Calif. Passes Reforms to Compete for Race to the Top Funding

By Evelyn Stacey

California started the year by passing two new bills and submitting an application to the federal government to win a piece of the funding pie known as Race to the Top. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) signed both bills into law on January 7. Both had passed the legislature with the minimum number of votes needed. The legislation was needed to ensure California meets as much of the Race to the Top criteria as possible before the state sent its application to the Obama administration by the January 19 deadline.

“We have to do what’s best for the children, not what’s best for the grownups,” Schwarzenegger said during the signing ceremony.

Choice Saves Money in Arizona

Choice Could Save Vermont Money

Charter Schools Grow

Texas, Massachusetts, and Connecticut have all seen significant action on charter school growth and legislation.

Virginians See Change, Hope

Though a school choice advocate won Virginia’s highest office in November, changes in policy will be a long time coming.

No Tenure Reform in Michigan

Teachers unions in Michigan defeated a legislative attempt to reform tenure rules to make it less difficult for schools to remove ineffective and even criminal teachers.

Choice Movement Loses Champion

Dan Gaby, who in 1999 founded the New Jersey group Excellent Education for Everyone, passed away in December at the age of 75.
Virginia Shares Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice

Continued from page 1

they also support greater choices.”

That sentiment was echoed by Chris Braunlich, vice president of the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy, a northern Virginia-based think tank that also sponsored the survey.

“For years, opponents of parental options have claimed that being for school choice means someone is against public schools. As this survey shows, that’s certainly not true.”

**CHRIS BRAUNLICH, VICE PRESIDENT**
**THOMAS JEFFERSON INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY**

**Strong Support for Choice**

Despite their general support for the public school system, Virginia parents appear open to alternatives. The survey identifies a disparity between actual school enrollment and the school preferences survey participants expressed.

Approximately 90 percent of elementary and secondary students in the state are enrolled in traditional public schools, but most surveyed parents reported they would prefer an alternative option for their children, such as private schools (39 percent), charter schools (8 percent), or homeschooling (11 percent).

Braun Research, Inc. surveyed 1,203 Virginia voters by conducting live telephone interviews between October 1 and 4, 2009.

The survey revealed consistently strong support across party, region, and race for a tax credit-funded scholarship program: 65 percent of surveyed residents support scholarships for K-12 students funded by tax credits given to individuals and businesses donating to nonprofit scholarship organizations. The survey revealed Virginians believe tax credit scholarships would give parents more power while inspiring both public and private schools to improve.

The survey also showed strong support for voucher programs. Among likely voters, 79 percent support a scholarship program for special-needs students. The proposal receives strong support from registered Democrats (81 percent) as well as Republicans (79 percent) and independents (76 percent). More than 90 percent of Hispanic and 80 percent of African-American voters favor the proposal.

**Renewed Legislative Interest**

Voucher proponents hope the results of the study will inspire state legislators to take a fresh look at a special-education scholarship program proposal. Legislation introduced in the 2009 legislative session passed the House of Delegates but was defeated in a Senate committee vote.

“The survey will help improve the chances that a plan like this will go further in the future,” said Don Soifer, executive vice president of the Lexington Institute, a survey sponsor and think tank. “Not only can it help raise awareness and understanding of the benefits of choice, but it presents a clear picture that it is fully compatible with what Virginians want when it comes to their schools.”

Braunlich agreed. “The voter views on a special-education scholarship are overwhelming,” he said. “When four out of five voters support a measure, elected officials who oppose it run the risk of a severe voter backlash.”

“**For years, opponents of parental options have claimed that being for school choice means someone is against public schools. As this survey shows, that’s certainly not true.”**

**PAUL DIPERNA, RESEARCH DIRECTOR**
**FRIEDMAN FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL CHOICE**

**No Partisan Divide**

Duff said the survey also shows this not to be a partisan issue.

“The majority of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all support educational options including tax credit scholarships and vouchers. We hope more lawmakers will open themselves to the idea that supporting school choice is the right move for Virginia’s children and families.”

The survey revealed support for every category of educational choice, including charter schools. Only three charter schools currently operate in Virginia, serving 190 students. Charter advocates hope the combination of the survey and the 2009 Virginia elections will help the charter movement.

“I think charter schools are going to get a real boost from the newly elected governor, increased support in the General Assembly, and a growing bipartisan foundation,” Braunlich said.

**Moving Forward**

School choice proponents shared the survey results with members of governor-elect Bob McDonnell’s (R) transition team and statewide elected officials and expected to provide the survey report to every member of the legislature before the 2010 legislative session in January.

During recent meetings with the McDonnell transition team, Soifer said, it was clear the report had been noticed and its findings considered. Paul DiPerna, research director for the Friedman Foundation and author of the report, hopes McDonnell will consider the full range of school choice policies.

“The quickest and most direct way to help families in disadvantaged circumstances is to design a tax credit scholarship system or a special-needs voucher system,” DiPerna said. “It will be terrific if the governor-elect and other public officials in the state consider not just growing the charter school sector but also launching scholarship and voucher systems.”

State Del. Chris Saxman (R-Staunton), founder and chairman of School Choice Virginia, is one of the education co-chairs for McDonnell’s transition team.

“We will be making it very clear that charter schools will be pursued vigorously,” said Saxman.

Virginia Gentles (virginigentles@gmail.com) writes from Virginia. She previously served in the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation and Improvement and led Florida’s school choice office.
California’s Bumpy Race to the Top

Continued from page 1

The two bills, introduced January 4, put California in the running for up to $700,000 of the $4.35 billion the Obama administration plans to dole out this year to states with student-centered laws, such as allowing charter schools and using merit pay for teachers. The bills—originally one piece of legislation—were broken into two, with each contingent on the other passing.

SBX5 1, sponsored by Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento), authorizes the use of long-term student data to evaluate individual teachers’ effectiveness. It also creates alternative routes for credentialing teachers, particularly in math and the sciences, and establishes processes for reforming persistently low-achieving schools.

The schools identified as the state’s persistently lowest-performing will be required to participate in a mentoring program with high-achieving schools, to help the poor ones improve.

Parent Triggers

A firestorm of controversy surrounded the other piece of legislation, SBX5 4. Sponsored by state Sens. Gloria Romero (D-Los Angeles) and Bob Huff (R-Diamond Bar) since last August, the bill holds significant reform potential in its unique “parent triggers.”

The new law holds if 51 percent of parents in any of the lowest-performing districts petition, the school board must hold a public meeting and vote for one of four reform measures: completely closing the school, converting it to a charter school, replacing administrators and 50 percent of the staff, or changing the school’s instruction style and curriculum.

Other provisions create an open-enrollment process for persistently low-performing schools.

Though Schwarzenegger supported the bill, the state’s education unions—including the California Teachers Association, California Federation of Teachers, California School Boards Association, and Association of School Administrators—lobbied hard against it. As a result, only 75 schools statewide will be eligible to reform by parental request, and the open-enrollment options would be implemented in only 1,000 schools. More than 2,800 California schools currently are failing to meet federal standards.

Parent Power

The new Los Angeles-based organization Parent Revolution is a strong advocate of the parent trigger.

“It’s an entirely new way of thinking about public education. It’s about giving parents real power to advocate for their children,” said Ben Austin, the group’s executive director.

For California to be more competitive against other states in the Race to the Top grant competition, local schools must agree to participate in implementing the reforms. Last December the state sent a memorandum of understanding to each school district and charter school so they could decide by January 8 whether they would participate. Nearly 5,000 of the 9,800 traditional and charter schools statewide agreed to do so.

“We are now asking local education agencies to collaborate with the state and with each other in unprecedented ways,” State Superintendent Jack O’Connell said at the bill-signing ceremony of his office’s efforts to get more schools on board. “Race to the Top represents our state’s best chance to engage in the fundamental reforms that are needed to develop our workforce and fuel future innovations.”

Mere ‘Illusion of Choice’

Despite the politics in the process, many education reformers are optimistic about what the future holds for California now that these bills are law. Charles Barone, director of federal policy for Democrats for Education Reform, told the Christian Science Monitor for a January 5 article, “There’s been more state legislation [around education reform] in the last eight months than there was in the entire seven or eight years of No Child Left Behind, in terms of laws passed.”

Lance Izumi, senior director of education studies for the Pacific Research Institute, disagreed. “The bill only creates the illusion of choice. What it purposely omits is any provision to allow parents to keep their tax dollars and transfer their students out of public schools and into private schools—school choice or vouchers.”

Evelyn B. Stacey (estacey@pacificresearch.org) is the education policy fellow at the Pacific Research Institute, a free-market think tank in Sacramento, California.
Texas Thinks Outside Box on Charter School Expansion

By Evelyn B. Stacey

The debate on charter school expansion in Texas is in full swing, since it could give the state a competitive edge in the federal Race to the Top grant competition.

Texas’s current charter law, enacted in 1995, limits the state to only 215 charter schools, and to qualify for the federal funds the cap must be lifted or expanded. However, despite the $350 to $700 million available in the federal grant, legislation to lift the cap was killed before going to the House.

Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott says he is not going to let the opportunity pass by. Scott hopes charter schools will be able to expand under current law without legislation.

Loophole in the Law

The plan is to allow successful charter school operators that currently exist in the state to replicate their schools. Though the state law limits the number of charters granted to 215, there is no limit on the number of schools able to operate under each charter. This gives charter school chains such as YES Prep, Green Dot, and KIPP, which have been creating new schools nationwide, the ability to continue their expansion despite the limit. Scott also hopes other local charter school operators would move to expand their practices.

The commissioner’s efforts for expansion are supported by education reformers across the state.

“We appreciate Commissioner Scott’s decision that allows successful charter schools to expand more quickly,” said Brooke Terry, an education policy analyst with the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

Bill Hammond, president of the Texas Association of Business, told the Tyler Morning Telegraph for a November 9 story that “charter schools in Texas are an indispensable complement to our public education system, and Commissioner Scott’s decision to help underserved communities by removing the bureaucratic shackles of the charter school application process on these already-effective schools deserves recognition. Scott’s decision could help. And we will all benefit through a better-educated workforce.”

Though the solution is innovative and has support around the state, charter advocates say legislative action is still necessary.

“The long-term solution to the problem is for the legislature to eliminate its arbitrary and unnecessary cap on charter schools,” Terry said. “We hope the legislature will do so at its next opportunity.”

Democrats, Union Oppose

Not all Texans support the idea. On November 9 the Texas Democratic Party criticized Scott’s idea as “overreaching his authority by going around the legislature.” Even though the American Federation of Teachers agrees the law allows charter operators to establish more than one campus, it still plans to challenge the approval of certain charter expansions.

The Texas Charter School Association says its members are thrilled with the idea, but they plan to manage the growth of new charter schools.

Evelyn Stacey (estacey@pacificresearch.org) is the education policy fellow at the Pacific Research Institute, a think tank in Sacramento, California.

www.EconomicThinking.org/EconomicsInABox
By Ben DeGrow

Dramatic growth in the waiting lists for Texas charter schools is spurring renewed efforts to modify the law that limits the number of public schools of choice in the state.

A December 2009 report by Texas Public Policy Foundation analyst Brooke Terry identified more than 40,000 students statewide who are waiting to enroll in the state’s 213 open-enrollment charter schools. Even though statewide capacity for these schools grew by 12,000 between 2008-09 and 2009-10, the number of students on waiting lists doubled.

“The increase in enrollment and waiting list numbers demonstrate that many parents are choosing other [public school] options,” Terry said.

Students in open-enrollment charter schools, which are authorized by the State Board of Education, constitute roughly 80 percent of the Texas charter school population. A smaller number of charters are authorized by local school districts or by universities. State law caps the number of open-enrollment charters at 215 statewide. Currently, there are 215 such charters with more than 400 campuses.

Raising the Cap

In 2009, state Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston) introduced SB 1830 to raise the cap by 12 schools per year. The legislation passed the Senate but was defeated in the House on a technicality last May. Patrick plans to reintroduce the legislation in 2011, during the next Texas legislative session. He believes the measure will help meet increased demand while addressing concerns about quality.

“Right now we need to allow for a steady growth of charter schools,” said Patrick. “By creating a moving cap, we can reduce that wait time for students and make sure we are approving schools to succeed.”

Texas charter schools serve substantially larger shares of poor and minority students than the state’s public school system at large. A greater percentage of the state’s open-enrollment charters met federal No Child Left Behind standards than their non-charter counterparts in 2008.

Most traditional measurements of academic status have not indicated an advantage for charter schools. A new system of measuring school performance will help all public schools because it will measure their non-charter counterparts in 2008.

“Parents recognize the one-size-fits-all education model in their neighborhood school is not able to meet their child’s individual needs.”

BROOKE TERRY, POLICY ANALYST
TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION

Other Options

Patrick agrees with the emphasis on quality but says existing charters seeking to grow currently are forced to wait too long.

“We need to tighten the financial accountability on charter schools and provide support,” Patrick said. “On the other hand, we need to loosen the regulations on highly successful charter schools and allow them to expand and open new campuses without going through the long approval process.”

Approximately 60 percent of Texas charter school students come from one of the major metropolitan areas of Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, or San Antonio. A wide range of existing charter programs operate throughout the state—from the dropout recovery focus of the Texas CAN Academies to the math, science, and computer emphasis at Harmony Schools.

“Parents recognize the one-size-fits-all education model in their neighborhood school is not able to meet their child’s individual needs,” said Terry. “Charter schools provide parents other options within the public school system.”

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a think tank in Golden, Colorado.

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Massachusetts Works to Expand Charter Schools

By Evelyn B. Stacey

On November 18 the Massachusetts State Senate passed a much-anticipated bill to expand charter schools. The bill, S. 2216, sent to the House in the late hours of November 17, lifted the many caps hindering charter school expansion in the Bay State.

Massachusetts has two types of charter schools. Commonwealth schools—less-regulated public schools—are capped at 72 statewide, Horace Mann charter schools—public schools with unionized teaching staffs, regulated much as government-run public schools—are capped at 48 statewide.

S. 2216 would allow unlimited numbers of both types of charters. In addition to raising charter limits, the bill also doubles the amount of money each district can spend on charter schools, from 9 percent of its net school spending to 18 percent.

“There are a lot of urban districts that are right at 9 percent of net school spending,” explained Dominic Slovey, spokesman for the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association, an advocacy group based in Boston. “This will open room for districts that are currently frozen.”

Seeking Reform

S. 2216 was initially authored by Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick (D) in the form of two bills, H. 4163 and H. 4164. H. 4163 was intended to expand the number of charter schools, and H. 4164 was to establish a process for turning around the state’s worst-performing public schools. In order to compete for $250 million in federal Race to the Top grant money, for which states had to apply by January 19, the legislature’s Joint Committee on Education combined the two bills into one (S. 2205).

“We bulked them up, we strengthened them, we sought more reform,” said state Sen. Robert O’Leary (D-Cape and Islands), Patrick also sent a letter to state senators urging them to pass this bill.

S. 2205 passed the Senate Ways and Means Committee on November 10, but with amendments that could harm its original intent. Those amendments would establish a separate and unequal funding formula for charter schools, restrict their growth by allowing only proven charter school operators to apply to operate new schools in the state’s lowest-performing districts, and require that charter school enrollment match the racial demographics of neighboring district schools before their charters can be renewed.

Unions Join Fray

An outcry from many reform organizations and charter school supporters convinced the state Senate to eliminate the detrimental changes to the funding formula, but other damaging provisions remained. Charter supporters are now focusing their efforts on pressuring the House to consider amending those aspects of the bill before it lands on the governor’s desk.

The Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) is not sitting by as S. 2216 proceeds from the Senate to the House. Though there is no date set for House debate, the MTA is already pushing to keep amendments adopted in the Senate related to limiting charter school expansion and increasing union control through bargaining time.

School Choice Can Save Vermont Taxpayers Money

By Sarah McIntosh

School choice could save the state of Vermont $80 million to $300 million per year, according to a study conducted by the Ethan Allen Institute, a public policy research and education group based in Concord.

The report, released December 1, was compiled by the institute’s Commission on Rebalancing Education Cost and Value to find out how Vermonters can achieve comparable or better education for children while flattening the spending curve.

The commission, which spent six months researching the issue, consists of 15 former superintendents, principals, school board members, state Senate education committee members, and doctors of education and is chaired by Chris Robbins, a former member of the Vermont Board of Education.

In his foreword, Robbins writes, “The fundamental premise of this report is that a policy of creating an ever-enlarging ‘system,’ directed from the top down, populated with thousands of teachers, administrators, and bureaucrats, controlling the annual expenditure of [1.45 billion taxpayer dollars], jealously protective of the benefits enjoyed by the people employed in the ‘system,’ and dismissive of the abilities and preferences of parents and children, is a policy headed off in a totally wrong direction.”

“It’s an important time for the report,” said John McClaughry, founder and vice president of the Ethan Allen Institute and a former state senator. “This is the first report in my 40 years in Vermont politics that says we can save taxpayers dollars by going to a competition and choice model. And we are facing $470 million in deficits in 2011-2014.”

The report makes several recommendations, including giving tuition certificates to students instead of payments to schools. It advocates creating charter schools and virtual schools and supports tax credit scholarship programs and allowing voters to create their own education models in “freedom districts.”

At press time, state legislators had yet to respond to the report as the legislature was not in session. McClaughry said the commission would present it to them by the end of January.

“We all have the report,” McClaughry said, “but I haven’t seen any of them interviewed as of yet.”

An opinion piece McClaughry wrote has run in seven of the state’s nine daily papers, attracting some negative attention along the way.

Mayor lends support

The teachers union’s fight against charter growth is not new, but finding itself on the opposite side of the issue with Boston Mayor Thomas Menino (D) is. The mayor has opposed charter schools for the past 20 years, but he has changed his tune since President Barack Obama began endorsing them.

“It believe that the increased flexibility that charters provide can … help us close the achievement gap,” Menino told The Wall Street Journal last summer.

INTERNET INFO

Better Value, Fewer Taxpayer Dollars, Ethan Allen Institute, December 2009: http://www.heartland.org/article/26796

By Sarah McIntosh (mcintosh.sarah@gmail.com) teaches constitutional law and American politics at Wichita State University in Kansas.

Sarah McIntosh (mcintosh.sarah@gmail.com) teaches constitutional law and American politics at Wichita State University in Kansas.
Charter Schools in Connecticut May Get a Boost

By Rick Docksa

Charter schools are a hot commodity among Connecticut parents, and the state Board of Education has taken note. In December it started debate on a series of proposed reforms to give charter schools steadier funding streams and more freedom to expand their building capacity.

“Our charter schools are generally quite well received. Many of them are doing an outstandingly good job. We could use more of them,” said Board Chairman Allan Taylor.

The proposals, which the board approved January 6, include requiring school districts to contribute to the tuition expenses of charter schools within their jurisdictions, just as they would for standard district public schools.

Right now all charter school funds come from the state. This new requirement will ensure charter schools are as well-funded as standard district public schools; currently, they are allocated less, on average.

Less Red Tape

The proposal coincides with a bill to raise overall state spending on schools to $10,000 per pupil, up from $9,300 per pupil. If the bill is enacted, Connecticut charter schools will get a total of $50 million in funds per year.

A third proposal suggests removing the cap on charter school enrollment growth. Currently a charter school is not allowed to grow beyond 300 students unless it has first secured a waiver from the state. Better funding would give charter schools the means to take in more students, eliminating the need to seek permission from the state beforehand.

“With the existing funding structure, basically every seat in a charter school has to be voted on by the state legislature every year,” said Taylor. “And unless the state puts money in the budget for growth in charter schools, they don’t have the money they need to operate.”

Equal Treatment

In addition to bigger budgets and newer buildings, the pending bills deal with the principle of treating schools equitably. Taylor points out charter schools and district schools are all public schools, so there is no need to have laws on the books that put one at a disadvantage to the other.

“A substantial part of our board would like to see the system restructured so the money follows the child regardless of what school he or she goes to,” Taylor said.

First, however, education reform supporters must clear the formidable obstacle of state budget concerns. With the recession still in effect, money is as tight in Connecticut as any other state.

“It will be difficult to change the system when we can’t lubricate the change process with extra money,” admitted Taylor.

Facing Hurdles

On the upside, the reforms will put Connecticut in the running for federal Race to the Top funds, which the Obama administration’s economic stimulus act is distributing to states whose school systems meet certain criteria, including not capping charter school growth. However, the entire Race to the Top coffer is $4.35 billion, and no one state can expect more than a few million at best. The funds might cover some of Connecticut’s charter school expenses, but not all of them.

Public school teachers unions claim the added expenses of charter schools will be too much for local communities to take on in the current lean times.

“We cannot expect to place the lion’s share of responsibility for charters on the shoulders of local taxpayers,” Mark Waxenberg, the Connecticut Education Association’s director of government relations, testified to the state board in December.

But there is a precedent in Hartford County Public Schools, which formed a partnership with the nonprofit Achievement First to open Achievement First Hartford Academy Elementary School and Achievement First Hartford Academy Middle School in 2008. Though the school district did not pay tuition for the schools’ students, it built the stadium and provided ongoing groundskeeping, security, and a range of other services. According to Hartford County Public Schools Director of External Communications David Medina, the partnership has been a huge success.

“They have an excellent track record working with low-income students,” Medina said.

Rick Docksa (rick.docksai@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.

Hartford County Public Schools formed a partnership with the nonprofit Achievement First to open Achievement First Hartford Academy Elementary School and Achievement First Hartford Academy Middle School in 2008.
DC School Voucher Program Faces Renewal Battle

By Joy Pavelski

Education reform and school choice advocates nationwide are already mourning the likely loss of the groundbreaking DC Opportunity Scholarship voucher program.

The U.S. House of Representatives delivered a blow by voting late on December 10 to let it expire. An omnibus spending bill pending in the U.S. Senate includes six measures that purport to continue funding for students currently in the program, deny entry to new students, and weigh down participating schools with requirements about testing and site visits.

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) has led the charge against the voucher program in the upper chamber for months. If that body also chooses to allow the program to expire, the bill will land on the desk of President Barack Obama, who was largely educated through scholarships to private schools but has thus far remained completely silent on the issue of allowing low-income, predominantly black, children in the nation’s capital have the same opportunity.

Unless the omnibus spending bill passes, federally funded vouchers of up to $7,500 for about 1,700 students to continue the program, holding public rallies and sending e-mails to Durbin and U.S. Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY) urging them to reauthorize the program.

Strong Union-Backed Resistance

Durbin has indicated he might support continuing the program with added requirements, such as having voucher students take the same achievement tests as public school children. Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of DC Parents for School Choice and the mother of a voucher recipient, said she initially didn’t expect the strong resistance the reauthorization efforts have encountered.

“We expected to be reauthorized and expanded, because we understood that if the children showed they made academic gains, it would be authorized,” Walden Ford said. “The three evaluations the Department of Education [sponsored] each time showed gains.”

Virginia Walden Ford, Executive Director
DC Parents for School Choice

Sources of Opposition

Durbin, who chairs the appropriations subcommittee responsible for funding the vouchers, held several September hearings questioning their value.

“They are still unresolved issues about the effectiveness of the program and questions about [its] administration,” Durbin said in opening remarks for the second hearing. He cited lack-luster progress among voucher students mentioned in several Department of Education reports.

DC public schools perform notoriously poorly by nearly every measure, and reform efforts, even by the relatively new and strong-willed Chancellor Michelle Rhee, face a history of failure, lack of infrastructure, political infighting, and tight funds.

Assessments have rated DC voucher students as performing slightly better than their public school counterparts. Students, parents, and teachers have consistently and enthusiastically supported the program, holding public rallies and sending e-mails to Durbin and U.S. Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY) urging them to reauthorize the program.

Future Gains?

The Department of Education evaluations Walden Ford mentioned, however, offer opponents a slight toehold. The most recent evaluation, issued in March 2009, reported voucher students gained three months of additional learning in reading and respectable gains in parent satisfaction and perception of school security, but no progress in math scores when compared with their public schooled counterparts.

Bills in the House and Senate reauthorizing DC vouchers, sponsored by Boehner and Lieberman, respectively, await further evaluation in committee before they can reach their floors for a vote.

“Right now, the primary focus is accountability of taxpayer dollars, and looking at the testing and accreditation process,” said Max Gleischman, Durbin’s press secretary. “[Durbin] is open to negotiations and anticipating further discussions.”

Joy Pavelski (joy.pavelski@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.
The Washington, DC-based Heritage Foundation has released a new, 30-minute documentary, *Let Me Rise: The Struggle to Save School Choice in the Nation’s Capital*, about the families fighting to save the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) in Washington, DC.

The OSP provides scholarships of up to $7,500 for low-income children in Washington, DC to attend a private school of their choice. To date, more than 3,000 children have received scholarships.

In March, however, President Barack Obama signed the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009 (HR 1105), which contained provisions phasing out the successful scholarship program by prohibiting any new students from receiving scholarships unless the OSP is authorized by the D.C. City Council and fully reauthorized by Congress. In April, 216 students who had been awarded scholarships for the 2009-10 school year had them rescinded by the U.S. Department of Education.

**Criminal Acts**

Juan Williams, a political analyst for Fox News and National Public Radio, narrates the film, which was released in November.

“Over the course of my career covering Washington, I’ve seen many political fights, debates. And none was more disappointing to me than what happened to the students of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program in 2009.”

**JUAN WILLIAMS, NARRATOR, LET ME RISE**

DC students have some of the worst academic performance in the nation, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). On the most recent assessments, 52 percent of District eighth graders scored below basic in reading, and 60 percent scored below basic in math. Violence is prevalent in DC public schools, with 912 incidents of violent crime on campus reported by the DC Metropolitan Police Department during the 2007-08 school year.

*Let Me Rise* illustrates how the DC OSP has provided students with a lifeline out of the underperforming and unsafe public school system.

“At the end of the day it’s not about the politics. It’s about that family,” declares former DC City Council member Kevin Chavous in the film. “It is shameful for us to stop something that we know will help them save their children.”

**More than Words**

Jennifer Marshall, The Heritage Foundation’s director of domestic policy studies, said the film was made to “call this country back to its ideals when it comes to education” by putting a human face on the debate over school choice.

“Conservative policy is first and foremost about people—not systems, not programs, not dollars and cents. School choice isn’t just an academic debate. School choice isn’t just an issue for [the children] featured in this film. It’s changing their lives and opening up a future they never thought they’d have,” Marshall said.

“To hear from students who are trying to do the right thing but are trapped in dangerous and ineffective public schools is to be astonished and outraged once again that this is happening regularly in cities all across our country,” Marshall added. “America has so much more promise to offer, and that promise should be open to all her people.”

Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of DC Parents for School Choice, agreed. “It is shameful that in 2009, inequality persists in our nation’s school systems, trapping many low-income families in unsafe and ineffective public schools,” she said. “Families in the District of Columbia don’t want to wait for the next reform plan to roll around, [a plan] which may or may not benefit their children. The DC Opportunity is helping children right now to get the kind of education that best suits their needs, the kind of education they deserve.”


Lindsey Burke (lindsey.burke@heritage.org) is a research assistant in domestic policy studies at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC.
Virginians See Slow Change, New Hope, for Education

By Ben DeGrow

The impending arrival of a new administration in the Commonwealth of Virginia has raised school choice advocates’ hopes, but they don’t expect change to come quickly.

Republican Governor-elect Bob McDonnell handily defeated Democrat Creigh Deeds in the November 3 general election—shifting not only the party in power, but also Virginia’s education agenda.

“It’s going to be a change of direction, clearly,” said state Del. Chris Saxman (R-Staunton), who serves as co-chair of McDonnell’s K-12 education transition team.

Upcoming Shifts
Christian Braunlich, vice president of the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy, a think tank in Springfield, agrees.

“I think choice supporters are guardedly optimistic that there will be a better environment in which to advocate for school choice,” Braunlich said.

Saxman cautioned, however, that any changes to Virginia’s K-12 schooling policy will take time because of the considerable power of the nine-member State Board of Education. McDonnell will have the power to replace board members as their terms expire. Two complete their service in 2010, and three more in 2011.

“Changes in Virginia don’t come quickly,” Saxman said.

Debating Charter Law
McDonnell’s 2009 campaign included a call to expand the number of public charter schools in Virginia. The state currently has four charters, all middle or high schools, enrolling fewer than 300 students in total.

The Center for Education Reform, a national advocacy group based in Bethesda, Maryland, has rated Virginia’s charter school law as the second-worst in the nation. In addition, a state constitutional provision granting local boards the authority to supervise all public schools would make it difficult to allow new charter authorizers or expand the appeals process.

Frank Barham, executive director of the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA), believes the state’s current charter law provides an appropriate level of accountability. He cited a May 2009 State Board of Education survey in which more Virginia local superintendents said district fiscal barriers and a lack of parental demand are greater obstacles to charter school growth than the restrictiveness of state law.

“We’re simply opposed to charter schools that have no accountability requirements,” Barham said.

Saxman dismisses the VSBA’s claims that accountability is charter schools’ biggest impediment to growth.

“I think you can have accountability standards that will meet the public’s criteria for taxpayer-supported education,” Saxman said, “whether or not the legislature agrees to what’s currently in law as the way to support innovation and creativity in public schools.”

Support for Tax Credits
Other groups in the state advocate adding private school tuition tax credits as another solution to address academic challenges in the poorer regions of the state.

“Tax credit legislation would be a win-win for both public and nonpublic schools,” said Jeff Caruso, executive director of the Virginia Catholic Conference (VCC).

During the campaign, McDonnell completed a VCC questionnaire indicating his support for both corporate tax credits to offset private scholarship donations and personal tax credits for parents’ education expenses. McDonnell attended Catholic schools and was honored in April 2009 for his role in helping raise money to save Petersburg’s St. Joseph School.

An October 2009 survey commissioned by VCC and the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice found two-thirds of Virginia voters favor the idea of tax credit scholarships. Barham opposes this policy approach, however, arguing instead for legislation to allow more local flexibility to reduce class sizes for at-risk and needy students.

Gathering Info
For five consecutive years Saxman has introduced in the legislature a tax credit bill that passed the House but was bottled up and defeated by the Senate Finance Committee.

“The goal over the next few years will be to grow support in that committee,” Caruso said.

Saxman says his team has yet to hold any conversations on tax credits, though consideration has been given to private school vouchers for special-needs students and military dependents. The transition team is charged with gathering information for a report on strategic policy initiatives to the governor-elect.

“People are beginning to recognize more and more there are areas where we are lagging, and innovation and private-sector choices are a real consideration.”

CHRIS SAXMAN
STATE DELEGATE
STAUNTON, VIRGINIA

“Tax credit legislation would be a win-win for both public and nonpublic schools.”

JEFF CARUSO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
VIRGINIA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Expanding Innovations
One policy area garnering a lot of attention from McDonnell’s transition team is online education.

“While virtual schools were taking off across the country, it has not been a priority for the last two administrations” in Virginia, Saxman said. He suggests the next administration may look to build connections with the state’s higher education system to expand cyberschooling opportunities.

Other issues given serious examination by the transition team include merit pay, STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) initiatives, character education, and dropout prevention.

In light of large revenue deficits that threaten to affect Virginia’s K-12 education funding in the near future, plus a desire to grasp the issues and make sound decisions, Saxman advises a deliberate and determined approach will be needed to turn around what he calls “a $7 billion enterprise.”

“But people are beginning to recognize more and more there are areas where we are lagging,” Saxman said, “and innovation and private-sector choices are a real consideration.”

Ben DeGrow (ben@21i.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Golden, Colorado.
Making a Difference One Breakthrough at a Time

Teach for America—the 19-year-old program that puts recent college graduates into underserved classrooms for two years—is an effort to make a difference in failing schools by bringing in a different kind of teacher. This academic year, a TFA teacher is taking School Reform News readers through her experiences in the classroom.

By Courtney Long

As I write now, I am about two months into my teaching career, and so far nothing in my teaching career has followed the traditional path for first-year teachers. As a Teach for America corps member I studied economics and history, and instead of completing a student-teaching program I participated in an intensive, five-week Teach for America Institute.

My school is also quite nontraditional—it is a public school in a high-poverty area that focuses on high student achievement and thrives on family involvement.

One of the ways my experience is like other new teachers’, however, is the number of challenges I have faced while trying to reach a particular student. This student, Zach, is incredibly bright, but he doesn’t always know it.

Zach came into my class knowing he was very good at reading—he tests about one grade level ahead of his peers, and his comprehension of books is very deep. He loves reading challenging history books (not historical fiction, true history). Math, however, has been another story.

On one of the first days of school, the whole class took a diagnostic test. Since this test covered third-grade material (which, as third graders, they haven’t learned yet), most students did not do very well. I tried to prepare my students for this by warning them that they wouldn’t know most of the things on the test but by the end of the year they would know how to do all of it.

Zach, however, did not take this news in stride. Usually a fast and efficient worker, he was only able to complete four problems in the time the rest of his classmates completed a 75-point test.

Afterward, I asked him about his performance. He said he has always been “dumb” in math, so I should just let him read all day. We discussed his career plans—to become either a professional football player or a doctor—and examined many of the ways that these careers require math. This made him realize math will be an important part of his life no matter what career he chooses.

That turned out to be the easy part. Now that he knew math would be important for him, he wanted to succeed. Unfortunately, he wanted to achieve immediately the same level of success he sees with reading. It takes time to learn a new skill, but for this third grader each missed problem was a major setback.

“Now that he knew math would be important for him, he wanted to succeed. Unfortunately, he wanted to achieve immediately ... It takes time to learn a new skill, but for this third grader each missed problem was a major setback.”

That belief took a while to overcome—but each week I saw it diminish further. This week Zach got rid of that view for good, during a class quiz on addition and subtraction. When he realized he knew how to do all of the problems, he told me he is good at math. Seeing a student make this revelation reminded me of why I became a teacher and how many more of these life-altering moments I hope to witness in the future.

Courtney Long (courtney.p.long@gmail.com) writes from San Jose, California.
Arizona Releases Survey of School Tuition Organizations

By Sarah McIntosh

After a series of investigative reports alleging a lack of accountability at Arizona organizations distributing tax credit scholarships, a legislative task force was created to review the situation. So far, little wrongdoing has been uncovered.

The first meeting, held October 14, developed a set of questions to ask school tuition organizations (STOs). The second meeting, in November, analyzed responses from the responding STOs.

“To date, the House Committee has not made any suggestions or recommendations,” reported Michael Kelly, executive director of the Arizona School Choice Trust. “They are analyzing responses from STOs that provide tax credit scholarships to children throughout the state and respective data from the Arizona Department of Revenue.”

Taking Stock

On November 16, the House Majority Research Staff released a report of the House of Representatives Ad Hoc Committee on Private School Tuition Tax Credit Review. It shows 51 of the state’s 53 STOs responded to the questions developed during the October meeting.

According to the report, 90 percent of respondents consider financial need when awarding scholarships and grants. Other factors considered when making the awards (with percentages based on the number of STOs reporting for that category), include: academic performance and scholastic merits (18 percent), required attendance in a specific school (44 percent), external recommendations (34 percent), self-determination by individual schools (20 percent), and parental and familial commitment to organizational philosophy and individual contribution to the school (14 percent).

The financial need consideration was also broken down into categories. Federal tax returns were considered by 71 percent of schools, expenses-to-income ratios (50 percent), family size and number of schoolchildren in the home (44 percent), extenuating situations such as job loss (56 percent), and federal poverty guidelines (13 percent).

Eradicating Abuse

The report also indicates 40 percent of the STOs undergo an annual audit by an independent certified public accountant. All deny arranging, facilitating, or otherwise encouraging parents to make contributions based on promises of scholarships for their children—the abuse local newspapers reported this summer. Kelly said this is an appropriate topic for the legislature to consider.

“There is always room for improvement and reform,” Kelly said. “The Arizona School Choice Trust (ASCT) is the oldest STO in Arizona. Since 1993, ASCT has raised $16 million and awarded about 10,000 scholarships to children from low-income families who have attended more than 125 private schools throughout Arizona. We adhere to the letter of state law, provide scholarships exclusively to low-income families, do not accept recommendations/designations for specific children, are not faith-based, conduct independent audits, have school choice experts on our board of directors, and are regularly defended by the Institute for Justice. ASCT strives to be the ‘gold standard,’ for school choice in Arizona.”

Sarah McIntosh (mcintosh.sarah@gmail.com) teaches constitutional law and American politics at Wichita State University in Kansas.

Tuition Tax Credit Saves Arizona Taxpayers Money

By Sarah McIntosh

For the past several months the Arizona media has reported extensively on the state’s tuition tax credit programs, characterizing them as rife with abuse and a lack of accountability. The investigative stories spurred the state legislature to investigate.

According to testimony presented in those hearings, the tax credit program saves the state millions of dollars each year.

In a November hearing, Baylor University economics professor Charles North told the Arizona legislature taxpayers save “somewhere between $99.8 million to $241.5 million due to students enrolling in private rather than public schools.”

Since 1997, Arizona law has allowed individuals to receive income tax credits for donations made to school tuition organizations (STOs). STOs must allocate at least 90 percent of their revenue each year to education scholarships to K-12 schools of choice. The program allows up to a $500 tax credit for individuals, $1,000 for those filing jointly.

Program Saves Money

“The program saves money for Arizona taxpayers because it likely reduces enrollment in public schools—enough to more than make up for the revenue given up via the tax credits,” North explains. “The amount of savings can only be estimated based on assumptions, because there are not good enough data available to do a thorough statistical analysis. Thus, how much will be saved depends on one’s assumptions about the number of students who would be in public schools but for the tax credit scholarship program.”

To calculate the savings, North assumed half of the students currently receiving scholarships from heavily need-oriented STOs would otherwise be educated in public schools, as would one-fourth of scholarship recipients from other STOs. Under those circumstances, Arizona taxpayers would be paying approximately $44 million each year, plus $55 million that would not be credited on their taxes.

“I have one daughter in a public school and two daughters in private school,” North says. “So beyond favoring letting people choose what kind of school they wish their children to attend I do not have any massive pro-private school bias.”

Andrew Campanella, spokesperson for the Alliance for School Choice, a national organization headquartered in Washington, DC, hopes the Arizona legislature will take the data into account as it moves forward to close loopholes in the law that have allowed abuses to occur.

“It is no surprise that Arizona’s tax credit program saves money while providing low-income families with opportunities to send their children to some of the best schools in the state,” Campanella said. “It is a win-win-win. A win for families, a win for taxpayers, and a win for state government.”

Sarah McIntosh (mcintosh.sarah@gmail.com) teaches constitutional law and American politics at Wichita State University in Kansas.

Internet Info

Charles M. North, Estimating the Savings to Arizona Taxpayers of the Private School Tuition Tax Credit: http://www.heartland.org/article/26769
Retired Physicist Offers New Education Enterprises

By Virginia Gentles

David Anderson, Ph.D., aspires to reform K-12 education by developing and offering schooling in the for-profit sector.

In 2003, Anderson, a 68-year-old retired physicist who lives in Rhode Island, launched Asora (Asynchronous, Self-paced, Online, Rigorous content, in an Assessment-based curriculum) Education Enterprises, for which he developed Stellar Schools, a self-paced, online instructional model he hopes to franchise. Anderson believes his model can improve schools’ productivity and students’ learning.

“To facilitate the cost-efficient development of such schools,” Anderson says, “there needs to be an economy of scale, which we intend to achieve by developing a franchising or licensing network of schools.”

Converting Data

Anderson designed Stellar Schools to operate in small-school environments, ideally with fewer than 50 students. He believes rural areas and small, religious, private schools, where the number of available students is limited, might benefit the most from the model.

As a high school junior in 1957, Anderson learned physics by watching taped programs taught by Harvey White, a University of California-Berkeley physics professor. That experience—which he now refers to as his time as a distance-learning “guinea pig”—led to Anderson’s career in physics and his current passion for Web-based, individualized instruction.

Thus far, Asora Education Enterprises has been unable to raise the capital needed to launch Stellar Schools, so Anderson has focused on other education endeavors, including testing analysis. Anderson’s primary income comes from the achievement test analysis consulting services he provides.

“We convert inflated public school system achievement test proficiencies from those reported by state educational authorities for localities to ones that are consistent with the Nation’s Report Card, also known as National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP),” Anderson said.

And the Numbers Say ...

Several state-based think tanks have asked Anderson to analyze their states’ data. The analyses consistently show states set their “cut scores” and academic standards significantly lower than NAEP, resulting in test results that artificially inflate their students’ reported proficiency levels.

“The test results claimed by states tend to be double what the NAEP says is proficient,” Anderson said. “My analysis discovered that almost all public school students are below grade level.”

Anderson’s analyses of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont data revealed “the worst schools in urban districts typically have less than 5 percent of their students proficient. The best schools in the best districts rarely have more than 60 percent of their students proficient.”

To raise proficiency levels legitimately, Anderson recommends using testing regimens consistent with NAEP. He also recommends using retention persistently to place each child appropriately and avoid “social promotion”—the practice of passing a child to the next grade level to keep up with his peers when his academic work indicates he would be better served by being held back.

Anderson believes the NAEP’s credibility comes from its almost 40-year track record and its use of National Assessment Governing Board-approved content standards. NAEP tests and reports state-level proficiencies for 4th and 8th grades. For 12th grade students, NAEP reports only at the national level. Anderson has analyzed testing data for seven states.

Great Minds

Anderson takes pride in a letter he received from the late Milton Friedman in 2003 responding to his Stellar Schools proposal.

“You and I are certainly singing the same tune,” the Nobel Prize-winning economist wrote, but he cautioned Anderson not to be overly optimistic about succeeding.

Anderson is blunt about his company’s limited success so far. “Asora’s only marketable assets are its achievement test analysis work and maybe its registered trademark,” he explained. “The business plan for Asora’s Stellar Schools currently requires upwards of $30 million to bring the schools to a profitable status after four years. This is a large amount of capital for a company with no experience running schools or running online instructional systems.”

While he remains dedicated to the Stellar Schools concept, Anderson intends to focus on other endeavors in the meantime.

Virginia Gentles (virginigentles@gmail.com) writes from Virginia. She previously served in the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation and Improvement and led Florida’s school choice office.
Michigan’s Sweeping Changes Omit Tenure Reform

By Kyla King

Legislation signed into law by Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) on January 5 promises sweeping education reform in Michigan, but some local lawmakers say it falls short of the goal of helping schools get rid of ineffective teachers.

State Sen. Patty Birkholz (R-Sagatuck Township) said she was disappointed by the failure of a bill she sponsored that would have changed the Teacher Tenure Act to allow schools to move more quickly and spend less money to remove problematic teachers.

Birkholz’s efforts faced intense resistance from teacher unions. This ultimately led to a compromise that inserted language into the reform package authorizing the state to change its school code to link individual teachers to individual student performance, which administrators can use as a guide to make tenure decisions.

“I think it had more teeth under my proposal,” said Birkholz. “But having it in the school code is certainly a major step forward for Michigan.”

Deeply Rooted Problem

A Grand Rapids Press investigation in 2008 illustrated how difficult it is to discipline or fire teachers under Michigan’s tenure law. The probe found 17 public school districts in Kent and Ottawa counties had to use buyouts or other deals to oust some 29 teachers—many of whom were protected by tenure—because of behavioral problems. In the investigation, teachers were found to be:
• sexually harassing students;
• viewing pornography on school computers;
• failing to keep classrooms under control; and
• drinking on the job.

In some cases, districts glossed over problems by shredding evidence, asking administrators not to speak about the reasons behind a departure or writing a positive letter of recommendation for the teacher. State Sen. Wayne Kuipers (R-Holland) said Birkholz faced an uphill battle in changing the Tenure Act.

“The teachers union put up enough roadblocks to [getting these reforms] and this was just one we couldn’t overcome,” Kuipers said.

Fighting for Funding

The education reform package, approved in the legislature December 19, is intended to bring some of the $400 million in federal Race to the Top funds to Michigan and will allow for public school takeovers, raise the dropout age, expand charter schools, and change teacher merit pay, among other things.

Doug Pratt, spokesman for the Michigan Education Association, which represents most public school teachers in West Michigan, said the language inserted in the school code was lifted straight from federal guidelines for capturing some of the funding.

“It’s what’s necessary to put Michigan in a good position to compete for those funds,” Pratt said. “It’s really what we had to do in order to compete.”

Despite his frustrations, Kuipers said the package met the goal of significantly changing the education system in Michigan.

“It’s easy to focus on what we didn’t get, but what we did get was very impactful,” Kuipers said.

Kyla King (kking@grpress.com) is a staff writer at The Grand Rapids Press, where a previous version of this story appeared December 24, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

A Lively Account of Fluoridation and its Discontents

Since its first implementation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1945, public drinking water fluoridation and its attendant conflicts, controversies, and conspiracy theories serve as an object lesson in American science, public health, and policymaking. In addition to the arguments on the issue still raging today, the tale of fluoridation and its discontents also resonates with such present concerns as genetically modified foods, global warming response, nuclear power, and environmental regulation.

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- Case studies of various cities and their experiences with municipal water fluoridation initiatives
- Fluorophobia and popular conspiracy theories involving fluoride
- The colorful characters in the debate including activists, scientists, magicians, and politicians

Purchase your copy at www.amazon.com today!

A richly and considerately told tale of American science and public life, The Fluoride Wars offers an engrossing history to both interested general readers and specialists in public health, dentistry, policymaking, and related fields.
**Teacher Turnover Rate May Not Truly Reflect Job Market**

By Karen Welsh

North Carolina’s latest Teacher Turnover Report revealed 12.72 percent of teachers statewide left their classrooms between March 2008 and March 2009.

That figure is down from 13.85 percent in 2007-08 and is well below the national teacher turnover of 16.8 percent reported by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future.

With some teachers retiring and others relocating to other schools outside their districts but within the state, the numbers may be even lower, said John Locke Foundation Education Policy Analyst Terry Stoops.

“They don’t take enough into consideration,” Stoops said. “I don’t feel the turnover rate is as much of a problem as [school officials] say.”

**Inflated Stats**

While the turnover rate might seem high, school officials say statistics don’t tell the whole story. In small, rural districts a few retirements or reassignments might inflate turnover in a misleading way.

Take the rural Jones County Public School System. It had the state’s highest rate of teacher loss, 25.69 percent, or 28 out of 109 teachers during the reported time period.

Jones County School Superintendent Michael Bracy said the initial numbers in the report were deceptive, however, as six teachers moved to nonteaching positions, three retired, and one was a formerly retired teacher who had returned to the classroom but hadn’t intended to stay for a long time.

“In a nutshell, 10 of the 28 were very valid moves,” Bracy said. “Without those 10 in the mix, we would have been at a 16.5 percent loss and it would have been an average year for us.”

**Developing Staff**

The district often suffers chronic loss of instructors because of an inordinately high number of transient teachers on staff, said Otis Small, executive director of human resources and accountability for the district.

“Many of our teachers are married to military personnel from Camp LeJeune in Jacksonville and Cherry Point in Havelock,” Small said. “When their spouse’s tour is up, they have to leave.”

Despite the constant need to refresh the teaching staff, Bracy said Jones County Public School students continue to do well in the classroom and on the Adequate Yearly Progress tests. That in itself is attracting teachers to the remote rural school district.

“Our data is showing we are a hidden jewel,” Bracy said. “We have smaller class sizes and more personalized support. Teachers actually want to come here and teach in the district. We are doing well in achievement. Success breeds success.”

**Ongoing Issue**

Still, the yearly teacher turnover reports are cited as justification for taxpayer-funded programs to provide incentives for recent college graduates to enter teaching, even if there are more educators looking for work than there are openings in the most desirable urban centers and suburbs.

Alisa Chapman, associate vice president of academic planning and university-school programs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said the “revolving door” of teachers in the state continues to be a “phenomenal problem,” especially in middle and secondary school mathematics, science, and special-education departments.

“Approximately one-third of the teaching workforce changes each year,” Chapman said. “We have a persistent and very high teacher turnover rate. With 2,400 schools and almost 100,000 teachers, it’s a complex puzzle to put together.

... The public university system is taking an active role to shore up our public education system’s supply and demand of teachers.”

One program, created by the General Assembly in 1986 as a way to prevent teacher loss, is the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program. Each year the program provides 500 high school seniors a $6,500 annual scholarship if they promise to teach at least four years after college graduation in a licensed, full-time teaching position in North Carolina.

**Working the Program**

While the report shows the highest teacher turnover rates occur in rural counties, many of the Teaching Fellows Program graduates are unable or unwilling to relocate to the more-isolated school districts. Though not all new teachers want to live in rural areas, Program Administrator Jo Ann Norris said graduates have to do all they can to find a teaching job in the state.

“They repay their promissory note through teaching, and they have to be willing to make a good-faith effort to go where the jobs are,” Norris said. “That’s the way the program works.”

One rural school district where turnover is not a problem is the state’s second smallest: Camden County, which lost only one of its 134 teachers from March 2008 to March 2009.

“We’ve been fortunate over the last several years to have an excellent teacher retention rate,” said Camden County Public School Superintendent Ron Melchiore. “Our staff does a tremendous job to achieve this.”

Paula Mickey, Camden County’s director of personnel and community schools, said the district’s new employee orientation, teaching mentors, and accountability programs offer new teachers a sense of well-being, employment satisfaction, and stability within the system. Camden County is reaping the benefits of the program.

“There is longevity of our teachers, and that not only benefits the students but the entire system. When people are in place and they’re not moving around, they become stronger teachers, and that makes for better classrooms and [better] results.”

**Paula Mickey, Director of Personnel and Community Schools**

**Camden County, North Carolina**

“**There is longevity of our teachers, and that not only benefits the students but the entire system. When people are in place and they’re not moving around, they become stronger teachers, and that makes for better classrooms and [better] results.**”

Karen Welsh (writeaway777@hawaii.rr.com) is a contributor to Carolina Journal, published by the John Locke Foundation in Raleigh, where a previous version of this story appeared. Reprinted with permission.
By Karla Dial

Dan Gaby, who in 1999 founded the New Jersey group Excellent Education for Everyone, passed away December 10 at the age of 75.

Gaby, a lifelong Democrat, sought a U.S. Senate seat in 1972 and was the New Jersey state chairman for Jimmy Carter’s election campaigns in both 1976 and 1980. But of all the jobs he held over the course of his life, he considered leading the charge for school choice to be the most important, said E3 Interim Director Derrell Bradford.

“One thing Dan used to always say is true: The school choice fight is really a proxy in the battle for the heart and soul of the Democratic Party,” said Bradford, who worked closely with Gaby from 2002 until his death. “His strategy was all about inflaming that conflict, making it visible, and helping the parents and children who are forced to attend these [under-performing schools] understand their interests weren’t being served. The fact that Dan lived to see Chris Christie elected [as New Jersey governor]—a Republican who campaigned on school choice in cities, who was unafraid of it—speaks volumes about Dan’s heart and soul for the Democratic Party,” Bradford said.

Bradford said E3 will announce the hiring of E3 Interim Director Derrell Bradford. "One thing Dan used to always say is true: The school choice fight is really a proxy in the battle for the heart and soul of the Democratic Party," said Bradford, who worked closely with Gaby from 2002 until his death. “His strategy was all about inflaming that conflict, making it visible, and helping the parents and children who are forced to attend these [under-performing schools] understand their interests weren’t being served. The fact that Dan lived to see Chris Christie elected [as New Jersey governor]—a Republican who campaigned on school choice in cities, who was unafraid of it—speaks volumes about Dan’s strategy, the courage of the governor, and the importance of this moment.”

Heartland Institute President Joe Bast said Gaby’s loss is palpable. More than 600 people attended his December 17 memorial service. “Dan Gaby was an overachiever, a brilliant man who had successful careers in public relations and politics and who could have done anything, or nothing, in his retirement. We are blessed that he chose school choice,” Bast said. “We’ll all miss him, and redouble our efforts to make his dream of universal school choice come true.”

Bradford said E3 will announce the hiring of a new executive director by the end of February.

Karla Dial (kdial@heartland.org) is managing editor of School Reform News.
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<td>202/466-3801</td>
<td><a href="http://www.alec.org">www.alec.org</a></td>
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<td>9900 Main Street #303 Fairfax, VA 22031</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.getliberty.org">http://www.getliberty.org</a></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.americansforprosperity.org">http://www.americansforprosperity.org</a></td>
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<td>954/202-3512</td>
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<td>212/752-4041</td>
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<td>Council for American Private Education</td>
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<td>301/916-8485</td>
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<td>Edison Schools</td>
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<td>212/309-1600</td>
<td>212/309-1604</td>
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<td>Education Intelligence Agency</td>
<td>P.O. Box 580007 Elk Grove, CA 95758</td>
<td>916/422-4373</td>
<td>916/392-1482</td>
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<td>Fight for Children</td>
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<td>First Freedoms Foundation, Inc.</td>
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<td>Home Schooling Legal Defense Association</td>
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<td>National Center for Policy Analysis</td>
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<td>214/386-1900</td>
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<td>889/774-2999</td>
<td>889/774-2951</td>
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<td>503/364-1490</td>
<td>503/364-2827</td>
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<td>National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation</td>
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<td>703/321-9613</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partners Advancing Choice in Education (PACE)</td>
<td>1315 North Main Street Dayton, OH 45405</td>
<td>937/279-0957</td>
<td>937/279-0976</td>
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<td>Partnership for Choice in Education</td>
<td>Minnesota Family Council 2855 Anthony Lane South #150 Minneapolis, MN 55418-3265</td>
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<td>651/293-9285</td>
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<td>Reason Public Policy Institute</td>
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