the chancellor of that state's [Education Achievement System](#) in August, now faces trying to build a system from scratch. The Michigan district is scheduled to begin operations in the 2012-13 school year, starting with schools in the 73,000-student Detroit school system.

Mr. Covington joined the system after two years as superintendent in Kansas City, Mo., where he drew national attention for pushing through a major school-closing effort to try to put the 17,000-student district on a stronger financial footing.

Kansas City leaders criticized Mr. Covington for leaving the district, which is now set to lose its accreditation in January due to academic problems. But Mr. Covington said he sees the strides that Kansas City made as an example of broader community support.

"What we were able to accomplish in Kansas City in a very short period of time wasn't entirely my doing—it was the community, working in a spirit of cooperation to get that done," he said.

During a break on a trip he and his leadership team took to visit the Recovery School District in Louisiana, Mr. Covington said that he sees his role as making fundamental changes in the one-size-fits-all model he says too many schools now operate under.

"But we're not saying that coming up with something new for the sake of being new is the silver bullet," he said. "We're coming up with something new to provide students with a more appropriate education."

For example, he said, some of the schools that will come under his jurisdiction might operate well as "blended learning" institutions, where students can mix face-to-face and computerized lessons.

But few specifics are in place about the new Michigan district. Though Mr. Covington is talking with other districts in the state, he said the plan for now is to concentrate on Detroit, though the schools have not been named yet.

But he is taking some cues from the Louisiana district.

"They're still not there," he said of the Recovery School District, "but if you look at where they are compared to where they started, it's almost mind-boggling."

Plans for Tennessee

Tennessee, meanwhile, has hired Christopher J. Barbic, the founder and president of the Houston-based charter school network known as YES Prep Public Schools, to be the superintendent of the [Achievement School District](#). In August, the district started co-managing four schools in Memphis and one in Chattanooga.

The plan is for the Tennessee district to eventually oversee the lowest 5 percent of schools in the state. Currently, 85 schools are at that level; all are located in Chattanooga, Memphis, or Nashville.

"I'm not walking into a legacy with an existing culture, good or bad," said Mr. Barbic, who was hired in May from the charter network, whose name stands for [Youth Engaged in Service](#). "That's a huge opportunity, but it's a big responsibility."

He said that the lure of system-building has attracted potential leaders who might not otherwise be interested in joining a large education bureaucracy.

At the same time, some of the school leaders in the individual districts have seen reform plans come and go. Mr. Barbic said that it's up to him to prove that this particular form of district management has staying power.

"There's definitely skepticism, and honestly, I think there should be. We haven't done anything yet," he said. "But I do think there's a healthy dose of optimism as well. We want to make sure that we're putting ourselves in a position to get results, and we want to do this slowly and methodically." In that way, Mr. Barbic said, the achievement district is following the example of successful charter operators that generally don't try to open dozens of schools at one time before seeing what works.

It's also important, he added, that these new leaders have direct experience providing a high-quality education to minority students and students who live in poverty.

Jury Still Out

As such efforts in Michigan and Tennessee get under way, results from Louisiana's 8-year-old recovery district are beginning to emerge. Before the storm, five New Orleans schools had been converted to charters under the auspices of the Recovery School District. After the storm, the RSD took over all but 17 schools in the district. Those remained under the control of the Orleans Parish school board.

In a report scheduled for release this week, the [Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives](#), at Tulane University in New Orleans, says that schools in the city that are managed by the Recovery District have shown marked improvement in state test scores, particularly those run by charter operators. Though proficiency is still lower than the state average, the growth has been faster, the report notes.

But the academic performance at the schools directly managed by the recovery district continues to lag. And there's still a question about how the state will help improve performance in regular districts that may still be left with a number of low-performing schools. The Recovery School District has also faced complaints that it was not responsive to parents and that charters were not prepared to enroll students with special needs, said Debra L. Vaughan, the assistant director for research at the Cowen Institute and the lead author of the report.

"Maybe the jury's still out" on whether turnaround districts are the best way to address failing schools, said Ms. Vaughan, though she believes that more states will look at recovery district-style improvement strategies. "With these chronically failing schools, we really can't afford to waste time."

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Virtual Schools Booming as States Mull Warnings

Associated Press

By: Staff

December 16, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2011/12/16/479823usonlineschools_ap.html

DENVER – More schoolchildren than ever are taking their classes online, using technology to avoid long commutes to school, add courses they wouldn't otherwise be able to take—and save their school districts money.

But as states pour money into virtual classrooms, with an estimated 200,000 virtual K-12 students in 40 states from Washington to Wisconsin, educators are raising questions about online learning. States are taking halting steps to increase oversight, but regulation isn't moving nearly as fast as the virtual school boom.

The online school debate pits traditional education backers, often teachers' unions, against lawmakers tempted by the promise of cheaper online schools and school-choice advocates who believe private companies will apply cutting-edge technology to education.

Is online education as good as face-to-face teaching?

Virtual education companies tout a 2009 research review conducted for the U.S. Department of Education that showed K-12 students did as well or better in online learning conditions as in a traditional classroom.

But critics say most studies, including many in that 2009 review, used results from students taking only some—but not all—of their courses online. They also point out wide gaps in state oversight to ensure students, and not their parents or tutors, are actually completing tests and coursework.

Still, virtual schooling at the K-12 level is booming. For example, one of the nation's largest for-profit online education providers, Virginia-based K12 Inc., saw its earnings more than double in the first quarter of this year, fueled in large part by a 42 percent enrollment spike.

"Online learning is the future of American education. Precisely because it's so transforming, it's threatening to the established institutions," said Terry Moe, a political scientist at Stanford University who studies the online school boom.

The conflict has boiled over in Colorado, which expects to spend \$85 million this year educating some 14,200 students online. The state's online school industry is growing by double digits a year, bankrolled by a state government that pays private companies to teach students as young as kindergarten entirely via computer with limited oversight.

Online schools aggressively court new students in Colorado, where they are paid the same as brick-and-mortar schools. But so far the results have been discouraging.

A 2010 report by the state Department of Education showed below-average test scores, dropout rates near 50 percent in some cases and a student-to-teacher ratio as high as 317 to 1 at one school. Still, enrollment grew more than 12 percent between 2008 and 2009, and Colorado's online schools get paid for an entire school year even if a student drops out after Oct. 1, the date the state tallies student enrollment.

"I know there are millions of dollars being bled from the system that have no accountability tied to them," said Democratic Senate President Brandon Shaffer, whose request for an audit of online schools but was blocked by Republicans.

"If you're the person bringing this up, you're labeled anti-choice, anti-reform," Shaffer said.

An October report by the University of Colorado-based National Education Policy Center said school-choice advocates are pushing states to rush headlong into virtual K-12 education despite limited data.

"These online school providers are raking in hundreds of millions of dollars, and the product they're putting out is just horrible," said Gene Glass, author of the CU report and a vocal critic of public funding for online schools. But he said legislators see online schools as a cost-saver so states are moving forward.

Idaho and Florida passed laws in the last year requiring high school students to take at least one course online. Ohio lifted a moratorium on new "e-schools," and Utah passed a "virtual voucher" law allowing high school students to choose which courses to take online and which to take at a brick-and-mortar school.

Virtual learning can fill an important void for some students.

In Mims, Fla., 14-year-old Celestial McBride was homeschooled by her mother after third grade because the family traveled frequently. Now she takes courses from the public Florida Virtual School, where she studies at her own pace and expects to have a college-level associate's degree by the time she's 16.

"I think you learn faster online," said McBride, who attends virtual "clubs" including the school's student newspaper, published online, of course.

"In a regular classroom, you could always have the kid who's a disruption," she said. "Online, there's no disruption."

McBride's mom, Nancy McBride, said that taking classes online allows her children to travel without falling behind.

"The misconception is that the teacher isn't there. Not true. The teacher's right there, and they're involved with my kids at every step," she said.

Jazmyn Styles, a 17-year-old senior at Pike High School in Indianapolis, said she takes online courses during the summer to free up time during the regular school year for college credit courses and internships.

She said she's in regular contact with her online teacher through Skype, instant messaging and email.

"I like working at my own pace. Because when you're in a normal classroom, the teacher can only work as quickly as the slowest student," she said.

What about the teachers?

Kristin Kipp, a high school teacher at Colorado's Virtual Academy in Jefferson County, said she worried about connecting with students one-on-one when she switched to an online setting, but found that she got to know her students more through their steady stream of texts, emails and phone calls.

Kipp said teachers need to be proactive to maintain regular communication with students to help them succeed.

"My constant message in an online classroom is, 'I see you, I know you're there,'" she said. "So kids are constantly getting messages from me saying, 'Hey your grade went up 5 percent this week. Congratulations, keep up the hard work.'"

The nation's largest industry group for online schools, the Washington-based International Association for K-12 Online Learning, says states would be foolish to apply the brakes to online school expansion. Group CEO Susan Patrick pointed out that about one in three college students now take some courses online, and about 50 percent of workforce training is believed to be done online.

"The world has moved online, no question," Patrick said. "You have to ask, when did face-to-face learning become the gold standard for education?"

At the same time, the group says states need to do a better job overseeing online schools.

"You absolutely must have accountability, and in some cases, it's not there," Patrick said.

That's starting to change. The Utah law that expanded students' online school options also set new compensation rules for online schools—they get half the money up front, but the rest only for those students who finish the courses. Florida also pays only for completed courses, not by students enrolled. Oregon set up a task force to come up with better governance for virtual schools, and Washington passed a 2009 law setting up an agency within the Department of Education to vet applicants wanting to set up online schools.

Wisconsin earlier this year became the first state to require 30 hours of additional training for online teachers.

"The majority of teachers still haven't learned to do this, and online education is a distinct skill," said Dennis O'Connor, who teaches online education for graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

O'Connor, who teaches his Wisconsin graduate students from his home in San Diego, embraces online learning but notes, "There's no proof one way or the other at this point if a total online learning experience is a good thing or a bad thing," O'Connor said.

Moe, the Stanford professor, said that states holding back on virtual education are ignoring reality.

"Twenty years from now, a typical child will be going to a hybrid school," he said. "They'll be going to a physical location, but computers will do 80 percent of the teaching."

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STATE NEWS

Florida: New FCAT cut scores unanimously adopted

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeff Solocheck

December 19, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/content/new-fcat-cut-scores-unanimously-adopted>

The Florida Board of Education has unanimously adopted [new higher FCAT cut scores](#) at every grade level, including a score of 245 for tenth-grade reading. That score is higher than superintendents supported.

"I must insist on the record that we are all, as board members, continuing to raise the bar for all students ... including all the minorities," board member A.K. Desai said. "We are not going to be falling for any soft bigotry of low expectations."

Board member John Padget noted that students will have more than one opportunity to pass the 10th grade reading test even with the higher score.

"It's up to everybody to help them recover and be able to graduate," Padget said.

No one from the public commented during the conference call meeting. The new scores take effect with the spring FCAT administration.

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Florida Legislature shifts focus to higher education

Associated Press

By: Christine Armario

December 19, 2011

<http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20111219/APN/1112190590>

MIAMI - Last year, Florida legislators made historic changes to education. Tenure for new teachers was eliminated. Instructor evaluations were revamped and linked to student test scores. And a new compensation system was passed to reward those whose students achieve the highest gains.

In the 2012 session, which starts Jan. 10, the focus is likely to shift from K-12 to higher education. Gov. Rick Scott and others say they want to find ways to make the state university system more effective and boost the number of students graduating with degrees in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Whether the Legislature is ready to pass wide-sweeping changes to higher education is another matter. To date, no bills have been filed and several legislators said they are still researching what possible action to take. Redrawing the state's congressional and legislative districts and the budget are likely to be at the top of the agenda, and lawmakers will also be focused on effectively implementing last year's K-12 overhaul.

"I hope we can make some changes," said House Speaker Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park. "But my real goal is to get the dialogue going, and then hopefully the leaders that follow me can continue that."

Scott caused uproar in academia this fall when he urged the state to look at the employment outcomes for all degree programs and pointed to anthropology as one field of study where more people weren't needed. He also touted the higher education overhaul pushed by Republican presidential candidate and Texas Gov. Rick Perry. The Texas plan includes ideas like basing professor evaluations on student reviews and how many students they teach.

So far, it's not gathering much momentum in Florida.

"I don't think anyone would seriously say that's the sole basis for evaluating faculty," said Rep. Bill Proctor, R-Winter Park.

Proctor, chairman of the House Education Committee, said legislators and staff are focusing on nearly a dozen areas for potential changes including tuition, accountability and sharpening university mission statements. Controversial topics like tenure haven't yet been addressed, Proctor said.

"It's a high-profile issue but it's really not the thing we're looking at too much," Proctor said. "Right now if I were to say what's (the) highest concern, it's sharpening the focus of our mission because it's reasonably clear there's not going to be a lot of state money for the university system in the foreseeable future, so we have to make sure we are spending it in the right places for the right things."

Even Scott conceded changes might not happen this session.

"I know this session's going to be harder to get things done just because we are going to spend so much time on redistricting," Scott said. "But I think to the benefit of our students I think the earlier we make sure that individuals are getting degrees in areas that they can get jobs it's good for the state."

After slashing the education budget last year, Scott is now proposing a \$1 billion increase for public K-12 education. That money comes as millions in federal jobs and recovery funds has dried up and districts across the state have cut jobs and reduced after-school options because of budget cuts.

"I think the governor heard his constituents and acted accordingly," said Wayne Blanton, executive director of the Florida School Boards Association.

Andy Ford, president of the Florida Education Association, the statewide teachers union, likened the increase to "a Band-Aid." He said years of cuts, the end of federal stimulus and jobs money, and a slew of expensive mandates, including the class-size amendment, end of course exams, and the new teacher evaluations, mean the \$1 billion increase won't go far enough.

The governor and legislators "just keep walking away from their responsibility," Ford said.

On the K-12 front, bills filed so far include: A measure that would eliminate a middle school physical education requirement; a bill to reduce the monetary penalty districts receive for failing to meet the class-size law; a proposal to allow prayer at high school events; and a bill to establish a technical career track for high school students.

"It's one of those issues that has been neglected for a long time and is going to move back to the forefront this session," Blanton said of vocational education.

Rep. Bryan Nelson, R-Apopka, has sponsored a bill to allow advertising on schools buses, an idea that's gained traction in a few other states.

"It doesn't cost taxpayers a nickel and it could raise a substantial amount of money for the school districts," Nelson said.

Charter schools are likely to be another area of focus. Last session, the Legislature passed a law to make it easier for high-perform charter schools to expand. This session, Rep. Janet Adkins, R-Fernandina Beach, has introduced legislation requiring school districts to share capital outlay tax revenue with charter schools. If not, the state will recalculate the money it receives from the Florida Education Finance Program and redistribute a share to charters.

Florida has seen some of the largest growth in charter school student enrollment nationwide. The number of students attending charter schools was 40,465 in 2001-02 and almost quadrupled to 154,780 in 2010-11.

"I think you're going to see a lot of attention paid to charter schools," Blanton said. "More charter schools and more oversight of

charter schools."

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Education measures on hold in New Jersey Legislature

Newsworks

By: Phil Gregory

December 19, 2011

<http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/item/31444-education-changes-will-have-to-wait-in-new-jersey->

New Jersey lawmakers are not expected to enact education reform proposals at next month's final meeting of the current legislative session.

Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean said he is disappointed lawmakers aren't acting sooner on teacher tenure and merit pay proposals.

"We could have had for the first time a merit-based, performance-based, achievement-based system of making sure that kids had the opportunity to learn and could graduate from high school going straight to college or straight to the work force and be qualified for that opportunity," Kean said.

Senate President Steve Sweeney expects education reform bills will be considered early in the next session of the Legislature.

Sweeney said he is close to reaching an agreement with Gov. Chris Christie on merit pay.

"We would give additional dollars to that school but for very limited uses so that it might make the teachers' job easier," Sweeney said. "Maybe it's improvement of technology. We would have a category of what they would spend the money on."

The governor wants to end the reliance on seniority to determine teacher wages and retention, but Sweeney says he won't agree to that.

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Judge to decide on constitutionality of Indiana school vouchers program

Associated Press

By: Staff

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<http://www.indystar.com/article/20111219/NEWS/111219007/Ruling-possible-today-constitutionality-Ind-vouchers>

INDIANAPOLIS — A judge will decide whether Indiana's new school voucher program is unconstitutional.

A hearing is scheduled for today in Marion County Superior Court 7 in Indianapolis.

A group of teachers and religious leaders backed by the Indiana State Teachers Association is challenging the law enacted earlier this year, claiming it violates the state constitution by providing public money to religious institutions.

The state contends the voucher system is legal because the state isn't directly funding parochial schools. Instead, it gives [scholarship](#) vouchers to parents, who can choose which school to use them at.

Judge Michael Keele declined to block the law in August, writing that the law "is religion-neutral and was enacted 'for the benefit' of students, not religious institutions or activities."

Indiana's voucher program is the nation's largest.

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