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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 01/13/12

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### STATE NEWS

## New Jersey: Gov. Christie signs bill allowing private companies to build schools in needy areas

Statehouse Bureau

By: Jenna Portnoy

January 12, 2012

[http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/01/gov\\_christie\\_signs\\_bill\\_allowi\\_3.html](http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/01/gov_christie_signs_bill_allowi_3.html)

Gov. Chris Christie today signed the first of what he hopes will be a series of education reforms: a measure giving private nonprofit companies the authority to build a total of 12 schools in Newark, Camden and Trenton.

"Just like charter schools that are already operating all over New Jersey," he said in the auditorium of Landing Square School in Camden, "these renaissance schools will be subject to strict accountability by the Department of Education in meeting the bottom line, which is improving student achievement."

The Republican governor first visited the school on a broiling day in June to unveil the legislation, called the Urban Hope Act. He was joined today by Camden Mayor Dana Redd, a Democrat who has worked with him on education issues, as well as Sen. Donald Norcross (D-Camden), a sponsor.

Norcross said the bill in its final form won the support of the New Jersey Education Association, which has tangled with Christie on other issues.

"It's about those children standing behind us," Norcross said, referring to dozens of students in blue polo shirts.

NJEA spokesman Steve Baker said in an interview that the union opposed the original bill because it called for private for-profit companies to run the schools, unraveled tenure rules and loosened certification requirements for teachers in renaissance schools.

"These are not charter schools," Baker said, "but more akin to charter schools than the original version of the bill, which would have been more like private schools receiving public funding."

The school projects will not be subject to public bidding requirements, but will have to abide by prevailing wage rules.

"Part of the idea here ... is we want to get this thing move quickly and we do not want to get weighed down in bureaucratic red tape," Christie said, adding that his Acting Education Commissioner Christopher Cerf can provide adequate oversight.

The Schools Development Authority is responsible for construction in these and other low-income districts, but many projects have been stalled since Christie took office — and no schools have been built to replace those that are crumbling or overcrowded. Christie said he wouldn't ask the public to entrust the SDA, once rife with wasteful spending, to borrow more money for construction projects.

"This is an innovative idea that allows us to partner with folks who will bring capital to the table to build these schools," Christie

said. "I inherited what I inherited with the SDA."

Christie said he hopes the bipartisan cooperation that passed the bill through the Legislature will continue with other parts of his education reform package. "This is one of the first acts that we're going to take and I am confident and determined that we will take more," he said.

Christie's other education efforts — to overhaul a 100-year-old teacher tenure law, offer higher salaries to the best educators and give vouchers for students in failing public schools to attend private and parochial schools — have not won approval from lawmakers.

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## Iowa Senate study bill contains education reform timeline

Des Moines Register

By: Mary Stegmeir

January 12, 2012

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20120113/NEWS/301130024/1004/NEWS02/iowa-Senate-study-bill-contains-education-reform-timeline>

An Iowa Senate study bill released this week sets a clearer timeline for some of the education initiatives Gov. Terry Branstad has proposed.

The 156-page document contains several key dates, including a July 2013 deadline for development of the state's third-grade literacy policy. That item is the plan's most costly and controversial reform. The governor has budgeted \$10 million for the program, which would end social promotion for third-graders who can't read and would give extra help to struggling students.

Some initiatives, including kindergarten readiness tests and a minimum 3.0 grade-point average requirement for prospective teachers, would go into effect immediately. Others would be phased in.

Some of the deadlines:

### **By July 1**

New teachers would be probationary employees for five years, replacing the three-year mandate currently in Iowa law.

### **By Oct. 15**

Task forces created to study educator pay, teacher and administrator evaluation methods, and the length of the school day and year would report their findings to state officials.

### **By Jan. 1**

New state teaching and administration standards would be adopted.

### **By July 1, 2013**

A statewide parent advocacy network would be established, with at least one representative from each school district.

Pilot programs for the evaluation of teachers and administrators would be created.

A state value-added assessment system would be completed. Value-added measures "chart gains in student achievement by conducting a statistical analysis of achievement data that reveals academic growth over time for students and groups of students, such as those in a grade level in a school," according to the study bill.

Guidelines for the third-grade literacy initiative would be adopted. Under the program, students would have to pass a reading test or demonstrate mastery of the subject with a portfolio of work to be promoted to fourth grade.

### **By July 1, 2014**

A teacher evaluation system would be adopted.

A system for tracking student achievement in school districts and accredited nonpublic schools would be developed.

End-of-course exams for high school students would be rolled out, and a policy for incorporating those tests into state high school graduation requirements would be adopted.

### **By July 1, 2015**

The state would develop a model K-12 curriculum aligned to state standards. Schools would have the option of using the framework to guide instruction.

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## Tennessee and Georgia climb in education quality ranking

Times Free Press

By: Kevin Hardy

January 13, 2012

<http://timesfreepress.com/news/2012/jan/13/tennessee-and-georgia-climb-education-quality-rank/>

Tennessee and Georgia each moved up in a national ranking of overall education quality, with Tennessee placing 21st and Georgia seventh.

But those figures came in well above other measures of statewide student success such as the ACT college entrance exam and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a test that compares states' performance on math and reading.

On Thursday, the Education Research Center released its 2012 Quality Counts report, a comprehensive assessment of the nation's public education system that ranks states by examining several areas of education policy and student performance. The report is produced by Education Week, a national education newspaper published by Editorial Projects in Education, a nonprofit organization based in Bethesda, Md.

In addition to providing a state-by-state analysis, this year's report looks at how well states use information from national leaders and whether they look to countries leading in education progress.

Tennessee students ranked second to last on the ACT in 2011. Tennessee is one of six states that requires the ACT for all students.

In the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which has results are culled from four separate tested areas, Tennessee scored in the bottom 10 of 50 states in all four areas.

In Georgia, students placed between 29th and 43rd on tested areas of the assessment.

Tim Haywood, a research associate who worked on the study, said it isn't just based on student achievement, though that is a piece of it. Three indicators look at educational outputs — school finance, K-12 achievement and a student's chance of success, he said. The other indicators look at state policy, such as standards and assessments, policies regarding the teaching profession and a state's alignment in policy and curriculum.

"We track state policies that experts believe will lead to future improvement," Haywood said. "The indicators that we look at are kind of a mix of how states are currently doing and what they're setting themselves up to do — how well they're going to do in the future based on current policy."

Georgia scored at or above average in all categories, while Tennessee showed mixed results.

Both states ranked low in the school finance analysis. Tennessee received a D+, while Georgia received a C. Using figures adjusted for regional cost differences, the ranking says Tennessee spends \$8,695 per public school student, while Georgia spends \$9,827 per pupil. The national average is \$11,665, the study said.

Because Georgia's other scores all are so high, state officials said the results show the state is able to do more with less.

"I don't know any other way to take that than to say we're able to do things well, getting things to the classroom level, without spending as much," said Matt Cardoza, spokesman for the Georgia Department of Education.

In the ranking on this year's report that looks at the teaching profession, Tennessee ranked ninth and Georgia ranked 10th.

"I think it's wonderful. I'm not at all surprised," said Sandy Hughes, president of the Hamilton County Education Association, the local affiliate of the Tennessee Education Association.

Hughes said Tennessee and Hamilton County have been in the lead nationally with improving teacher quality for many years.

The study found that the national pay gap between teachers and other comparable workers has narrowed in the past several years, and it estimates that teachers earn about 94 cents for every dollar earned in similar occupations.

The study puts the median salary for U.S. public school teachers at \$49,974, compared to \$52,972 for comparable workers, a list that includes fields such as accounting, nursing, human resources and clergy.

But Hughes said she believes the national average isn't indicative of Tennessee's teacher salaries.

"Nationally, Tennessee doesn't score too well on how we pay our teachers," she said.

The report also showed that Tennessee and Georgia are among 29 states that use information and data from other nations when making comparisons and policy decisions. That's a step education and business officials said is increasingly important.

At a Washington, D.C., event where Thursday's report was released, several education leaders called on the U.S. to improve its education system in order to remain globally competitive.

Marc Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, a national nonprofit policy group, said American educators need to stop ignoring the methods and results of nations such as Finland that out-perform the U.S. in student achievement.

"They really believe the experience of these other countries is irrelevant," Tucker said in a policy roundtable discussion streamed online. "We have to get beyond that. These folks are eating our lunch."

The U.S. needs a centralized institution that can manage the education system, he said, rather than many governmental agencies that have various responsibilities and regulatory authority.

"It's not that the United States has a bad system. We have no system," he said. "We basically keep making minor changes in an institutional picture that's 100 years out of date."

Mary Jean Gallagher, deputy assistant minister in Canada's Ontario Ministry of Education, said such improvement in the United States isn't only necessary for this country's future.

"As the mouse, Canada sleeps with the elephant, the U.S.," she said. "We really need you to get it right, folks."

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## Colorado: Gov. Hickenlooper calls legislature to action

Education News Colorado

By: Todd Engdahl

January 12, 2012

<http://www.ednewscolorado.org/2012/01/12/31101-hick-calls-legislature-to-action>

Gov. John Hickenlooper today wove repeated references to education into a State of the state speech that focused on entrepreneurship, economic development and improving the efficiency of state government.

Hickenlooper also made several aspirational calls "to make Colorado the best state in the nation" during the 40-minute speech in a packed House chamber at the Capitol. He said entrepreneurship, efficient government and partisan cooperation can make the state an example for the nation and the world.

He also said, "Colorado kids must be educated" not just for jobs but because "the gift of education lasts a lifetime."

The governor referenced two specific areas of education legislation in his remarks:

**Early childhood:** "We seek your support in consolidating early childhood services under one roof," referring to a bill that would centralize most such agencies in the Department of Human Services.

"We must develop early childhood strategies" to improve third-grade literacy, he said, adding that Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia is preparing a plan for release in early February. "We are working on bipartisan legislation to make Colorado a national model for early literacy."

The state recently lost a bid for \$60 million in federal early learning funds, and the governor made no mention of funding in his speech.

**Educator effectiveness:** Hickenlooper said, "We need your support to pass legislation approving" rules to implement the educator evaluation system laid out by Senate Bill 10-191. (The rules measure, House Bill 12-1001, is expected to pass easily.) The governor also asked legislator support of a request for \$7.7 million to fund implementation work in the Department of Education.

"Being a great teacher is hard work. Thank you to them, and thank you to every teacher," Hickenlooper said.

Here's what the governor had to say on other matters of interest to education:

**State budget:** "Working together we have made significant progress stabilizing our state budget, [but] we are still in rough water." Hickenlooper said. He mentioned his belief that continued partial suspension of a senior citizen property tax exemption is needed to balance the 2012-13 budget.

**School funding:** Citing pressures on the state budget, including increased school enrollment, Hickenlooper also mentioned the ruling against the state in the Lobato school funding lawsuit. "The question of finding additional revenue for education is one of the greatest budget challenges we have," but he noted voters last year defeated Proposition 103, which would have raised state taxes to fund school and colleges. "That's one reason job growth is so important" to raise state revenues, he said.

**Pensions and state workers:** While he said he's "mindful" of the obligation to ensure the Public Employees' Retirement Association "is both sustainable and stable," Hickenlooper said no administration proposals are currently planned to change PERA, which manages retirement funds for all state teachers and many other government workers.

He did say he's working with state employee groups on civil service reforms to "go to the ballot this year."

**Higher education:** Hickenlooper's only reference was to the possibility that sale of the state-chartered Pinnacle Assurance workers' comp firm could raise money for scholarships.

**Colorado's future:** Hickenlooper only briefly referenced TBD Colorado, his planned effort to engage Coloradans in statewide discussions about the state's future. "In the coming weeks you'll hear more details," he said. ([Get background in this story.](#))

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## New Mexico: Democrats challenge governor on social promotion

Santa Fe New Mexican

By: Robert Nott

January 12, 2012

<http://www.santafenewmexican.com/Local%20News/Dems-challenge-gov--on-social-promotion>

In what might be deemed a game of political chess, Rep. Rick Miera and Sen. Linda Lopez, Democrats from Albuquerque, announced Thursday a bill to counter Gov. Susana Martinez's legislation to end social promotion.

The Democrats' bill, which could cost about \$28 million, reaffirms state law in saying that students can only be held back with the permission of their parents. School districts would determine whether a student is prepared to move to the next grade.

Unlike Martinez's bill, it includes a math component, as well as reading.

The bill was expected to be pre-filed by the end of the day Thursday.

The governor's proposal, which failed in the last session of the Legislature, gives the state authority to determine whether to hold back third-graders who cannot demonstrate reading proficiency.

Flanked by educators and state legislators, Miera, chairman of the House Education Committee, called the governor's bill "the third-grade flunking bill" during an afternoon news conference at the Roundhouse.

As with the governor's bill, Miera said his bill will include intervention and remedial tutoring as early as kindergarten for struggling students.

In promoting her bill last year, the governor and her secretary of education-designate, Hanna Skandera, referred to studies showing that about 80 percent of fourth-graders cannot read at grade level.

But national studies show mixed results on the value of social promotion. A recent Westchester Institute for Human Services Research report, for instance, notes that students who are promoted without being able to read are inadequately prepared for college. Yet that report also argued that students who repeat one grade more than double their odds of dropping out before graduation.

Last year Arne Duncan, the country's education secretary, said, "If your students keep being allowed to leave third grade and fourth grade without being able to read, you're not doing them any favors."

Asked directly whether the Democrats' bill means that sponsors condone the practice of moving unprepared students forward in school, Miera said, "That's up to the parents."

As to whether the bill expresses legislative discontent with the governor's educational-reform plans — which also include the recent A to F grading system for schools, and a planned retooling of the teacher-evaluation system — Miera said, "The bill speaks for itself."

Thursday afternoon, the governor's spokesman, Scott Darnell, said via email, "Governor Martinez is willing to work with Democrats on key education reforms, but simply repackaging the status quo will not improve our schools and will not ensure that our kids can read and succeed.

"The central goal of the governor's plan is to identify struggling students as early as we can and get them the help they need, so that they can read well by the end of the 3rd grade and are ready to learn and achieve in future years."

The 30-day session begins Tuesday, Jan. 17.

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# Utah looks at giving kids a boost before kindergarten

The Salt Lake Tribune

By: Lisa Schencker

January 12, 2012

<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/53290001-78/standards-state-childhood-early.html.csp>

Education leaders are considering implementing standards outlining what children should know before they enter kindergarten in hopes of helping them be better prepared, but some say the state is creeping into an area where it does not belong.

The idea behind the new standards is to help make sure young children are ready for kindergarten by giving preschools and parents an idea of what to teach 3- and 4-year-olds. The standards would be mandatory for public preschools, but not for private preschools or parents.

The state school board voted Thursday to seek public comment on the standards over the next month or so before voting on whether to approve them.

Brenda Hales, state associate superintendent, said the standards can help preschools, parents and kids.

"If someone enters kindergarten behind and it's not simply a maturity problem, then they are less likely to be successful in succeeding grades," Hales said.

Among many other things, the standards include skills such as retelling stories with simple plots, recognizing that text is read from left to right and top to bottom, and recognizing some letters of the alphabet. Until now, many have only been guidelines.

Tiffany Hall, K-12 literacy coordinator at the State Office of Education, said the standards acknowledge that parents are children's first teachers, that children are individuals, that the preschool years are a time of rapid growth and development, and that young children learn best through play.

"The learning activities emphasized here should capitalize on children's natural curiosity," Hall said. Hales said the standards are not recommending, for example, that 3-year-olds be given workbooks.

Still, some expressed discomfort with them Thursday, saying they're not sure it's the state's place to tell anyone what to teach children before kindergarten.

"This seems to be outside the realm of public education," said state board member Craig Coleman. "I'm a little uncomfortable with the state injecting itself into a realm in which it does not have constitutional authority."

And Amber Peck, who runs and teaches a private preschool in Lehi, said she's not sure statewide standards are necessary.

"I just wonder, if you make a standard like that, if it's too confining," said Peck, who attended the school board meeting Thursday as part of the education coalition of the Family Action Council Team, a coalition of conservative groups.

Board member Joel Coleman said he worries that standards open the door to possible future enforcement, though he likes the idea of knowing as a parent what a child should know before kindergarten.

"My concern was just, I don't want to start having this type of enforcement regulating private preschools or families," he said.

Hales said that's not the intention. But she said as districts create their own optional preschools or offer preschools for special-education students, and as lawmakers legislate early-childhood education programs such as UPSTART (an at-home software program available to preschool-age children passed into law several years ago), statewide standards become more important.

Plus, she said, many parents are interested in knowing how they can prepare their children for kindergarten at home.

"From my perspective, we have lots of parents who ask for this, who want to know this ... and there are lots of preschool programs out there that want to know this," said Dixie Allen, board vice chair and a former school principal.

Janice Dubno, who served on the state advisory committee that helped develop the standards, said they would help prepare children for school.

"There are fundamental skills that children need to have in order to be prepared to succeed in school," said Dubno, senior early childhood policy analyst for Voices of Utah Children. "And early childhood standards will facilitate the school readiness of all children, and particularly at-risk children."

The preschool standards would flow into new academic standards now being implemented in grades K-12 called the Common Core.

Those early childhood standards likely will be available within the next week or so on the State Office of Education's website, [www.schools.utah.gov](http://www.schools.utah.gov).

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