



Brian Widdits for Education Week

BUILDING SKILLS: Inside Central College Academy, Shabria Hathorn, left, and Josephine Holmes build a pergola, which will be installed in a nearby park. The 2013 graduates and other students from disadvantaged schools in Detroit are working with General Motors retirees, who teach them work and life skills in preparation for college and and workplace. PAGE 8

Common Tests In Cross Hairs

Assessments Cast as Weak Link

By Andrew Ujifusa

Having failed to persuade lawmakers in any state to repeal the Common Core State Standards outright, opponents are training their fire on the assessments being developed to go with the standards and due to be rolled out for the 2014-15 school year.

They're using as ammunition concerns about costs and the technology required for those tests, in addition to general political opposition to the common core. A few states—including Georgia, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania—have already chosen to limit or end their participation in the assessments under development by two federally funded consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

Legislators in Kansas, where a common-core repeal bill failed this year, may ultimately

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POCKETBOOK ISSUE: States weigh their options now that they know the cost of the tests. PAGE 20

Quantifying Pain From 'Sequester' Proves a Puzzle

By Alyson Klein

As Congress shifts focus to next year's spending bills, education advocates are getting ready to renew their push against the across-the-board funding cuts known as sequestration. But the fallout from the cuts, which trimmed roughly 5 percent from federal K-12 funding overall this year, is often hard to illustrate or quantify, even for seasoned number-crunchers.

The sequestration cuts—which were put in place for virtually all federal agencies in 2011 to force a long-term budget agreement—are hitting most districts at the start of this coming school year. While some Head Start early-childhood programs already have had to make painful choices, sequestration's impact on K-12 education in the fiscal year ending Sept. 30 is very uneven around the country.

"I thought by now we'd start to hear feedback from school districts and states," said Michael Griffith, a school finance consultant for the Education Commission of the States in Denver. Mr. Griffith, who travels around the country talking to state and district officials about fiscal issues, hasn't heard nearly

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Syracuse 'Says Yes' to Whole Child

By Sarah D. Sparks

Syracuse, N.Y.

For Syracuse, N.Y., "educating the whole child" is not just a mantra for school improvement but a strategy to save a struggling urban community, too.

Five years ago, Syracuse became the first city to adopt, citywide, a national education partnership model called Say Yes to Education, which provides academic, legal, social, and health supports to families and students from preschool all the way through college, culminating in free tuition for any of the district's 21,000 students who graduate from high school and want to attend college.

In the process, the Syracuse Say Yes initiative offers a rare look at what the popular

push for holistic, community-centered education reform can look like in practice, both in the ongoing challenges of meeting students' and families' needs, and in the surprising effects on communities.

According to 2012 data from the Census Bureau, "for the first time in 50 years, the Syracuse population has stabilized," said Ann Rooney, a member of the Say Yes task force and the deputy executive for human services for Onondaga County, which includes Syracuse. "That's one thing we as a community all focus on."

Syracuse's struggles mirror those of post-industrial communities nationwide. The city of just more than 145,000 has steadily lost industry and residents over the years, and the remaining population—especially the public

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NAEP Data Misused To Promote Policies

By Stephen Sawchuk

The National Assessment of Educational Progress is widely viewed as the most accurate and reliable yardstick of U.S. students' academic knowledge.

But when it comes to many of the ways the exam's data are used, researchers have gotten used to gritting their teeth.

Results from the venerable exam are frequently pressed into service to bolster claims about the effect that policies, from test-based accountability to collective bargaining to specific reading and math interventions, have had on student achievement.

While those assertions are compelling, provocative, and possibly even correct, they are also mostly speculative, researchers say. That's because the exam's technical properties

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Steve Cannon/AP

FLORIDA CHIEF RESIGNS POST

Tony Bennett quit last week after accusations that he altered the state grading system to benefit a charter school in his previous job as Indiana state chief. The controversy raises questions involving leadership and accountability systems. PAGE 27

INDUSTRY & INNOVATION

Investors Seeking Preschool Returns

By Sean Meehan

An unusual partnership involving Goldman Sachs, a school district in Utah, and several community charities to expand the school system's early-education program is intended to save taxpayers money and provide a financial return for investors.

This fall, Goldman Sachs and an-

other investment company, the Pritzker Group, will pay for the expansion of an early-childhood program in the 67,000-student Granite district through a social-impact bond, also known as a pay-for-success loan. Social-impact bonds are loans that seek to achieve a positive social outcome, and reduce future costs, by investing in prevention and intervention programs in the public sector.

If successful, the venture would be the first investment of this kind to finance a public school program, according to officials at Goldman Sachs, which has its headquarters in New York City but whose second-largest

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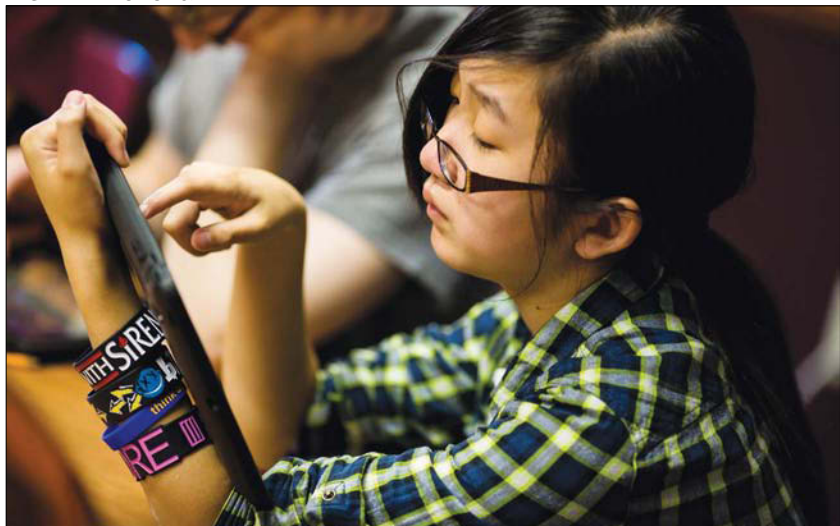
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DIGITAL DIRECTIONS:



Narayan Mahon for Education Week

Researchers See Video Games as Testing Tools

Serena Lee, 14, plays a video game developed by University of Wisconsin-Madison researchers. Video games may be the next frontier of student assessment. PAGE 14.

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| WEBINAR |

A Steep Climb: One Classroom's Journey Into the Common-Core English/Language Arts Standards

Wednesday, Aug. 21, 2 p.m. ET

Education Week spent six months reporting on how the District of Columbia's vision of the common-core English/language arts standards is being put into practice in one 8th grade classroom at Stuart-Hobson Middle School on Capitol Hill. In this webinar, two officials from the district share the work of translating the common core into reality.

▶ www.edweek.org/go/webinar/SteepClimb

| INTERACTIVE GAME |

Pop Quiz: Fractions

Fractions are considered one of the most challenging areas of basic mathematics for students to master. Want to know what students face? Try your hand at some sample fraction problems from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Take the pop quiz.

▶ www.edweek.org/go/fractions



| INTERACTIVE RESOURCE |



Field-Trip Map

Teachers, do you have a favorite field-trip location? Need ideas about where to take your students for beyond-school learning? See *Education Week Teacher's* interactive map of the best field-trip spots across the United States—based on the collective intelligence of educators. While you're there, submit your own favorite field-trip venue.

▶ www.edweek.org/go/getgoing

| NEW OPINION BLOG |

Education Futures: Emerging Trends and Technologies in K-12

Education professor Matthew Lynch chronicles promising new trends and technologies in the K-12 classroom.

▶ www.edweek.org/go/education-futures



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NEWS IN BRIEF

Student-Loan Measure To Drop Rates, for Now

A bipartisan bill that would lower the costs of borrowing for millions of students is awaiting President Barack Obama's signature.

The House last week gave final congressional approval to legislation that links student-loan interest rates to the financial markets. The bill would offer lower rates for most students now, but higher rates down the line if the economy improves as expected.

Undergraduates this fall would borrow at a 3.9 percent interest rate for subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford loans. Graduate students would have access to loans at 5.4 percent, and parents would borrow at 6.4 percent. The rates would be locked in for that year's loan, but each year's loan could be more expensive than the last. Rates would rise as the economy picks up and it becomes more expensive for the government to borrow money.

Rates on new subsidized Stafford loans doubled to 6.8 percent July 1. Without congressional action, rates would have stayed at 6.8 percent.

—ASSOCIATED PRESS

Newtown, Conn., Votes To Build New School

Residents of Newtown, Conn., have voted to use \$750,000 in grant money to begin construction on a new Sandy Hook Elementary School.

The grant money comes as an advance from \$50 million in funding provided by the state of Connecticut. After a quick town-hall meeting last month, the overflow crowd of about 200 approved the spending by unanimous voice vote, according to *The News-Times* of Danbury.

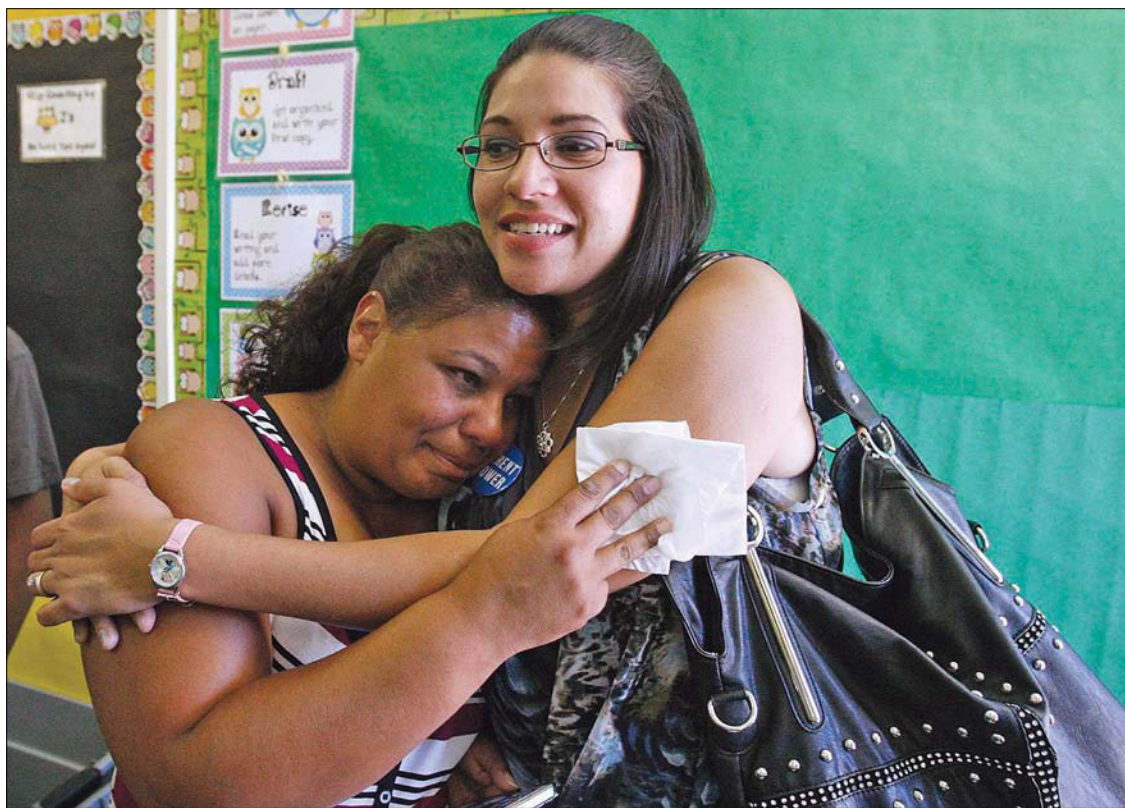
The vote allows the preliminary steps of construction—planning and design—to move forward before the town gets access to the remaining \$49.25 million in October, pending another vote. After last December's massacre at the elementary school left 27 dead, including 20 children, several charities began accepting donations for Newtown, but the town and state have squabbled over the distribution of those funds.

—ROSS BRENNEMAN

Apple Found Guilty In Price-Fixing Case

Technology giant Apple Inc. "forcefully facilitated" a conspiracy with other publishing companies to fix the price of e-books and weaken Amazon's influence over the market, a federal court judge has ruled.

In her decision last month in the closely watched case, U.S. District Judge Denise Cote cited the statements and records of



Cynthia Ramirez, right, a parent, hugs Parent Revolution organizer Doreen Diaz inside a newly decorated classroom at Desert Trails Preparatory Academy in Adelanto, Calif., last week.

Gary Friedman/Los Angeles Times/MCT

California 'Parent Trigger' School Opens Its Doors

The first school to come into being as a result of a "parent trigger" law has opened its doors.

The Desert Trails Preparatory Academy, in Adelanto, Calif., welcomed students late last month after a tumultuous process led by a group of parents who said they wanted to change the leadership and direction of what has been an academically struggling school serving grades K-6.

The effort to create the new school roiled the community and touched off a legal battle, in which a judge ultimately ruled that the parents invoking the trigger policy had met the legal standards to go forward with their plans. The website of the former Desert Trails Elementary School lists four other attendance options for students for the 2013-14 school year.

Parent-trigger laws typically allow for the overhaul of a low-performing school, and potentially the removal of its administration and staff, if signatures can be collected from a majority of parents of children at the school who agree to take that step.

Backers of those plans see them as grassroots initiatives to bring immediate and dramatic improvements to schools that have resisted change and shown no signs of improving soon. But detractors say trigger policies divide communities—they cite the Desert Trails fight as an example—and leave parents at the will of outside operators who potentially have little investment in producing a better school.

California was the first state to approve a parent-trigger law, in 2010. The initial undertaking to use the state law to redesign an academically struggling school, in the Southern California community of Compton, disintegrated in political and legal turmoil.

Despite the fights on display in California, legislators in other states have been drawn to trigger laws. As of spring, at least 25 states had considered parent-trigger policies, and seven of them had adopted laws establishing the policies, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

—SEAN CAVANAGH

officials from a number of publishing companies who said that Apple helped rally them to the cause of taking on Amazon and its comparatively low prices, with the intent of "altering the landscape" of the market. The judge also cited the statements of the late founder and CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs, as having revealed the company's motives in shaping the market.

Judge Cote said she found compelling evidence that Apple had encouraged other publishers to join with the company in taking on Amazon.

—SEAN CAVANAGH

Memphis-Area Towns Reject Merged District

Residents of six suburbs near Memphis, Tenn., have voted to create their own school dis-

tricts. The votes came weeks after the Memphis school system and Shelby County district had officially merged into one 140,000-student system, in one of the largest school mergers in the nation's history.

The new districts would be located within the boundaries of the former Shelby County school system. The towns voted last fall to create their own school systems, but a federal judge invalidated the action. A newer state law allowed the latest votes. Racial differences have haunted the conversation about the merged district.

Shelby County and Memphis students will attend the merged system for the 2013-14 school year, but it is now likely that separate systems will serve students next school year.

—JACLYN ZUBRZYCKI

N.C. Teachers to Lose Tenure, Salary Bumps

North Carolina's teaching force will no longer be eligible for tenure or to receive the pay bump that accompanies earning a master's degree, reports *The Wall Street Journal*.

Top-performing teachers in the state will still be able to receive four-year contracts, but otherwise, continued employment will be on one- or two-year contracts.

Teachers still can't be dismissed during the middle of a contract year unless it's for "cause," established during a hearing.

In what may be a first, North Carolina is also doing away with the salary premiums for teachers who hold master's degrees, the newspaper reports.

Lawmakers in the state in recent years have frozen teacher salaries and dismantled a celebrated teaching-fellowship program that encouraged promising high school students to consider a teaching career.

—STEPHEN SAWCHUK

New Manager Named For Detroit Schools

Jack Martin will become the third emergency manager of Detroit's 40,000-student school system.

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder made the announcement just days before the city filed for the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history last month.

Mr. Martin will leave his post as the city's chief financial officer, which he has held since May 2012. Previously, he was the emergency manager of the Highland Park, Mich., school district.

He replaces Roy Roberts, who had been appointed to a one-year term in 2011, and then another yearlong term in 2012.

The Associated Press reports that Mr. Martin graduated from the Detroit schools, ran his own accounting firm, and served in the U.S. departments of Education and Health and Human Services and the Selective Service System, during three presidents' administrations.

—J.Z.

Layoffs, Lawsuits Vex Chicago District

Chicago school officials announced they have eliminated jobs for more than 2,100 employees—roughly 1,000 of them teachers—in the budget-strapped district.

Those layoffs last month come on top of the 850 teachers and staff members who lost their jobs in June—cuts that mostly stemmed from the district's closure of nearly 50 elementary schools.

Officials in the 405,000-student district say they must address a \$1 billion deficit, a large chunk of which is the result of rising pension obligations.

A lawsuit against the district challenging the closing of 10 of the schools—which claimed the district did not follow its own guidelines for such closures—was rejected by a Cook County, Ill., judge last week. Meanwhile, two federal lawsuits are pending that were brought by the Chicago Teachers' Union challenging the closures on behalf of parents.

—LESLI A. MAXWELL

Schools Help Bolster U.S. Computer Market

While the worldwide demand for personal computers continues to decline, the market for those devices has remained relatively stable in the United States, bolstered partly by schools' continued reli-

REPORT
ROUNDUP

ance on them, according to a newly released industry report.

Preliminary results from a report by the Connecticut-based research firm Gartner Inc. indicates that PC shipments dropped almost 9 million units worldwide during the second quarter of 2013, marking a loss for the fifth consecutive quarter—the longest sustained decline in history for those devices, the analysis says.

—KEVIN CONNORS

Grant Will Expand
Teach For America

The Walton Family Foundation, already the largest single donor to Teach For America, has committed an additional \$20 million to recruit, train, and place an additional 4,000 corps members.

The new investment brings its financial support of TFA to about \$95 million in all.

The money will support nine cities: Denver; Detroit; Indianapolis; Los Angeles; Memphis, Tenn.; Milwaukee; Newark, N.J.; New Orleans; and the District of Columbia. It's the first time the foundation has directly supported TFA's efforts in Detroit, Indianapolis, and Memphis. (The Walton Foundation supports *Education Week's* coverage of parent engagement and empowerment.) —SS

Indiana Test Glitches
Did Not Hurt Scores

One in three Indiana students experienced interruptions while taking the state's online standardized tests this spring, but the widespread glitches had no discernible effect on statewide student scores, says a review commissioned by the state education department.

The testing problems occurred

in late April and early May, as nearly half a million students in grades 3-8 took the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus, or ISTEP+, exams. The interruptions were the result of faulty memory on the servers of the state's testing vendor, CTB/McGraw-Hill.

In a statement, state schools Superintendent Glenda Ritz said there is "no doubt" that the problems adversely affected students and schools and acknowledged that there is no way to definitively know how children would have performed had the interruptions not occurred.

The state is still negotiating a settlement with the company. Oklahoma recently settled with CTB/McGraw-Hill for \$1.2 million over similar problems. —BENJAMIN HEROLD

Philadelphia to Salvage
Some Axed Programs

Public school officials in Philadelphia say they'll use \$33 million in savings and new funding to recall laid-off music teachers and school secretaries and restore fall sports programs that were axed.

The Philadelphia Inquirer says the School Reform Commission also voted late last month to expand two successful schools, open a new high school, and turn over three low-performing schools to charter operators.

Faced with a \$304 million shortfall in June, the district laid off nearly 3,900 employees and eliminated art, music, and athletic programs.

Superintendent William Hite Jr. says the \$33 million comes from district savings initiatives and increases in the state's basic education funding and city tax collections. —AP

TRANSITIONS

Kara Kerwin will become president of the Center for Education Reform, in Washington, replacing the group's founder, Jeanne Allen, who will retire in October. Ms. Kerwin has worked for the center for 13 years and is currently its vice president for external affairs.



Sharon Robinson, the president and CEO of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, is the 2013-14 chairwoman of the Learning First Alliance's board of directors.

Lucille E. Davy, a senior adviser to the James B. Hunt Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy in Raleigh, N.C., was appointed to a four-year term on the National Assessment Governing Board, beginning Oct. 1. The board sets policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Current members Doris Hicks, an elementary school principal in New Orleans; Tonya Miles, a parent and former educator from Maryland; W. James Popham, a testing expert from the University of California, Los Angeles; and Leticia Van de Putte, a Democratic state legislator from Texas, were appointed to new terms on the 26-member board.

Lea Crusey, a former classroom teacher and state director for StudentsFirst, based in Sacramento, Calif., has been named deputy director of Democrats for Education Reform, a political action committee.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

"The Invisible Lever"

The public education sector is proving to be a highly sought-after career track for some top graduates of business, law, and technology programs—one that is more likely to give them high-level management responsibilities than if they'd gone into the private sector, a report finds.

In a survey of 1,300 professionals chosen for a highly competitive fellowship program for a high-profile assignment in education while in graduate school, more than 70 percent of respondents stayed in the education sector after completing their degrees. The students who stayed in the field were twice as likely as fellows who went to the private sector to have high-level management jobs.

The survey and the related report were produced by Education Pioneers, a national nonprofit group in Oakland, Calif., that selects and places graduate fellows in law, business, public policy, and education. —LESLI A. MAXWELL

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS

"Diverse Children: Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration in America's New Non-Majority Generation"

While children of immigrant families are generally more likely to be poor and to struggle academically than those of United States-born families, their well-being varies far more based on their race or ethnicity and economic position than on their immigration status, concludes a study by the Foundation for Child Development.

In fact, for some racial and ethnic groups, children of immigrants are doing better than those of their native-born counterparts. For example, black children of American-born parents fared worse than all or nearly all other groups, both immigrants and other U.S. natives, on 15 out of 19 indicators. By contrast, black children of immigrant parents fared better than their native-born counterparts in income level, parent education and employment, and high school graduation. —SARAH D. SPARKS

EARLY LEARNING

"Synthesis of IES Research on Early Intervention and Early-Childhood Education"

The results of dozens of research studies in early intervention and early-childhood education are synthesized in a new report released by the federal Institute of Education Sciences.

The report notes that teachers who learn strategies to engage

Geography Is Destiny in Study
Of Children's Social Mobility

"The Economic Impacts of Tax Expenditures: Evidence From Spatial Variation Across the U.S."

Communities with better public schools and more integrated housing offer better opportunities for poor children to climb out of poverty as they grow, according to a new study from the ongoing Equality of Opportunity Project at Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley.

The study looked at 741 "commuting zones"—geographical groups of counties based on commuting patterns that are similar to metro areas but also cover rural areas—across the United States. Researchers analyzed characteristics of the communities in which children who were born between 1980 and 1981 grew up (to age 16), and then tracked those children's income at age 30, in order to gauge how frequently children born poor, middle-class, or wealthy moved among the socioeconomic tiers.

Social mobility varies tremendously between different geographic areas, the study found. For example, a child born into the lowest 20 percent of family income in Gettysburg, S.D.—less than \$25,000 a year—has more than a one-in-three chance of growing up to earn in the top 20 percent of Americans' annual incomes (more than \$70,000), while a child born in poverty in Salt Lake City or Scranton, Pa., has better than a one-in-10 chance of doing the same.

By contrast, much of the South and Southwest has more limited social mobility. A child born in poverty in the Atlanta area has only a 4 percent chance of becoming a top earner. Even a middle-class child in that city has only a 14 percent chance of earning more than \$70,000 by age 30.

The researchers found that social mobility did improve in communities with relatively stronger economies overall, but that the overall economy wasn't the main source of differences in social mobility from city to city, nor was the cost of living. However, cities with a smaller middle class, and those in which the wealthiest and poorest families live farther apart geographically, had lower social mobility, suggesting that more economically integrated communities are associated with better social mobility.

In general, researchers found higher-than-average rates of social mobility in communities which, after controlling for income-level differences, had higher K-12 test scores, lower dropout rates, and higher per-student spending on education. —SARAH D. SPARKS

children in print-focused conversations during group-reading time often produce a boost in literacy skills for their young pupils. And structured mathematics curricula can improve children's knowledge of the subject beyond counting or identifying shapes. Yet some of the instructional methods that have been connected to positive student gains are used infrequently, researchers have found.

The report focuses on studies funded through the National Center on Education Research or the National Center on Special Education Research, and published in peer-reviewed journals from 2002 to June 2010. —CHRISTINA A. SAMUELS

STUDENT WRITING

"The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing Is Taught in Schools"

Digital technology has "tangible, beneficial impacts on student writing" and on writing instruction, according to nearly 2,500 middle and high school teachers surveyed by the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project.

But those same teachers—most of whom are teaching students in

Advanced Placement, honors, and accelerated courses—also worry that such technology is making students more likely to "take shortcuts," more likely to let the truncated language of text messages and social media "creep" into their papers, and less able to "produce a solid piece of writing containing a coherent and persuasive argument that synthesizes material well."

The report is the third from the research center on technology use in schools. —BENJAMIN HEROLD

BUSINESS OF EDUCATION

"2013/1st Half/Trends Report/ Education Industry"

Mergers and acquisitions in the education industry rose by 5 percent in the first half of 2013 over the second half of last year, an uptick driven by deals focused on testing and assessment products, cloud-based systems, e-reading, and other areas, says a new analysis.

The overall number of education-focused transactions rose from 128 in late 2012 to 135 in the first half of this year, reports Berkery Noyes, a New York City-based investment bank that conducts market research. —SEAN CAVANAGH

Scholars Craft New Approaches to Teaching Fractions

By Sarah D. Sparks

There are some basic properties of whole numbers any 3rd grader can tell you: Each number is represented by a single symbol, and followed by a single successor. Multiplication makes a number bigger; division makes it smaller.

The problem is, none of those qualities is true when it comes to fractions, one of the most chronically troublesome basic mathematics areas for children and adults. Now, as the Common Core State Standards push for earlier and deeper understanding of fractions, researchers and teachers are exploring ways to ensure students learn more than a sliver of the fractions pie.

“Developmental research shows even very young children have a fundamental grasp of fractions that can be built on through instruction,” said Nancy C. Jordan, a professor of education at the University of Delaware. But, she added, “if children are taught math in a way that’s very rote, where they memorize procedures, ... it really doesn’t help you much.”

‘Whole New World’

The traditional approach to teaching fractions can make it more likely for students to show superficial progress without real understanding, some researchers and educators argue.

“We’ve had a tendency in our traditional scope and sequence of math that you teach all this whole-number stuff ... and then, all of a sudden, you get to fractions, and it’s a whole new world of what to do—everything they learned in whole numbers has nothing to do with how you do fractions,” said Linda M. Gojak, the president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, in Reston, Va., and the director of the Center of Mathematics and Science Education, Teaching, and Technology at John Carroll University in University Heights, Ohio. “It’s one of the hardest things for kids to get their heads around.”

Cynthia Hacker, the education director for Sylvan Learning Center of Irmo in Columbia, S.C., sees that confusion a lot. For more than a dozen years, the center has run a weeklong “Fraction Action” summer camp, at which students play games using shapes and number lines to compare fractions of different sizes and practice multiplying and dividing mixed and improper fractions.

A lack of fractions understanding has been cited as second only to word-problem difficulty as the top handicap for students learning algebra, in a survey of a representative sample of 1,000 algebra teachers conducted by the National Mathematics Advisory Panel.

The typical American approach to teaching fractions can overemphasize procedures at the expense of an understanding of the relationships among numbers, which is needed for higher math, according to Lynn Fuchs, a professor of special education at Vanderbilt



Photos by Brett Flashnick for Education Week



FROM TOP: Christine Miller, a teacher at the “Fraction Action” summer camp run by Sylvan Learning Center of Irmo in Columbia, S.C., helps Asia Brown, a rising 3rd grader, learn to master fractions.

Ms. Miller and her student work on a fractions worksheet together at the camp last month. While the camp is geared to elementary students, teenagers have also come to try to fill in gaps in their understanding of basic mathematics.



POP QUIZ: When it comes to fractions, are you smarter than a 4th or 8th grader? Test yourself with an interactive quiz at www.edweek.org/go/fractions.

University in Nashville, Tenn.

In the United States, curricula mostly focus on understanding fractions as parts of a whole, using area models and pie charts, and teaching students the procedures for adding or multiplying, for example.

That’s soon to become an even bigger hurdle, as the common core in math push more work on fractions into 3rd grade, as opposed to 4th and 5th grades. The common standards also call for teachers to focus less on the procedures for specific fraction problems and more on getting students to understand the relationships between numbers that underlie a fraction problem.

Some Asian countries, by contrast, focus on what Ms. Fuchs calls a “measurement interpretation” of fractions: how they fall on a number line; the relationships between numbers represented by a fraction.

“It’s actually a very different way to teach fractions,” Ms. Gojak said.

In a 2012 essay, Robert Siegler, a professor of cognitive psychology at Carnegie Mellon University,

in Pittsburgh, and his colleagues call fractions a “new frontier” for understanding students’ numeracy development.

Building Better Fractions

The National Center on Improving the Learning of Fractions, a multi-university project based at the University of Delaware, in Newark, and supported by the federal Institute of Education Sciences, is trying to help students and teachers become more adroit with fractions.

Ms. Jordan, Mr. Siegler, and Ms. Fuchs are working with Nashville and other public school districts to explore more effective ways to teach those concepts.

Beyond simply being able to count, Mr. Siegler said, fraction knowledge in 5th grade “uniquely predicts” a student’s 10th grade math achievement, beyond the student’s IQ, family background, or even knowledge of other parts of mathematics.

Ms. Jordan’s research has found that students’ ability to understand and estimate where fractions would fall on a number line and explain magnitude—that a number represents a set of items that can be changed or compared to other sets—will predict how well they perform in math over the long term. She is developing a screening tool for 4th to 6th graders to identify children who are having trouble learning fractions and the instructional areas their teachers need to emphasize.

Mr. Siegler and his team at Carnegie Mellon are developing a board game to help early-elementary students understand and compare the magnitude of different fractions. The computer-based game, Catch

the Monster, asks students to find a monster hiding along a number line by estimating the point closest to a location, using a fraction-related hint.

In one of Ms. Fuchs’ studies, students in 53 4th grade classes in 13 schools were randomly assigned to take part in either their schools’ regular fractions instruction or a 12-week intervention focused on teaching the underlying relationships in fractions. The intervention students performed significantly better than peers who had received the regular instruction on a test of fractions problems culled from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Plus, the achievement gaps between students considered “at risk” in math—those initially in the lowest 35th percentile on a standardized test—and those not at risk closed significantly for program participants.

“We are teaching children to think of fractions in terms of quantities, how different-sized fractions compare to one another,” Ms. Fuchs said. “We’re trying to teach them a more sophisticated understanding of fractions and help them do well.”

Coverage of “deeper learning” that will prepare students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world is supported in part by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, at www.hewlett.org. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.



Scan this tag with your smartphone for a link to the studies “Early Predictors of High School Mathematics Achievement” and “Improving At-Risk Learners’ Understanding of Fractions,” or go to edweek.org/links

Obama Inspires Thoughts On Supporting Black Males

Since President Barack Obama articulated, in a most personal way, the painful, commonplace encounters with racism that many African-American boys and men experience, his reflections have sparked new—and renewed some old—conversations about what schools and educators can do to support black male youths.

The president's remarks last month—in which he described his own experiences as a black man with arousing suspicions in a department store or on a street corner—came after days of angry protests in the wake of the Trayvon Martin verdict. In that high-profile, racially charged case, a Florida jury found defendant George Zimmerman, a white and Hispanic neighborhood-watch volunteer, not guilty in the shooting death of Mr. Martin, an unarmed African-American 17-year-old.

For some educators and advocates, the president's extemporaneous speech—which called for American society to do more to support and value African-American males—has put the persistently precarious state of black boys and men into the brightest possible spotlight.

What should be done in America's public schools, where research consistently shows that African-American males are the least likely demographic group to read on grade level and the most likely to be suspended or expelled, referred to special education, or drop out?

How can educators and advocates seize on the momentum from President Obama's comments, and the renewed national attention on race, to take action at the schoolhouse level and all the way to the national level? Some practitioners and advocates shared their ideas in interviews with *Education Week*.

—LESLI A. MAXWELL

Staff Writer Jaclyn Zubrzycki contributed reporting.



Gerald Herbert/AP

PROTESTING VIOLENCE

Six-year-old Jaquin Nelson attends a "Hoodie Sabbath," a church service in New Orleans that honored Trayvon Martin. Mr. Martin, 17, was wearing a hooded sweatshirt when he was shot and killed by a neighborhood-watch volunteer in Florida. The event was organized by the PICO National Network's Lifelines to Healing Campaign, a faith-based effort to reduce gun violence in the nation's inner cities.



We need to spend some time in thinking about how do we bolster and reinforce our African-American boys? ... There are a lot of kids out there who need help who are getting a lot of negative reinforcement. And is there more that we can do to give them the sense that their country cares about them and values them and is willing to invest in them?"

PRESIDENT OBAMA
July 19 remarks

"We have to start by focusing around the historical contributions and identity of young men with African ancestry. We have to deal with the social and emotional issues that young people come to school with and give them strategies to transcend and rise above them. We have to give them an academic environment that also supports their social and emotional needs so they start to see themselves as learners, as scholars."

KAMAU PTAU
Program Curriculum and Facilitator
Development Specialist, Sankofa Passages,
Philadelphia

"I am a tutor. The kids I tutored in reading this year were two African-American boys, and just that act of going in and taking one hour a week to help them and to show them a different path is very impactful. I was an African-American boy, so I know the impact that can have on a child. Helping these young boys to become readers, and students who love to read, is critical."

BYRON McCAULEY
Senior Director of External Relations
KnowledgeWorks, Cincinnati

"This moment cannot be swept under the rug. As educators, we have to make this a moment of inquiry and pose some essential questions. When you hear the most powerful man in the world talking about that feeling of walking past a woman who clutches her pocketbook closer, how does that resonate with all students? Have a town hall in high schools and talk about this openly, from all perspectives."

RONALD WALKER
Executive Director
Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color
Cambridge, Mass.

"I think we haven't, as a country, figured out the correct policy levers to make real systemic change in districts that have large numbers of black and Latino boys, and this is increasingly true of black and Latina females as well. We've spent a lot of time as a nation talking about standards-based education. Those reforms we've put in place, by and large, haven't worked. We need to think about supports-based education."

CASSIE SCHWERNER
Senior Vice President for Programs, Schott Foundation for Public Education
Cambridge, Mass.

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Portrait photo by Rick Lohren for Education Week

For additional voices on this topic, go to www.edweek.org/go/africanamericanboys.



Internship Pairs Detroit Students With GM Retirees

Teams of high schoolers from poor neighborhoods hold down 9-to-5 jobs and get life-skill and other lessons

By Caralee Adams
Detroit

The grass and weeds surrounding the burnt-out house across the street from Cody College Prep Upper School of Teaching and Learning were about 4 feet tall when the crew began its work here at 9 a.m. on a recent day in July.

The 10 paid high school interns from Cody, alongside three General Motors retirees and a recent graduate of the University of Detroit Mercy, decided that securing the abandoned properties was the top priority for their newly formed GM Student Corps team. Not only were the homes an eyesore, they were also potentially dangerous: The empty structures were magnets for illegal activity, and neighborhood children had to walk in the streets because of the brush-covered sidewalks.

Wearing fluorescent orange vests, work gloves, and hats with the Student Corps' sunshine logo, the group used saws, clippers, weed-whackers, rakes, and brooms to chop and bag the debris. After three hours of work and two water breaks, bag lunches arrived in a Chevy Silverado.

The students crossed the street to the park and packed up the

tools, knowing they otherwise might disappear before the young people finished lunch in the air-conditioned school cafeteria.

"Look," said Dawin Wright, 61, the team leader and a retired executive, smiling and pointing to the cleared property and adjacent homes the students boarded up earlier in the week. "Those kids are walking down the sidewalk. They didn't do that yesterday."

Cody rising senior Kristi Trader said the Student Corps experience has been good for her and the neighborhood. "You are helping the community by cleaning it up, making it look nicer, and inspiring people to help and have more respect for it," she said. "And you are really helping yourself. You learn things like how to pace yourself and be a hard worker at the same time."

The Cody team is one of 11 in the Student Corps in what started as a summer employment program, but morphed into a comprehensive experience that combines service, life-skills education, and mentoring. All told, 110 high school students, 60 retirees, and 12 college interns are involved in this, its first year. Since 2010, when the GM Foundation gave \$27 million to the United Way to create "networks

of excellence" in a handful of high-need area schools, company liaisons have been working with students. Last fall, the idea of a summer internship program emerged.

GM retirees, who oversee the teams, give encouragement to students who are growing up in a city that just filed for bankruptcy, where many grocery stores have bars on the windows, unemployment is more than twice the national average at 16.3 percent, and about one-third of the population lives below the poverty line.

"It's not like this everywhere," Mr. Wright told his charges in a mentoring session during lunch. "Until you see something different [from Detroit], that's the way you think it is."

Broad Exposure

Company officials wanted to do more for schools than write a check. So they turned to Mike DiGiovanni, 65, a retired GM executive, and asked him to become the director of the Student Corps and recruit fellow retirees.

"Our program is unique because it's not just putting kids to work, it's teaching them about life," said Mr. DiGiovanni. "It's giving them a paid internship and GM on their résumé to set

them up for life. This is about exposing them to the skills and education they need to succeed in life."

The retirees wanted the summer to be about more than cleaning up parks. The organizers soon realized the breadth of retiree talent and considered how to fill rainy days with activities, said Heidi Magyar, the manager of Student Corps. Also, the company had miscalculated the caliber of the students—most have aspirations to go to college—so the program expanded in response.

"These kids have grit. They are determined to be successful in life," said Mr. DiGiovanni. "Their need and drive was way beyond what we anticipated."

Research solidly shows that having a mentor can help students from disadvantaged backgrounds who often don't have the support system and social capital needed to make it in college, said David Conley, the director of the Center for Educational Policy Research at the University of Oregon, in Eugene. Mentors "take something that is abstract and make it real," he said.

The transition process from high school to college is far more complex and demanding than most schools acknowledge, said Mr. Conley. In these kinds of pro-

“Our program is unique because it's not just putting kids to work, it's teaching them about life. ... This is about exposing them to the skills and education they need to succeed in life.”

MIKE DIGIOVANNI
GM Student Corps Director



FROM LEFT:

Jameel Harris, foreground right, a senior at Cody College Prep Upper School of Teaching and Learning in Detroit, cleans up brush outside an abandoned house near his school. He and the other students are participating in the GM Student Corps, a new program sponsored by General Motors, in which they work with retired company employees on community-service projects and receive career mentoring and other instruction.

Mike DiGiovanni, the director of the Student Corps, talks about the program near Central Collegiate Academy, where students built pergolas that will be installed in Gordon Park, a few blocks away.

Photos by Brian Widdis for EducationWeek

grams, students learn skills that help them feel more in control of their lives, which is a huge step in the process of getting ready for college, Mr. Conley said.

"It's a great example," he said of the GM program, "but ultimately, you need government to step in, colleges to step up, and school systems to reach out to local corporations and others to help make it happen."

Inspiring Confidence

The GM teams work on their community-service projects from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays for 10 weeks, leaving lunch and occasional Mondays and Fridays for seminars on such topics as financial management and decisionmaking conducted by retirees and current employees, along with tours of the company's facilities and a college campus. The retirees get a modest stipend, and the students are paid slightly more than minimum wage for a 30-hour work week. The college interns provide logistical support to the crews and answer students' questions about college life.

Yvonna Olds, 22, an intern who graduated from Detroit Mercy in May, said she frequently tells the students that, unlike in high school, there won't be someone in college telling them what to do and to be prepared for the experience to be hard. "You have to want it bad enough," said Ms. Olds. "In college, you have to develop a personality where you are a go-getter. I encourage them to have the right mindset."

Geneva Brooks, 17, who wants to study social work in college, said she is grateful for the advice from the mentors and is enjoying the program. "You hear people complaining this is such a bad neighborhood, but they don't do anything about it. We are stepping out of our comfort zone," she said. "We are having fun and we are learning."

Students talk about the awe of working for a big-name com-

pany like GM, although some wish the internship was at its headquarters downtown rather than outdoors in the heat. Others worry that the grass at the abandoned houses will grow back and the trash will accumulate again. But most convey a sense of satisfaction in the work they've accomplished and are full of questions about the future.

In Detroit, the four-year high school graduation rate is about 65 percent, and many of those in the Student Corps programs want to be the first in their families to attend college, if they can secure scholarships.

Marilyn Gripper, 57, a retiree volunteering at Cody, is gathering resources on scholarships and financial aid for the students, who, she says, are eager for information. "We are trying to inspire them. The biggest barrier is not believing they can do it," she said. "I've been inspired by them. They are yearning to learn."

Back in Cody's cafeteria, Mr. Wright, the team leader, has written on a white board: "Love Yourself"

"My job is to impart as much knowledge with you and in you so when I transition off, you will be OK ... to make you independent, strong, and confident," he said. In 45 minutes, he packs in advice on staying away from bad influences, a demonstration of how to walk with a purpose, and tips on how to carry on a conversation with someone new.

At the end of the lunch period, it was time to tackle more weeds outside.

"We aren't here to make you professional gardeners," Mr. Wright said. "The grass and the clipping, that's the external stuff. This is what this it is about," he said, referring to the lunchtime conversation.

'Don't Be Scared'

Across town, at Osborn College Preparatory Academy, GM

retiree Jack Hazen, 70, led a Student Corps team painting a small, weather-worn garage for a senior citizen. The students and retirees developed the business plan for the summer, including compiling a supply list for the repair work and sprucing up Osborn's baseball field.

"They learned [that] in business that everybody has to live within a budget. We tried to emphasize that we can't just throw money at everything," said Mr. Hazen.

In the 87-degree heat, students took occasional breaks to splash themselves with icy water from the cooler. Among them, rising senior and aspiring journalist Lettie-Ann Miller said she also has been soaking up advice about networking. "Don't be scared. Always make sure you go out there and get contacts because you never know what will happen," she said.

The Student Corps team from the River Rouge High School, just south of downtown, landscaped around a viaduct that cars pass through to reach their school. The city cleared the weeds, and the student crew then laid plastic and planted 200 boxwoods to transform the space. Other projects chosen by the team include food distribution at a local community center and mentoring incoming freshmen in a high school orientation program.

Retiree Lew Eads is volunteering because he remembers adults in his life who encouraged him as a young person. "They showed me my potential, that's why I'm here," said the 70-year-old who worked as a GM advertising manager. "I tell the kids, 'We're here for you.' I give them hugs and tell them we love them."

No decision has been made yet about whether the program will continue next year, but Mr. DiGiovanni would like to see other Detroit businesses join

the initiative. "Imagine a Student Corps of not 110 kids, but 3,000 kids," he said.

Sandy Baruah, the president of the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, said GM has been instrumental in supporting education reform, and this program was a natural next step. "It really demonstrates the importance that the business community is placing on education achievement," he said.

Common Interests

Programs such as the GM Student Corps can reduce the perceived gap between business interests and community interests, Mr. Baruah suggests. "When people understand each other better, we find we have more in common than we have not in common."

After the summer, Mr. DiGiovanni said he anticipates many of the retirees and students will stay in touch.

Seventeen-year-old Gregory

Thomas, a 4.0 student who wants to be an engineer, says he hopes the experience will help his future job prospects. "If later in life I want to try to work for GM, I might get tips from them," he said.

Volunteer Tom Parkhill, 69, plans to give students on his Cody team his business card at the end of the program. "They have expectations. Our job is to do what we can to make those expectations happen," he said. "You need door openers and people who can help."

Special coverage on the alignment between K-12 schools and postsecondary education is supported in part by a grant from the Lumina Foundation, at www.luminafoundation.org. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.

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New Dropout-Warning System Flags Pupils' Risks in 1st Grade

Indicators pave way for intervening early

By Sarah D. Sparks

As tracking data on students grow ever more extensive, some Maryland educators find early warnings of students at risk of dropping out may become visible at the very start of their school careers.

The affluent and tech-savvy 149,000-student Montgomery County public schools, in a suburb of Washington, is building one of the first early-warning systems in the country that can identify red flags for 75 percent of future dropouts as early as the second semester of 1st grade.

"If these kids are always with us, we can do something about this," said Thomas C. "Chris" West, who built the tracking formula as Montgomery County's evaluation specialist and now works as a data specialist in Frederick County, Md., schools. "Remember, these are signs of students who drop out—it doesn't mean they *are* dropouts."

Montgomery County's initiative comes in the midst of an explosion in the use of longitudinal-data systems to identify students at risk of not graduating from high school on time. According to the most recent count by the Data Quality Campaign, for 2012, 28 states use early-warning systems, with more in development. These systems can be used to target interventions based on profiles of characteristics of students who fail academically and drop out of school, though at this point, relatively few states or districts have reports available to principals and teachers multiple times a year.

Knowing the District

Most modern early-warning systems evolved out of the work of Robert Balfanz, the co-director of the Everyone Graduates Center and a research scientist at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and from the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Research from the Johns Hopkins center showed that three red flags—chronic absenteeism, severe disciplinary infractions, and reading or mathematics failures—signal as early as 6th grade a student's disengagement from school and predict his or her risk of dropping out.

Other studies have since replicated the findings at earlier and earlier grades. However, Mr. West, who is also affiliated with Mr. Balfanz, cautioned that researchers and educators must study these risk factors in the context of a specific school system.

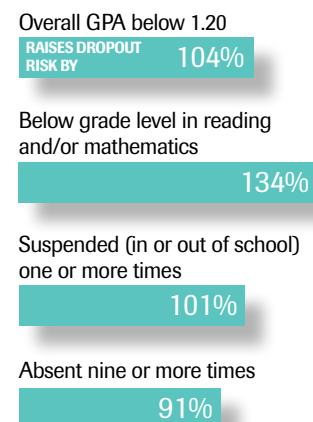
The Montgomery County district compared the grades, attendance, and behavior of 723 dropouts from

the class of 2011 and 523 dropouts from the class of 2012 with those of their classmates who graduated. The early-warning system reverse-engineers a risk profile based on warning signs at four critical transition points: spring of 1st grade and fall of 3rd, 6th, and 9th grades.

For example, chronic absenteeism is generally defined as missing 10 percent or more days of school, excused or unexcused. In Montgomery County, Mr. West found virtually no pupils in the early-elementary grades missed 20 days of school. But missing as few as nine days of school nearly doubled

FLAGGING STUDENTS AT RISK

As early as 1st grade, factors such as reading below grade level or racking up more than nine absences in a year can greatly increase the odds that a student will eventually drop out of school, according to Montgomery County's data.



SOURCE: Thomas C. West, Montgomery County, Md., Schools

a student's risk of dropping out later. "The message for Montgomery County is, our kids are there in school; they just aren't doing well," Mr. West said at a discussion of the data system at the National Center on Education Statistics' annual conference in Washington last month.

Similarly, elementary schools rarely suspend students, but subtler behavior cues, such as report card notations of incomplete homework, more accurately signaled future problems at that age.

Report card grades were the strongest predictor of dropout risk in grades 1 and 3. An overall GPA of 1.2 (roughly a D) in the spring of 1st grade more than doubled a student's risk of dropping out later, and reading or doing math below grade level in 1st grade boosted that risk by 134 percent.

"A parent has the report card, student has a report card, teacher has a report card," Mr. West said, "so if we base our conversation on the report card, at least everybody's talking from the same page."

In later years, lower academic performance was even more pre-

dictive, even with higher report card grades. At both the 6th and 9th grades, a student with a GPA below 3.0 and no other risk factors still was more than 3½ times more likely to drop out of school.

All told, a combination of the grades, attendance, and behavior indicators in 1st grade predicted about 75 percent of the students who dropped out in the classes of 2011 and 2012. A quarter to one-third of students who had at least one warning sign in 1st grade had more red flags in the 6th and 9th grades.

Changed Conversation

While Montgomery County's warning system is not yet being used to track individual students in real time, the district is changing the way it talks about student risk factors. For example, the data showed that more than 60 percent of students who dropped out were not from poor families. English-language learners were overrepresented among dropouts in the class of 2011—16 percent, compared to the 4 percent district average—and special education students accounted for more than one in five dropouts in 2011, higher than their 11 percent share of the class overall. Mr. West said grade and behavior indicators proved more reliable and less discriminatory than looking at socioeconomic or race.

"It's like getting your blood pressure checked; you have to do it often and over time," Mr. West said.

One reason for caution: At early grades, the system can show almost 50 percent more students at risk of dropping out as those who ultimately do. Still, Mr. West noted that it's not certain whether the false positives come from mistakes that make sense in context—for example, a high-performing student who gets chicken pox and misses two weeks of school—or the effect of interventions to help at-risk students in later grades.

"But then you get into stigma; is it good to tell a 1st grader, 'You might be a dropout?' These kids do move in and out of these indicators," Mr. West said.

"You will not reduce dropout rates by [identifying] the students; it's what you do with them," he said. "Early-warning systems are part of an intervention strategy."

The district is working to analyze changes in the indicators from grade to grade to find the trajectories that might be more accurate predictors than at a single grade. It is also analyzing data from its high school graduates to find indicators associated with later college persistence.



Scan this tag with your smartphone for a link to "Just the Right Mix: Identifying Potential

Dropouts in Montgomery County Public Schools Using an Early Warning Indicators Approach." www.edweek.org/links.



Students work in a classroom at John Eager Howard Elementary School in Baltimore in April. Funding under a bond measure approved by the Maryland legislature this past spring will pay for overdue upgrades to city schools.

Parents Provide Muscle As Bond, Tax Measures Scrap to Win Approval

By Nora Fleming

Sitting in a cafeteria at Pimlico Elementary/Middle School last fall, parents were asked to imagine what their children's school would look like with an influx of money under a proposed \$2.4 billion bond project to renovate and upgrade facilities in the Baltimore district.

Parents called for "basic standards": working air conditioning, drinkable water in fountains, and windows that open, said Sherrell Savage, a mother of three students, who helped rally parental support credited for providing the crucial momentum needed to get the measure approved by state lawmakers in this year's legislative session.

"Our parents couldn't even dream about 21st-century schools because they were still dealing with 20th-century schools that weren't operating properly," she said.

To help push the measure over the top, Baltimore parents had to prod both their community and legislators from across the state to approve and pay for the project, which will rely on a combination of state, city, and district resources to build new schools, shut down old ones, and provide up-to-date facilities for the 84,700-student district.

Though the specifics may differ from community to community, parents throughout the country are increasingly becoming advocates for bond and tax measures needed to fill budget holes and better the quality of schools.

Their outreach often goes beyond knocking on doors, posting on Facebook, and running ads on

local TV stations: In Baltimore, for example, the nearly three-year campaign included a 3,000-person rally and weekly parent bus rides to lobby state legislators in Annapolis, the capital.

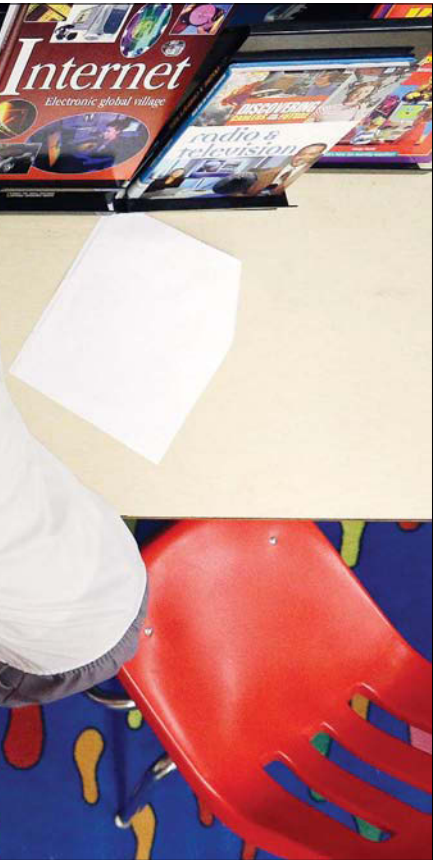
According to Michael Griffith, the senior policy analyst for the Denver-based Education Commission of the States, parents are vital in pushing local voters to pass both bond measures, which typically pay for lengthy infrastructure projects, and tax or levy measures, which pay for district operating expenses.

"While in most school districts these measures have to go through the school board or the district's fiscal agent to be put before the community, it is the parents that have to rally to support the measure," Mr. Griffith said. "Whether it be organizing a campaign or voting for the measure, parent involvement is crucial to getting these measures passed."

Mastering Complexities

An effective campaign can also require a high level of sophistication from parents when it comes to details and legalities surrounding the proposals. The rules and regulations governing bonds and tax levies can differ substantially by state, and even within states. Some states have caps on tax rates for taxpayers, limits on how much money can be raised for operating expenses, rules on when measures can be placed on local ballots, and a statistical threshold for voter approval, he said.

In Kansas, for example, caps



Photos by Patrick Semansky/AP

on how much districts can raise and spend on operating expenses may have encouraged a growth in bond measures—which have fewer restrictions—as a means for parents to bring more money into local schools, said Mark Tallman, an associate executive director at the Kansas Association of School Boards. However, the trend has generated concerns about equity, since wealthier districts can leverage more funding given their higher property-tax bases.

Washington state has responded to that concern by providing additional “levy equalization assistance” to districts where property values are lower than the state average. Three years ago, 220 districts received \$261 million in matching funds for tax-levy measures.

States’ rules, as well as their circumstances, have also influenced the number of measures pushed and passed by parents. Changes more than a decade ago to the way Minnesota finances public education meant significant cuts to school districts that communities have tried to buffer by passing levy measures, said Mary Cecconi, the executive director of Parents United, a state advocacy group based in St. Paul that has helped parents get tax measures passed for districts.

“Minnesota has spawned a cottage industry around local levy campaigns: If you’re not running a levy campaign here, you’re planning on running one the next year,” said Ms. Cecconi, who estimates that more than 90 percent of the state’s districts have at least one levy in place. “The psyche of the taxpayer is that districts keep going out for more and more money; most everyone in Minnesota is now suffering from levy fatigue.”

In the past decade-plus, parents there have also developed finely tuned and pricey campaign strategies that can cost \$125,000 or even more, she added.

Although the measures can net upwards of \$700 in additional funds per student per year in Minnesota, districts frequently use them to patch budget holes, rather



Tamara Hanson, the principal of **John Eager Howard Elementary School,** looks in on a class in session last spring.

than provide additions or improvements. Even with a good campaign, the use of the money can make it challenging to get voters to pass measures and to renew them, as is required every 10 years.

Fiscal Pressures

According to Jared Boigon, a partner with TBWB Strategies, a San Francisco-based political-consulting firm that focuses on public-finance measures, the state cuts that many districts have faced in recent years have made it much harder to fulfill the campaign promises for programs and new facilities when the money is needed to cover basic school needs. Strategic campaigning—such as showing how modern buildings could save money in energy costs over time—are essential in helping the measures pass, he said.

The failure to pass a levy can often make the budget holes grow bigger. In Minnesota’s Osseo Area school system, last year’s levy measure lost by 124 votes (out of 69,000 cast), resulting in \$3 million in cuts for the 20,000-student district, said parent and campaign leader Mary Ellen DeBois. She and other parents are already in the midst of ramping up the campaign strategy for another levy, on the ballot this fall; projections show its failure would bring another \$8 million in cuts within two years.

“The most difficult part of the campaign is building an immense number of relationships across a diverse community, one conversation at a time,” Ms. DeBois said. “Our message to our volunteers is: We don’t need people to take on huge tasks, we need many people to take on small pieces of the puzzle. We know we don’t have the time or the resources to change everyone’s mind [to support the levy].”

Districts tend to take varied approaches to campaign strategies and style, said W. Kyle Ingle, an associate professor of educational administration at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, who has researched tax-measure campaigns. In general, campaigns that more readily involve the community and disseminate varied and targeted messages to different groups tend to be more

successful at the polls, he said.

Restrictions governing measures and pushback from naysayers have inspired progressive ideas in many communities, like those in Minnesota, in how to craft campaigns, and in others, how to pay for the bond and tax measures themselves.

Analysts determined the level of repairs needed to put all Baltimore schools in adequate condition would cost at least \$2.4 billion, an amount that would be nearly impossible for the district to borrow and pay off alone with the city’s limited property-tax base. At the urging of parents, the community at large, and advocacy groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and the Baltimore Education Coalition, the state, city, and district agreed to share responsibility for paying off a portion of the bond each year, supported by the state legislation approved this past spring.

Other places have also been creative. Board members in Greenville, S.C., voted to create a non-profit organization, governed by former school board members, that borrowed \$1 billion to build nearly 80 new schools within five

years—impossible for the district to do given state laws and the local voter climate.

Level of Support

Since tax and bond measures differ considerably among districts and states, common features of successful measures are hard to discern, said Alex Bowers, an associate professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. Mr. Bowers has found, however, that one omnibus bond financing several projects, rather than smaller bonds broken down to pay for specific projects like a new track or library, tend to do better at the polls. In addition, repackaging and refloating bond measures that have failed usually doesn’t produce a different result.

Still, he said, the overall success of bond measures largely depends on community support for local schools, or the support parents and the district are able to drum up—components that are hard to measure statistically.

While the campaign in Baltimore was successful, the community’s efforts are far from over for the project, which will take 10 to 15 years

to complete and require additional funding mechanisms to support it.

Local advocacy groups and parent leaders like Ms. Savage, a member of the education coalition, hope that parent involvement continues past the campaign stage to implementation of the project itself. Some parents already went back to the drawing board this summer to help hash out the specifics and timetable for the first set of schools in line to be built, renovated, or closed.

“Parents are often relegated to the back seat, but this time,” Ms. Savage said, “parents have recognized that they have the power to have their voices heard and move things to change in the schools our children attend and in our city.”

Coverage of parent-empowerment issues is supported by a grant from the Walton Family Foundation, at www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.

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Bridgeport Schools Chief's Future in Doubt

Ouster appeal slated by Conn. high court

By Jaclyn Zubrzycki

A Connecticut judge's order that Paul G. Vallas, who has run of some of the largest school systems in the country, must leave his post as the superintendent in Bridgeport because of a lack of formal certification highlights some of the tensions in national debates over superintendents' qualifications and state interventions in struggling urban districts.

Though Mr. Vallas, a former budget director for Chicago mayor Richard Daley, has garnered national attention as a district leader in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Louisiana's state-run Recovery School District, he was never fully certified to be a superintendent in Connecticut.

In a strongly worded June 28 ruling that is being appealed, Superior Court Judge Barbara Bellis said that a state board-approved independent study taken by Mr. Vallas at the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education was a course rather than the leadership program he was required to take under a state law passed last year.

Judge Bellis also found that, although his professor gave him an A for his efforts, Mr. Vallas did not actually complete the independent study—which had never been used for any other district leader in the state—in the form approved by the state board of education. That means, the ruling said, that Mr. Vallas was ineligible for the waiver from state certification requirements granted to him by state Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor.

Staying for Now

The Connecticut Supreme Court announced in July that Mr. Vallas, who has courted his share of controversy, can remain the district's superintendent while the case is being appealed. The court will



Bridgeport Superintendent of Schools Paul G. Vallas hugs Aphia Griffiths, a parent, after she spoke at a rally to show support for him last month in Bridgeport, Conn.

hear arguments in late September. "We're going to keep on doing what we do until the courts tell us we can't do it," Mr. Vallas said in an interview with *Education Week*.

Carmen Lopez, the retired superior court judge who brought the case against Mr. Vallas' appointment, said her action was prompted by a series of decisions—including his appointment—that state officials had made about the 21,000-student system without the input of Bridgeport residents. The school board that hired Mr. Vallas was state-appointed rather than elected. Mr. Vallas' entry into his position was eased by Commissioner Pryor, Ms. Lopez said.

"Paul Vallas was imposed on the city," she said. "Then we find out that he lacks something as basic as having certification."

"There is a movement in this country to change education as we know it, and you start that where people are vulnerable," she said. "There's never any discussion with

the people, who are looked on as incompetent. ... The only recourse we have is the court."

Despite the court ruling, Mr. Vallas says the independent study allowed him to show he met state standards, which should permit him to be superintendent in Bridgeport, the state's second largest district and also one of its poorest.

"This is about more than certification," Mr. Vallas said. "If I'd taken a longer course, they'd have found something else to sue the district over," he said. "This is about maintaining the status quo."

Other superintendents who have come to districts from non-traditional backgrounds, such as business or the military, have had their credentials questioned and, in some cases, seen their education careers come to an end.

Cathleen P. Black, who was named the chancellor of the New York City schools in 2011 after holding top executive posts in magazine publishing, drew heat

for having no experience working in education. Like Mr. Vallas, Ms. Black was granted a waiver by the state's education commissioner that permitted her to lead the nation's largest school system. She left the job, however, after 95 days.

Nontraditional Chiefs

Other prominent district schools chiefs in recent years have not had traditional administrator credentials, including U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who became the CEO of Chicago's schools after serving under Mr. Vallas; Michelle A. Rhee, who led the District of Columbia's school system; and Anthony J. Tata, who headed the district in Wake County, N.C.

The fact that in Bridgeport the issue has been taken to court is unusual, however.

"This is the first situation I've seen where a major city superintendent's credentials were the

“This is the first situation I've seen where a major city superintendent's credentials were the subject of a lawsuit.”

MICHAEL D. CASSERLY
Council of the Great City Schools

Photos by Brian A. Pounds/The Connecticut Post

subject of a lawsuit," said Michael D. Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a Washington-based group that represents large urban districts.

As of 2005, 44 states required some sort of specific education program or certification for their superintendents, according to the Denver-based Education Commission of the States.

Particularly in large urban systems, though, superintendents from outside the education world are hardly a new phenomenon, said Mr. Casserly.

"There probably ought to be changes in state laws in a way that would allow nontraditional superintendents to lead at least major-city school districts," he said.

In most cases, a state waiver is granted or the path is cleared at the legislative level for a non-traditional leader to take the helm, and the issue never reaches a court, said Kenneth Wong, a professor of education policy at



PAUL G. VALLAS

EXPERIENCE

Jan. 2012
Became **superintendent** in Bridgeport, Conn.

2010-12
Education consultant for government of Haiti after 2010 earthquake; education consultant for government of Chile.

2007-2011
Served as **superintendent** of the Recovery School District,

La., where he helped oversee the rebuilding of New Orleans' schools after Hurricane Katrina. He closed direct-run schools and opened charter schools, seeking to create what he described as a "system of schools" rather than a "school system."

2002-2007
Became **CEO of Philadelphia school district** immediately after a state takeover gave control of many of the schools to private managers and universities. He replaced K-8

schools with elementary and middle schools, promoted a zero-tolerance discipline policy, and opened more than 60 charter schools.

2001-2002
Gubernatorial candidate in Illinois, losing Democratic primary to now-former Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

1995-2001
Was the first mayorally appointed **CEO of Chicago's public schools**. He sought to

Brown University.

Mr. Vallas said he had not been required to take any course for his district positions in Chicago, Philadelphia, or Louisiana.

Mr. Casserly questioned whether a course would have helped Mr. Vallas become a better superintendent. “Frankly, there’s no paper or credential that could be added to his résumé that would somehow make him more skilled,” he said.

Jeffrey Henig, a professor of education policy at Teachers College, Columbia University, said the dispute over Mr. Vallas’ credentials was evidence of a bigger battle.

“There’s a strong sense within most of the traditional education community that standards and regulations that were meant to ensure expertise and training in things like pedagogy and curriculum are being eroded by a broad assault on these traditional institutions,” he said.

“The irony is that these very regulations that the contemporary school reform movement is complaining about were promulgated, in the early 20th century, by the reformers of that day,” Mr. Henig said. “These were the tools for ensuring that local and state party machines didn’t award these positions based on loyalty.”

Back Story

The recent turmoil over school governance in Bridgeport began in 2011, when the school system was placed under mayoral control by the state board of education, though the Connecticut Supreme Court later ruled that the action was not constitutional. Mr. Vallas was elected by the mayorally appointed board after meeting Mr. Pryor in Haiti, where both men were doing post-earthquake relief work, and being introduced to city board members, the superintendent said.

The city’s school board became an elected body again after the supreme court ruling, with some members who vehemently opposed Mr. Vallas’s policies. But that elected board eventually voted 5-4 in favor of keeping Mr. Vallas as a superintendent and awarded him a three-year contract. That same divide has remained consistent in school board

votes this spring.

An informal poll conducted by the *Connecticut Post*’s website found, as of July 17, that only 17 percent of readers believed that Mr. Vallas was qualified for his job.

Mr. Vallas’ legal fees are being paid by the city school board.

“The fact that there’s tension and conflict politically over who should be calling the shots in Bridgeport makes the earlier effort to bring mayoral control relevant,” Mr. Henig said. “There’s a component of the community that feels that reform is being driven largely by outside actors.”

Ms. Lopez, who brought the legal challenge against the selection of Mr. Vallas, said that she was wary of his record in other places he’d worked, where the charter sector has grown significantly while district schools have been closed.

“Community schools are important in Bridgeport,” she said. She also expressed concern about more standardized tests being used in schools, and about new military schools that have opened in the district. “I wonder if he thinks that’s the only way black and Latino kids can learn, to impose military schools on them,” she said. “They wouldn’t do this in the suburbs.”

No new charter schools have opened in Bridgeport during Mr. Vallas’ tenure, though he touted a new military academy in an interview. The district’s budget deficit, meanwhile, has been reduced. Mr. Vallas said that while he had made cuts at the central-office level, no schools had been closed, and big layoffs had been avoided. “If the [state supreme] court rules against us, which I don’t believe they will, then so be it. It’s not like we haven’t made significant progress,” Mr. Vallas said. “The issue for the city will be: Can you maintain the investment that we’ve made? Can you implement it to its fruition?”

As far as the implications for other cities with nontraditional superintendents, Mr. Casserly of the Great City Schools said that “it’s a little hard to believe someone hasn’t thought of [challenging a controversial leader’s credentials in court] before, ... but I’m pretty confident in saying someone will think of it again.”

end automatic grade promotion, required summer school for more students, opened many magnet, alternative, and charter schools, and balanced the district’s budget.

1993-1995

Budget director for city of Chicago under Mayor Richard M. Daley.

1990-1993

Executive director of the Illinois legislature’s economic and fiscal commission.

EDUCATION/TRAINING

1980-1993

Illinois National Guard

1980

Master’s degree in political science, Western Illinois University

1976

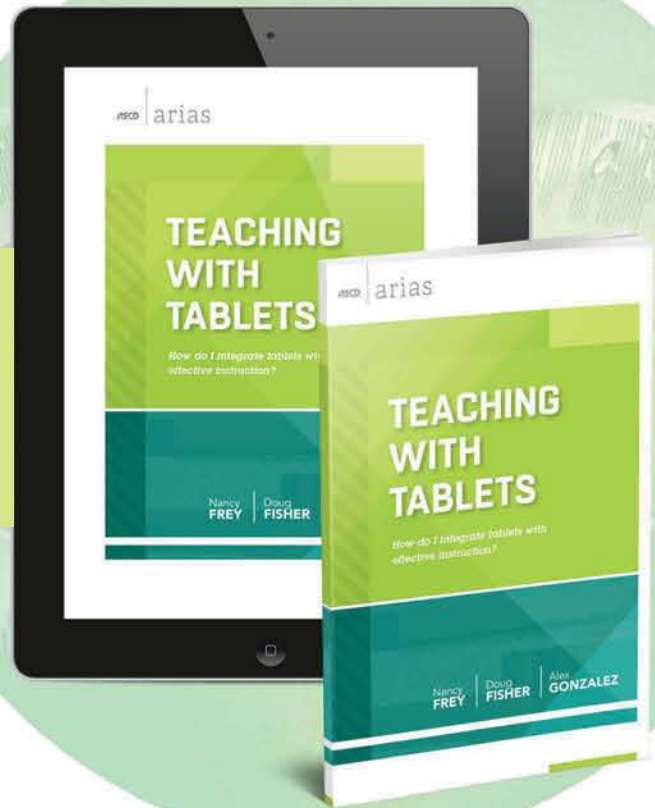
Bachelor’s degree in political science and history, Western Illinois University

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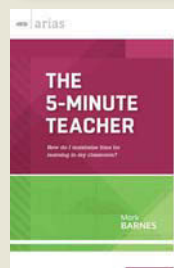
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Researchers See Video Games as Testing Tools

Play used to gauge noncognitive skills

Benjamin Herold

Madison, Wis.

Forget No. 2 pencils, or even the new computer-based common-core exams that have schools across the country scrambling.

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison are convinced the tests of the future will look like *Crystals of Kaydor*, a role-playing video game about aliens.

Designed to measure children's learning in real time while rewiring their brains to help them be more empathetic, *Crystals* offers a potentially transformative response to two cutting-edge questions now being debated in the world of testing: whether digital games can effectively blur the line between instruction and assessment and how educators can better gauge children's social and emotional skills.

"Our job is to provide compelling examples of what assessments can be," said Constance Steinkuehler, an associate professor of education and former White House policy analyst who co-directs Games+Learning+Society, a center based here that is dedicated to designing and studying video games.

Along with the university's Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, led by the renowned neuroscientist Richard Davidson, Ms. Steinkuehler and her team hope to demonstrate that successfully playing a video game can itself constitute clear evidence of learning, eliminating the need for after-the-fact assessments.

They also hope to show that video games can strengthen the circuits

in children's brains that regulate empathy, self-control, and the other "noncognitive skills" that researchers increasingly view as the foundation of lifelong academic, financial, physical, and emotional well-being.

In *Crystals*, players assume the identity of a damaged robot stranded on a distant planet. To succeed, they must recognize and respond to the nonverbal cues of humanlike aliens, enlisting the creatures' help through altruistic and "pro-social" behaviors.

Funded by a \$1.4 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *Crystals* and a second iPad game, called *Tenacity*, also developed by Games+Learning+Society, are at the fore of three broad trends reshaping K-12 education: the explosive growth of digital media; the controversial rise of "big data"; and the emergence of new brain research suggesting that critical noncognitive skills are malleable well into adolescence.

(The Gates Foundation also helps support *Education Week's* coverage of business and K-12 innovation.)

Assessment experts caution that video games must clear numerous hurdles before they can be considered legitimate testing tools and that efforts to measure social-emotional learning are still in their infancy.

But the notion that games like *Crystals* and other radically new forms of assessment could soon be used as tests in schools is not fanciful science fiction.

"I would love to see ... more reliable, meaningful, and easy-to-administer assessments that help us understand whether we are teaching the noncognitive skills that predict students' success in college, careers, and life," U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said at a conference of the American Edu-



cational Research Association in May. "This is the next frontier in assessment."

'Cool' Learning

Crystals of Kaydor opens with a serene scene of a space shuttle carrying robotic explorers on their way to a newly discovered planet.

Within seconds, the action kicks into high gear, with sweeping visual effects and pounding electronic music accompanying the robots' crash landing.

Fourteen-year old Maria Thurow was hooked.

A rising freshman in the 900-student New Glarus school district, outside Madison, Ms. Thurow tested *Crystals* during one of Games+Learning+Society's recent "play squads."

By the time she encountered her first alien, Ms. Thurow, who said she plays digital games ranging from mindless phone apps to complex strategy games like *Civilization* for up to 10 hours each week, had de-

clared the game "cool."

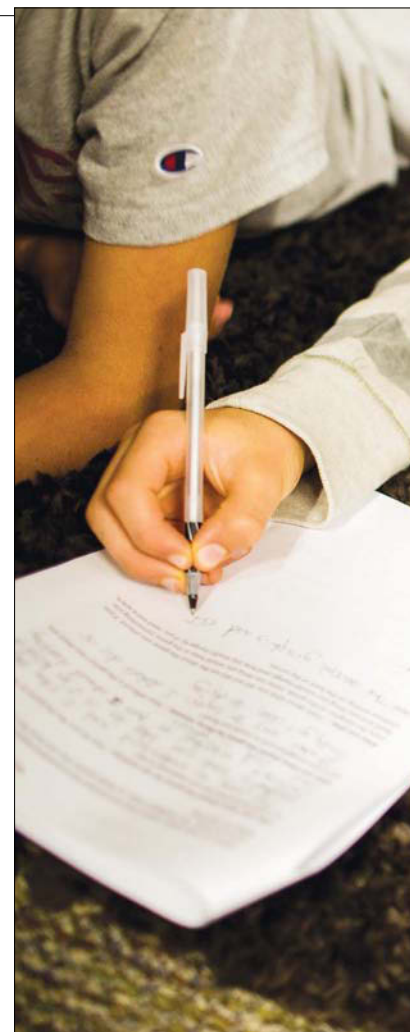
Proponents have argued for a decade that video games are powerful learning tools because of their popularity and capacity to engage players in complex problem-solving.

More recently, James Paul Gee, the godfather of video game theory and a co-founder of Games+Learning+Society, has advanced the idea that success in playing video games can offer proof of student mastery of academic content.

Mr. Gee, now a professor at Arizona State University in Tempe, used as an example the popular first-person shooter video game *Halo*, arguing that it would be nonsensical to give children who successfully complete the game separate, written tests of their *Halo* knowledge.

"The game is the test," said Mr. Gee. "If we could design teaching algebra as well as *Halo* is designed, we'd say the same thing."

Games+Learning+Society has devoted more resources and talent than most to overcoming two key



FROM LEFT: Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison use state-of-the-art MRI scanners to examine whether new video games can change the structure and function of the brain.

Zander Esh, 13, center, and Isaac Ballwahn, 14, evaluate *Crystals of Kaydor*, a role-playing video game that challenges students to learn empathy by identifying nonverbal cues.

FCC Releases Blueprint for Restructuring E-Rate Program

By Sean Cavanagh

The Federal Communications Commission has officially launched an effort to refashion the E-rate program with the release of an ambitious notice of proposed rulemaking, a document that seeks public input on such issues as schools' use of fiber-optic cable and standards for Web connectivity in schools.

The E-rate, established by Congress in 1996 and overseen by the FCC, provides schools and libraries with funding for discounts on telecommunications services. The aid is derived from fees on telecommunications providers and is designed to improve program applicants' technological access.

Advocates for improving technology in schools have been clamoring for years for changes to the

program, which they say is underfunded and badly antiquated, in terms of the types of Web connections and technology it supports.

Among those calling for change is President Barack Obama, who recently argued in favor of setting the goal of giving 99 percent of the nation's schools access to high-speed broadband and wireless Internet access within five years. Administration officials have said those changes would be supported through a temporary, "one-time capital" expense that would cost phone users no more than \$5 per year.

Specifics Lacking

The far-reaching, 175-page notice, released late last month, offers few specific proposals on how E-rate policy should change.

Instead, it presents what the FCC commissioners see as shortcomings in the program and poses a series of pointed questions to the public and the nation's school and technology communities, asking them to weigh in by Sept. 16.

Commissioners have said they have three overriding goals for the program: increasing broadband capacity for schools and libraries; improving purchasing practices to reduce costs and increase the program's effectiveness; and streamlining the program's administration.

The FCC currently has three members and two vacant seats. Both the Democrats on the commission, Jessica Rosenworcel and acting Chairwoman Mignon Clyburn, have called for a major reworking of the program and have praised Mr. Obama's blueprint.

"Without adequate capacity, our students are going to fall short," Ms. Rosenworcel argued at a recent public meeting, when the notice was announced. "We fail our children if we expect digital-age learning to take place at dial-up speeds."

The lone Republican on the commission, Ajit Pai, also describes the program as behind the times and notes the amount of money that flows to phone services and other areas. But he has also emphasized a need to reduce waste and increase transparency in the program.

During a speech last month at the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank in Washington, Mr. Pai suggested that schools would be more accountable for spending E-rate money wisely if they were required to chip in \$1 for every \$3 in federal E-rate

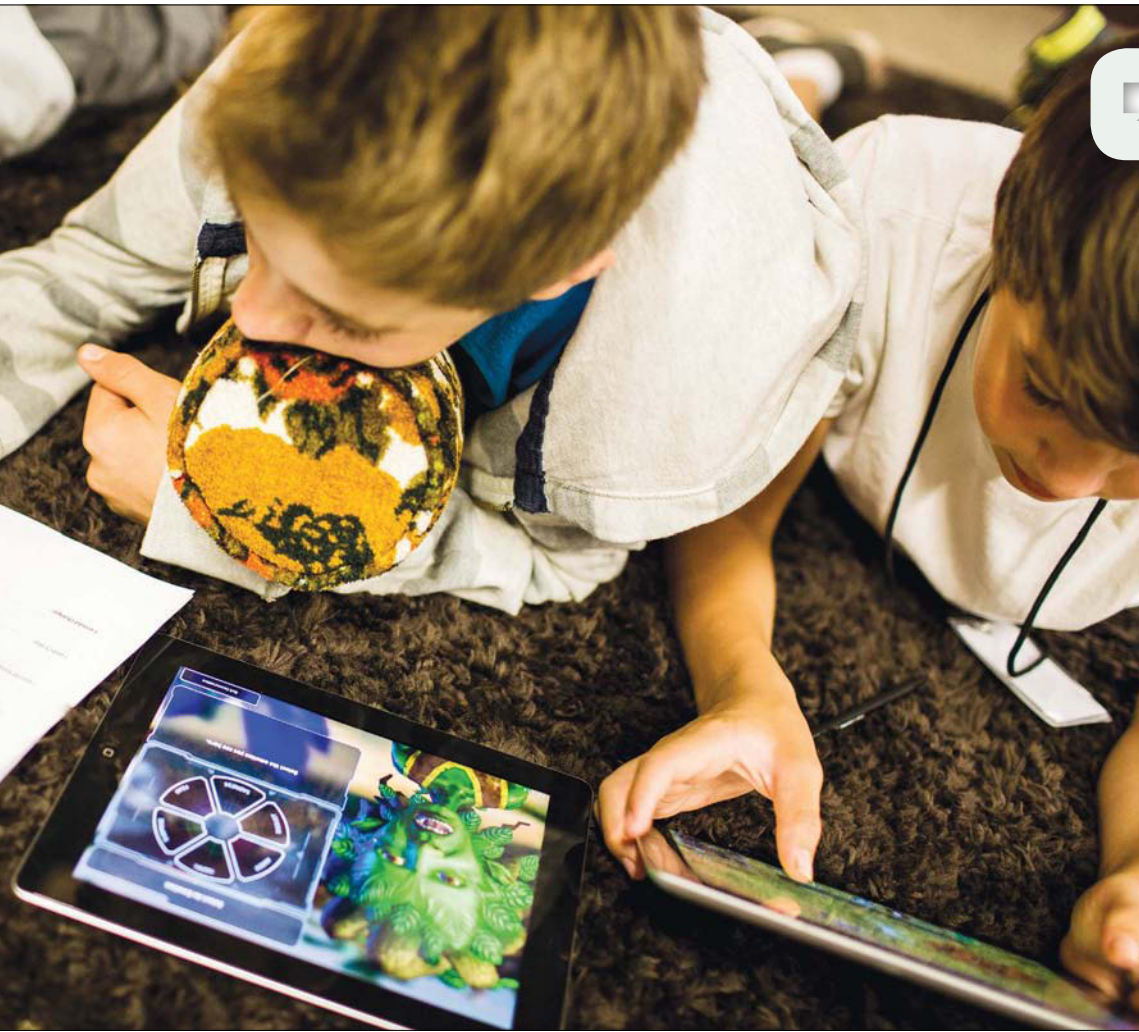
money they receive.

And Mr. Pai questioned the premise that "funding, or rather an alleged lack of funding, is the main problem with today's E-rate program."

"By reducing waste, eliminating misguided incentives, and distributing funds more fairly, we can accomplish more—probably a lot more—with the same amount of money," he said.

Financial Infusion?

Some of the questions posed in the FCC's notice appear to echo Mr. Pai's concerns. For instance, it asks whether the agency should reduce the discount rate, a provision the FCC says created incentives to control costs and improved efficiency within a federal program that supports telecommunications



Photos by Narayan Mahon for Education Week

MULTIMEDIA: For videos of the games described in this story and audio interviews with researchers behind them, visit www.edweek.org/go/games.

challenges to Mr. Gee's vision: creating video games that children actually want to play and capitalizing on the avalanche of information the games generate.

The center's design studio includes more than a dozen programmers, developers, and artists. Creative director Brian Pelletier spent 18 years overseeing the artistic development of popular commercial games like *X-Men Legends*.

While not a multimillion-dollar blockbuster, *Crystals of Kaydor* took Mr. Pelletier's team eight months and \$300,000 to create.

The same attention is being paid to the game's back end, where researchers and programmers are refining a new system for collecting and analyzing "clickstream data."

Completing *Crystals* requires about 3,000 "events," such as taps on the screen, each of which repre-

sents a decision made by the player. The game automatically logs records of every event, along with roughly 15 pieces of related information it has been programmed to collect.

Soon, the center will have a huge database to mine for evidence that particular patterns of play—how a child solved a particular problem or how long he or she spent trying—are tied to learning outcomes.

Instead of taking isolated, decontextualized snapshots of student learning, said Mr. Gee, "we can now use digital [games] to assess people in multiple contexts, measure their growth across time, and track different trajectories to mastery. It's an incredibly threatening moment for more traditional forms of assessment."

While playing *Crystals*, Ms. Thuro initially struggled to identify

the emotions displayed on the faces of the aliens she encountered.

Afterward, she said the game was reminiscent of the "culture shock" she experienced when her family moved from Wyoming to the tight-knit Wisconsin community of New Glarus shortly before she started 8th grade.

"Everyone was looking at me, and I had to gauge if they really wanted to get to know me or they were just being nosy," she explained.

Building Blocks

Mr. Davidson, the neuroscientist, said developing the ability to read others' nonverbal cues is key to navigating many social situations. And the ability to focus your mind—the skill at the heart of *Tenacity*—is even more important, he argued.

In his influential book *How Children Succeed: Grit, Resilience, and the Hidden Power of Character*, writer Paul Tough describes multiple strands of research backing those views, including findings by Duke University researchers that individuals who exhibited poor self-control as young children went on to make significantly less money than their peers, were far more likely to suffer from poor physical health and substance abuse, and were far more likely to have been convicted of a crime, regardless of intelligence or social class.

Equally important, said Mr. Davidson, are neuroscientific studies showing that the parts of the brain that regulate important noncognitive skills can be altered through training and experience—and possibly through video games.

"We believe the way to strengthen the circuits of attention and the circuits of empathy is through practice," he said. "And the way you can make practice fun is by embedding it in a game."

To test that theory, Mr. Davidson's team is using an MRI scanner to peer inside the brains of children who play *Crystals* and *Tenacity*. Mr. Davidson said positive findings would signify a "very hopeful" message.

"We're not accustomed in this culture to thinking about qualities like attention or empathy as skills," he said. "But neuroscience is teaching us that they're no different than learning to play a violin."

For games like *Crystals*, though, the road from cool prototype to widely used tool will likely be long and rocky.

States and school districts are still struggling with the cost, technical challenges, and politics of implementing the computer-based, exams linked to the Common Core State Standards.

And Ms. Steinkuehler acknowledged that the notion of testing students' empathy or self-control

could prove controversial.

"You have to figure out ways to work on [those] skills without it becoming this Orwellian task where Big Brother is constantly watching to make sure that you display the right values," she said.

Reality Check

Before game-based assessment of noncognitive skills can move into the mainstream, said Gregory Cizek, a professor of educational measurement and evaluation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, there will be debate about whether "it's appropriate to measure certain things in kids, who should be doing the measuring, and how those skills should count in determining students' success."

There will also be psychometric hurdles to clear, Mr. Cizek said.

"A kid might look at these stringy alien things and demonstrate empathy as defined in a gaming situation," he said, "but does that translate to treating human beings differently?"

Still, it's not every day that you see 14-year-olds enthusiastically taking tests and bragging about their sensitivity to others' emotions, as Ms. Thuro and her peers did during the recent Games+Learning+Society play squad.

"Games are a terrifically powerful vehicle for altering the brain in very specific ways," Mr. Davidson said. "If we can intervene with children and actually strengthen circuits that are beneficial for life outcomes, I think we have a moral obligation as a society to try."

Coverage of entrepreneurship and innovation in education and school design is supported in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.

services in rural health care.

The July 23 notice also asks what steps the FCC should take to measure overall program performance, or that of individual school applicants. Ideas include setting target Internet speeds for schools or within schools, or even, more controversially, trying to gauge whether access to E-rate money improves academic outcomes.

Despite what had been championed by the Obama administration, the FCC does not recommend specific dollar amounts and timelines for boosting E-rate funding. Instead, the commission asks for comments on how much funding is necessary and how strictly it should be tied to certain types of technology or applicants.

The notice asks, though, whether the FCC should consider lifting the overall program cap, even temporarily, on E-rate funds, which now stands at about \$2.4 billion—far short of the \$4.9 billion that schools and libraries requested in

fiscal 2013. It also asks how the FCC could boost schools' buying power by encouraging more consortia of schools to apply for aid.

The document raises the question of how flexible or prescriptive the agency should be when it agrees to finance school projects aimed at increasing broadband access. Some technology advocates, for instance, say fiber-optic cable is the best option for boosting the speed of schools' Web connectivity, while also giving them the greatest ability to handle increases in demand. Others say less ambitious, lower-priced upgrades are more realistic options for schools.

The notice "indicates to me that they're serious about a sweeping modernization of the program, and not just an incremental approach," said Evan Marwell, the CEO of Education Superhighway, a San Francisco-based organization that promotes improved Web access for schools. "There's an openness to outside-the-box ideas."

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Charter-Space Seekers Run Into Hurdles On Several Fronts

By Katie Ash

Before Le Monde French Immersion Public Charter School opened its doors last fall in Portland, Ore., it had already overcome one of the biggest challenges facing charter schools: finding and financing its facility.

"It was a traumatic experience," said Shouka Rezvani, the board president for the independent public school. "We all know what our academic models are, but as a startup, you have no financial history that you can fall back on with respect to getting money."

Unlike regular public school systems, which can seek taxpayer-backed bonds for school construction and renovation, many charter schools have no mechanism in place to offset their facilities costs. And while some of the larger charter networks have more experience and financial track records to fall back on, startup charters are hit particularly hard when seeking loans and other financial assistance because of their lack of a financial history, experts on the sector say.

In addition, charters' contracts with their authorizers tend to range from three to five years, while loans are typically paid back over several decades, making banks wary of lending to the schools for fear that their contracts will not be renewed.

For the Portland startup, even before tackling how it would pay for the facility, an even bigger hurdle was simply finding a suitable

space, Ms. Rezvani said.

"We have to meet all of these code requirements that older schools [and private schools] may not have to comply with because we're a new school, which makes even the consideration of most spaces impossible and difficult," she said.

In addition, when it was seeking to move into a Portland school system building that was no longer in use by the district, Le Monde faced competition from private schools with larger budgets.

Allowing charter schools to occupy former district-owned buildings is a practice that has spread to many states, and in some cases, it has increased the tension between charter and district-operated schools.

Ultimately, Le Monde ended up where many charters start out: colocating with a church. And while that arrangement has worked so far, it hasn't been ideal, Ms. Rezvani said.

The school has installed reversible bulletin boards that can be flipped over depending on the use of the room, and the school and the church have signed agreements about where student artwork can be posted and what can and cannot be displayed.

For now, the arrangement is working, but officials of Le Monde are continuing to seek suitable but affordable spaces as the charter's enrollment increases, Ms. Rezvani said. The school currently serves about 150 students in grades K-2 and plans to add grade levels each



year until it is a K-8 school.

Le Monde is not alone in its struggle for a space, said Josh Kern, the owner of Ten Square, a Washington-based consulting firm that works with charters to help them find and finance facilities.

'Political Battle'

"This is the single biggest business decision that schools will make," he said. "Making a bad facilities decision in the first year can really determine the performance of the school."

Mr. Kern, who founded and ran a charter school, Thurgood Marshall Academy, in the nation's capital for 10 years, said that although charter schools in the District of Columbia receive one of the charter sector's largest per-pupil facility allowances (about \$3,000 per student), the Washington real estate market makes

it nearly impossible to find an appropriate and affordable location.

"It's a nonstop political battle," said Robert Cane, the executive director of a Washington-based charter advocacy group, the Friends of Choice in Urban Schools, or FOCUS. A city law requires the District of Columbia public school system to give charter schools "right of first offer" whenever a public school building transfers hands, but Mr. Cane contends the school district has been hesitant to do so.

"There's a tendency to want to keep control because [the district] is afraid that if [it] gives up [the facilities] to charter schools, that will just accelerate the decline in their enrollment," he said.

That is also a problem for charters elsewhere, said Emily Dowdall, a senior associate for the Philadelphia Research Initiative at the Pew Charitable Trusts.

"In a number of cities, there

is a growing concern that turning those buildings over to charters will lead to expanded enrollment for charters and even further rounds of closures [in regular school districts]," said Ms. Dowdall, who recently wrote a paper about what happens to shuttered school buildings in 12 cities around the country.

But while districts may be hesitant to embrace charter schools, Ms. Dowdall's research showed that the biggest share—42 percent—of shuttered school buildings do end up in the hands of charter operators. "In many cases, there might not be a lot of choices," Ms. Dowdall said. "The charter school may be the only prospective buyer."

Tracking Facility Needs

Until recently, charter advocates could only estimate the percentage of operating budgets

States, Districts Set Policies to Give Charters Financing for Facilities

By Katie Ash

Several states have been working to change policies and budgeting practices to help charter schools identify and pay for better facilities.

In Idaho, education officials representing both traditional district schools and charter schools came together this year to work on a plan for equitable facilities funding for charter schools.

After a series of compromises by both district and charter groups, the final recommendation was for the state to provide 20 percent of facilities costs for charters in its per-pupil allocation the first year of the program and 30 percent the next year; after that, the funding would increase or decrease in increments of 10 percentage points, with a cap at 50 percent and a minimum of 20 percent, depending on fluctuations in the overall state education budget, said Jason Han-

cock, the deputy chief of staff at the Idaho education department.

"It was important to administrators that future increases in that equivalency percentage would be tied to the budget," he said. "If charter schools were getting more money for facilities, it was because all schools were receiving more money."

The proposal passed the legislature with minimal changes and was signed into law in April.

Meanwhile, in Tennessee's state-run Achievement School District—which was created with \$22 million from the \$500 million Race to the Top grant awarded to the state in 2010—education officials are aiming to move the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in the state into the top 25 percent of student achievement within five years.

To do so, the achievement district has relied largely on conversion charters in the low-performing schools.

Conversion charters are those that were previously a traditional public school before becoming a charter.

To cut back on the competition between charters and regular schools, the conversion charters can only pull students from schools in the Achievement School District. In exchange, the charters operate in district facilities rent-free.

"We don't want this to be a financially adverse situation for the home district," explained Malika Anderson, the chief portfolio officer for the 1,600-student Achievement School District.

Ballots and Bonds

In California, a series of lawsuits stemming from a 2000 ballot measure has put the state in the limelight for the charter school facility movement. The measure, Proposition 39, requires that public school facilities be "shared fairly and equally among all public schools, including those in charter schools."

Proposition 39 has been critical in helping charters find adequate facilities, said Ricardo Soto, the senior vice president for legal advocacy and general counsel for the

California Charter Schools Association. But even with the law in place, the state's charters face challenges in securing space and paying for it, he said.

For starters, the law applies only to charter schools with more than 80 students, which not all startup charters may have, he said. Second, while Proposition 39 helps charters access facilities, it doesn't help those charters finance the buildings.

In some California districts, such as San Diego and Los Angeles, charters have responded to that challenge by working with districts to be included in local bond measures, said Mr. Soto.

Miles Durfee, the Southern California managing regional director for the California Charter Schools Association, is helping oversee the distribution of funds to charters from a facilities bond passed in the San Diego school district last November.

"We absolutely would like to see this model explode or become bigger as we look through different local bonds," he said. "The political nexus occurs when the voters vote for the bond. They want to vote for all students, and they have kids at charter schools."

Contractor Joe Martinez paints door trim inside the South Side Middle School in Memphis, Tenn. Originally South Side High School, the site now houses a traditional public school and a separate charter school. Some charter schools around the country are seeking locations to share with traditional public schools.

Mike Brown/Memphis Commercial Appeal/Zuma

hensive information on charters' access to affordable facilities.

Preliminary data from April, collected from a survey of nearly 1,000 charter schools in 10 states, show that charters spend roughly 10 percent of their operating budgets on facilities. And that has a direct impact on the academic quality of charters, said Nina S. Rees, the executive director of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

"Every penny that's spent on facilities is a penny that's not spent on the classroom," she said.

Jim Griffin, a former president of the Colorado League of Charter Schools, said the issue also affects what kind of services and programming the schools can offer. (Mr. Griffin is now the president of Momentum Strategy and Research.)

In nine of the 10 states surveyed, for instance, fewer than 50 percent of charters reported having kitchen facilities that qualified schools to prepare meals on site and met federal guidelines for the free- and reduced-price lunch program. (While a lack of such facilities does not exclude those schools from participating in the federal program, it may increase their expenses by forcing them to buy vendor meals that cost more than the federal reimbursement rate.)

Many charters also do not have access to gyms, libraries, computer labs, and science labs, the survey found, and fewer than a quarter of the charter schools surveyed met regional and national standards for overall facility size.

"We have to break this challenge down into its parts and recognize

that there are options, and there are improvements that the state can make to public policy that don't have to dip into the public treasury," said Mr. Griffin. He cited examples such as requiring districts to share derelict or underutilized school buildings with charters or creating credit-enhancement programs that allow charters to negotiate loans at more-affordable rates.

'Bogus Comparison'

Still, some researchers say that charter advocates are oversimplifying the debate around facilities.

"To suggest that charters pay 100 percent through their operating budget [for facilities] and districts get them for free is really a bogus comparison," said Bruce Baker, a professor and researcher at Rutgers University's graduate school of education in New Brunswick, N.J., who studies school finance. "The fact that the money flows are not simple and direct means that making those comparisons isn't easy," he said.

Gary Miron, a professor of education at Western Michigan University and a researcher at the Boulder, Colo.-based National Education Policy Center who studies school finance and charter schools, said that while policies vary from state to state, many traditional public schools pay for at least some facilities costs out of their operating budget as well.

"It is true that [regular public schools] have low-cost and low-interest bonds that have been issued over time, but this notion

that charter schools have to take a big chunk of their operating budget [for facilities]—districts have to do that, too," he said.

But Mr. Baker, from Rutgers, agrees that regular district schools receive more systematic support for facilities than charters do.

"Clearly, the funding should be fair, and one of the baseline issues that comes up with charters is that most states from the outset did not set up a mechanism for charters to finance their capital," he said.

Around the country, states and districts have experimented with different ways of providing more-equitable access to facilities for charter schools.

New York City, for instance, has embraced co-location, an arrangement by which charter schools are housed in the same facility as district-run schools and sometimes other charters, for free. So far, 159 charter schools, or 64 percent, are co-located.

But the United Federation of Teachers, New York City's affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, has called for a moratorium on co-locations and has filed a lawsuit against the New York Department of Education, challenging the legality of the arrangements.

The lawsuit does not question the legality of co-location as a practice, but seeks to stop those decisions from being made over a year in advance of the proposed sharing of facilities, explained Michael Mulgrew, the president of the union.

In some cases, co-locations have been arranged three years in advance, which does not allow parents

and community members to accurately assess whether the agreement is a good fit for their school, especially if demographics and programming change dramatically during that time, Mr. Mulgrew said.

In addition, in some cases, co-location has forced schools to cut back on the programming and services they provide to students in order to make room for another school, negatively affecting those teachers and students, he argued.

Some charter advocates acknowledge that co-location can be challenging since charters often depend on the cultivation of a distinctive culture and school model. But Sara Batterton, the senior director of real estate and facilities for Uncommon Charter Schools—a network of 38 charters in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts—said the practice is working.

Uncommon Schools currently operates 14 schools in Brooklyn that are participating in the co-location program, and Ms. Batterton said she would like to see the practice replicated in other cities.

"The system in place in New York City has allowed us to grow and scale quickly and provides an amazing partnership with the city of New York and the city school system," she said. "There are understandably challenges to sharing any kind of space to any co-tenant, but we've found really positive ways of working together."

» The CHARTERS AND CHOICE blog tracks news and trends on this issue. www.edweek.org/go/chartersandchoice

that charters typically spend on facilities-related costs, including lease and loan payments as well as maintenance and other upkeep of the properties.

But the newly formed Charter Schools Facilities Initiative—a collaboration between the Denver-based Colorado League of Charter Schools and the Washington-based National Alliance for Public Charter Schools—has launched a national effort to gather compre-

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Goldman Sachs, Pritzker Bet on Preschool Expansion

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

office is in Salt Lake City.

But the arrangement also raises questions among some experts in early education and school finance, who wonder whether the investment model might encourage the district, and others tempted to try something similar, to change school policies in ways designed to produce greater financial returns.

The investment of \$7 million over eight years will help increase the size of the preschool program in the Granite district, located south of Salt Lake City. Data collected by the charity Voices for Utah Children indicate that students who go through the program are less likely to need expensive special education later in their academic careers.

Schools in Utah receive roughly \$2,600 per year from the state for each student who requires special education. According to experts in the field, and to school officials who helped arrange the investment model in the Granite district, many students are placed in special education simply because they trailed their peers academically upon entering elementary school.

Enrollment Boost

The idea behind the preschool investment plan is that if fewer children start school behind their peers, the district will save money on special education costs. Though the money saved is state funding, district officials hope that by demonstrating that such savings are a result of the preschool program's expansion, they will be able to persuade state lawmakers to pass the savings on to the school system, where it will be used to pay back the loan, plus 5 percent interest.

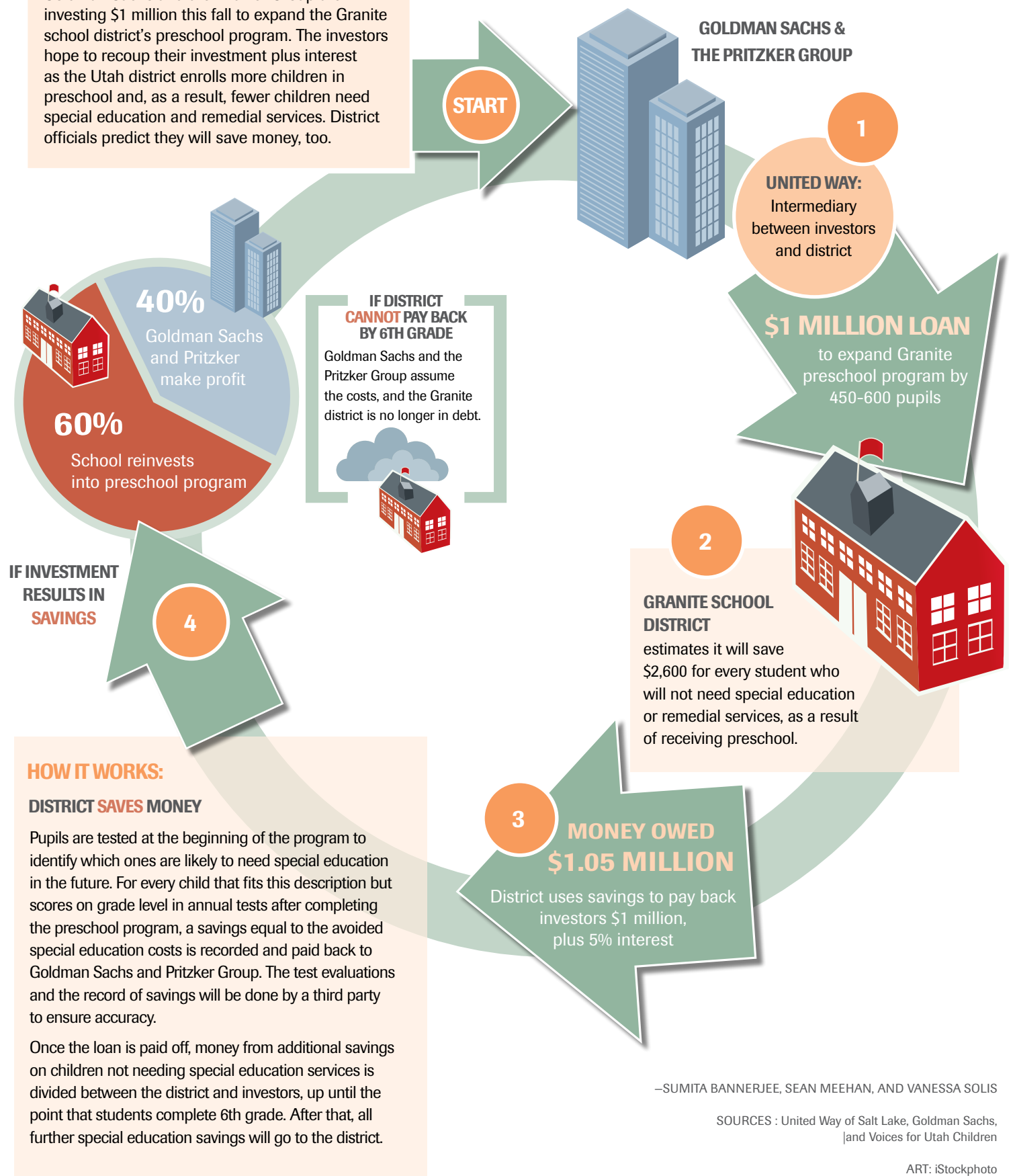
Before receiving money from Goldman Sachs and the Pritzker Group, the district lacked the funding to extend its program and serve all the children on its waiting list. The first year's \$1 million investment will create capacity, allowing the preschool, which currently serves 3,000 pupils in 45 schools, to enroll 450 to 600 more this fall.

"The basic idea is to take a proven operator with a proven program and have investors pay to expand it. We can track the impact of [the program] to the kids and tie repayment of investors to that actual performance," said John Goldstein, the managing director of Imprint Capital, a San Francisco-based company that acted as investment advisers to the Pritzker Group.

Based in Chicago, the Pritzker Group is a private investment firm founded by J.B. Pritzker, a venture

MAKING EARLY EDUCATION PAY OFF?

Goldman Sachs and the Pritzker Group are investing \$1 million this fall to expand the Granite school district's preschool program. The investors hope to recoup their investment plus interest as the Utah district enrolls more children in preschool and, as a result, fewer children need special education and remedial services. District officials predict they will save money, too.



—SUMITA BANNERJEE, SEAN MEEHAN, AND VANESSA SOLIS

SOURCES: United Way of Salt Lake, Goldman Sachs, and Voices for Utah Children

ART: iStockphoto

“The basic idea is to take a proven operator with a proven program and have investors pay to expand it. We can track the impact of [the program] to the kids and tie repayment of investors to that actual performance.”

JOHN GOLDSTEIN Managing Director, Imprint Capital



capitalist and former co-chairman of Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign.

Goldman Sachs became aware of the Granite district several years ago after awarding the school system a grant to study the impact of its preschool program. Based on the results, Goldman Sachs saw an opportunity for its Urban Investment Group to invest in the program. "The results show they have an incredible track record, so we began talking about how that data might make a case for developing a sustainable financing model," Andrea Phillips, a vice president in Goldman Sachs' Urban Investment Group, said.

In addition, Goldman Sachs' and the Pritzker Group have agreed to absorb all the risk: If the program does not reduce special education expenses, the investors, not the district, will eat the cost.

Any savings by the Granite district are expected to be calculated by the Early Intervention Research Institute at Utah State University, with which the United Way of Salt Lake is working out final details of a contract. The institute will serve as a third-party evaluator of the program, ensuring that repayment of the loan is tied only to actual student performance. The United Way is serving as an intermediary between the investors and the district.

"What we've tried to do in the repayment structure is to remove any financial incentive for anybody to push kids one way or another," said Bill Crim, the vice president of collective impact and public policy at the United Way of Salt Lake.

Cautionary Notes

The district will test children at the beginning of the preschool program to identify those who might need special education. For every student identified in that category before preschool whose achievement rises to grade level in subsequent annual benchmark tests, the investors will receive repayment equal to the amount the district saves on special education.

Because the repayment is tied to the performance of the preschool program, some observers ask whether the investors will be able to affect preschool policy if savings don't appear at the expected rate.

Michael Griffith, the senior school finance analyst for the Education Commission of the States, a research and policy organization in Denver, said it's important when dealing with public-private partnerships to define the amount of control the private partner has.

"Donating money and loaning money are treated very differently, and this is a rare mixture," he said. "Is it about loaning money and trusting the school district, or, if the

results aren't as good as expected, are the investors going to demand that changes be made?"

Steve Barnett, the director of the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., echoed those concerns, expressing worry that the deal is based on overly optimistic projections of the program's success rate.

"It's true that high quality preschool programs can reduce special education costs," he said, "but [the projections] aren't consistent with the larger body of evidence."

The district has until the students complete 6th grade to pay off the loan. If the district pays it off early, Goldman Sachs and the Pritzker Group will, combined, receive 40 percent of any additional savings, and the district will keep the other 60 percent. Once the students complete 6th grade, any further savings will go solely to the district.

Seeking State Backing

Mr. Griffith warned that those success payments, through which Goldman Sachs and Pritzker could make much more than 5 percent on their investment, might cause controversy if the amount is high enough. "Anything above a 5 to 7 percent return and you're going to have people start saying, 'I can't believe we're sending education money there,'" Mr. Griffith said.

District officials, however, say that their focus is solely on the success of the students, and that the returns for investors don't affect their objectives or methods.

"On the implementation end, we're not concerned about the investment return at all," said Brenda Van Gorder, the director of Granite's preschool services. "It's important to me to make sure that the money shows up and is being used without the influence of the investors."

One major difference between the partnership in Utah and most social-impact bonds is that the state government is not yet a player in the Granite preschool venture. Because social-impact bonds require public money and affect public policy, governments typically act as key intermediaries between investors and program providers.

Initially, the backers of the Utah venture planned to set up a loan-repayment account funded by the state using the money that otherwise would have gone to the district for special education costs.

However, a bill that would have freed up state funding for those loan repayments proposed by state Sen. Aaron Osmond, a Republican who represents a district just south of Salt Lake City, failed a Utah Senate vote in March. The measure is expected to be considered by the legislature again early next year.

For now, Goldman Sachs and the Pritzker Group have decided to go ahead with the preschool investment on the assumption that the bill will pass in the next session.

Because the district won't receive state funding for students who are kept out of special education, for the first year the loan-repayment fund will be backed by a \$1 million contribution from the United Way and \$350,000 from the Salt Lake County Council. Backers of the effort hope that by the time that aid runs out, the state will pass a law allowing state money to fund the account.

Model for Others?

Because social-impact bonds originated in the United Kingdom, and have existed in the United States only since 2012, the Utah venture could serve as a test for whether the investment model can work in education.

Organizations that track and support the use of social-impact bonds say that early education stands out as a logical place to experiment with the new financing structure because high-quality early-education programs provide clear and quantifiable results relatively quickly.

According to Kristin Giantris, who leads the pay-for-success branch of the national Nonprofit Finance Fund, a New York City-based nonprofit, the ability to see financial results quickly is especially important in proving the viability of social-impact bonds. "In terms of structuring a deal, I know I can monetize decreases in special education costs," she said. "The early deals in pay-for-success should be ones that are the easiest to execute and measure for the sake of establishing a precedent in the market."

Advocates of social-impact bonds hope that by proving the viability of such an arrangement, the Utah venture also will encourage investors and governments to back longer-term partnerships that track the benefits of social investment.

Robert Dugger, a former venture investor and current co-chairman of the advisory board at ReadyNation, a Washington-based group that encourages private investment in public projects, said that as more social-impact bonds are successfully executed, more funding possibilities will open up in education.

"I'm certain that as we get some examples developed, and schools deepen their own cost-structure analysis," he said, "we'll find pay-for-success possible in elementary and middle school."

Coverage of the education industry and K-12 innovation is supported in part by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.

BLOGS of the WEEK

| NEWS | [Teacher Beat](#)

Math Teachers Find Common Core More Rigorous Than Their State's

A large majority of middle school math teachers say the common core is more rigorous than their state's prior mathematics standards. At the same time, most teachers reported receiving fewer than 20 hours of professional development over the past year related to the common core, according to findings from a joint project among researchers at several universities supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation.

The survey, conducted this spring, involved 403 middle school math teachers from 43 of the 45 states to adopt the common-core math standards. The study was conducted by researchers at the University of Rochester (in New York), Western Michigan University, Michigan State University, and Washington State University Tri-Cities.

More than 85 percent said the common-core math standards were more rigorous than their state's. In all, 71 percent of teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the focus on math practices is the "biggest innovation" of the standards.

—ERIK W. ROBELEN

| NEWS | [State EdWatch](#)

Common Core and Evaluations: Are Teachers 'Going Crazy'?

On the off chance people were looking for a lively discussion about the connections between the Common Core State Standards and teacher evaluations on a mid-summer Sunday afternoon, they would have found it at the National Association of State Boards of Education's annual conference in Arlington, Va., on July 28.

The 2013-14 academic year is shaping up to be a year when both topics will begin to converge in schools, as 17 states will be asking districts to fully implement new teacher evaluations, Angela Minnici, the principal researcher in the American Institutes for Research's education program, said during a panel discussion.

With pilots of newly aligned assessments also slated to be given to students in 2013-14, state board members and others should no longer consider the common core and educator evaluations on two different tracks. Challenges include getting trained professionals to administer the evaluation systems, recasting teacher certification and professional development, and finding more reliable measures of teacher performance, Minnici said.

The NASBE audience expressed anxiety about that convergence. One attendee said that implementing the standards and new evaluations simultaneously was putting too much stress on those in the classroom: "Our teachers are going crazy."

—ANDREW UJIFUSA

| NEWS | [Politics K-12](#)

What New Jersey's Cory Booker Could Mean For K-12 Policy If Elected to U.S. Senate

The Newark, N.J., mayor, Cory Booker, is one of the most prominent Democrats to embrace private school vouchers. He's teamed up with his chief Garden State political rival, Republican Gov. Chris Christie, to help birth a new Newark teacher contract that includes merit pay. And, for good measure, he persuaded Mark Zuckerberg, of Facebook fame, to donate an astonishing \$100 million to the long-struggling Newark school system.

Now Booker is likely to be the next U.S. senator from New Jersey. With a commanding lead for the Aug. 13 Democratic primary, he appears likely to trounce his GOP opponent in the special election to fill the seat of the late Sen. Frank Lautenberg, a Democrat.

Years ago, Booker was one of the galvanizing forces in bringing together a cadre of high-powered Wall Street donors with an interest in education policy. They worked together to support his early races for City Council and mayor. The group eventually became Democrats for Education Reform, which is now the signature political action committee for lefty politicians who are fans of less-than-traditional lefty policies, like charters and performance pay.

As for the No Child Left Behind Act, if Booker wins his race, as expected, he could be in place in time to vote on the Democrats' version of the legislation.

—ALYSON KLEIN

“Is it about loaning money and trusting the school district, or, if the results aren't as good as expected, are the investors going to demand that changes be made?”

MICHAEL GRIFFITH Senior School Finance Analyst, Education Commission of the States

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States Ponder Price Tag of Common Tests

About half in PARCC group facing hikes

By Catherine Gewertz

With the news that PARCC tests will cost \$29.50 per student, all states in the two federally funded common-assessment consortia now have estimates of what the new tests will cost. And they're sorting out how—and in some cases, whether—to proceed with the massive test-design projects.

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers released pricing last month that's just under the \$29.95 median spending for summative math and English/language arts tests in its 19 member states. That means that nearly half of PARCC states face

paying more for the tests they use for federal accountability.

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, or SBAC, the other state group using federal funds to design tests for the common standards, released its pricing in March. At \$22.50 for the "basic" system of summative math and literacy tests, or \$27.30 for a "complete" system that includes formative and interim tests, that group's prices are higher than what one-third of its 24 member states currently pay.

Georgia Drops Out

States at various points in the cost spectrum reflected on the role that the new tests' cost would play in their decisions about how to move forward. Within two hours of PARCC's announcement on July 22,

Georgia, one of the lowest-spending states in that consortium, withdrew from the group, citing cost, along with technological readiness and local control over test design, among its reasons.

The cost of the tests being built by PARCC and Smarter Balanced are a topic of intense interest as states shape their testing plans for 2014-

15, when the consortium-made tests are scheduled to be administered. Building support for different tests can be difficult even without a price increase. But that job is even tougher when new tests cost more than those currently in use.

"I'm not going to suggest to you that it's an easy sell to the legislature," said Deborah Sigman, the

deputy superintendent who oversees assessment in California, which belongs to the Smarter Balanced consortium. "But we think that assessment should model high-quality teaching and learning. To do that, you have to look at assessing in different ways.

"The irony is, people say they want a robust system that gets to those deep learnings, but, let's make sure it doesn't take as much time and that it doesn't cost more money. Those things are incongruent. Those performance items require more resources and a greater investment."

California faces a steeper assessment bill if it uses Smarter Balanced tests, Ms. Sigman said. The state's lower legislative chamber has passed a measure embracing those tests, but the Senate has yet to act on it.

Douglas J. McRae, a retired test-company executive who monitors California's assessment movements closely, believes the SBAC

Critics of Standards Take Aim at Assessments

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

mately allow districts to pick their own assessments instead of requiring them to use what will be provided by Smarter Balanced, said Mark Tallman, an associate executive director of the Kansas Association of School Boards.

"I think there's a real good chance the tests could be targeted," he said.

The common assessments are intended to allow student performance to be compared across several states based on broad and high-quality standards, specifically the common core. They are also intended to provide much better insight into students' knowledge than previous tests under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Without common assessments to assess students on the standards and compare states' performance, the common core will enter "no-man's land," said Jim Stergios, the executive director of the Boston-based Pioneer Institute, which opposes the new standards and has been helping state-level political groups advocate against them.

"People will do whatever the hell they want," Mr. Stergios said of states deciding not to use the new assessments. "It means, 'We're not doing common core.'"

But officials from the testing consortia say it's wrong to believe that support for common assessments is crumbling.

Despite recent departures from PARCC, Mitchell D. Chester, the Massachusetts K-12 commissioner and the chairman of the consortium's governing board, said he never believed every state that had joined the consortium would stay. He sees it as evidence of strength that 14 states and the District of Columbia have committed to field-testing PARCC's assessment in 2014. "Each state has a very particular

context for its testing program, how much is being spent, how it's used," he said.

Support for the common standards themselves isn't necessarily wavering in state education departments. The Center on Education Policy, based at George Washington University in the District of Columbia, reported last month that deputy state school superintendents in 37 states said it was "not likely" their state would drop out of or limit involvement in the common core.

But the consortia's assessments are a key "linchpin" for the standards, said Maria Ferguson, the executive director of the CEP, even though "there are other products out there that can fill the gap," she noted, referring to testing materials produced by ACT Inc. and others.

Financial Concerns

Cost factors come in to play at a time when the common standards themselves face vocal, grassroots opposition from conservative activists in particular.

Georgia announced its withdrawal from PARCC on July 22, after a recent uptick in anti-common-core activity in the state—and one day after PARCC released cost estimates showing a \$29.95 median cost per student for its summative math and English/language arts tests. That's higher than nearly half what its members pay for their current federal accountability tests.

Georgia schools Superintendent John Barge, a Republican, voiced concern about the potential per-student costs and whether lawmakers in his state would sign off on significant spending increases required to pay for the consortium's test.

The previous week, on July 17, Florida Senate President Don

Gaetz and Speaker of the House Will Weatherford, both Republicans, wrote in a letter to then-Commissioner of Education Tony Bennett that the state should drop out of PARCC over concerns about costs and other reasons. Mr. Bennett resigned from that post last week in a controversy involving grade-changes for a charter school while he was the Indiana schools chief. (See related story, Page 26.)

Costs are likely to be an issue even in states like California where the standards themselves enjoy officials' broad support, said Robert Rothman, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Alliance for Excellent Education and a standards supporter. California, a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, is projected to see an increase in per-student assessment costs, as would about a third of that consortium's members.

"If they see a big jump in the testing budget, that's going to cause problems in the legislature, not because of the tea party," he said.

Technology a Factor

Georgia and Oklahoma have also cited concerns about their technological capacity for new assessment regimes as a major reason they have decided not to use PARCC tests.

Mr. Gaetz and Mr. Weatherford, the Florida lawmakers, wrote that they were worried about Florida's ability to add enough computers to satisfy PARCC's assessments. The consortium calls for a minimum

student-to-computer ratio of 2:1 for schools with three tested grades.

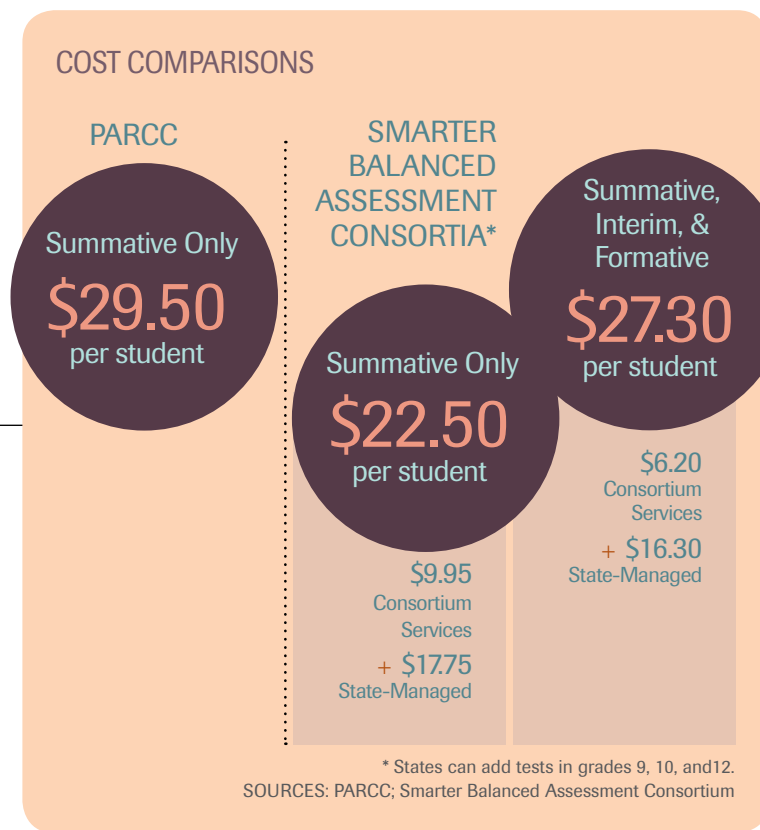
And in a survey last year of technology in Florida schools, the state education department estimated that 1,616 schools would need new "high-density wireless" systems, and 67 districts would have to get upgraded broadband to prepare for PARCC.

Even in California, a Smarter Balanced member that has earmarked \$1.25 billion over the next two years specifically for districts to implement the common core, the targeted money is also intended for textbooks and professional development, not just new K-12 technology.

New hardware and wireless capabilities are not the only issues. Brandt Redd, the chief technology officer of Smarter Balanced, said the consortium is trying to help school systems figure out what to do when Microsoft's support for its XP operating system, used by a vast number of districts, ends in April.

Still, Mr. Redd said, "We have designed the assessments not to be terribly demanding on devices." He noted that they will require only a 10-inch screen, for example.

Both Mr. Chester and Mr. Redd highlighted the federal government's role in providing more financial support for school technology in the near future. The Federal Communications Commission released a plan late last month to overhaul the E-rate program that K-12 advocates hope will improve connectivity and cost-effective purchasing, following President Barack Obama's ConnectED Initiative



unveiled in June. (See related story, Page 14.)

Both also acknowledged, however, that in 2014-15, not all states will have yet reached their technological goals for common-core tests.

Comparability Issue

As of late last week, PARCC officially had 18 member states and the District of Columbia, down from 26 states when it won the federal money. Smarter Balanced has 24 states. (Until recently, some states belonged to both.)

At some point, a decline in membership could raise concerns about the ability to look at performance across the board for states and districts, although opinions about the value of this comparability, given the use of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, are divided.

Mr. Rothman said that while comparing nonconsortia and consortia tests would be "very difficult," comparison hasn't mattered much to the four states that have used the New England Common Assessment Program, or NECAP, for example.

Another concern is whether there will be large differences between the consortia's tests and common-core tests from other organizations, such as ACT's (which Alabama plans to use), in terms of students' learning, their readiness for college and career, and teachers.

As an analogy, Mr. Bennett, before resigning his post, argued that while the SAT and ACT are different tests, college-admissions officers feel comfortable using both. He is an ardent common-core supporter.

But Daniel Koretz, a professor at the Harvard Graduation School of Education, stressed that teachers whose students are facing different tests will approach the common core in correspondingly different ways.

"Consortium tests don't just measure what students know. ... They're designed to push instruction in a certain way," he said.

test will cost the state much more than current estimates suggest. Testifying before the legislature, he said that assumptions about cost savings from computer administration and scoring, and from teacher scoring, are inflated, and that the real cost of the test there could be closer to \$39 per student.

Different Models

While PARCC's pricing offers just one fee and set of services, Smarter Balanced offers two pricing levels. It will be responsible for providing some services, such as developing test items and producing standardized reports of results, and states are responsible for others, including scoring the tests. Smarter Balanced states could opt to score their tests in various ways, such as hiring a vendor or training and paying teachers as scorers, or combining those methods. SBAC will design guidelines intended to make scoring consistent, said Tony Alpert, the consortium's chief operating officer.

Smarter Balanced's cost projections include what states pay the consortium for services and what they should expect to spend for services they—or vendors—provide. For instance, the \$22.50 cost of the "basic" system is made up of \$6.20 for consortium services and \$16.30 for state-managed services. The \$27.30 cost of the "complete system," which includes interim and formative tests, breaks down to \$9.55 for consortium services and \$17.75 for state-managed services.

In PARCC, the consortium, rather

than individual states, will score the tests, according to spokesman Chad Colby. PARCC's pricing includes only the two pieces of its summative tests: its performance-based assessment, which is given about three-quarters of the way through the school year, and its end-of-year test, given about 90 percent of the way through the school year.

Its price does not include three tests that PARCC is also designing: a test of speaking and listening skills, which states are required to give but don't have to use for federal accountability; an optional midyear exam; and an optional diagnostic test given at the beginning of the school year. Pricing for those tests will be issued later, according to Mr. Colby.

Paper-and-pencil versions of the PARCC tests, which will be available for at least the first year of administration, will cost \$3 to \$4 more per student than the online version, according to a document prepared by the consortium.

A Value Proposition?

State spending on assessment varies widely, so states find themselves in a range of positions politically as they anticipate moving to new tests.

Figures compiled for the two consortia's federal grant applications in 2010 show that in SBAC, some states paid as little as \$9 per student (North Carolina) for math and English/language arts tests, while others paid as much as \$63.50 (Del-

aware) and \$69 (Maine). One state, Hawaii, reported spending \$116 per student. In the PARCC consortium, per-student, combined costs for math and English/language arts tests ranged from \$10.70 (Georgia) to \$61.24 (Maryland), with a median of \$27.78.

Comparing what one state spends on tests to what another spends—and comparing current spending to what PARCC or Smarter Balanced tests could cost—is difficult for many reasons. One is that states bundle their test costs differently. Some states' cost figures include scoring the tests; others do not. Some states' figures include tests in other subjects, such as science. Some states' figures lack a subject that the two consortia's tests will cover: writing.

Most states' tests are primarily or exclusively multiple choice, which are cheaper to administer and score. Some give more constructed-response or essay questions, making the tests costlier to score but of greater value in gauging student understanding, many educators believe.

Matthew M. Chingos, a Brookings Institution fellow who studied state spending on assessment last year, said he is not yet sure the consortia's pricing will prove accurate.

"What are these numbers based on? There's no way for anyone to verify the work yet," he said. "People need to be skeptical of anyone who says they know what this is going to cost until [the consortia] are further down the road."

Edward Roeber, a former Michigan assessment director who is now a consultant for various assessment projects, said he is concerned that states that choose to withdraw from consortia work now face paying more to develop tests on their own because they won't benefit from the economies of scale that consortium work can offer. That added cost down the road, he said, could lead states to buy cheaper, less instructionally useful assessments.

The two consortia are keenly aware that states might find it difficult to win support for the new tests if they represent increases in cost or test-taking time. They are taking pains to point out what they see as the value their tests will add compared with current state tests.

A Power Point presentation assembled by PARCC, for instance, notes that its tests will offer separate reading and writing scores at every grade level, something few state tests currently do. It says educators will get results from its end-of-year and performance-based tests by the end of the school year, while in many states, it's common for test results to come back in summer, and even, in some cases, the following fall. Echoing an argument its officials have made for many months, the PARCC presentation says that its tests will be "worth taking," since the questions will be complex and engaging enough to be viewed as "extensions of quality coursework."

It also seeks to make the point that \$29.50 isn't a lot to spend on a

test, noting that it's about the same as "a movie date" or "dinner for four at a fast-food restaurant," and less than what it costs to fill the gas tank of a large car half full.

Mr. Alpert of Smarter Balanced noted many of the same points, as well as the "flexibility" of SBAC's decentralized approach to scoring and administration, which offers states many options for how much to do themselves and how much to have vendors do. If states choose to draw heavily on teachers for scoring, he said, they derive an important professional-development value from that.

"Comparing costs isn't really accurate," he said. "States will be buying new things. It's like comparing the cost of a bicycle to the cost of a car. A car costs more, but what are you buying? [Smarter Balanced tests] are definitely a better value and a better service. They're going to give teachers and policymakers the information they've been asking for."

The role of artificial intelligence in scoring tests remains an open question in both consortia. If they determine that it is reliable enough to play a large role in scoring, test costs could decline.

Quality Versus Cost

In Massachusetts, cost isn't the most important factor in looking ahead to new tests, since the state currently spends more than the PARCC tests are projected to cost, said education Commissioner

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States Weigh Testing Costs And Options

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

Mitchell D. Chester.

"The number one criteria for us is the quality of assessment and whether it represents a value proposition beyond our own assessment," he said. "If [PARCC tests] show that they're at least as strong in terms of the expectations for student performance, and that they measure a broader range of academic skills, that's the threshold decision for me."

The PARCC tests will demand more extensive tasks in math, and more writing and research tasks, than does the state's widely regarded MCAS, Mr. Chester said. He said PARCC would prepare students for college better than the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Currently, he said, four in 10 Massachusetts students who enroll in public universities require remediation, even though the "vast majority" have scored "proficient" on the MCAS.

That is a poor reason to switch assessments, according to Jim Stergios, the executive director of the Pioneer Institute, a Boston-based group that has been among the common core's most vocal critics in Massachusetts. The solution, he said, is to raise the cutoff score on the MCAS, something the legislature has "lacked the political will" to do. Mr. Stergios and other critics contend the common assessments are flawed because they rest on standards that emphasize nonfiction at the expense of fiction and lower expectations in math compared with Massachusetts' current math frameworks.

Other Suitors

In Kentucky, Commissioner Terry Holliday is considering many testing options, although Kentucky remains a member of PARCC and might be able to save money using the group's tests. The state is already giving tests designed for the common standards, as well as ACT's suite of tests in middle and high school.

Mr. Holliday said his state could stick with that arrangement, but it plans to issue a request-for-proposals in the fall to see what other vendors might offer for grades 3-8 and high school. He would consider proposals that emerge from that process, along with ACT's new Aspire system, which is aiming for a \$20 per-student price, as well as using Smarter Balanced or PARCC's tests. He is also considering expanding the state's own test-item banks with items from the two consortia's item banks, he said.

"We're going to treat PARCC and Smarter Balanced like any other vendor," Mr. Holliday said.



Scan this tag with your smartphone for links to information about the PARCC and Smarter Balanced test pricing. www.edweek.org/links.

Results of NAEP Often Misinterpreted

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

make it difficult to use NAEP data to prove cause-and-effect claims about specific policies or instructional interventions.

"It's clearly not NAEP's fault people misuse it, but it happens often enough that I feel compelled to call [such instances] 'misNAEPery,'" said Steven M. Glazerman, a senior fellow at Mathematica Policy Research, a Princeton, N.J.-based research and policy-evaluation nonprofit.

"NAEP is so tempting, because it has very wide coverage," he said. "But what it tries to do is actually pretty modest, pretty narrow. And that's a good thing."

Often called "the nation's report card," NAEP represents the achievement of a nationally representative sample of students at three grade levels: 4, 8, and 12. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, each state receiving federal Title I funds also must participate in the exam at the 4th and 8th grade levels in reading and math every two years.

Because of that stipulation, achievement trends across states can be compared, an impossibility using the results of states' own hodgepodge of exams.

Twenty-one urban districts also volunteer to have their students' results reported through the Trial Urban District Assessment, or TUDA.

NAEP data are generated through a technique known as matrix sampling. Some questions are given to each participating student; no child takes a "full" exam.

Contrasting Assertions

In a sense, what has made NAEP unique in the annals of testing—its commonality and independent administration in an era of cheating scandals—has also rendered it susceptible to misinterpretation and misuse.

"The NAEP exams have good measurement quality and assess subjects other jurisdictions don't have assessment data on," said Sean P. "Jack" Buckley, the commissioner of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, which administers the exam. "They are comparable across state lines, which is unusual, and they are well known in the policy world. And unlike trying to negotiate with states and [privacy laws], NAEP data are right there on our website."

The downside is that examples of "misNAEPery" are legion.

During the height of implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, the most recent rewrite of the ESEA, dozens of press releases went out from the Education Department, then headed by Margaret Spellings, attributing gains on NAEP to the effects of the law.

In the District of Columbia, promoters of the policies instituted by former Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee have seized on readings of NAEP as evidence that student achievement improved under her watch.

On the other hand, a report recently released by the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education—a

coalition housed in the Education Policy Institute, a left-leaning think tank—drew on the data to support the exact opposite conclusion. And Broader, Bolder's claims that increased access to charter schools, teacher evaluations tied to student test scores, and school closures in the District of Columbia and two other cities didn't lead to improvements for poor and minority students were picked up and repeated by influential education figures.

"The lesson of the new report: Billions spent on high-stakes testing have had minimal to no effect on test scores," New York University education historian Diane Ravitch wrote about the paper. "High-stakes testing has failed."

Statistics 101

Most such claims suffer, researchers say, from failing to consider that a correlation or relationship between two points of data does not prove causation.

"They're committing the fundamental and almost inexcusable error of leaping to the causal conclusion they prefer, when hundreds of others are possible," said Grover M. "Russ" Whitehurst, the director of the Brown Center for Education Policy at the Brookings Institution and a former director of the Education Department's research wing.

Another spurious use: treating NAEP data as though they track the same students' progress through school. Such longitudinal data generated from state tests are frequently used by statistical researchers, who can take into account students' background characteristics to control for the effect of poverty or

family education on scores.

But NAEP data represent repeated cross-sectional snapshots of achievement, not the progress of individuals, making it more challenging to institute such controls.

"I can understand why people think if test scores go up, it's because schools get better," said Matthew Di Carlo, a senior fellow who writes about education research for the Albert Shanker Institute, a think-tank affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers. But with NAEP, "you're comparing two different groups of students and assuming they're not changing over time."

Some misuse occurs entirely outside of policy contexts.

"The states see this happening more than even we do nationally," said Cornelia Orr, the executive director of the National Assessment Governing Board, the body that sets policy for NAEP.

For instance, she said, "they're concerned about real estate companies and how they abuse their own state test data, and they're concerned it will happen with NAEP."

New Techniques?

The issue has been sufficiently worrisome that a joint task force of NAGB and the Council of Chief State School Officers began to catalog it in 2009-10.

Scholars say that it is possible to conduct high-quality studies using NAEP data, but doing so appropriately requires research expertise beyond what most lobbyists and policy analysts possess.

"NAEP is just an outcome measure. It's no different from an

IQ test or the number of teachers with advanced degrees," Mr. Whitehurst said. "The ability to draw causal inferences about any education variable depends not on NAEP, but on the quality of the research design for which NAEP is the outcome measure."

High-quality studies have drawn on NAEP results, for example, to estimate the impact of Georgia's expanded early education program, Mr. Whitehurst noted.

Mathematica's Mr. Glazerman cautioned, though, that such studies are few and far between.

Advocates' desire to seek quick confirmation for their policy prescriptions—especially when they are gaining or losing momentum—means that it's unlikely that interest in using NAEP for policy analysis will end anytime soon.

"There is just this unwillingness to accept that policy analysis is difficult, takes a long time, and often fails to come to strong conclusions about individual policies," said Mr. Di Carlo.

Over time, the difficulties inherent in interpreting NAEP results have even posed challenges for the NCES and NAGB, which must weigh how to report and disseminate data from the exam to minimize misinterpretations.

The NCES itself has on occasion produced reports that include correlations, Mr. Buckley noted. Even when accompanied with caveats, he said, they have been misinterpreted in press accounts.

Still, Mr. Buckley said, the benefits of NAEP data far outweigh the harm that accompanies ill usage.

"We're not the country's education data police," he said of the NCES. "We want the data to be useful, and we trust that the marketplace of ideas will drive the bad uses out."

PARSING CLAIMS

Advocates are fond of making claims about what data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress mean, but not all of them stand up to scrutiny.

Use of Data	Problem
<p>Public education is supposed to be the great equalizer in America. Yet today the average 12th grade black or Hispanic student has the reading, writing, and math skills of an 8th grade white student."</p> <p>—From a 2009 <i>Wall Street Journal</i> op-ed written by Joel I. Klein, then the chancellor of the New York City school system, and the Rev. Al Sharpton</p>	<p>NAEP scales differ by subject and grade.</p>
<p>Among these low-performing students [on 2009 NAEP in reading], 49 percent come from low-income families. Even more alarming is the fact that more than 67 percent of all U.S. 4th graders scored 'below proficient,' meaning they are not reading at grade level..."</p> <p>—From advocacy organization StudentsFirst's website</p>	<p>NAEP's definition of "proficient" is based on "challenging" material and is considered harder than grade-level standards.</p>
<p>In Charlotte, N.C., and Austin, Texas, both cities in right-to-work states where collective bargaining is not required, students in 4th and 8th grade are performing higher than the national average in both reading and math."</p> <p>—From "Collective Bargaining and Student Academic Achievement," by the American Action Forum</p>	<p>The statement implies that specific policies affected scores, but casual conclusions are difficult to validate using NAEP.</p>
<p>We subtracted the percentage of students in the state who scored proficient or better from the state NCLB test from the percentage of students in that state who passed the NAEP, and used this difference (or gap) to align each school and district test scores across the nation.</p> <p>—From real estate website NeighborhoodScout</p>	<p>NAEP cannot be used to generate comparable school results.</p>

—STEPHEN SAWCHUK

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‘Say Yes’ Takes Root Throughout a City

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

school population—is poor and diverse. The median household income is just over \$30,000 a year, more than \$20,000 below the state median. More than eight out of 10 students in the district qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Officials regularly point to the city’s beleaguered school system—19 of the district’s 32 schools have been designated as “priority schools” by the state for their persistently low academic performance, and seven are in some stage of turnaround—as a source of the problem and a potential solution.

“A city like this, a Rust Belt city, it’s taken decades to get to where it is, in terms of losing all its industry, people moving to different ways to make a living,” said Kevin Ahern, the president of the Syracuse Teachers Association, which is affiliated with both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. “It’s going to take a lot to turn around, but you’ve got to pay a lot of attention to your schools if you are going to do any of that.”

Ms. Rooney echoed the sentiment: “In Onondaga County, we have 6,000 people on welfare. Only 37 of them have a college degree; only 27 percent had a high school diploma,” she said. “Who’s on welfare? It’s often [people who as children] were not making the grade academically” in K-12. “If we can move the needle even a little, it makes a big difference.”

College Lure

The potential for sending more students to college is what first drew city officials to the New York City-based Say Yes to Education Inc., which promised full tuition for all public high school graduates in return for the city implementing civic and education reforms.

“The public grabbed onto the idea of the [college] tuition as the centerpiece, and for the first couple of years, that’s all they knew,” said Douglas P. Biklen, the education dean at Syracuse University. “But we were getting students on health insurance, getting mental-health care, tutoring, a summer camp that didn’t exist before. These are all part of this bigger model. It’s a much more holistic approach than what you see in most district efforts.”

Universal scholarship programs have been gaining in popularity in the past decade, as college costs soar and many school districts face dwindling enrollment. First and most notable among them is the Kalamazoo, Mich., “Promise Scholarship,” in which anonymous donors pledged to pay all or nearly all of college tuition for students who attend the district schools from early grades through high school. The program sparked similar initiatives in cities such as Detroit and Denver and helped

inspire Say Yes. However, later studies of the Kalamazoo project found that while it boosted district enrollment and graduation rates, half the scholarship students dropped out of college without completing a degree.

Say Yes Inc. has created Promise-style scholarships in communities such as Philadelphia and New York City’s Harlem for more than 20 years, but Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, the president of Say Yes, said she became convinced that the initiative would be more effective when integrated citywide.

A 2005 evaluation of Say Yes to Education’s work in Philadelphia—where the initiative was focused on a select group of students and parents in some of the public schools—found that over 18 months, participating 3rd graders had eight to 10 fewer missed days of school, better behavior, and significantly better math and reading performance than the school and district averages. However, during the same time, staff at the schools became mistrustful of the program, believing it created a separate group of students and parents who did not fit with the rest of the school culture, making it difficult to sustain local support for the program over time.

“After a lot of years of working on this, we were not seeing a breaking of the cycle of poverty,” Ms. Schmitt-Carey said. Students who went to college on the scholarships weren’t necessarily prepared to complete their postsecondary studies, for example. “We realized the scholarship alone was not going to be enough.”

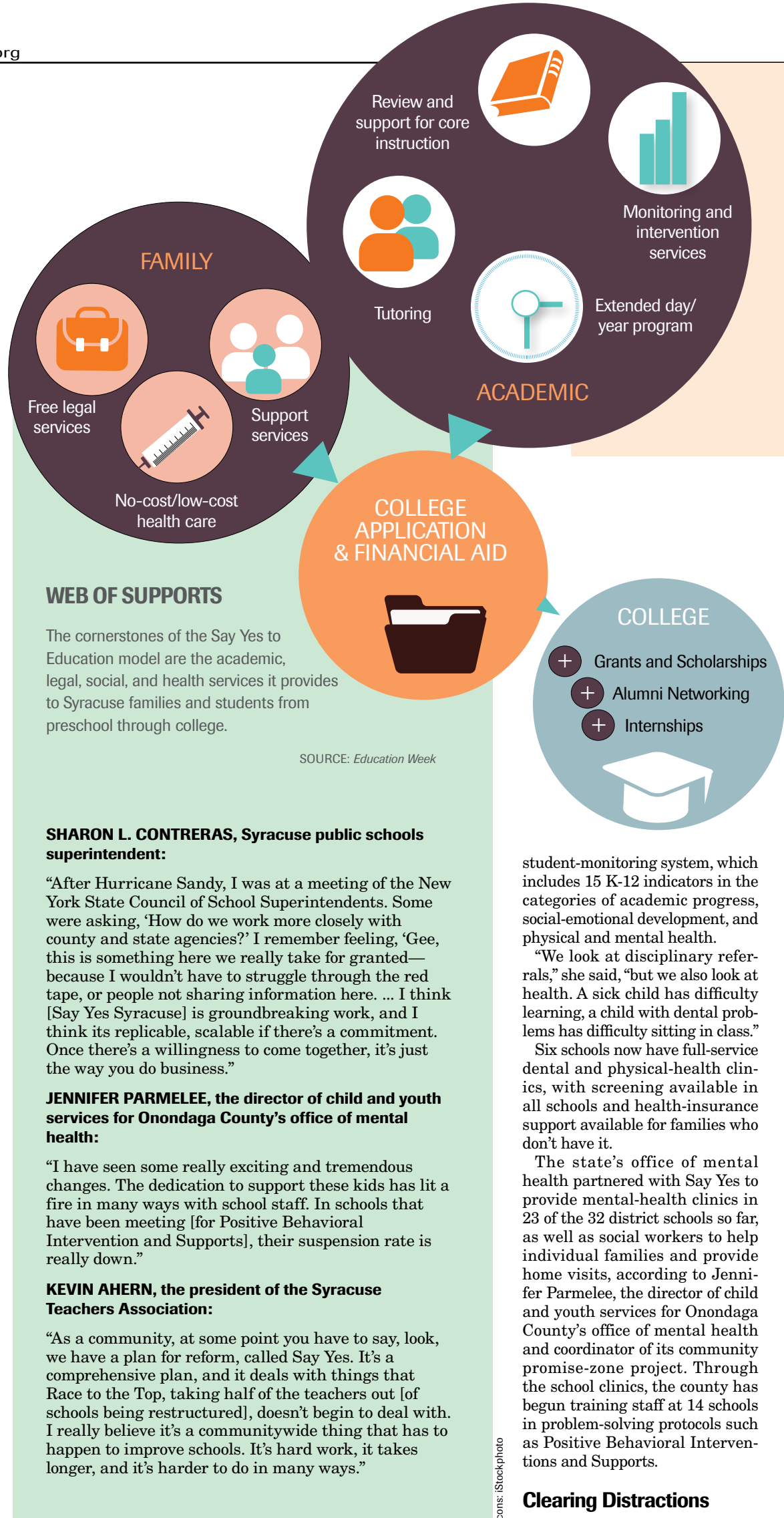
Comprehensive Services

In Syracuse, the group got a chance to try a much more comprehensive approach. Say Yes doesn’t fund every aspect of Syracuse’s initiative, but it coordinates services through a representative at each school and a biweekly task force of leaders from the district, the teachers’ union, local universities, state and county social-services agencies, and mental- and physical-health offices.

“The discussion was initially around the benefit of the scholarship,” recalled Ms. Rooney, “but it quickly turned into the benefit of the scholarship is no benefit if students are not able to get that [college] diploma.”

The scope of the initiative quickly became more comprehensive, Mr. Biklen and others recalled. “We tried to think, what do the children of upper-middle-class families enjoy?” Mr. Biklen said. “Music lessons, camp, a lot of after-school enrichment provided for them. So we try to replicate that.”

The city launched a 3,000-student summer camp, including academic enrichment and creative arts. More than 100 local college students are hired as counselors and mentors, some of them Say



WEB OF SUPPORTS

The cornerstones of the Say Yes to Education model are the academic, legal, social, and health services it provides to Syracuse families and students from preschool through college.

SOURCE: Education Week

SHARON L. CONTRERAS, Syracuse public schools superintendent:

“After Hurricane Sandy, I was at a meeting of the New York State Council of School Superintendents. Some were asking, ‘How do we work more closely with county and state agencies?’ I remember feeling, ‘Gee, this is something here we really take for granted—because I wouldn’t have to struggle through the red tape, or people not sharing information here. ... I think [Say Yes Syracuse] is groundbreaking work, and I think its replicable, scalable if there’s a commitment. Once there’s a willingness to come together, it’s just the way you do business.’”

JENNIFER PARMELEE, the director of child and youth services for Onondaga County’s office of mental health:

“I have seen some really exciting and tremendous changes. The dedication to support these kids has lit a fire in many ways with school staff. In schools that have been meeting [for Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports], their suspension rate is really down.”

KEVIN AHERN, the president of the Syracuse Teachers Association:

“As a community, at some point you have to say, look, we have a plan for reform, called Say Yes. It’s a comprehensive plan, and it deals with things that Race to the Top, taking half of the teachers out [of schools being restructured], doesn’t begin to deal with. I really believe it’s a communitywide thing that has to happen to improve schools. It’s hard work, it takes longer, and it’s harder to do in many ways.”

Yes scholars themselves.

For the district, Say Yes paid for a curriculum and funding audit, which showed little link between the district’s curriculum and New York state’s college-readiness standards. It helped the district plan a curriculum overhaul and add two additional hours a week of class as well as after-school programs in kindergarten through 5th grades, with more planned for middle school in coming years.

Syracuse University also now

provides free teacher training to launch more Advanced Placement courses, as well as summer teacher professional-development institutes in writing, mathematics, and science. The university also created a special education training program with two schools.

“There is a laserlike focus on the needs of students, but not just the academic needs you see in some districts,” said Syracuse schools Superintendent Sharon L. Contreras. The district implemented a

student-monitoring system, which includes 15 K-12 indicators in the categories of academic progress, social-emotional development, and physical and mental health.

“We look at disciplinary referrals,” she said, “but we also look at health. A sick child has difficulty learning, a child with dental problems has difficulty sitting in class.”

Six schools now have full-service dental and physical-health clinics, with screening available in all schools and health-insurance support available for families who don’t have it.

The state’s office of mental health partnered with Say Yes to provide mental-health clinics in 23 of the 32 district schools so far, as well as social workers to help individual families and provide home visits, according to Jennifer Parmelee, the director of child and youth services for Onondaga County’s office of mental health and coordinator of its community promise-zone project. Through the school clinics, the county has begun training staff at 14 schools in problem-solving protocols such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

Clearing Distractions

The local bar association also created legal clinics in several high-need schools and community centers, where lawyers volunteer their time to help students and their parents with any problem that could affect students’ schooling, from immigration to visitation and custody disputes to landlord-tenant problems.

“When you look at the array of services, it allows the district to concentrate on learning,” said Kim S. Bradley, the chief of staff for the Syracuse district.

M'TIA WILLIAMS, currently studying communications at Onondaga Community College: Ms. Williams participated in the 'Say Yes' college-bridge program, the Summer Success Academy, and "it was by far the best experience I'd ever had, because it got me a jump-start to college. Not only did I get to take the one uncredited class I needed out of the way, but I was able to take an art class that was so much fun. It got me to meet some of the people who were also going to OCC, so if I ever felt kind of lost, I could go to the other classmates and teachers." This summer, she came back to become a counselor.



After high school graduation, Say Yes scholars can participate in a six-week college-preparation session, including academic support to help them test out of remedial classes, financial planning, filling out forms, gathering supplies, and packing for school—even a ride to move onto campus for students who don't have one. This spring, as the first Say Yes class of four-year college students graduated, Say Yes also launched job shadowing and internship help, as well as résumé workshops.

"People are more open to partnership, and we see ourselves as more of a continuum than all these individual players doing their own stuff," said Monique R. Fletcher, the community executive director of Say Yes to Education in Syracuse.

The effects so far have been positive. Since the initiative began in the 2008-09 school year, the 9th grade dropout rate has fallen by nearly half, to 281 students; high school graduation rates have risen 10 percent, to 55 percent in 2011; and college certification and degree earning grew by a third, from 451 students to 579 in 2012. Those numbers still fall well below most federal and state progress targets for the school district, however.

Impact Beyond Schools

Outside of school, juvenile crime rates also fell from 580 arrests a year to 398 between 2008 and 2012, and housing prices in the city have risen 6.4 percent, according to the Trulia Real Estate website. While many factors likely contribute to the city's improving real estate market—not the least of which is the gradual improvement in the economy overall—Don Radke, the owner of FM Realty Group in Syracuse and the former president of the Greater Syracuse Association of Realtors, credits the promise of universal college scholarships as being a draw for families with school-age children.

More than 100 colleges and universities in the state now offer free tuition for Say Yes scholars, and dozens of private universities, including the University of Notre Dame, Duke University, and Georgetown University, have pledged substantially reduced tuition, Mr. Biklen said.

Say Yes Inc. has been steadily drawing down its start-up support in Syracuse, which has six years to make the program self-sufficient. Cities like nearby Buffalo, which



LAUREN BRUSH graduated from New York University in May with a bachelor's degree in classical voice:

"My older sisters weren't interested, but going into high school, I was really motivated for school; I always wanted to go to college. But we are a working-class family, and my mom lost her job while I was in high school. It was really hard to even think about going to college when you know your family is struggling financially." Because of the scholarship, Ms. Brush was able to study opera at college, both in the city and as part of a study-abroad program in Prague. "And it's funny, when I went to school, it kind of motivated my mom to go to school. So, even though she wasn't a beneficiary of the scholarship, because she didn't have to pay for my schooling, that opened the door for her to go. So, technically I'm a first-generation college student, but now she's gone to Onondaga Community College for health technology," completing an associate degree in 2012—a year before Ms. Brush graduated.

Photos by Heather Ainsworth for Education Week

are also trying to launch citywide Say Yes initiatives, are watching Syracuse's fate closely.

The city has already passed its first test: The mayor, school superintendent, and teachers' union president have all turned over since the initiative began, and their successors have bought into the strategy.

"The biggest thing, I think, is we've seen a dramatic change in the culture of the city, in terms of the leadership of the city being all on the same page," the teachers' union's Mr. Ahern said. "In urban districts like this, we tend to churn programs, chase grant money for a few years, and then do something else. Over the years, we have faced a lot of challenges as a district, ... but we've all stayed together despite that and figured ways to do things to make it sustainable."

Political and financial sustainability, Superintendent Contreras said, "still is a huge problem and keeps me up at night."

She pointed to state budget cuts that forced the district to eliminate 1,000 staff positions in the past five years, just as it was working to roll out the new Say Yes services and monitoring. "But

at least we're able to advocate together," she said. "The other key people don't say, 'Well, the school district has a problem' and leave me hanging. The city has never backed down from this. That's key to the success and sustainability."

For example, Huntington Family Centers, a social-services provider in the city, hired school social workers that the district had to lay off and was able to continue services to students.

"Many of the families may never know how richly the Say Yes model supported them, but their students are graduating because of the support system," Ms. Contreras said.

Coverage of school climate and student behavior and engagement is supported in part by grants from the Atlantic Philanthropies, the NoVo Foundation, the Raikes Foundation, and the California Endowment. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.



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ALEX MINNOE, studying physical education at the State University of New York at Brockport:

Mr. Minnoe said he always knew he wanted to teach physical education, but "having the opportunity for [Say Yes] to pay my tuition was huge." For the past three summers, he has been a youth-enrichment-services counselor for the Say Yes summer camp and said it's "a great experience, because I'm an education major, and every day I've taught soccer and softball in the afternoons. It gives me the opportunity to get more experience working with the kids, help them get that extra bit of education during the summer so they don't lose what they get throughout the year. It's kind of my way of giving back, but it's also helping me a great deal."

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Duncan Unlikely to Tweak Accountability Oversight

Secretary responds to Indiana grade-change flap

By Michele McNeil

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sees no need to step up the federal role in oversight of new accountability systems that are part of his department's No Child Left Behind Act waiver program, even in the wake of a school-grading flap that last week cost Florida Commissioner of Education Tony Bennett his job.

In a wide-ranging interview with *Education Week* last week, Mr. Duncan did not defend Mr. Bennett—embroiled in a controversy stemming from his previous job as Indiana state schools chief—or Mr. Bennett's actions. Nor did Mr. Duncan say there's a reason at this point for federal officials to investigate what happened in the Hoosier State, which involved a grading system at the heart of its NCLB waiver agreement. (See related story, Page 27.)

Instead, the secretary said, it's important that those systems be developed and implemented transparently. And in the case of Indiana, given that the grading-system changes were exposed in the media, transparency prevailed, he said in the Aug. 1 interview.

"I'm not worried. See what happens when someone messes up?" Mr. Duncan said, adding that he doesn't know if Mr. Bennett did anything wrong. "You need maximum transparency, and if anyone's looking to do something silly, the costs on their lives and careers is profound."

The Indiana changes came to light after the Associated Press obtained internal state education department emails from last fall.

Indiana is one of 39 states plus the District of Columbia with federal waivers allowing them considerable flexibility to design their

own school accountability systems and freedom from many of the constraints of the NCLB law as written in 2001.

Mr. Duncan said that all the facts of the Indiana situation will come out soon enough.

"I think the facts will emerge, and we'll look at them," he said.

Waiver Renewals Loom

Even as states continue to work out the kinks in their waiver systems, it's almost time for those state-federal agreements to be renewed. Federal approval of the waiver plans expire as early as the end of the 2013-14 school year. But Mr. Duncan wouldn't offer any details about what a renewal process might look like.

"It's early. We're starting to think about it; we'd love to figure out if reauthorization has a shot in a bipartisan way," he said.

By reauthorization, Mr. Duncan meant a rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, whose current version is the NCLB law. While there are bills moving in both chambers of Congress to revamp the outdated law, Mr. Duncan has not been out front as a strong advocate for renewal, as he's been on other issues, such as President Barack Obama's proposal to greatly expand access to preschool.

"You want to spend time where people are serious," said Mr. Duncan, explaining that he doesn't view the House Republican version of an ESEA reauthorization, approved last month on a party-line vote, as "serious" in a bipartisan way. "I want to spend time where there's a chance to get things done."

Even though Mr. Duncan has not been making many public appearances in sup-



port of President Obama's preschool initiative, no bill has yet been introduced, nor is there an appetite in Congress to raise taxes to support public programs. But Mr. Duncan sharply rejects the view that preschool legislation is a lost cause.

"Totally disagree. Why is this not a wild goose chase? Because there is such extraordinary bipartisan investment and support across the country that we're seeing from governors, Republican and Democrat," he said. "And while it is not public yet, we have had many, many conversations with Republican leaders in the House and Senate that are frankly encouraging."

Mr. Duncan said preschool is one of the most important policy initiatives he wants to accomplish in Mr. Obama's second term.

"You have 3½ years to think about what are the big things you want to get done, and the fact that today so few children in this country have access to high-quality early-childhood education, the fact that so many start kindergarten so far behind, the fact that so many never catch up, to me is morally unacceptable," he said.

District Agreements?

Mr. Duncan wouldn't talk much about the tailor-made waiver that nine California districts are seeking in order to get out from under provisions of the NCLB law just as states have done. That would be a first-of-its-kind waiver and would upend the traditional relationship districts have

Stark Partisan Split Persists on ESEA Renewal

By Alyson Klein

Precollegiate education legislation used to unite Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill—perhaps most prominently when Congress approved the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 by overwhelming bipartisan margins.

But it became clear that those days are over, at least for awhile, last month when the U.S. House of Representatives passed its GOP-authored reauthorization of the long-stalled Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the current iteration of the NCLB law. Not a single Democrat voted in favor of the measure, which was approved July 19 on a 221-207 vote.

The bill's partisan roots are likely to complicate its path forward in the Democratically controlled U.S. Senate, where the education committee approved its own, very different, version of an ESEA rewrite back in June. What's more, the Obama administration has threatened to veto the House GOP legislation, arguing that it would short-change the poor and minority students the federal law was crafted to protect. That

combination of factors makes it highly unlikely that the ESEA, which was supposed to be renewed in 2007, will be reauthorized before the end of the year.

The House Republicans' bill would maintain the law's signature testing schedule and its practice of breaking out student-achievement data by particular groups of students, such as English-language learners and students in special education. But, otherwise, it's almost a complete U-turn, from a policy perspective, from the existing federal school accountability law. States and districts would still have to craft accountability plans, but they would get a lot more say on how they hold schools accountable for the progress of all students, including special populations.

Title I Portability

During floor consideration of the House bill, lawmakers also added an amendment by U.S. Rep. Eric Cantor, R-Va., the majority leader, that would allow parents to take Title I dollars, long earmarked for disadvantaged schools, to any public school of their

choice, including a charter. That proposal is likely to continue to fuel Democratic opposition to the bill.

During debate, Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., the chairman of the House education committee and the author of the legislation, argued that his bill would give school districts much more predictability than the Obama administration's current reauthorization solution: a series of some 40 waivers that offer states short-term relief from many of the NCLB law's most stringent requirements.

"We can't allow these political waivers or temporary fixes," Mr. Kline said. "We can't stand idly by and allow the administration to micromanage our classrooms."

Meanwhile, Rep. George Miller of California, the ranking Democrat on the House education committee, said the bill would turn back the clock to the pre-NCLB era, when the poor performance of disadvantaged students, English-language learners, and minority students often went unnoticed and unfixed, in his view.

"No Child Left Behind turned the lights on inside our nation's schools," said Mr. Miller, an architect of the NCLB law. "For the

first time, parents could see whether their schools were actually teaching all students." While he said the current law has "flaws," he thinks the GOP rewrite would ultimately hurt accountability for traditionally overlooked students.

Some advocates for school districts, including the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association, like the new leeway being offered by the House Republicans and are backing the measure.

But civil rights organizations, the business community, and urban districts are not on board. Those groups, including the Education Trust and the National Council of La Raza—both advocates for poor and minority students—are much more enthusiastic about a competing Democratic-sponsored measure, approved by the Senate education committee this spring.

Senate Alternative

The Senate legislation in large part mirrors the Obama administration's vision for reauthorizing the law. It would require states to set ambitious achievement goals for all students, and for particular subgroups of students—a requirement that is also a hallmark of the waivers. The bill's author, Sen. Tom

New Grading-System Scrutiny May Follow Fall of Fla. Chief

By Andrew Ujifusa

The fallout from Tony Bennett's sudden resignation from Florida's top education position last week amid a school-grading controversy stemming from his previous post in Indiana might alter the political environment around K-12 oversight and accountability, and trigger tougher questions for advocates of state policies that award letter grades to schools.

Mr. Bennett stepped down Aug. 1, following disclosure of records from his tenure in Indiana showing he had adjusted the state's A-F grading system after learning a charter school that he had touted and that was run by a campaign contributor would earn a mediocre score for the 2011-12 school year.

Although the popularity of school-grading systems has risen in recent years, and can largely be attributed to the A-F model Florida itself adopted in 1999, Mr. Bennett's fall from power might bring new scrutiny of those systems from governors, state lawmakers, and other officials around the country.

"Maybe it will be a good thing, because we'll figure out more about the negatives and benefits of these kinds of systems," said Paul Manna, an associate professor of government at the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Va., who has studied Indiana education policy under Mr. Bennett.

But, while legislators in states like Arizona, New Mexico, and Virginia might start taking a closer look at their own A-F systems, Mr. Manna said, "I can't really see that one guy's failings here will bring all this stuff down." The Foundation for Excellence in Education, a national K-12 advocacy group that supports A-F school grading, lists 15 states that have adopted A-F systems.

Precipitous Drop

Mr. Bennett took over as Florida's appointed commissioner of education in January after losing his 2012 re-election bid as Indiana state superintendent to Glenda Ritz, a Democrat.

A nationally prominent K-12 leader, he is widely admired in some quarters of the policy community for his aggressive approach to promoting school choice and school accountability, and for overhauling teacher evaluations in Indiana. He also has strong political connections as a member of Chiefs for Change, a group of state education leaders that is affiliated with two advocacy groups run by former Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida, including the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

The departure of Mr. Bennett from Florida,

roughly seven months after he began work in the state with the high-profile backing of Gov. Rick Scott and Mr. Bush, both Republicans, could also open up a leadership vacuum at a critical time for the state's education policy decisionmaking around standards and tests.

Internal Emails

The grading controversy erupted when the Associated Press on July 29 published internal email correspondence between Mr. Bennett, then the Indiana schools chief, and key staff members beginning on Sept. 12, 2012, when they first learned that Christel House Academy, a charter school in Indianapolis, would not earn an A grade on the state accountability system.

Christel House was operated by Christel DeHaan, an Indiana philanthropist who donated a total of \$130,000 to Mr. Bennett's 2008 and 2012 campaigns. Before the time of the emails published by the AP, Mr. Bennett had assured Ms. DeHaan and others, including Indiana Speaker of the House Brian Bosma, a Republican, that Christel House would receive an A.

Mr. Bennett told his staff in an email that anything less than an A for Christel House would compromise "all of our accountability work." Ultimately, the grade for Christel House became an A, and the change also affected other schools.

During the Aug. 1 press conference announcing his resignation as Florida's chief, Mr. Bennett denied any wrongdoing, stating that he had merely acted to save Christel House and other schools from unfair penalties under the A-F system. In a July 30 conference call with reporters, he said some schools without 12th grades, such as Christel House, had been hurt by not having graduation rates. "That wasn't rigging," Mr. Bennett told reporters.

He denounced what he called "malicious" and "unfounded" reports out of Indiana, and said he would ask Indiana's inspector general to investigate. (The Indiana Department of Education also has said it is examining the 2012 school grades.) Ms. DeHaan, in a statement, said neither she nor anyone associated with Christel House requested that its grade be changed.

He added that both Gov. Scott and Mr. Bush had asked him not to resign. Pam Stewart, the Florida education department's chancellor, will take over for Mr. Bennett on an interim basis.

As the story unfolded, and after he resigned, Mr. Bennett received support for his work from such groups as the Foundation for Excellence in Education, the advocacy group chaired by Mr. Bush. The former governor said in an Aug. 1

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Ga. in Doghouse Over Race to Top

Just as the U.S. Department of Education was letting Hawaii out of the Race to the Top doghouse, federal officials put Georgia in.

Federal officials announced last week they are planning to withhold \$9.9 million from Georgia after it backed out of a promise to institute merit pay in order to win a \$400 million Race to the Top grant in 2010.

"This is about Georgia making commitments ... and now saying it will not move forward with those commitments," said a senior Education Department official in a press call last week.

The nearly \$10 million that Georgia is poised to lose sometime this month won't disappear, but it will be set aside in case state officials have a change of heart. Any unused money, from Georgia or any other state, reverts to the U.S. Treasury on Oct. 1, 2015.

"We listened to our educators in districts across the state who told us that we needed another year to work on the implementation of performance measures for high-stakes personnel decisions in subjects where we do not have a standardized test," said Georgia school's chief John Barge.

More than a year ago, federal officials put \$33 million of the state's \$400 million grant on "high risk" status after growing concerned about the strategy behind the teacher-evaluation component of the grant.

The day before taking steps to withhold some of Georgia's grant money, the Education Department rewarded Hawaii for big improvements in its work by removing it from high-risk status. This black mark—and the threat of losing grant money—came after a prolonged labor squabble delayed a teachers' contract, and key Race to the Top programs, for months. After a contract was reached earlier this year, Hawaii's implementation sped up—sparking last week's decision to put Hawaii back in good standing.

"This is great news that validates the good work that's been done by the teachers, educational leaders, and our community partners," said state Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi. "The transformation of our public schools is in full swing."

—MICHELE McNEIL



Swikar Patel/Education Week

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan discusses accountability systems, waivers, and preschool in a wide-ranging interview last week.

with states. With the beginning of school just a couple of weeks away, those school districts—which cover about 1 million students and include Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Fresno—are anxious for an answer.

But Mr. Duncan gave no clues about whether he would go forward with granting such a waiver, except to say his staff hasn't presented him with a proposal to consider.

"Our teams have been working hard," he said. "At some point, staff will bring a recommendation to me; we're not at that point yet."

Harkin, D-Iowa, is hoping to move the legislation to the floor of the Senate this year. But it hasn't yet been scheduled for floor action. In a statement on the House bill, Sen. Harkin said the GOP measure "falls short" when it comes to holding states accountable for the success of disadvantaged children.

The House measure won support from some of the most conservative members of the House GOP caucus only after Rep. Kline acquiesced to the more conservative wing of his party on a policy he was personally committed to: requiring districts to use student outcomes to measure teacher effectiveness. Reps. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, and Steve Scalise, R-La., persuaded Mr. Kline to make such evaluations optional, not mandatory. And those conservative lawmakers were in lock step with the 3 million-member National Education Association on that issue.

The teacher-evaluation change brings the House bill much closer in line with legislation introduced by Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., the top Republican on the Senate education committee, who supports the idea of teacher evaluation tied to student outcomes, but doesn't think it's the federal government's job to mandate it. And, in fact, Mr. Alexander released a statement calling the House GOP bill a "kissing cousin" of his own legislation, which has the support of all 10 Republican lawmakers on the Senate education committee.



Steve Cannon/AP

Florida education Commissioner Tony Bennett announces his resignation last week in Tallahassee. He resigned amid allegations that he changed the grade of a charter school run by a political donor during his previous job as Indiana's schools chief.

Head Start Shake-Up Yields Little Turnover

Few new providers join program's roster

By Christina A. Samuels

The first competition for federal funds in Head Start's history was a sea change for the more than 120 grant recipients deemed low-performing that were asked to go through the process—but it didn't result in many new organizations entering the program.

Only eight of the 153 agencies to come out of the recently completed competition with funding will be new to providing Head Start services this year. Many of the grantees are organizations that had served as "delegates" to larger Head Start programs, meaning they provided early education services, but did not directly control their own funding.

That the Head Start shake-up has yet to result in many brand-new providers does not negate the worthiness of the competition process, which is part of other major changes in the federal program aimed at making centers more accountable for child outcomes, said a spokesman for the program.

"All of the selected awardees successfully demonstrated their ability to raise the quality of Head Start services," said Ted Froats, a spokesman with the children and families administration, the division of the Department of Health and Human Resources that oversees Head Start.

Even though the competition produced little in the way of new faces among awardees, a Head Start shake-up was needed and overdue, said Ron Haskins, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, in Washington, and the co-director of its Center on Children and Families. He served as a member of an administration advisory committee on re-designation of Head Start grantees.

"The biggest flaw is that in order for the strategy to work, you've got to have good competition at the local level," and so far, that seems to be lacking, he said. But Head Start providers, even those that do not need to compete for funds, are now focused on improving their quality, he said. "This is still worth doing, because Head Start wasn't providing the results it could have."

First Wave

Head Start and Early Head Start, a separate program launched in 1994 to serve pregnant women and toddlers, served about a million children and pregnant women in fiscal 2012, at a cost of about \$7.6 billion. Automatic federal budget cuts under what's known as sequestration will force some centers to reduce their enrollment.

During Head Start's 48-year history, grantees were allowed to hold on to the money indefi-

nitely, unless they committed a serious violation. But, facing concerns that the programs were not adequately preparing young children for kindergarten, Congress required in 2007 that those not meeting a set of quality benchmarks would be required to compete for continued funding against other interested organizations in their communities. The rules for competition were announced by the Obama administration in 2011.

A second competition is underway, and all grantees, even those that are not required to compete for continued funding, will be on a five-year funding cycle. One of the new grant recipients is the Kalamazoo Regional Education Service Agency, which provides support to nine school systems in Michigan, the largest of which is the 12,000-student Kalamazoo district. The region had been served by a county community services organization.

"Over the years, we've seen the rising standards for kindergarten," said David Campbell, the superintendent of the regional service agency. Also, he said that statewide, there's been a move toward having the regional service agencies, with their exclusive focus on education issues, take a larger role in providing Head Start services. The agency will serve 594 4-year-olds, with part of the money coming from a newly expanded funding stream from the state.

San Antonio represents an example of one area where delegate agencies stepped up to receive money directly from the federal government. Instead of one agency overseeing Head Start citywide and in surrounding Bexar County, there are now six. They include Family Service Association of San Antonio, which has been providing Head Start services to about 1,600 children.

Localized Control

That organization decided to seek direct funding because "you have more control of the programming," said Todd R. Greaves, the director of early-childhood and Head Start services. "When a program is not so large, you have a better understanding of what your community needs." And though they receive funding separately, Mr. Greaves said that the six agencies, which will serve about 6,800 children, plan to meet regularly to discuss common needs.

Hudson Guild, a community organization serving the Chelsea neighborhood in New York City and Manhattan's West Side, is counted as a new provider of Head Start services, even though it previously had provided early-childhood services as a delegate agency of the city's children's services administration. The city had cut funding to Hudson Guild, saying the community it served

was too affluent. Ken Jockers, the executive director of Hudson Guild, said that housing for the working poor in the neighborhood is right next to luxury buildings.

That funding cut prompted the organization to apply for a grant, he said. The program now plans to expand to add 142 more children, for a total of 320, paid for through Head Start and city money. "For us, what drove the decision was the need to provide care for low-income children who would not have access in this area," Mr. Jockers said.

But some grantees say the touted benefits of Head Start competition have yet to be seen.

Keesha Woods, the director of the Head Start program at the Los Angeles County Office of Education, is a so-called "super-grantee" that has seen its \$212 million in federal funding shrink to \$115 million, both through the competition process and cuts related to sequestration. The number of children served through the county office's delegate agencies will shrink from about 22,000 to about 11,500. Former delegates will receive direct funding from the federal government, but the transfer process will be complex and take about a year, she said.

"I don't think there's any way to say yet that breaking up LACOE as a grantee will be more effective," Ms. Woods said. "I know it's going to increase bureaucracy."

MAKING THE CUT

As part of Head Start reforms announced by President Barack Obama in 2011, 125 grantees that failed to meet quality benchmarks were required to reapply for federal funds. As a result, some large programs were split among several providers, leading to 153 winners at the end of the process.

TOTAL GRANTEES NATIONWIDE:
1,600

HEAD START FUNDING, INCLUDING SEQUESTER CUTS:
\$7.57 billion
for fiscal 2013

CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN SERVED:
1.1 million
in fiscal 2012
(most recent year for which complete figures are available)

Numbers are rounded.

TOTAL NEW GRANTEES AFTER ROUND 1 COMPETITION:

● St. Anne's Maternity Home, Los Angeles

● Calvert County Public Schools, Prince Frederick, Md.

● St. Mary's County Public Schools, Leonardtown, Md.

● Genesee County Intermediate School District, Flint, Mich.

● Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency, Kalamazoo, Mich.

● Hudson Guild, New York City

● YMCA of Central Ohio, Columbus, Ohio

● South San Antonio Independent School District, San Antonio

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Bennett's Fall Likely to Ignite Policy Debates

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

statement: "Leadership is doing what is right, knowing the results will follow. The data is clear; thanks to Tony's leadership, children are better prepared for success."

On the same day Mr. Bennett stepped away from the Florida job, the Indiana affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers called for Indiana's grading system to be suspended.

In an analysis of how Christel House Academy's grade was altered by Indiana education officials on Mr. Bennett's watch, Anne Hyslop, a policy analyst at the Washington-based New America Foundation's education policy program, determined that without any of alterations to the A-F system that ultimately led to Mr. Bennett's departure from Florida, the school would in fact have earned a B, not the C grade Bennett's chief accountability officer, Jon Gubera, identified in an email.

The lesson from what Mr. Bennett and his staff did to alter Indiana's A-F system, she said, is that if such officials believe the right accountability model is in place, it should not be subjected to personal considerations.

"My hope is that policymakers are paying attention, and that they don't sort of use this [controversy] to either scrap the systems entirely, or attack the notion of school accountability in and of itself," Ms. Hyslop said.

Mr. Bennett's exit from Florida shows that accountability isn't ultimately based on numbers, but the individuals who control them, said Marc Porter Magee, the president and founder of 50CAN, a K-12 advocacy group based in New York City.

"In the end, it's an ethical effort, not a scientific effort. ... Do you trust the state chief and his team? If you sever that trust, the most important job going forward is to try to rebuild that," he said.

Unfinished Business

When Mr. Bennett resigned last week, he was working to maintain political support for the Common Core State Standards in Florida, and also grappling with whether to keep the state in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, a testing consortium developing assessments aligned to the new standards.

Florida Sen. Dwight Bullard, a Democrat who said he supports the common core in principle and who called for Mr. Bennett's ouster after the story broke, is among the state Democrats suggesting that the resignation should lead Florida to change its constitution to once again require state education commissioners to be elected.

"If nothing else, the voters should have a choice. The system that we have now is a deluge of political appointees," Mr. Bullard said.



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Sequestration Varies in Impact Across Districts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

as much about sequestration this summer as he thought he would. “At no point did [state and district officials] ever bring up the issue. If I brought up the issue, I got met with a shrug, basically. It was surprising to me.”

One possible reason for the lack of anxiety: Thanks to the economic recovery, states are generally much more fiscally fit than they were in past years, and many have decided to boost K-12 funding, Mr. Griffith said.

“People tend to look at the bottom line for all education spending, and most states had a decent budget year,” he explained. “They increased education spending, and that might cover up the sequestration cuts.”

Effects Debated

Sequestration is slated to remain in place for the next decade, until Congress is able to come to up with a long-range plan to trim the deficit.

Earlier this year, the White House used K-12 education as a poster child to illustrate the potentially devastating impact of the cuts on domestic programs. As part of that push, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan went on CBS’ “Face the Nation” and predicted that 40,000 teachers could lose their jobs.

Months later, Mr. Duncan agrees that the relatively rosy state fiscal picture has meant fewer teacher layoffs than the administration initially suggested might take place. But, he argues, sequestration is still having an effect on student learning.

“It is a good thing that we had less layoffs than were possible,” said Mr. Duncan in an interview last week. “It’s been obviously extraordinarily helpful that states and local communities have increased their investment, but at the end of the day, we at the federal level need to be a good partner.”

To make up for the federal cuts, he said, districts have put off updating their technology or replacing outdated textbooks.

“The fact that those investments aren’t being made, that’s not something we should feel proud of,” Mr. Duncan said. And he thinks the impact will only get worse if the cuts remain in place for years. “It’s a noose around your neck that just gets a little tighter and a little tighter.”

He also stressed the effect of sequestration on districts that rely on roughly \$1.2 billion under the federal Impact Aid Program, which helps school districts with a nearby federal presence, such as a military base.

But some members of Congress remain unpersuaded. U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita, R-Indiana, the chairman of the House subcommittee that oversees K-12 policy, said the administration blew the impact of



Todd Martin/Killeen Independent School District/AP-File

Students move through the halls of Meadows Elementary School in Fort Hood, Texas. Meadows is among nine public schools in Fort Hood operated by the Killeen Independent School District that are affected by across-the-board federal budget cuts under sequestration.

the cuts far out of proportion.

“Given what the president and the secretary and the entire administration said about the cuts, I’m surprised any teacher’s car started the morning after sequestration,” Mr. Rokita said. “The effect of the sequester was small in the education world. ... I’m not surprised that states and localities were able to weather this. It wasn’t nearly as drastic as the administration led us to believe.”

Ample Notice

Sequestration doesn’t appear to have led to massive layoffs or huge programmatic reductions in most Virginia districts, Charles Pyle, a spokesman for the state’s department of education said. That might be, in part, because education spending at the state level is up, from \$5.17 billion in the 2012-13 school year to \$5.34 billion this coming school year.

Plus, Mr. Pyle said, the state gave districts plenty of notice that the cuts were coming—alerting them to the possibility of sequestration as early as last summer. That gave districts time to figure out how they would implement the cuts without much of an impact on classrooms, which might become a lot tougher if the reductions stay in place for yet another year.

Other states and districts were able to soften the blow by using federal flexibility to shift unused funds from previous fiscal years to help cover the shortfall. For example, New Jersey was able to cut its federal funding loss roughly in half, from a projected \$44.6 million for the coming school year to roughly \$22.6 million, according to a spokesman for the New Jersey

department of education.

And the timing of sequestration was fortunate: Districts in the nearly 40 states that have received waivers from the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act no longer need to set aside 20 percent of their Title I funding for school choice or tutoring services. This was the first year that districts got access to those long-withheld funds.

“That allowed us to have some additional dollars, which helped mitigate” the impact of the cuts on the classroom, said Milagros Fornell, the chief academic officer of Florida’s 315,000-student Miami-Dade County school district.

Delaying Purchases

But that doesn’t mean the cuts are no big deal.

Under sequestration, which took effect in March, the Title I program, which is financed at roughly \$14.5 billion, was cut by \$725 million nationally. Special education state grants, funded at \$11.6 billion, were cut by \$600 million. Overall, those were the most significant cuts to key formula grant programs in recent history, according to the Committee for Education Funding, an education lobbying coalition.

In some cases, that’s meant prioritizing. The 34,000-student Cincinnati school district lost about \$4 million out of roughly \$54 million in federal funding thanks to sequestration.

That didn’t directly translate into layoffs, but it’s going to affect instruction just the same. The district put off some necessary technology upgrades, including \$1 million to refresh computer systems to prepare for online tests linked to the Common Core State Standards. Cincinnati also cut a contract for school-based technology support by \$500,000 and put off spending about \$300,000 in extra software upgrades, in addition to trimming professional development.

The cuts come as Kentucky is still reeling from the recent recession. The Bluegrass State has

weathered more than \$100 million in total programmatic reductions for education since 2006, said Rebecca Blessing, a spokeswoman for the Kentucky department of education, in an email.

While basic classroom funding was preserved, “we have not funded textbooks and resources for five years. Increasing costs of health care and pensions have had a devastating impact as well,” she said.

And in some states, the cuts have led to job losses. The 1,600-student Rockford Area school district in Minnesota lost roughly \$19,250 of its Title I funds, which meant cutting one paraprofessional position, according to Paul Durand, the superintendent.

Still, he noted that it’s tough for a small school district to tell which funding reductions are the result of sequestration and which might be the result of other factors, such as changes in enrollment or cuts to local and state funding.

Kathy Murphy, the superintendent of the Monroe County schools in the southwestern corner of Alabama, a high-poverty district that’s heavily reliant on federal funds, seconded that. Ms. Murphy lost 13 staff positions this year, some through attrition and others through layoffs. But she isn’t sure which job losses directly resulted from sequestration.

“What we know is that we have less teachers employed,” she said. “How much of this we can put at the feet of sequestration and how much can be put at the feet of declining enrollment because of a foundering economy? It’s hard to parcel out which is which.”

The 1,200 impact-aid districts may be among the hardest hit. The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools surveyed 45 impact-aid schools about how they had implemented the cuts. It found that 31 districts had cut positions, either through layoffs or attrition. One district reported using online learning to keep the student-teacher ratios from soar-

ing out of control. Eleven districts said the cuts would be minimal in 2013-14, but only because they’re tapping reserve funds.

Funding Fight

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, the battle over sequestration is likely just beginning anew. The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a Republican-backed bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that would lock the cuts in place.

And the House GOP budget blueprint approved earlier this year would actually deepen the cuts for domestic discretionary spending, while alleviating sequestration for defense programs. It’s unclear, however, exactly what that would mean for K-12 programs, because the committee that oversees education spending hasn’t put forth a specific plan yet for implementing the domestic cuts.

On the other hand, the Democratically controlled Senate Appropriations Committee gave a partisan stamp of approval to a spending bill for fiscal 2014, which starts Oct. 1, that would essentially “pretend sequestration never happened,” according to Clare McCann, a policy analyst at the New America Foundation’s Federal Education Budget Project.

Congress will also have to revisit the government’s borrowing limits sometime this fall. That likely means another round of budget wrangling and uncertainty, said Joel Packer, the executive director of the Committee for Education Funding.

“I don’t think there’s going to be one big final package,” he said. “There’s going to be multiple fights and crises and [short-term] budget bills.”

All of that may mean that sequestration stays in place for the long haul—a prospect that has even districts that came through the first year of sequestration relatively unscathed feeling anxious.

“I’m dreading next year,” said Ms. Fornell of Miami-Dade.

COMMENTARY

www.edweek.org/go/commentary

The Call of the Common Core

By **Carol Thomas**

If Big Brother were behind the new academic standards for public school students in 46 states, you would expect private schools these days to be reveling in their independence. But as I work in Florida to build parent engagement in the nation's largest tax-credit-scholarship program for economically disadvantaged students, private educators in the state are tugging at my sleeve with a remarkable request: Let us use the Common Core State Standards.

These are not idle musings. Our nonprofit, Step Up For Students, oversees the scholarship program, which will serve more than 60,000 low-income students this fall in more than 1,400 private schools in the state. Three-fourths of those schools are faith-based, and all of them covet their educational independence.

As part of our outreach to scholarship parents and schools, we are conducting a pilot project to find ways to promote stronger relationships between parents and teachers. To help educators chart the progress of each student, we have built an online tool that ties their conversations to the benchmarks described in the common core. We have no relationship with the common-core developers or the consortia that are preparing the related tests, and, frankly, we have kept our distance from the political developments in Florida public schools. Our main motivation is practical. We wanted a rigorous set of standards that could be shared across these schools.

For example, the 3rd grade literature standard is: "Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters." In our "student learning compact," the teacher selects the teaching

methodology and the specific parent and student responsibilities that are related to mastery of the standard.

Our target for the state pilot was to find 100 scholarship schools that would volunteer to participate. We already have more than 140, and my phone is still ringing. These principals aren't calling to lecture me on state sovereignty or intrusive regulation. They are calling because they think the common standards will help them guide the learning plans in their schools.

We call our pilot the "Success Partners" and have toured the state to spread the word to schools. In a recent meeting with principals of Seventh-day Adventist schools, 13 of the 15 attendees had decided to enroll their schools in the program before I could even finish the presentation. Catholic diocesan schools throughout the state are moving forward with the standards, and many of the

teachers are also signing up for state-run workshops that were intended primarily for public school teachers. In one Christian school, after learning about the common core, the headmaster purchased a laptop computer for every teacher to use for his or her own research about learning and implementing the standards.

Suzette Dean is the principal at Bible Truth Ministries Academy, a small mission-driven school in Tampa that serves mostly African-American students. Of the common core, she emailed me with her reaction: "Finally, we are all on the same page [with the standards], our teachers know what to teach, and the parents know what their children should be doing in school. Sure, it is a change, but it is real change that is needed if we are going to prepare our students for college and a successful future."

The teachers with whom I now work, like the teachers in public schools with whom I used to work,

“ [P]rivate educators in [Florida] are tugging at my sleeve with a remarkable request: Let us use the Common Core State Standards.”

Schools Can—and Must—Do More About Bullying, Violence, and Suicide

By **Mariam Azin**

The story is all too familiar: accusations of sexual violence, public shaming, and relentless bullying followed by the tragic end of a young life full of promise. Rehtaeh Parsons, a Nova Scotia teenager, hanged herself in early April more than a year after a photo from her alleged 2011 rape circulated through her high school and community. Just as we did after the suicides of high school students Amanda Todd and Audrie Pott, we find ourselves asking what could have been done differently to prevent Rehtaeh's death at 17. Did she get the help that she needed? Did her family?

Now, her family members are asking questions of their own. In an interview with *The Toronto Star*, her mother's longtime boyfriend said: "The justice system failed us completely. The education system didn't do much of anything." Rehtaeh's father wrote on his website: "[S]he was disappointed to death. Disappointed in people she thought she could trust, in her school, and the police."

Is it fair to hold her school accountable for her death?

A review of Halifax school board policy requested by Nova Scotia Minister of Education Ramona Jennex found that Rehtaeh's lengthy absences from school should have been cause for concern by school officials, although reviewers did not lay blame for the girl's death on the schools.

We know, according to news reports, that she confided in at least one teacher, and that peers were well aware of the cyberbullying leading up to her suicide. We also know that she was getting help. She switched schools, and the CTV television network reported that she checked herself into a hospital for six weeks to deal

with depression and suicidal thoughts. Sadly, even a loving and proactive family and the best mental-health care cannot erase all pain and do not guarantee a happy ending.

But all of us in the education community need to ask ourselves if we are doing everything possible to prevent the toxic and damaging social environments that lead to tragedies like Rehtaeh's. Her mother reports that she was shunned, bullied, and humiliated by classmates as a picture spread through social media. Did teachers and school staff members witness bullying in the classroom, the lunchroom, and the hallways? If they did, what was done to address the issue not only with Rehtaeh, but also with those perpetrating the bullying?

Do we really know what's going on with our kids, on and off school grounds? Recent events have made it all too clear that the answer is often no. This year's trial in Steubenville, Ohio, in which two high school football players were found guilty of raping an unconscious girl and carrying her from party to party, highlights just how disconnected adults in the community were from the culture of substance abuse and sexual assault happening right under their noses.

This kind of disconnect, whether we are talking about bullying, substance abuse, or sexual assault, is unacceptable. Obviously, parents have the primary responsibility for their children's well-being. But teachers and other staff members know much more about what is happening with kids than those school employees ever report. We know which kids are showing up hung over, which kids hide in the library to avoid the lunchroom, which kids are suddenly ostracized from a group they were once part of. We observe kids together at school in ways that parents never can, and often have them in our care for more of their



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“ Schools have a responsibility not only to help students learn, but also to keep them safe, physically and emotionally, while they are in our care.”

really do just want what is best for the students. They recognize the standards are more complex and will require work to implement. But they say they want the challenge in order to motivate students and to keep their schools competitive with other private schools. They also tell me they are reassured by seeing the standards tell them what to teach, not how to teach.

At a recent meeting in an inner-city Catholic school, teachers were eager with their questions and left me with encouraging comments. “Boy,” one wrote, “I could have used these standards in my parent conference.” Another, “Why don’t we just use the standards profile as our report card? It certainly lets us know more about what the students are learning than a single grade.” And a third, “Wow, I can focus on helping my students understand, not just memorize!”

I’m no newcomer to the standards debate. Before joining Step Up two years ago, I spent 30 years in Florida’s Pinellas County public schools—the nation’s 26th-largest district—where I was ev-

erything from a classroom teacher to an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction to an area superintendent. So I’ve seen more than my share of fads and state and federal edicts. But the common core is a bipartisan effort, led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers and imbued with genuine academic research. It mostly tries to ensure that students are held to high standards, and that they won’t get lost in the maze if they move from one school or one state to another.

If there is anywhere I would expect to experience pushback on what is being described in some quarters as a federal government mandate, it would be within the private school sector. But what I’m finding is quite the contrary. The common-core contrarians would do well to pay these schools a visit. ■

CAROL THOMAS is the vice president of the office of student learning at Step Up For Students, a nonprofit organization based in Tampa, Fla., that oversees the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program.

waking hours than their families do.

We can say it’s not our job, or not our business. But schools have a responsibility not only to help students learn, but also to keep them safe, physically and emotionally, while they are in our care. If we are not addressing the culture of bullying and public shaming, if we are not doing everything we can to teach young people how to treat each other kindly and civilly, if we are ignoring social and emotional crises unfolding before our eyes, we are failing Rehtaeh and thousands like her.

There are things that we can do. We can end the culture of silence and encourage all school staff members to speak up when they notice something happening with a child. We can train them better in what to look for, whom they should talk to if they see a problem, and what resources are available for students at risk for bullying (as victims or perpetrators), violence, or suicide. And we can make sure we have systems in place to make identification, referral, and monitoring of students in crisis easy and automatic so no child slips through the cracks.

We cannot ease every heartache, prevent every act of violence, or ensure that our young people will always act with the best judgment. But we can do a better job of paying attention and addressing the issues we observe every day. We are the adults, and it is our job to build a culture in our schools and our communities that keeps every one of our students safe. This is a responsibility we cannot abdicate. We owe Rehtaeh, and others like her, better than that. ■

MARIAM AZIN is a psychologist with more than 20 years of experience in educational research and evaluation. She has been the principal investigator on numerous large-scale evaluation efforts related to at-risk learners; curriculum and instruction; educational technology; and community programs spanning mental health, substance use, and criminal justice. She is the president and chief executive officer of Mazin Education, a Columbus, Ohio-based company that works with schools to assess, identify, and serve at-risk students.

Boredom’s Paradox

By Mark Bauerlein

Why do students drop out?

An oft-cited 2006 study by the public-policy firm Civic Enterprises asked then-high-school dropouts that question and came up with unsurprising answers. Nearly half of them—47 percent—said that classes were boring, and 69 percent said that school just didn’t motivate or inspire them. Students scored personal reasons as being more of an issue than the challenge of academics. In fact, most of the dropouts believed they could have handled the work. They just weren’t motivated to do so.

The High School Survey of Student Engagement from 2010 found the same rates of boredom. It noted that 66 percent of students were bored “at least every day,” and 98 percent admitted to being bored at some point, citing uninteresting and irrelevant material as the leading causes. When asked to rate teaching methods, respondents praised peer-oriented learning and rated “teacher lecture” the least engaging.

The recommendations that followed these findings sound entirely sensible. The curriculum and teaching styles must change, researchers say. We need energetic instructors to present pertinent material in lively ways. Teachers should draw more assignments from real-world situations and create projects that are collaborative by nature, or culturally relevant (for example, by providing an Afrocentric curriculum to African-American students). If students recognize direct connections between schoolwork and their personal lives, including their future employment, academic engagement will rise, and they’ll stay in school and proceed to college and the workplace ready to thrive.

Let’s assume that these adjustments work, that the curriculum is relevant, the exercises engaging, the teacher inspiring, and that the students prosper through 12th grade and head to college. What happens then?

Likely, they’ll end up in a situation that is the opposite of what they experienced in high school. Usually, when students start college, they have to take freshman composition, a course universally dreaded by 18-year-olds. Few of them enjoy grammar exercises or paragraph development or the revision process. And chances are they don’t easily relate to the readings. (I teach freshman comp, so trust me, it’s hard to find any academic material students are eager to write about.) Many also have to take a math or another quantitative-skills course—subject matter irrelevant to students interested in the arts and humanities. Often, too, they face a U.S. history and civics requirement covering events and texts 200 years old and thoroughly alien to their job ambitions and leisure activities. And these aren’t the only tedious courses. In addition, most of them take lecture classes, in

which the teacher is often talking from a stage to 300 students—their least-favored format. Sadly, all too often, students respond to these conditions in college just as they did in high school—drifting away and submitting shabby work.

The on-time graduation rate at four-year colleges is currently only 59 percent and at two-year colleges a troubling 31 percent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. A 2009 study by Public Agenda found that 45 percent of recent college dropouts listed boredom as a “major” or “minor” reason they left, while 43 percent cited “I had to take too many classes that I didn’t think were useful.”

Their testimony adds an additional dimension to college readiness: the soft skills, *not* the academic preparation, required to complete the work even if the teacher is a drone, the materials dull, and the assignments solitary. This disposition is necessary for students to earn a college degree. Typically, except for vocational programs, students cannot plunge into a major or specialty until they’ve met general education requirements, most of which are unrelated to their academic preferences. Success translates into the ability to slog through them. If they cannot tie their coursework to their ambitions, it shouldn’t matter. If the people in the readings have a different skin color and lived at a different time and place, it shouldn’t matter.

This raises a disturbing concern about the relevance of student engagement at the high school level. In adjusting curriculum and pedagogy to student interest, educators may raise certain secondary school results but, ironically, stunt students in preparation for the next level of their education. In telling them, “You think the material is pointless and musty, but we’ll find ways to stimulate you,” high school educators fail to teach them the essential skill of exerting oneself even when bored, even when the material has no direct bearing upon one’s future.

Perhaps they believe that if revised curricula can engage high school juniors, they will build enough momentum to reach college with the pluck to keep focused in spite of their ennui. I presume the opposite. Students will have learned a different lesson when they go to college: If they’re not interested in a course, there’s something wrong with it, and they needn’t bother.

If educators wish to keep students in high school and in college, they must plant a better attitude in the former, while recognizing the intransigence of the curriculum in the latter. Boredom is not always something to be avoided. It is to be accepted and worked through. ■

MARK BAUERLEIN is a professor of English at Emory University in Atlanta. He participated in the Feedback Group on the English standards for the Common Core State Standards, conducted by the Washington-based Council of Chief State School Officers.

LETTERS to
the EDITORHigh-Speed Internet in Schools
'Must Be a National Priority'

To the Editor:

The White House calls it ConnectED, a clever name for a critical initiative ("Obama Plan Champions E-Rate Fixes," *June 12, 2013*). Unveiled by President Barack Obama in June, ConnectED aims to connect 99 percent of America's students with high-speed Internet within five years.

Not quite a moon shot, but still a challenge. Why connect students to high-speed Internet? Not because it is easy, but because it's necessary.

According to the White House, fewer than 20 percent of America's schools have adequate Internet connections. With cash-strapped districts scrutinizing every budget item, broadband rarely makes the cut.

Given how important the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields are to the future of our country's economic well-being, ensuring every student is able to benefit from a high-speed Internet connection must be a national priority.

As part of President Obama's directive, not only must the Federal Communications Commission modernize and scale up existing programs to provide broadband access to schools, but businesses and local governments also must do their part to help hit the 99 percent mark.

To be successful, the program needs massive investment. Not just in dollars—although that's necessary—but in focus and energy.

Today's technology—innovative displays, remote learning, and mobile applications available on laptops and tablets—is revolutionizing education. Students need access to that technology.

President Obama has fired the starter pistol. Now it's time for all of us to invest time and resources into making it happen.

Scott Krantz
Chief Executive Officer
On Campus Media
Los Angeles, Calif.

Computer-Adaptive Assessment
Can Serve Differing Purposes

To the Editor:

I read with interest the article "Adaptive Testing Gains Momentum, Prompts Worries" (*July 10, 2013*). All who publish computer-adaptive assessments should applaud legislative efforts to include computer-adaptive testing, or CAT, in federal assessment programs. However, I wish to address the concerns cited in the article about whether test items in such assessments should be constrained by grade level.

The article failed to highlight an essential point: Not all CATs are designed for the same educational purposes. A focus on grade level may be appropriate for federally mandated accountability testing—the summative tests discussed in the article. When the purpose is to discover the level at which a student is performing (potentially above or below grade), however, and whether that student is growing academically, the test design will need to be substantially different.

To provide instructionally useful information to students, teachers, and administrators, all students' achievement levels must be measured with equivalent precision, wherever they reside on the

achievement continuum. Information from assessments designed to inform learning can be directly translated into differentiated instruction that gives each child the opportunity to succeed.

Based on the vision sketched in the article, one could ask whether instruction should be merely standards-based rather than student-centric, and whether the only metric that matters is if students are proficient at grade level, not that they are actually growing.

With classroom time at a premium, schools need an assessment program that balances teachers' needs for actionable information with federal accountability requirements. Computer-adaptive testing can play a pivotal role in this, and all students and teachers in the country stand to benefit.

Raymond Yeagley
Vice President
Chief Academic Officer
Northwest Evaluation Association
Portland, Ore.

Center for Education Reform
'Skeptical' of Charter Study

To the Editor:

While it's gratifying to read the headline "Charters Show 'Slow and Steady Progress,' Multistate Study Finds" (Charters & Choice blog, *edweek.org, June 25, 2013*), it's also a bit disconcerting since the study—from Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes, or CREDO—is anything but charter-school-performance gospel.

We at the Center for Education Reform have been advocating for nearly two decades on behalf of substantive, structural change in K-12 education. We know that, like education itself, research can be complicated. Although the article cites "slow and steady progress," we're also skeptical about another flawed report that makes spurious comparisons of student achievement in charter schools across state lines.

We believe all schools, including charter schools, must be held accountable. The path to accountability must start with strong charter school laws and must be laid with gold-standard research. Such research uses randomized control trials to measure progress. Students deserve nothing less, in classrooms and in research.

The CREDO report, upon which the article is based, fails to use such methods. Rather it employs statistical gymnastics to compare student achievement in charter schools across state lines while adjusting data to ensure that all students "start" at the same level.

Highly criticized by leading researchers and economists for failing the test of good research, the CREDO results do not accurately convey the results of charters or other public schools. State-by-state and community-by-community analyses are the only true measures that offer validity for parents and policymakers.

Jeanne Allen
President
The Center for Education Reform
Washington, D.C.

Creative Classrooms Still Possible
In Age of Standards and Testing

To the Editor:

Teachers have been quitting the profession, saying that the testing regime is crowding out the joy of learning and suffocating classroom creativity and innovation.

How can we prevent talented and dedicated educators from leaving the profession? We need to bring back the

WEB COMMENT
of the WEEK

"Everyone's for 'raising the bar,' as Arne Duncan puts it, but that has to come with the supports needed to make sure every kid who tries hard can actually reach the bar."

—MIDK,
responding to the District Dossier blog post
"How Districts Can Seek to Bolster African-American Boys"

To read the post and respond, go to www.edweek.org/go/african-american.

creativity and flexibility that has been lost in a single-minded race toward higher standardized-test scores.

For 10 years, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills has built partnerships between states, educators, businesses, and nonprofits. Together, we outlined the essential skills, knowledge, and support systems necessary for a well-rounded, rigorous, and relevant education for all students.

With the P21 Framework, it is possible to elevate creativity and flexibility in the classroom while helping prepare students for assessments, as well as their future roles as lifelong learners, workers, and citizens. And it is possible to do so while connecting to the Common Core State Standards and next-generation assessments. It's not one more thing to teach. It's how you teach.

We know that accountability and assessments are important, and we know that there are better ways to measure student learning and teacher effectiveness than relying solely on standardized tests.

We can't afford to lose even a single great teacher, and we can't afford not to prepare students for the world they'll inherit and inhabit.

Steve Paine
President
Partnership for 21st Century Skills
Washington, D.C.

Frank Gallagher
Executive Director
Cable in the Classroom
Chairman of the Board
Partnership for 21st Century Skills
Washington, D.C.

Dyslexia Group: Education Schools
Must Boost Teaching of Reading

To the Editor:

In 2000, the bipartisan National Reading Panel issued recommendations on the skills children need to become successful readers. More than a decade later, a majority of teachers-in-training are still not receiving the knowledge they need to impart these skills.

A recent review of schools of education by the National Council on Teacher Quality, or NCTQ, shows that only 29 percent of the

nearly 600 education schools reviewed adequately address the five reading component skills identified in the reading panel's report (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) in their teacher-training curricula ("Disputed Review Finds Disparities in Teacher Prep," *July 10, 2013*).

The NCTQ review set a low bar for schools of education.

The International Dyslexia Association, or IDA, believes that teachers require a greater depth of knowledge and practice to become skilled teachers of reading. In 2010, the IDA published comprehensive knowledge and practice standards, and last year recognized nine programs that are aligned with them.

While critics may be tempted to write the IDA standards off for their focus on the needs of struggling readers, these standards essentially codify the recommendations of the National Reading Panel, which concluded that all students benefit from science-based reading instruction. More importantly, all teachers require knowledge of science-based reading instruction and how to apply it to the range of learners in their classrooms.

Why have schools of education been slow to embrace the need for better-trained teachers in reading? A significant hurdle lies in the lack of faculty expertise in the area of reading science.

In recent years, a movement toward improved teacher training in reading has been building, and more than half the states have enacted or introduced literacy laws. These can only take us so far. The schools of education must step up their efforts.

Elisabeth Liptak
Director of Professional Development
International Dyslexia Association
Baltimore, Md.

COMMENTARY POLICY

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Civics in the Core

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

unearths students' higher character as they learn to value integrity, compassion, and their unique conception of patriotism and the common good.

But mark "character" absent from the common-core. In its website, the core's narrow mission statement sounds less

like a set of learning expectations for children than a parody of a sterile business plan. It talks about preparing America's students "for success in college and careers" so "our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy." Really? Wouldn't preparing America's students in order "to be successful, virtuous members of America's workforce and democracy" be more appropriate? As Abraham Lincoln warned, "The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next."

A citizenship component in the common standards would promote a more open-minded, student-centered philosophy of education for the entire core cohort. While civics in the core is an imperfect solution, it is a viable, scalable one because it accesses a system with an enormous infrastructure, corporate backing, and absolute support in the Obama administration. And, should the common core collapse, at least civics will have been woven into lessons nationwide.

A corollary approach is to invite David Coleman, the College Board's chief executive officer, to include civics

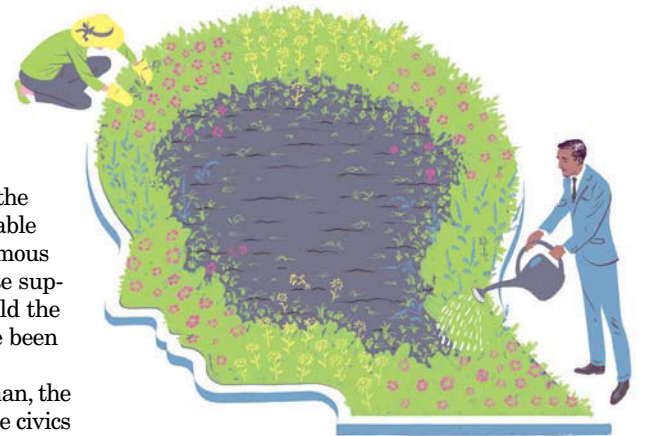
in the board's realignment of the SAT with the core.

And, what is not taught is neither learned nor lived. If our schools are the nurseries of democracy, we must patiently teach our children the complex and rewarding arts of citizenship. Soon, they will reinvigorate our schools and our polity with their blunt honesty, fresh thinking, and, especially, their infectious idealism.

In his letter from Birmingham, when King invokes the *Brown* decision's rallying cry, "Justice too long delayed is justice denied," he is speaking to us. He is challenging us, a half-century later, to finally give our nation's children the skills and the platform to "make real the promise of democracy."

Let's heed his call. Let's let their voices be heard! ■

"If our schools are the nurseries of democracy, we must patiently teach our children the complex and rewarding arts of citizenship."



Jori Bolton

COMMENTARY ONLINE

■ During *Education Week's* recent print publishing break, Commentary published Web-only pieces on a wide range of topics, including democracy in an Egyptian classroom, map-reading and the common core, and the true meaning of "satisfaction" in education. Find these op-eds and keep abreast of new opinion essays during the upcoming publishing break, which lasts until Aug. 21.

www.edweek.org/go/commentary

■ Teacher evaluation also figured prominently in Commentary's online-only coverage. In his essay, Kim Marshall says principals must "up their game" when it comes to supervising teachers. Readers responded strongly; some charged that principals are not necessarily qualified to evaluate teachers. Weigh in with your opinion.

www.edweek.org/go/marshall

■ Edweek.org

welcomed the

new opinion

blog Education

Futures: Emerging Trends and Technologies in K-12 last month. Follow Matthew Lynch's predictions for education's evolution on the Industry & Innovation channel.

www.edweek.org/go/education_futures

■ Peter Gow

conducted a two-part interview with **John Chubb**, the new president of the National Association of Independent Schools, in Gow's Independent Schools, Common Perspectives blog. Check out the full Q&A.

www.edweek.org/go/chubb



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PRINCIPALS/ HEAD OF SCHOOL



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PRINCIPALS/ HEAD OF SCHOOL

PRINCIPAL

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Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS), located just south of Richmond, VA, is recruiting for the position of Principal of Wells Elementary School. The school district is comprised of 62 schools and 58,286 students. Position is responsible directing the elementary school to include administration of instructional and operational programs and activities.

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EOE/M/F/D

PRINCIPALS/ HEAD OF SCHOOL

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Sandtown Middle School is located at 5400 Campbellton Road in the southwest Atlanta community of Sandtown. The Sandtown community is one of the Atlanta area's most affluent African-American communities with the majority of the population belonging to the middle and upper middle class.

Positions Available

BILINGUAL TEACHERS (Austin, TX)
Responsible for teaching elementary school subjects in both English and Spanish. Mail resume to: Austin I.S.D., Attn: Dora Fabelo, 1111 West 6th Street, Austin, TX 78703.

BILINGUAL TEACHERS (Special Ed) for Austin, TX: Responsible for teaching elementary school subjects in both English and Spanish in special education classes. Mail resume to: Austin I.S.D., Attn: Dora Fabelo, 1111 West 6th Street, Austin, TX 78703.

English Language Learner (ELL) Instructional Specialist: Assist elementary teachers by providing direct support & assistance to the classrooms in the use of effective instructional research-based strategies, use of data to improve English learner student achievement, and align curriculum and instruction to state and district-identified standards. Résumé to Northampton County Public Schools, 7207 Young St, Machipongo, VA 23405. Attn: Susan Bradford.

1) School Psychologist: Responsible to provide special education consultation, leadership, & resources in order to support & maintain the students with disabilities with access to the district's adopted core curriculum. **2) Speech and Language Pathologist:** administer & coordinate diagnostic, therapeutic & consultative functions relative to communication disorders. Respond to Ravenswood City School District, 2120 Euclid Ave, East Palo Alto, CA 94303. Attn: Mr. Lovelace.

SCIENCE TEACHERS (Austin, TX): Responsible for teaching science related subjects at the high school level. Mail resume to: Austin I.S.D., Attn: Dora Fabelo, 1111 West 6th Street, Austin, TX 78703.

Teacher/High School: teach high school students pre-Algebra, Algebra and Geometry. Résumé to Salinas Union High School District, 431 W. Alisal Street, Salinas, CA 93901. Attn: Ms. Sylvia Halcon.

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PRINCIPALS/ HEAD OF SCHOOL

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Positions Available

Union Academy Charter School seeks Spanish teacher to teach in Monroe, NC. Must have Bachelor's or foreign equivalent in Education, Spanish or related field. Must have or be qualified to hold NC teacher license in Spanish and must be bilingual Spanish/English. Mail résumé & cover letter to Union Academy; Attn: Lynn Kroeger, 675 North M L King Jr Blvd; Monroe, NC 28110.

VPK Teacher and Education Coordinator: Lighthouse Point, FL. MA in Preschool Education required. Knowledge of Beka Book & Beyond Centers & Circle Time curriculum, strong leadership skills & ability to lead staff in implementing appropriate curriculum, ability to form positive relations with parents required. Email résumés to ABC Workshop of Lighthouse Point, Inc., Attn: E. Salamon at abcworkshoplhp@yahoo.com

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TOP SCHOOL JOBS's K-12 TALENT MANAGER

Engagement Critical To Retaining Top Performers

Retaining the best and brightest employees is critical to the success of any organization. A recent article from **Compdata Consulting**, "**Engaging Your All-Stars: How Successful Companies Retain Their Top Performers**," explains that a key to keeping top performers, or "*All-Stars*," is increasing employee engagement and developing programs that make it easier for employees to be successful. They identify high performers as:

"...more productive than the average employee. They are self-motivated workers who don't settle for simply attaining the goal. These employees are adaptable, consistent, and reliable. You can trust they'll be able to adjust to new or different situations without sacrificing quality of work. Ultimately, they require less supervision or monitoring because they take the initiative to develop solutions and solve problems...They're dedicated to understanding the goals and objectives of the company, and are not only able to see the big picture, but are also able to see the details. Strong analytical skills are a common characteristic of top performers. They're intuitive, strategic thinkers, and they become your go to people."

Retaining top performers is easier said than done. These "All-Stars" often have multiple career options (remember, A's have options!) and a strong desire to continually grow and succeed professionally. Compdata provides four actions that organizations can take to ensure the best and brightest employees stay engaged.

- 1. Build a Career Advancement Program:** Paths must be designed to allow employees to progressively take on additional roles and responsibilities. While the development of these programs is important, moving people at the right time to the right role is just as important.
- 2. Eliminate Waste:** Unnecessary work and duplication of effort wastes employees' time (which is a waste of

money) and talents, organizational supplies, and more. It can also be frustrating. If employees understand their job descriptions and job expectations, these issues are much less likely to occur.

- 3. Linking Pay to Contributions:** Organizations must ensure that they are appropriately linking total rewards and performance or contributions to ensure that all staff understand how the pieces fit together and how they personally make a difference. The organization must also be dedicated to communicating the program and the link between contributions and compensation.

- 4. Welcome Feedback:** Great organizations involve employees in the planning, design, execution, and redesign of new programs. Engaging staff in this work will only increase the likelihood of success.

Compdata contends that organizations which focus on these four actions are better suited to "hit a homerun" when it comes to retaining their All Star employees.

How are K-12 talent managers using these four strategies to retain All-Star teachers, building leaders, support, or central office staff? I know many school districts that are currently focused on career advancement, pay, feedback, and employee recognition, but few that are exploring opportunities to eliminate waste. Has your organization taken any of these actions to keep your best people? If so, please share your story in the comments section below!

To read more from TopSchoolJobs's K-12 Talent Manager, visit http://blogs.edweek.org/topschooljobs/k-12_talent_manager/ and click the "Leadership" link under "Categories".

The opinions expressed are strictly those of the author and do not reflect the opinions or endorsement of Editorial Projects in Education.

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COMMENTARY

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Civics in the Core

By **Web Hutchins**

Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy, and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood.

—Martin Luther King Jr., Letter From Birmingham Jail (1963)

This year, educators and their fellow citizens celebrate the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s ethereal "I Have a Dream" speech and his prophetic "Letter From Birmingham Jail." The unbridled urgency of King's passion for justice almost jumps from the page, transcending time and inspiring us today to build civically engaging schools for all our children.

In 1963, King penned his letter on the margins of a newspaper in the confines of his "narrow" jail cell during the pivotal civil rights march on Birmingham, Ala. His still-unfulfilled ultimatum, "Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy," could be the mission statement for the swelling 21st-century "new civics" movement, which is pressing to restore civics in America's schools.

Civics proponents' wishes have fallen mostly on deaf ears.

Through promotion of the Common Core State Standards, the Obama administration and its allies orchestrated one of the most dramatic assertions of federal power into K-12 education since *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, but failed to promote civics where it counts—in the common core's package of standards and assessments. These documents determine what will be taught, and what will not be taught, to more than 40 million children across the United States. Because the core is barren of civics—the word does not appear in the 66-page standards document for English/language arts—the imperatives of the "not tested, not taught" mindset will diminish time for citizenship education, as it did under the No Child Left Behind Act.

In honor of Martin Luther King's faith in education's democratizing power, we should insist that civics be added to the core's standards and unfinished assessments. A first civics standard could cover democracy, scaffolding K-12 students toward expertise in democratic citizenship. Instead of high-stakes tests, the core could promote authentic assessments, such as participation in a model United Nations simulation.

A half-century after his iconic address in Washington, King's dream seems worse than deferred. It seems forgotten. Racial and socioeconomic segregation in K-12 schools is now worse than it was in the 1970s. In the NCLB era, nearly 14 million students dropped out of school (an average of 7,000 per day), and gaps between the academic performance of white and minority students persist. In too many communities, a specter of hopelessness and violence haunts young people. A student I was fond of was shot, in the back, this spring while I was writing this essay. Since 2008 in Chicago, more than 530 young people under the age of 21 have been killed.

NCLB's high-stakes, civics-free stance absolutely failed our children and our democracy. In 2010, approximately three-quarters of the 4th, 8th, and 12th graders who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress civics test failed to score "proficient."

Time is a stern master. Learning to operate democracy's levers requires sustained K-12 attention. But under NCLB, precious minutes for social studies dis-

appeared as principals anxious about "adequate yearly progress" narrowed curricula to test-prep kids in math and literacy boot camps. This ongoing trend, which is disproportionately common in schools in poor communities, contributes to the widening civics gap. Will the core be NCLB redux?

If so, it will be because of "the appalling silence of good people," as King suggested in his letter. How much longer can we ignore the U.S. Supreme Court's mandate in *Brown* that "education ... is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms"?

Civics education is the silver bullet for America's schools. It is a pedagogical imperative because it often fuels tremendous academic growth by stimulating and leveraging the dynamic interplay of cognitive and, especially, affective, or emotional, learning. In a 10-paper research compendium published in 2011, the American Enterprise Institute asserted that civic literacy was just as critical to student success as literacy in math and English.

Civics benefits teachers and administrators as well as students. It is an interdisciplinary silo-buster—civics texts and principles easily link all subjects and grades while aligning with the common core's emphasis on formulating evidence-based claims from nonfiction readings. In 23 years as a Seattle high school teacher, I've seen civics-centric history and English classes empower perhaps thousands of low-income, predominantly black students to make enormous intellectual, personal, and academic strides. Civics involves the study of citizenship, government, ethics, current events, and politics. It engages and empowers struggling learners—especially hard-to-reach boys—because it is verbal, current, and contentious.

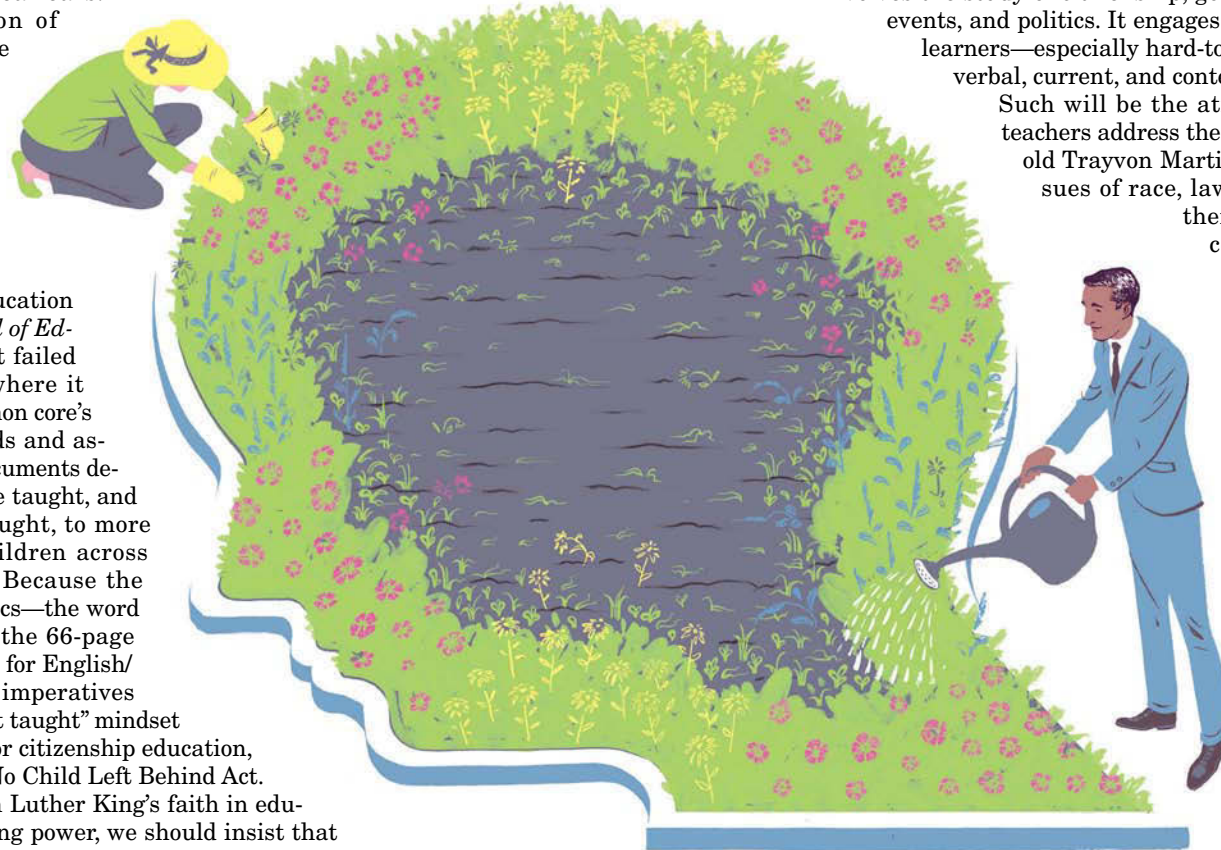
Such will be the atmosphere this fall when teachers address the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin and frame the case's issues of race, law, and politics within the thematic structures of their courses. Students' voices need to be heard. By confronting sometimes combustible "teachable moments" like the Martin case, civics-minded teachers honor their students' concerns, which helps build meaningful, productive classroom relationships. Yet without civics standards and school cultures that encourage teachers to use class time for such seminal current events, tragedies like the Trayvon Martin case are too often glossed over or ignored completely.

When this happens, everyone loses. But thoughtful analysis challenges students to develop, and back up, their own civic credo or code. This is personalized education writ large.

When civics becomes service, magic happens. In 11 years of overseeing students' service-learning projects at our state legislature, I've seen at-risk students regularly stand up for the common good. For example, in 2007, my juniors petitioned, lobbied, and testified at the state Capitol to help pass legislation creating a college-bound scholarship for low-income students. Since then, this scholarship has helped many of their younger siblings and friends attend college.

Without civics, the common core is simply a gilded NCLB. As the 18-year-old King wrote while attending Morehouse College: "Intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education." Civics captures this—it offers thoughtful analysis of democracy's timeless tensions, which often

PAGE 33 >



Jori Bolton

WEB HUTCHINS has taught social studies and language arts in the Seattle public schools since 1990. He is the winner of the Washington state legislature's 2013 Civic Educator of the Year award and the founder of Seattle's Civics for All Initiative (www.civicsforall.org).

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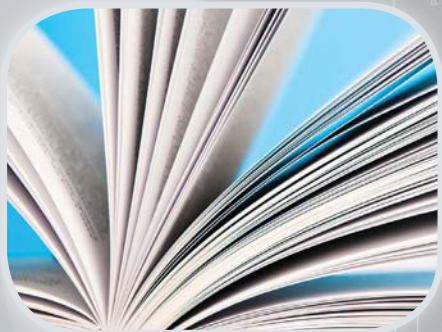
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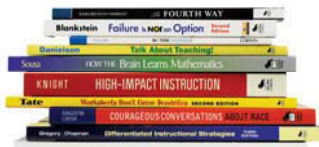
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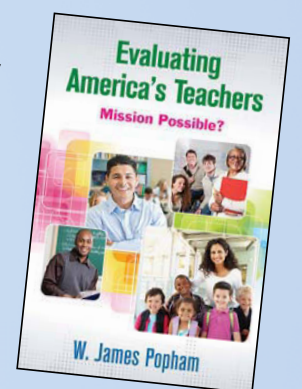
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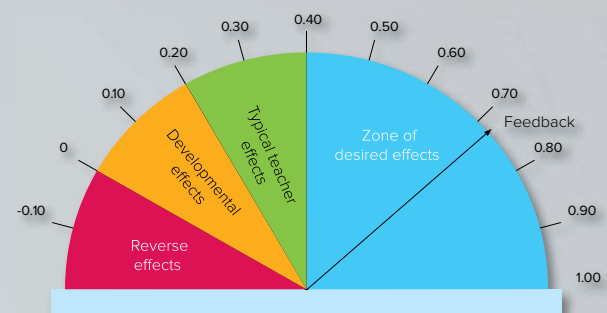
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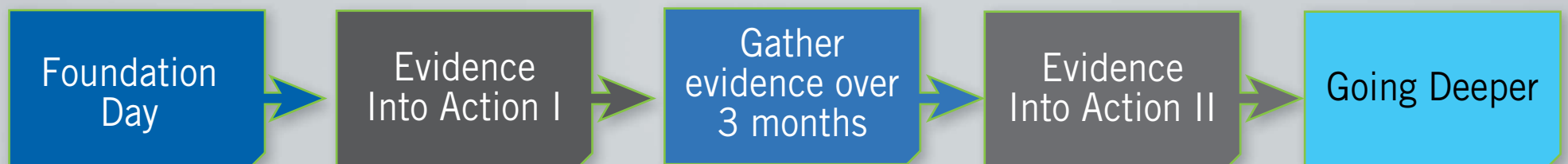
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