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**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 4/25/11

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 4/25/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Duncan Issues Far More NCLB Waivers Than Predecessors**

Education Week

By: [Michele McNeil](#)

April 22, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/04/22/29nclb\\_ep.h30.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/04/22/29nclb_ep.h30.html?tkn=PNYFQt35NTgsEpxVZ4m4lu3qFe1Nnl9ADfx%2B&cmp=clp-edweek)

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With Secretary Arne Duncan at the helm, the U.S. Department of Education is gradually—and sometimes quietly—chipping away at key parts of the No Child Left Behind Act as states and districts demand more relief from the elusive goal that all students be what the law terms “proficient” in reading and math by 2014.

The pressure on Mr. Duncan to waive substantial parts of the 9-year-old federal school-accountability law is only growing as Congress continues to drag its feet on reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, of which NCLB is the latest version.

Although President Barack Obama and Mr. Duncan have called for revision of the law by the start of the next school year, draft legislation has yet to be introduced, and school leaders anxious about rapidly approaching deadlines are clamoring for leeway in the meantime.

“We need flexibility as we age out of NCLB,” said Kansas Commissioner of Education Diane DeBacker, who, in a request also being made by officials in Arkansas, is seeking a waiver of the law’s hallmark 2014 proficiency requirement.

Officially, the Education Department remains mum on any plans it has to issue waivers if the ESEA is not renewed by the time students return to school in the fall.

“We’re working very hard to address these issues for all states when we fix No Child Left Behind this year,” department spokesman Justin Hamilton said this week.

But during Secretary Duncan’s first year in office, in 2009, he granted 315 waivers under NCLB—many linked to the education aid Congress provided as part of the economic-stimulus package. That marks a nine-fold increase in the number under his predecessor, Margaret Spellings, the year before, according to [annual reports made to Congress](#).

Information for 2010 is not yet available. But waivers continue—including some that strike at the heart of the requirement that students, schools, and districts be measured against the same state tests.

In Kansas, for example, a school district just this month got a first-of-its-kind waiver to use its own standards and tests, opting out of state exams for its oldest students. In Utah, the state in March won approval to let 12 districts use computer-adaptive tests for accountability purposes—a request rejected in 2008 by Ms. Spellings.

The waivers are a sign of the need for flexibility under the current system, in the view of Gene Wilhoit, the executive director of the Washington-based Council of Chief State School Officers.

#### *Broad Discretion*

The NCLB law—the centerpiece of President George W. Bush’s education agenda—requires states to test all students annually in reading and math in grades 3-8 and once during high school. Schools that fail to meet proficiency targets, or make “adequate yearly progress”—known as AYP—face an escalating set of sanctions. Periodically, those proficiency targets get higher, as

states seek to bring all students to the 100 percent proficiency mark by the end of the 2013-14 school year. The law gives the education secretary broad waiver authority aside from areas involving civil rights and funding. But between 2002 and 2004, just eight NCLB-related waivers were granted under then-Secretary Rod Paige, who had made it clear he didn't want to entertain requests from states or districts to circumvent what were then new requirements under the revamped ESEA. The first substantial waivers were granted in 2005 by Secretary Spellings and involved the requirement that schools and districts provide public school choice and supplemental education services, or tutoring, to students who attend schools in need of improvement. That year, Virginia got a first-of-its kind waiver for four districts to reverse the order of those remedies and provide tutoring before offering public school choice. That same year, Ms. Spellings granted another precedent-setting waiver to the Boston and Chicago school districts, letting them be their own providers of tutoring. (Current law requires outside providers to do the tutoring for districts "in need of improvement" under the law.) The overall number of waivers grew to 51 in 2008 as Ms. Spellings expanded a pilot program to allow states to use student-academic-growth models for accountability purposes. Mr. Duncan, who sought flexibility as Chicago's schools chief prior to being appointed education secretary by President Obama, has embraced his waiver authority in his current role. The majority of the 315 NCLB-related waivers granted in 2009 were related to how states and districts could use the additional \$10 billion in Title I funding wrapped up in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the economic-stimulus package Congress passed that year. Mr. Duncan also invited and granted dozens of waivers involving tutoring and school choice.

### *'Shocked' in Kansas*

The decision to grant a waiver depends on many factors, department officials say, such as the impact of the request on students and teachers, whether the waiver would improve education for all students, and what precedent would be set if the waiver was approved. But for now, Mr. Duncan is avoiding saying much of anything about waivers. "My whole mentality is to get [NCLB] passed," the secretary said on Feb. 7 at a meeting of the National School Boards Association, when asked repeatedly about what waivers he was considering. Nevertheless, the waivers Mr. Duncan has granted suggest where he might be willing to bend if the ESEA remains stalled in Congress. A prime example: the waiver given this month to the 2,400-student McPherson Unified School District, in Kansas. McPherson won approval to ditch its state's standards and tests for grades 6 and up, and to implement a more rigorous curriculum set to college- and career-ready standards tied to new tests—all developed by the Iowa City, Iowa-based testing company ACT. The waiver effectively upends a top priority of NCLB, which tries to ensure that all students be held to the same standards and be tested with the same assessments so there's a uniform yardstick by which schools and students in a state can be compared. "I was shocked," said Superintendent Randy Watson, who has since fielded calls from state lawmakers, superintendents, and other education officials from across the country who wanted to know how he secured the waiver. The federal Education Department said that, generally, requests from states and districts for McPherson-like waivers will only be granted if the standards and cutoff scores on tests are more difficult than those currently in place. And states and districts must demonstrate they need the flexibility as they switch to new, tougher standards. "The [Kansas] waiver was not about relief, it was about reform," Mr. Hamilton, the federal department spokesman, said. Even with tougher standards and a harder test, the department insists in its [April approval letter](#) that McPherson be measured against Kansas' AYP benchmarks and the 2014 proficiency deadline. That decision came even though two months earlier, Mr. Watson said federal officials told him they were also going to waive the accountability provisions.

### *Transparency Issues*

The lack of transparency around waiver decisions worries some education policy advocates. In the case of the McPherson waiver, "I think it's extremely confusing," said Vic Klatt, a principal at Penn Hill Group, a government-relations and advocacy organization in Washington, and a former top Republican aide on the House education committee. He said allowing a district to operate under its own standards, with its own tests, seems to fly in the face of the main impetus behind NCLB. Charles Barone, the director of federal legislation for Democrats for Education Reform, a New York City-based political action committee, put it this way: "It's very murky when these decisions are made, how they're made. No one knows." Another waiver approved with no fanfare from the Education Department allows 12 districts in Utah to use computer-adaptive tests rather than traditional state exams for accountability purposes. The waiver, for the 2010-11 school year, affects about 4 percent of the state's students and allows them to take tests that adjust their questions according to how a student is performing. Three years ago, when two districts wanted to use such tests, Secretary Spellings' administration said no. In Missouri, the 25,000-student Springfield district is hopeful it can persuade federal officials to let it use its own computer-adaptive tests for some grade levels, instead of state exams. The district will still abide by the state's accountability plan and AYP targets because it's able to translate the scores students receive on the district tests onto a scale used for state tests. "We're hoping to be a sample of where the states and the country will go," said Superintendent Norm Ridder. "I think we might become the pilot that everyone wants to look at."

### *Other Routes*

Those waivers aren't the only way to gain flexibility under NCLB. States can also tweak their [accountability workbooks](#), which serve as each state's master accountability plan. Georgia, for example, was allowed in 2009 to use for AYP purposes the highest scores from students who retook the graduation

exit exam. In 2010, Alabama was allowed to lower the attendance-rate requirement for making AYP to 90 percent from 95 percent.

Also last year, the federal department allowed Virginia to deviate from its plan and freeze its proficiency targets at 2008-09 levels, rather than make gradual progress toward the 100 percent proficiency goal, because the state was getting ready to administer new tests. In addition, it temporarily let Virginia leave its [proficiency targets for 2010-11 and beyond undetermined](#) for a period of time—something unprecedented up to that time because the law requires specific numeric targets every year. So Virginia officials were a bit taken aback that the department [wouldn't allow them](#) to keep their proficiency targets frozen, given that their first request was accepted. The federal Education Department had led the state to believe “that we were making a reasonable request,” said state education department spokesman Charles Pyle.

### *Challenging AYP*

One of the biggest threats to a central tenet of the No Child Left Behind law is the chorus of demands to relax the AYP requirement that is supposed to lead states, districts, and schools to 100 percent proficiency for their students by 2014. Mr. Duncan, in an effort to turn up the heat on Congress to reauthorize the ESEA, has cited Education Department estimates that more than [80 percent of schools](#) could be labeled as “failing” this year (the law’s technical term is “in need of improvement”). For the secretary, the concern is over the validity of the label.

For that reason, Kansas state board Chairman David Dennis has petitioned the federal department to hold its AYP targets at 2009-10 levels.

“We’re not taking our foot off the accelerator. We have schools that are failing that aren’t failing—they just are not meeting an arbitrary target,” Mr. Dennis said. But he’s not very hopeful that the request will be granted as Secretary Duncan instead presses for reauthorization. Instead, he asserted, Mr. Duncan wants to “use us as a hostage of ESEA reauthorization.” [Arkansas officials are making a similar request](#), asking that AYP targets be held at 2011-12 levels as the state implements the common-core standards.

And Kentucky [could be next in line](#) as part of its “Next Generation Accountability Model,” which relies on student academic growth measured against the higher, common-core standards.

“Our goal is that kids reach proficiency or higher in the tested subjects, but our model doesn’t have a date,” said Kentucky Department of Education spokeswoman Lisa Gross.

The federal education department said a handful of these kinds of requests are pending. But if history is any guide, those requests—especially when it comes to waiving the 100 percent proficiency target—are likely to be rejected.

In 2009, the federal department [rejected a request by West Virginia](#) to move its 100 percent proficiency goal to 2019-20.

“Secretary [Duncan] has stated that he does not intend to change this timeline through administrative action; this should occur through the reauthorization process,” the department’s letter to the state’s education department reads.

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## **In New York’s Schools Chief, a Knack for Quiet Conciliation**

New York Times

By: David M. Halbfinger, Javier C. Hernandez, and Fernanda Santos

April 23, 2011

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/nyregion/dennis-walcott-brings-softer-touch-to-chancellor-role.html?\\_r=1&ref=education#](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/nyregion/dennis-walcott-brings-softer-touch-to-chancellor-role.html?_r=1&ref=education#)

*This article was reported by David M. Halbfinger, Javier C. Hernandez and Fernanda Santos and written by Mr. Halbfinger.*

They called him “Dirt” — and said it with affection. Playing in a recreational football league in the 1970s, his teammates recall, [Dennis M. Walcott](#) was a walking laundry-detergent commercial, constantly making tackles.

During one game, as he pulled himself to his feet after sacking the quarterback, an opponent sucker-punched him in the jaw. The benches cleared, and Mr. Walcott’s buddies — the only all-black team in a nearly all-white league on Staten Island — looked to him for a signal. But he shook it off.

“We weren’t there to fight,” he said. “It could have been a race war.”

After early work mentoring children in Queens and a searing stint in Harlem finding homes for crack babies — he even adopted two children of an addict — Mr. Walcott rose to the presidency of the [New York Urban League](#), one of the city’s premier civil rights groups. But in the racial turmoil of the Giuliani years, Mr. Walcott refrained from getting arrested alongside scores of politicians and other black leaders in demonstrations against police brutality. He chose to advise the embattled police commissioner behind the scenes, trusting that his subdued approach would be more likely to win results.

All along, his trademark has been forbearance, and in his new role as New York City’s schools chancellor, Mr. Walcott will test whether the nation’s full-tilt approach to urban education reform is ready for a different kind of leader. But for the past nine years as a deputy mayor whose main responsibility was to oversee the Department of Education, he has left only the faintest of fingerprints during a time of momentous changes to the schools.

In a lengthy interview, Mr. Walcott struggled to name any achievements for which he had been the driving force, finally citing the creation of an early-literacy program for children in public housing and a mayoral [Office of Adult Education](#).

In a City Hall populated with visionary strategists, managerial wizards and publicity magnets, Mr. Walcott was none of these. Working between a strong-willed mayor, [Michael R. Bloomberg](#), and a tenacious chancellor, [Joel I. Klein](#), he seemed more comfortable in a role as deputy mayor for mollification: mediating disputes, calming tensions and endlessly listening.

That, of course, may be precisely what is needed at this moment: Mr. Walcott is taking over the nation's largest school system after a disastrous experiment with [Cathleen P. Black](#), at a time of low mayoral approval ratings and with teacher layoffs and other retrenchments in the offing.

But Mr. Walcott, 59, concedes that despite his years in City Hall, there is little record on which to judge whether he is the right person to defend, advance and improve upon Mr. Bloomberg's education agenda of test-based accountability, welcoming [charter schools](#) and closing failing ones.

"People will question spine," Mr. Walcott said. "I'm very confident about decision-making and toughness. It will be my actions they have to take a look at over the next two and a half years to determine whether there is spine or not."

### *In Two Worlds*

Backyard baseball with a tree stump for home plate. Trombone in the school orchestra. Biking down the street under the watchful eyes of friendly neighbors.

It was "Leave It to Beaver," but black, to hear Mr. Walcott describe his childhood in the [Addisleigh Park section of southeast Queens](#), a destination for ambitious émigrés from Harlem and Brooklyn that was already dotted with celebrities like [John Coltrane](#), [Ella Fitzgerald](#), and W. E. B. Du Bois.

Dennis Malcolm Walcott was an only child, born in 1951 to Dennis C. and Eleanor Walcott. His father was an exterminator for the city's [Housing Authority](#) who never finished high school, even-tempered and affable; his mother, a city social worker, the tough-minded family "enforcer."

The couple wanted Dennis to succeed in a white world, so they sent him for three summers to Lincoln Farm Work Camp, in the Catskills, where teenagers labored on construction projects. The children of [Ossie Davis](#) and [Ruby Dee](#) were there, but nearly everyone else was white and wealthy, he said.

Mr. Walcott graduated from Francis Lewis High School and thought he might become a psychiatrist. He went to the University of Bridgeport, in Connecticut, a small seaside campus not too far from home. But neither of his parents saw him graduate. His father fell ill and died in 1971, at age 60. The next year, on spring break from his senior year, Mr. Walcott arrived home to find his mother, 48, dead on the living room floor. He did not want an autopsy, so the cause was never determined.

Her body was beneath a window looking out to the street. "The theory was that she was sitting on the chair, waiting for me to come in," he said.

Mr. Walcott abruptly changed his diet, cutting out things he thought might bring on the diabetes that had stricken many of the men in his family. These days he avoids red meat and seldom eats anything but a salad for lunch. He once favored Old Grand-Dad and colas, but now rarely touches alcohol and does not smoke.

With a master's in education, he found a job teaching kindergarten at a new church-run school in Queens. He was unenthusiastic about the work, a friend recalled. But he was moved by the longings of boys who had no fathers at home, and he created his own "Brother to Brother" program.

Mr. Walcott persuaded a television station to broadcast a free advertisement during "Soul Train," he said, and the flood of interest from single mothers and male volunteers was more than he could handle. He ended the program.

In 1977, he married Denise St. Hill — they had met as young children and reconnected by chance at a party — just as he started working at a [foster-care](#) agency in Manhattan as part of a master's program in social work. He later interned at the Greater New York Fund, the arm of the [United Way](#) that handed out grants to smaller nonprofits.

Friends and bosses marveled at his listening skills, calm and maturity. "He could always talk himself out of sticky situations or stay above the fray," Nancy Gresham-Jones, a classmate and a co-worker, said.

The fund hired him full time, assigning him to work with recipient agencies to improve operations. One was Harlem-Dowling Children's Services, the first black-run adoption agency in New York, [whose finances were a mess](#) after management changes and a bookkeeper's conviction for embezzlement.

Mr. Walcott became its executive director in 1985, just in time for the crack epidemic. Staggering numbers of babies were being born with drug toxicity or H.I.V., or were being abandoned at birth. In one day alone, he found foster homes for 30 "boarder babies" left at Harlem Hospital.

He was a hands-on director: watching a child die of AIDS complications; helping a little girl born without a stomach; rushing to a

woman's home to talk her out of suicide. When a wealthy woman offered to do something nice one Christmas, Mr. Walcott said, he sent to her home two children who had never had a hot bath.

"Things like that were emotionally draining," he said. "It was a trying period in time, and you're right in the fulcrum of it."

By the time he took over the New York Urban League in 1990, he had two daughters. But when he heard of a girl named Shatisha, 10, and her brother Timmy, 5, who needed a home, Mr. Walcott and his wife signed up to take them in as foster parents and soon adopted them. He later reconnected the two with their birth mother, who has been clean for a number of years.

### *A Challenging Decade*

Mr. Walcott embraced the Urban League's mission, even tattooing its logo, an apple with an equal sign, on his right arm. He worked particularly hard to expand city-financed programs aimed at reducing [infant mortality](#), training welfare recipients for work and coaching parents to get involved in schools.

"Dennis moved the league into government contracts it never had before," said Harvey Newman, then a board member. "I don't know if it was a swimming success. But it changed the direction of the Urban League." From 1993 to 1999, state records show, the league's government financing grew by \$2.2 million, or 54 percent.

In 1993, before he lost his re-election bid, Mayor [David N. Dinkins](#) appointed Mr. Walcott to the Board of Education, where he served for just over a year. Norman Steisel, a deputy mayor, recalled Mr. Walcott working on a model for mayoral control of the schools that would entail "extensive parental involvement," but the plan went nowhere.

One of Mr. Walcott's greatest victories as an advocate was his most fleeting one: a federal court ruling that briefly blocked a subway fare increase in 1995. Represented by a lawyer named [Eric T. Schneiderman](#), now the state's attorney general, the Urban League and the [Straphangers Campaign](#) argued that minorities were being hit harder than suburban whites, whose commuter fares were not rising as sharply.

The decision was overturned the next day. But [Gene Russianoff](#), the Straphangers leader, said he believed it created a political problem for Gov. [George E. Pataki](#) that was solved a year later by the introduction of the unlimited-ride [MetroCard](#).

As relations between Mayor [Rudolph W. Giuliani](#)'s Police Department and minority communities deteriorated, Mr. Walcott retained his access to senior administration aides by rarely criticizing the mayor publicly, and never in harsh terms.

"That was a very activist period of time," he said. "We had the Korean boycott; we had Crown Heights. My goal was to walk the line."

Mr. Walcott helped [Howard Safir](#), the police commissioner, come up with a strategy to push officers to use a kinder demeanor with the public, with sting operations intended to weed out surly officers. The slogan he helped devise — "Courtesy, Professionalism and Respect" — remains emblazoned on patrol cars, Mr. Walcott noted with some pride. "Yeah, that was me," he said.

Yet his restraint earned Mr. Walcott catcalls from other civil rights leaders who said it was doing little good. "The inside road is a hard row to hoe," said Michael Meyers, the president of the New York Civil Rights Coalition. "But at the same time, you've got to show me that you're being effective."

Mr. Walcott said his refusal to get arrested after the fatal shooting of [Amadou Diallo](#) was one of the toughest decisions he ever made. It also raised questions about whether the Urban League's reliance on government money for 75 percent of its budget had compromised his independence.

Mr. Walcott denied this. But he acknowledged trying to "protect the league," and said that taking a more "strident" public stance could have caused "unnecessary pressure or strain on the organization." Then again, he suggested, perhaps he was being held to an unfair standard.

"I provided services to communities and tried to deal with empowerment and equality, which was part of the mission of the Urban League," he said. "But defining myself as a civil rights leader — I wouldn't quite say that. I was in charge of a not-for-profit."

### *The City Peacekeeper*

In January 2002, Mr. Walcott arrived in City Hall as an odd man out: he was one of few minorities and barely knew Mr. Bloomberg. He wore his differences with pride, sometimes calling himself the "working-class deputy mayor."

His chief responsibility was limited in part by Mr. Klein's hands-on style and close relationship with the mayor. So Mr. Walcott became something of a go-between: an ambassador to far-flung corners of the city, a pair of eyes in the department for Mr. Bloomberg and a guardian of Mr. Klein, whose pugnacious style he defended repeatedly in City Hall. Mr. Walcott described his role as being "the glue between two very smart people who have very strong viewpoints."

He popped in regularly at the department to eavesdrop on meetings or simply to chat. He saw his mission not as coming up with ideas or challenging Mr. Klein, but as working around the edges — reminding officials to call a Harlem politician before proposing a new charter school or pushing for more town hall meetings.

“His style was never to say, ‘No, we’re not going to let you do this,’ ” said Garth Harries, an education official from 2003 to 2009. “It was more like probing and testing to make sure we had done the work and understood the implications of what we were doing.”

When the department was considering closing the Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education High School in the Bronx, Mr. Walcott expressed concerns about community opposition. As a result, the department preserved a popular automotive program at the school and phased out other programs.

But when the department faced one of its most contentious decisions, whether to release teacher performance data to the public, Mr. Walcott was conflicted, expressing concerns about denigrating teachers.

Some have interpreted his restraint as excessive deference, even cowardice. Jill Levy, a former president of the principals’ union, grew frustrated with his reluctance to speak up in meetings and to weigh in on issues. “He never disagreed,” she said. “I didn’t see any overt leadership.”

But Dina Paul-Parks, a former aide, said Mr. Walcott was often misjudged. “Dennis is so laid-back that sometimes people tend to think that he is a bit of a wallflower,” she said. “He actually has very, very strong opinions and feels passionately about these issues.”

Still, Mr. Walcott’s knack for peacemaking and consensus-building in tense moments made him indispensable to Mr. Bloomberg and Mr. Klein, who each had a habit of alienating other political players.

It was Mr. Walcott, not the blunter Mr. Klein, who was called upon to explain — gently but unapologetically — to parents and community leaders why their schools were being closed for poor performance. So, too, when the fury reached City Hall without warning from the [Education Department](#), it was Mr. Walcott who briefed the mayor, covering for Mr. Klein.

The mayor sent Mr. Walcott to soothe tensions after several crises, including the fatal police shooting of [Sean Bell](#) in 2006 — the same year that Mr. Walcott’s son, Timmy Craig-Walcott, was shot in the leg after getting off a bus one night in Queens.

Mr. Walcott’s skills proved critical in 2002, when Mr. Bloomberg wanted the State Legislature to give him control of city schools, and in 2009, when some legislators were demurring over whether to renew that control. Steven Sanders, who was chairman of the Assembly’s Education Committee in 2002, said Mr. Walcott approached the task with the discretion of an attorney guarding his client’s interests.

While Mr. Walcott and Mr. Bloomberg get along, they have never been particularly close, City Hall colleagues say. Mr. Bloomberg has invited him to Yankee games and to the [inauguration](#) of [Barack Obama](#). Mr. Walcott devoted his vacation time in 2005 to the mayor’s re-election campaign.

But Mr. Walcott sometimes seemed to have trouble getting the mayor’s ear, telling colleagues he was “stalking” Mr. Bloomberg to sound him out on an issue when other officials had no trouble engaging the mayor in conversation.

Always, he was mindful of being the highest ranking African-American in the administration — even welling up with tears in an interview as he described how much he meant to younger minority staff members. At times, Mr. Walcott acted on that sensitivity, as when he cautioned against laying off cafeteria aides because it would disproportionately hit minority workers. But he disappointed some lower-level staff members who privately said they wished he had done more to help minorities land more senior jobs.

It was during the short tenure of Ms. Black that Mr. Walcott took a more commanding role. He was by her side, or behind a curtain, at tense public meetings, and rolled back her decision to take for the department half of any money saved by principals during the year. (The department is now taking back 30 percent.)

The appointment of Ms. Black was contentious, even inside City Hall. The mayor consulted with virtually no one in his administration before naming her, and Mr. Walcott declined to say whether his input had been sought.

But when Ms. Black seemed unable to grasp basic issues three months into her tenure, Mr. Walcott was part of a small circle of advisers who told Mr. Bloomberg that her chancellorship could not be salvaged, according to a person who spoke with the mayor.

True to form, Mr. Walcott refused to discuss what he told the mayor. “That’s between us,” he said.

*Sharon Otterman, Mosi Secret and Rebecca White contributed reporting.*

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# Fordham's Blueprint for Rewriting No Child Left Behind

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

April 22, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state\\_edwatch/2011/04/fordhams\\_blueprint\\_for\\_rewriting\\_no\\_child\\_left\\_behind.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/04/fordhams_blueprint_for_rewriting_no_child_left_behind.html)

The [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#), an influential think tank with a couple former top federal education officials on its staff, has issued its [preferred blueprint](#) for reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act.

Some of the ideas they put forward have been kicking around Capitol Hill for awhile now—like the idea of setting tighter expectations for student learning but giving more flexibility for how states and school districts get there, and establishing more competitive federal funding for school improvement and innovation, rather than across-the-board mandates and formula funds.

Fordham's authors are obviously familiar with Beltway culture. They note that they've structured their document like the briefing books that Capitol Hill and U.S. Department of Education staffers deliver to their bosses.

The report calls for "a radical rethinking of the federal role in education," one that is "much more limited and focused than it is currently, and it should be tailored to Uncle Sam's capacity and expertise."

The recommendations cover a lot of ground. I'll touch on a couple of them, and I'll let you peruse the rest on your own.

Fordham, which has a favorable view of the "[Common Core](#)" state academic standards, says states should be required to develop standards at least as rigorous as those guidelines in order to secure federal Title 1 dollars. An external body (possibly a panel with members selected by both states and federal officials) would be review states' standards, to judge whether they're up to snuff.

States should also be required to set tough achievement levels—at least as tough as those set by the Common Core—and tests based on their academic standards, Fordham argues. States that choose not follow the Common Core would have to show a panel that their achievement levels are pegged to "college and career readiness."

Fordham also calls for doing away with No Child Left Behind's mandate that teachers become "highly qualified," saying it's done little to improve the system. They also don't like the idea of the feds imposing mandate on states to develop teacher-evaluation systems. Instead, they envision a competitive program that incentivizes states to develop their own, innovative approaches to evaluating teachers and encouraging them to improve.

One reviewer with a dim view of Fordham's vision is education researcher and blogger Jay Greene, who sees some of their suggestions as too fed-heavy, particularly on standards and tests, and others as too vague, such as judging states and students on "college and career readiness."

"Fordham folks have no idea what that phrase means," Greene writes, "No one knows what college and career ready means."

Greene punctuates his [blog post](#) with a photo of noted scholar John Blutarsky—which seems to sum up his skepticism on many levels.

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## **FLORIDA NEWS**

### **Hernando families praise school vouchers**

St. Petersburg Times

By: Tony Marrero

April 23, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/hernando-families-praise-school-vouchers/1165612>

*Parents are grateful for the help in sending their children to private schools. Participation is rising.*

**SPRING HILL** - It's just a spelling quiz, but God is still top of mind in Room 10 at West Hernando Christian School.

Teacher Suzanne Evans sits at her desk in the small, low-ceilinged classroom in a portable building on the Osowaw Boulevard campus. Twenty or so first-graders, including a dirty-blond-haired boy named Jack Pasmore, hunch over their tiny desks, pencils at the ready.

Evans reads the next word, "were," and then uses it in a sentence: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

Jack and his classmates get to work.

It's a timely example, two days before Good Friday. The classroom walls are adorned with colorful placards on the same theme: *In Christ, all things are made new*, reads one. *Jesus is alive*, proclaims another.

These are the telltale signs of the faith-based education that Jeff and Kimberly Pasmore say they are glad their son is able to receive - and that they wouldn't be able to afford without the help they get from the state. The missionaries from Spring Hill have a meager income, but use the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program to cover the roughly \$3,600 annual tuition.

"We were blessed to put him right in," Jeff Pasmore said. "It's like a second home. It really is."

The program uses donations from Florida corporations to give tuition assistance to families with low incomes who want to send their children to private school. A donating corporation receives a dollar-for-dollar tax credit of up to 75 percent of its state income tax liability.

Students get a flat stipend of up to 80 percent of the state's per-pupil funding for public schools. That came out to \$3,950 for the current fiscal year.

Statewide, nearly 96 percent of students in the program use funding administered through the nonprofit Step Up For Students.

The number of Florida families using the tax credit scholarship program has steadily climbed since its inception in 2001, hitting nearly 33,000 earlier this year and reaching the program funding cap of \$140 million. There are currently about 6,000 students on the waiting list.

The trend is the same in Hernando, where enrollment has more than tripled in recent years.

In 2006, 61 students were attending Hernando private schools with the help of a Step Up voucher. Last June, the number was 195, accounting for about \$695,000 in tuition aid.

As of last week, 217 students were using Step Up vouchers at seven Hernando schools.

A second voucher program called the McKay Scholarship also has grown in popularity here, though at a much slower rate. McKay gives tuition vouchers for students with disabilities to attend private schools. By the end of last school year, 76 Hernando students were enrolled, receiving more than \$426,000 in aid.

Vouchers were initially used in Florida to give students in failing public schools the ability to pay for a better-performing private school. Created in 1999 under then-Gov. Jeb Bush, the so-called Opportunity Scholarship was the first of its kind in the nation, but in 2006 the Florida Supreme Court struck down the private school portion of the law, ruling it unconstitutional.

Now Florida lawmakers are considering several pieces of legislation aimed at increasing the number of tax dollars available for private education. One Senate bill that passed its first committee two weeks ago would make vouchers available to all, regardless of income.

As those proposals spark a familiar debate about using tax dollars to fund private school educations, Hernando parents, students and private school administrators say vouchers are changing lives for the better.

One day last week, 8-year-old Ariana Blevins beamed as she raced a few classmates around West Hernando Christian's basketball court during physical education class. She had already had Bible study for the day.

Ariana is happy and thriving on the close-knit campus of 270 students in pre-kindergarten to 12th grade, and so is her brother, Ethan, a kindergartener, said parents Daniel and Christine Blevins.

Chapel is held every Friday, parents take an active role and the older students are happy to help tend to the youngsters, the Blevinses said. Ariana and Ethan are both on the principal's list, but just as important, the firm moral foundation the parents set at home is strengthened at school, they said.

"If your school doesn't match up with home, they're going to lose what they learn at home," Christine Blevins said.

There is no way the family could pay the tuition without a Step Up voucher.

Daniel had been making good money building trade show exhibits for the aerospace industry, but then that work dried up. They had purchased a house in Hernando Beach in 2006 after his father got cancer before they sold their house in Virginia. Then the market crashed and they spent their savings struggling to carry two mortgages. They finally lost both properties.

The family still lives in Hernando Beach, in the home of a doctor who agreed to let them move into his vacant house in exchange for caretaker duties.

"The only thing consistent in our lives the last four years has been our children's education and our children's faith," Daniel Blevins said.

The Blevinses acknowledged the athletic programs aren't as extensive as those in public school, but that need can be met in club sports, they said.

Nikita Kostjukoff, an 18-year-old senior, didn't want to attend a small, faith-based school when she arrived at West Hernando Christian as a freshman on a Step Up voucher. But her affinity for the school grew, and so did her faith in God and in a private

school education.

"You're not just a number," said Kostjukoff, now bound for a small Christian college in Hawaii.

During the recession, the voucher programs also have helped private schools by stemming the exodus of families who can no longer afford tuition.

West Hernando Christian has the most Step Up students in the county at 65, or roughly one-quarter of the school's student body.

"We look at it as a program that has truly blessed us and blessed families that want a Christian education," said school administrator Marti Covert.

Ken Alvaraz, superintendent of Hernando Christian Academy in Brooksville, agrees.

Of the school's 200 or so students, 64 are in one of the voucher programs. Tuition there ranges from \$6,000 to \$7,000, and though families can get additional financial aid through the school, they still have to pay something out of pocket, Alvarez said.

"The students have taken advantage of being here," he said.

Statewide, 79 percent of schools attended by students on Florida Tax Credit Scholarships are faith-based. Of the seven Hernando schools that participate, all but one - Wider Horizons in Spring Hill - is faith-based.

The school of about 155 students uses the Montessori method of teaching for students in kindergarten through sixth grade and a college preparatory curriculum for seventh through 12th grades. Tuition ranges from \$3,600 to \$6,900.

Before her divorce, Darlene Murray and her then-husband could afford the roughly \$13,000 expense to send their sons, Tyler and Trevor, to Wider Horizons. The boys did well in the environment, where classes are small and hands-on group activities are a mainstay.

After the divorce, Murray moved the boys to the public school system.

"They were so far ahead of everyone else," said Murray, who lives in Spring Hill and works in the customer service division of a company that does background checks for state transportation workers. "Tyler was in advanced classes, and it still wasn't challenging enough. They lost a lot that year."

Murray found out she qualified for Step Up for Students, and the boys returned to Wider Horizons, though she still pays \$500 a month to cover the balance of their tuition. Trevor is now in sixth grade, Tyler in ninth.

"I drive a '95 Honda that's falling apart just so I can keep the kids in there," she said.

As heartening as the success stories can be, dedicating public money for private schools undermines a critical effort, said Mark Pudlow, spokesman for the Florida Education Association.

"The whole voucher idea - whether it's McKay, whether it's corporate scholarships, whether it's vouchers for all - takes away from what we ought to be doing to fix public schools that are struggling in Florida," Pudlow said.

In an era when the state places so much emphasis on the results of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, private schools aren't held accountable to ensure all students are meeting benchmarks, Pudlow said.

"They get to set their own curriculum, and the government says, 'Here's your money, good luck,' " he said.

There should be no doubt about the quality of private school education, said Domenick Maglio, who founded Wider Horizons 28 years ago. Maglio and his wife, Julie, are co-administrators at the school.

"The quality is in the student achievement and how well they do in college and on SATs and ACTs, and research has shown they do as well if not better (than public school counterparts)," Maglio said. "Private school, dollar for dollar, is a much better bet."

Voucher recipients pay property taxes or sales taxes or both, and deserve to have options, Maglio said. Ideally, all families would get a direct tax credit to use at the school of their choice, he said.

"That would be revolutionary," Maglio said. "It would redistribute - and that's a good word since (President Barack) Obama's in - the resources to be better utilized."

Some state lawmakers think so, too.

Senate Bill 1150, proposed this session by Republican Sen. Joe Negron of Palm City, would create a so-called education savings account for all schoolchildren that would be equal to 40 percent of the state's per-pupil funding, or about \$3,100 this year. Gov. Rick Scott has expressed support for the idea, but even top GOP lawmakers have said it's unlikely to go anywhere

this year as Republicans focus on other policy issues.

Another bill this session would expand the list of conditions that qualify students for McKay scholarships.

Rep. Jimmie Smith, R-Inverness, who represents a portion of Hernando, said he's looking forward to sending his 3-year-old daughter to a nearby public school. But Smith also said he would be inclined to support a plan like Negrón's for parents who wanted other options.

"It will cause our (public) school system to look inward and say, 'How can we make ourselves better and more competitive?'" Smith said.

There is a fundamental flaw in that theory, said Hernando school superintendent Bryan Blavatt.

Public schools accept all children at the door. Private schools, by definition, can control admission and are able to spend resources as they see fit on a student body tailored to their liking, Blavatt said.

"I think competition's good, but it's kind of like Tampa trying to compete with the Yankees," he said.

State Sen. Mike Fasano, whose district includes about half of Hernando County, said Negrón's bill goes too far.

Fasano, a New Port Richey Republican, supports the voucher programs as they are now - limited in scope but still a viable way to give families options. But he also said voucher students should be tested to make sure they're meeting the same standards as their public school peers.

"Any time we spend tax dollars, we spend to ensure that student is getting the best education possible," Fasano said.

That would be fine, said Tyler Miles, one of Darlene Murray's boys at Wider Horizons.

Students there take a similar standardized test, but teachers don't spend weeks or months teaching to it, Miles said.

"I have no problem taking the FCAT," he said.

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#### *Enrollment in voucher programs increasing*

The number of families taking advantage of two voucher programs - the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship and the McKay Scholarship - has risen steadily in Hernando County. The current McKay Scholarship enrollment countywide is 91, and the total for both voucher programs is 308.

#### Florida Tax Credit Scholarship

Year	Number of students	Funding
2009-10	195	\$695,003
2008-09	121	\$404,014
2007-08	106	\$361,096
2006-07	95	\$298,807
2005-06	61	*\$198,555

\* Estimate

Source: Florida Department of Education

#### *Current Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program participation by school*

Faith Christian Academy	21
First United Methodist School Center	20
Hernando Christian Academy	29
Ridge Manor Christian Academy	20
Spring Hill Christian Academy	50
West Hernando Christian School	65
Wider Horizons School	12
Total	217

Sources: Step up for Students, Florida Department of Education

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## **'Gifted' teaching methods elicit better performance**

Miami Herald

By: Jane Stancill

April 23, 2011

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/04/23/2180448/gifted-teaching-methods-elicite.html>

Here's a brilliant idea: if you want smarter kids, treat them as if they are smart.

A U.S. Department of Education evaluation of a North Carolina program shows that when at-risk students are taught as if they are gifted and talented, they are likely to perform better academically.

The pilot program, called Project Bright IDEA, operated between 2004 to 2009 in kindergarten through second-grade classrooms in 11 North Carolina school districts. Five thousand students were in the program at schools that receive federal funding because of a high percentage of low-income children.

The study found that within three years, the number of children identified by their school districts as being academically and intellectually gifted ranged from 15 percent to 20 percent, compared to 10 percent of children in a control group. The year the project began, no third-graders from the schools in the study had been identified as gifted.

Teachers in the study received intensive training on strategies aimed at gifted children.

The project was based on the view that all kids can learn gifted behavior, said William Darity, a professor at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy.

"We disproportionately locate black and Latino kids in those environments where they get the dumbed-down instruction," Darity said. "So one of the exciting things about Project Bright IDEA is the premise that you provide this high-level curriculum and instruction to all the kids."

That means you can eliminate what is, in effect, "internal segregation" that happens in schools when teachers group students for lessons, Darity added.

The training of teachers is key, said Margaret Gayle, co-designer of the program and director of the American Association for Gifted Children at Duke. The program was designed to give teachers new skills tailored for advanced students.

"They challenge students more; they do more with problem-based learning," she said. "They get a lot of higher-level instructional strategies, they know better how to motivate kids."

Educators say the methods don't mean that teachers have to work harder, but that they do work smarter.

"A lot of times, especially with the younger kids, a lot of teachers will like to dumb down the language that they use with students," said Danielle Dingus, a second-grade teacher at Kinston, N.C., school that has adopted the concept. "What we do with Project Bright IDEA is we expose the students to language they are going to need to know and use in the real world."

In workshops and weeklong summer programs, the teachers were taught by experts how to develop students' behavior, including how to pose questions, take risks and invent solutions.

"We need to retrain every teacher in America," Gayle said, "just the way we retrain our doctors and other professions, to meet the challenges of the 21st century."

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## Getting help on black student achievement

St. Petersburg Times

By: Ron Matus

April 23, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/getting-help-on-black-student-achievement/1165760>

*Pinellas schools may hire a researcher to improve black students' slow achievements.*

The Pinellas County School District is considering hiring a top-notch education researcher to help it solve a troubling mystery: why black students in Pinellas lag behind black students elsewhere in Florida.

At the request of superintendent Julie Janssen, School Board attorney Jim Robinson made a pitch to David Figlio, a Northwestern University economist who has conducted studies on everything from vouchers to school grades.

Figlio, who will meet with Janssen and Robinson on May 4, said he is "highly likely to take this on." He investigated black student achievement in Pinellas several years ago.

Robinson told School Board members in an e-mail last week that he will talk to Janssen about bringing them a contract for consideration at Tuesday's board meeting. "The urgency of this problem compels prompt action," Robinson wrote.

The call to Figlio, who has worked at the University of Florida, followed an April 17 *St. Petersburg Times* story about the slow pace of progress for black students in Pinellas.

Between 2005 and 2010, the paper found, the divide between black students in Pinellas and black students statewide increased in every grade on the reading and math portions of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. In every grade on both tests, black students in Pinellas score lower than black students in Hillsborough, Miami-Dade, Duval and the other 11 big districts.

"The more eyes you can have on our situation, that are objective, the better," said board member Terry Krassner, referring to an outside researcher. "We're very serious about it. We don't want to be in this kind of limelight."

Figlio "could be a very valuable resource," said board chairwoman Carol Cook, who was asked about the growing disparity with black students during her appearance Thursday at the Suncoast Tiger Bay Club.

It's not clear how much the research will cost, or where the money will come from. Janssen did not respond to requests for comment. District spokeswoman Andrea Zahn said the funding source is yet to be determined.

Figlio was a star economist at UF before becoming a professor of education and social policy at Northwestern in 2008. His education research has covered everything from whether school grades affect housing values (he found they do) to whether children with Afrocentric names trigger subconscious bias in educators (he found they do) to whether students using vouchers in Florida perform better than similar students in public schools (he found they do not).

Figlio is familiar with black student achievement in Pinellas.

In 2006, he and another researcher concluded the achievement gap between black and nonblack students in Pinellas (as opposed to black and white students) was similar in size to gaps in other Florida districts. They also said they could find no evidence that "these gaps are due to systematic exposure to the Pinellas County schools."

That study was commissioned by the School Board in response to a lawsuit that charged the district with failing to properly educate black children.

Since the April 17 story, the *Times* has taken a closer look at FCAT scores, this time going back to 2001, the first year the test was required in Grades 3-10. Between then and 2010, the trend lines show white students in Pinellas falling slightly in reading, relative to the state average for white students, and rising ever-so-slightly in math. Meanwhile, the trend lines for black students in Pinellas show them tumbling, in both subjects, compared to black students elsewhere.

The apparent disparity drew more scrutiny last week.

School Board member Linda Lerner referenced the numbers during a board discussion about proposed charter schools that would cater to black students.

"We have a large achievement gap, which is all around the country, but the statistics came out - there's more of a gap in Pinellas," she said. The charters "would be a wonderful opportunity for us to learn what can be done in a small setting."

The story drew a mixed response elsewhere.

The figures call for a "state of emergency," said the Rev. Manuel Sykes, president of the St. Petersburg NAACP. He blamed the district's "intellectual arrogance."

"They will never question themselves," he said. "Instead, they will blame the victim."

Asked if he was troubled by the numbers, St. Petersburg Mayor Bill Foster said they were improving and he wasn't going to be "hypercritical" of the School Board.

"I just want to see improvement," he said. "I'm only going to compare St. Pete schools to St. Pete schools. Hopefully we'll see the data from 2011 is better than 2010, and 2012 will be better than 2011. That's my goal."

Figlio, the researcher, said he still needs to talk with district officials about the specific task ahead. But he added via e-mail that he was "impressed with their openness."

"My previous experience with Pinellas schools has led me to believe that the school district leadership is serious about this issue and wants to learn the truth," he wrote.

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Opinion: Illinois school reform – Go for more**

Chicago Tribune

By: Editorial Board

April 25, 2011

A hard-charging new Chicago Public Schools CEO to stir things up?

On his way.

A fresh Chicago school board stocked with talented and driven innovators to shake the status quo?

Ready to rock.

New powers enshrined in law to give those school leaders — and many others across the state — a better chance to change the face of public education?

Hellooo, Illinois House.

The reform legislation known as Performance Counts recently whipped through the Illinois Senate in a matter of hours. A good sign: Republicans *and* Democrats sang its praises. That's a credit to Sen. Kimberly Lightford, D-Maywood, who negotiated the deal, and to Senate President John Cullerton, who encouraged it.

Now that bill goes to the House. Time for the House to say: Nice work, let's make this even better.

There are several ways to improve Performance Counts:

- The byzantine process of firing an inept teacher can take up to five years. The Senate bill shortens that time, but modestly. It will still take too long to remove a teacher who can't cut it in the classroom. For starters, the House should shorten the "remediation" period — the time a consultant works with a failing teacher to improve his or her performance. That takes up to one year now. Principals should have the authority to decide after 30 school days whether a teacher will continue in remediation.
- The Senate bill sets a higher bar for granting tenure to teachers. The House should create a tougher standard, and push for merit pay for teachers who prove their worth, who take on tougher assignments, who are proficient in high-demand subject areas. Optimally, the House would eliminate tenure for newly hired teachers, as Florida recently did.
- The Senate bill allows the Chicago Board of Education to extend the school day and school year, a key demand from Mayor-elect Rahm Emanuel. But the bill also says teachers can bargain for more pay in exchange for that extra time. The school board faces a \$720 million budget gap. It needs full authority to extend time in the classroom without added expense. Chicago teachers' salaries compare favorably to other big city systems. In terms of classroom time, Chicago comes up woefully short.
- The Senate bill requires a 75 percent vote of approval by teachers to authorize a strike in Chicago. That's a fairly high bar, but as new school leadership gets established and Chicago sorts through its financial crisis and contract talks, children need a guarantee that they will be in school. The House should set at least a five-year moratorium on Chicago school strikes.

Performance Counts emerged from the Senate after months of bargaining. It's a very good bill. It could be a great bill. That's the challenge to House Speaker Michael Madigan, Minority Leader Tom Cross and their members. Make it great.

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## Opinion: In Kansas City, tackling education's status quo

Washington Post

By: George F. Will

April 22, 2011

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/in-kansas-city-tackling-educations-status-quo/2011/04/21/AFh6qWRE\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/in-kansas-city-tackling-educations-status-quo/2011/04/21/AFh6qWRE_story.html)

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** — John Covington hesitated before becoming this city's [26th school superintendent in 40 years](#). A blunt-talking African American from Alabama, he attended the [Broad Superintendents Academy](#) in Los Angeles, which prepares leaders for urban school districts, and when he asked people there if he should come here, their response, he says, was: "Not 'no,' but 'Hell, no!'" He says they suggested that when flying across the country he should take a flight that does not pass through this city's airspace.

How did this pleasant place become so problematic? Remember the destination of the road paved with good intentions.

This city is just 65 miles down the road from Topeka, Kan., from whence came [Brown v. Board of Education](#), the fuse that lit many ongoing struggles over schools and race. Kansas City has had its share of those struggles, one of which occurred last year when Covington took office with a big bang: He closed 26 of the district's 61 schools. Kansas City had fewer students but twice as many schools as Pueblo, Colo., where Covington had been superintendent.

Thirty-five years ago, Kansas City's district had 54,000 students. Today it has fewer than 17,000. Between then and now there was a spectacular confirmation of the axiom that education cannot be improved by simply throwing money at it.

In the 1980s, after a court held that the city was operating a segregated school system, judicial Caesarism appeared. A judge vowed to improve the district's racial balance by luring white students to lavish "magnet schools" offering "suburban

comparability” and “desegregative attractiveness.” And he ordered tax increases to pay the almost \$2 billion bill for, among other things, an Olympic-size swimming pool, a planetarium, vivariums, greenhouses, a model United Nations wired for language translation, radio and television studios, an animation and editing lab, movie editing and screening rooms, a temperature-controlled art gallery, a 25-acre farm, a 25-acre wildlife area, instruction in cosmetology and robotics, field trips to Mexico and Senegal, and more.

Neither test scores nor the racial gap in academic achievement improved, and racial imbalance increased. Today, African Americans are 28 percent of the city’s population and 63 percent of public school students. And Covington (“We’re not an employment agency. We are a school district”) has survived the tumultuous process of closing schools. He won the support of a narrow majority on the elected school board. Except for one incumbent board member who ran unopposed, all those candidates in the next election who had opposed the closures were defeated. Now what?

He wants more money, but in Missouri 70 to 75 percent of dollars for schools are local dollars, and the last increases of Kansas City property taxes were the ones the judge ordered two decades ago. There has been no ballot measure to raise taxes since 1969.

To find what he calls “highly effective” teachers, Covington is seeking help from Teach for America. This year he has 39 of its teachers. For next year, he wants 150 more, which would make them more than 13 percent of his teachers — one of the highest percentages of any district in the nation. To achieve this, he has \$3.2 million from such local philanthropies as the Hall Family Foundation and the Kauffman Foundation.

He wants to abandon “the industrial model” of education, which is anachronistic for children “who come from the womb with a laptop in one hand and a cellphone in the other.” He says that if someone who attended Kansas City’s schools in the 1950s were put in a classroom today, the only striking difference would be the ethnic composition of the class.

Covington wants to blur, even erase, the distinctions between grades K through 12, teaching individual children at whatever level they are learning.

He wishes the school day and year were longer, but this would require money, the scarcity of which shapes collective bargaining with the teachers union: “We give them language instead of money.” By language he means work rules. He says the resulting rules mean, for example, that some teachers will not stay five minutes after school for a meeting. “Overall,” he says delicately, “the relationship with teachers is somewhat volatile.”

So, he is asked, is Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (R) sensible in wanting to confine teachers’ collective bargaining to questions of salaries? Covington: “It makes sense to me.”

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## Ohio's teacher pay system could be 1st of its kind

Associated Press

By: Staff

April 24, 2011

<http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/ohio-news/ohios-teacher-pay-system-could-be-1st-of-its-kind-1144140.html>

**COLUMBUS, Ohio** — Ohio’s new law to limit collective bargaining for public workers could make it the first state with a mandatory system to pay teachers based on their performance.

The measure passed by the Republican-led Legislature and signed by GOP Gov. John Kasich bans strikes by public workers and replaces automatic pay increases with merit raises or performance pay. That means it eliminates salary schedules and step increases of 110,000 full-time public teachers in the state, The Plain Dealer reported Sunday.

Ohio would be the first state in the U.S. to replace automatic raises with a performance-based pay system for teachers statewide, said Kathy Christie, chief of staff for the Denver-based Education Commission of the States, a nonpartisan group that researches education policy.

“That is the type of component that really, really resonates with the public,” she told the newspaper. “If you are not pulling your weight, if you are not getting performance, if you are not tenacious and really trying to learn and all those sorts of things you want to see teachers doing, then you don’t move up at all.”

A Colorado school district that made a similar change in pay systems has found success, Christie said, and other schools throughout the country have tried linking student achievement to staff bonuses, though teachers were guaranteed any pay raises outlined in their contracts.

A handful of states have tried performance-based pay programs, but Christie said many have had trouble finding an equitable way to offer pay raises for everyone while giving some merit pay.

If the Ohio law remains in place, state officials would develop new standards to evaluate teacher performance, and student achievement would constitute half of an educator’s evaluation, affecting whether any pay raise is awarded.

The idea doesn’t go over well with teachers, who are among the opponents of the Ohio law pushing for a referendum to let voters decide whether to keep it or overturn it. They argue the proposal for merit pay isn’t fair because student learning is affected by factors beyond a teacher’s control, and they question how student achievement would be measured.

“We are concerned about it because currently there aren’t any student growth measures that exist that are designed to be valid and reliable for high stakes decisions like teacher compensation,” said Matt Dotson, of the Ohio Education Association. He said if the system is perceived as unfair, it could have a negative effect on the recruitment and retention of quality teachers.

Existing teacher contracts would apply until they expire and would not be affected by the new system, the newspaper reported.

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