Second of Five NCLB Bills Backs Charters, Moves Forward

By Jim Waters

As part of their piecemeal approach toward reauthorizing No Child Left Behind, congressional Republicans are getting support from Democrats for modifying part of the dominant federal education law to encourage states to develop and expand high-quality charter schools.

The House Education and the Workforce Committee voted 34–5 to move The Empowering Parents through Quality Charter Schools Act (HR 2218) forward for a floor vote. The bill could make it easier for the 400,000 students currently on charter school waitlists nationwide to get a seat in a school started by a proven, high-quality operator.

The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), “will help get the government out of the way of local innovation,” said committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN).

NCLB, p. 7

Calif. Nears Final ‘Parent Trigger’ Rules

By Ben Boychuk

California’s State Board of Education is on track to approve final, permanent regulations governing the state’s landmark Parent Trigger law at its September meeting.

The state board on July 13 voted to approve the latest version of the rules, circulating the draft for another 15-day public comment period. The September vote is expected to be a formality.

Under the 2010 parent empowerment law, if at least half of eligible parents at a persistently failing school sign a petition requesting reform, the school district must undertake one of several prescribed “intervention models.” For example, parents may convert the school district to a charter or charter school under the control of a proven high-quality operator.

Calif. Nears Final ‘Parent Trigger’ Rules, p. 6

Wis. Voucher Program Expands

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker signed a bill extending Milwaukee’s vouchers to the entire county and a neighboring one, potentially doubling enrollment in the program over three years.

Wis. Voucher Program Expands, p. 4

Colo. Likes Teacher Evaluation

So many school districts have signed up for Colorado’s pilot teacher evaluation program that the state department of education has had to make room.

Colo. Likes Teacher Evaluation, p. 5

Utah OKs Digital Learning

The state has enacted the first “high-quality” digital learning law, expanding providers and opportunities—but schools are still waiting for explicit guidelines.

Utah OKs Digital Learning, p. 11

U.S. Funds for Health Centers

The Department of Health and Human Services rolled out funds from the 2010 health care law for school health centers, but the cost could turn out to be huge.

U.S. Funds for Health Centers, p. 9

Students Learn Economics

The Foundation for Teaching Economics estimates it has reached 43 million students by offering teachers free seminars on the basics of economic thought.

Students Learn Economics, p. 13
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Presented by the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, Florida Department of Education
New Accountability System in the Works for Wisconsin Schools

By Alice Constant

Wisconsin parents will have more ways to evaluate schools and their children’s academic progress under a new accountability initiative proposed by Gov. Scott Walker (R) and Tony Evers, state superintendent of public instruction.

The proposed system will measure students’ academic improvement year-over-year instead of compiling only annual test scores. It also will track which schools offer advanced coursework and dual enrollment for college credit or industry certifications earned in high school.

Every publicly funded school—traditional public schools, charter schools, and private schools that participate in Wisconsin’s recently expanded voucher program—will be required to participate, said Cullen Werwie, Walker’s spokesperson.

Evers called the state’s current system, created under No Child Left Behind provisions, “broken, one-size-fits-all accountability.” Wisconsin will seek approval from the U.S. Department of Education for the plan to ensure it remains compatible with NCLB.

Measuring Achievement

The current Wisconsin Adequate Yearly Progress Report focuses on graduation rates, attendance, and test scores in reading, math, and special education. The current database isn’t difficult to access, but the data aren’t self-explanatory.

“Consider a high-poverty school that moves its eighth-graders, who were previously reading at a fourth-grade level, to a seventh-grade reading level in one year—a tremendous achievement,” reads a letter in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel signed by Walker, Evers, and a number of state legislators and school associations. “Our current federally mandated accountability system, which doesn’t recognize growth as an important factor in school success, would actually label that school as failing.”

Alan Borsuk, a senior fellow in law and public policy at Milwaukee’s Marquette University Law School, said the state standardized test is “not highly respected by just about anybody across the spectrum.

“Wisconsin took one of the most ‘creative’ approaches in the country to find ways to avoid the consequences of [NCLB],” Borsuk said. These included setting low standards for initial years and unrealistically hiking achievement standards closer to 2014, the law’s target date for 100 percent student proficiency.

Enabling Informed Choice

Later this summer a panel chaired by Walker and Evers will evaluate public feedback and outline details of the system, which they hope to finish by the 2011–12 school year. Although the methods of evaluation and distribution haven’t been determined, Werwie said, the panel might create a Web site and send emails or mail letters to parents rating the schools in their area. Schools could receive a letter grade (A through F) or some other performance indicator.

The state will model its system after the “Roadmap for Next Generation Accountability Systems,” released in June by the nonpartisan Council of Chief State School Officers. The roadmap encourages states to reward high-performing schools with recognition, funding, or more flexibility.

“Ideally, we want to communicate with parents … so that when they’re enrolling their children, they’re able to evaluate the quality of the education in the various institutions in their community,” Werwie said.

Borsuk said better data should decrease the number of parents who choose to send their children to poor-performing schools.

“In an ideal world, parents would be tuned in to making careful, conscientious, well-researched choices. In the real world that doesn’t happen nearly as often as you wish it did,” Borsuk said.

He said although most voucher schools are excellent or average, some are “by any outside examination, pretty terrible.”

Political Rifts Remain

Although some private choice schools objected to the proposed reporting mandate, Borsuk said initial opposition “faded” after the primary state advocacy group, School Choice Wisconsin, signed on.

“I think people realize now that if you’re taking public money, there’s a pretty good argument for why you have to report publicly how you’re doing,” Borsuk said.

The state’s largest teachers’ union, the Wisconsin Education Association Council, declined to sign on the plan.

WEAC clashed earlier this year with Walker’s successful proposals to limit collective bargaining for some state workers and cut the state’s education budget by $800 million to help close a $3.6 billion shortfall.

Borsuk said it is “encouraging” that the state superintendent, who also stood against Walker’s budgeting restrictions and vouchers expansion, is working with the governor on the accountability plan.

“There’s a thousand ways this could turn out to be inconsequential,” Borsuk said. “The state political situation is still so fractured and emotional. That kind of politics could easily intervene and disrupt efforts.”

Alicia Constant (alicia.constant289@gmail.com) is a freelance journalist.
Walker Signs Largest Choice Expansion in Wis. History

By Joy Pullmann

The oldest voucher program in the nation is expanding to two southern Wisconsin counties now that Gov. Scott Walker (R) has signed the state budget. At least 22 schools have indicated interest in accepting voucher students this fall, and more plan to accept voucher students in fall 2012.

The 2011-13 budget included a provision expanding the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, originally aimed at city students only, to Milwaukee and Racine counties. The Milwaukee program, currently capped at 22,500 students, will no longer cap enrollment. The Racine program will be capped at 250 students in the first year, 500 in the second, and uncapped in the third and following years. About 21,000 students attend Racine public schools.

“Wisconsin can once again be a national symbol of education excellence by empowering parents to make decisions regarding their children’s education through providing the opportunity to access quality public, private, and charter schools,” Walker’s press secretary, Cullen Werwie, said. “It is important that students and their achievements come before defending the educational status quo.”

Contentious Debate

Voucher recipients may take their education money to any state-accredited school. The vouchers will be worth up to $6,442 and available to families at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, that’s an annual income of $66,150, an increase over the previous eligibility limit of $39,113 for the same family.

To receive a voucher, a student must have spent the past two semesters in a Wisconsin public school or be entering kindergarten, first grade, or ninth grade. The state spends approximately $9,000 per pupil in traditional public schools. Last year, the Milwaukee city vouchers program saved the state about $50 million.

No Democrats voted for the budget—the legislative session teemed with raucous disputes over Walker’s agenda, including its limits to collective bargaining and requiring state employees, including teachers, to pay 5.8 percent toward their pensions and 12 percent of their health care benefits.

During negotiations, protestors chained themselves near the state capitol, shook pictures of Walker as Hitler and a “dead man,” and stood during committee meetings to disrupt proceedings until police hauled them away.

Community Response Positive

State representatives’ offices, however, have heard mostly positive feedback from voters in Racine and Milwaukee districts.

“That’s been in the media, but I haven’t taken any calls saying ‘I can’t believe you did this,’” said Kit Beyer, spokeswoman for state Rep. Robin Vos. (R-Rochester), co-chair of the Joint Committee on Finance. Vos represents part of Racine.

“One woman was calling to thank us, saying her older child goes to a private school and she can’t wait to have that opportunity for her other children. We received a call today saying, ‘I want to write a letter to the editor because I’m so excited,’” Beyer recounted.

The response was similar from state Sen. Alberta Darling’s (R-River Hills) office. Darling’s district includes part of Milwaukee and Darling, a former teacher, chairs the Senate Finance Committee.

“We don’t hear too much about it,” said Darling’s spokesman, Bob Delaporte. “People are used to the program, and I haven’t heard too many complaints.”

Public School Funding Stable

In Wisconsin, when a public school loses a student, the school still receives state funding for the child for the next two years. The school loses a third of the child’s funding in the first year, two-thirds in the second year, and all in the third year. That, combined with the enrollment caps in the first two years for the Racine vouchers expansion, will likely make for an initially small impact on public schools, Delaporte said.

Despite losing 20 percent of its enrollment in the past decade, MPS’s budget is bigger than ever, and the district is not cutting jobs, said Jay Greene, head of the Education Reform Department at the University of Arkansas. Greene has issued several reports on Milwaukee’s voucher program.

Students in the Milwaukee vouchers program are 18 percent more likely to graduate high school. Various studies of the program have shown small reading and mathematics gains for both Milwaukee choice and public school students as a result of the program. Seventy-one percent of Milwaukee parents approve of vouchers, and 53 percent support offering them to all Milwaukee students.

Joy Pullmann (jpullmann@heartland.org) is managing editor of School Reform News.

Bargaining Limits

Save Millions

By Alicia Constant

Sixty-seven of Wisconsin’s 424 school districts have reported saving more than $140 million in total by collectively negotiating only salaries under Gov. Scott Walker’s (R) bargaining limits enacted earlier this year.

More than 150 districts rushed to conclude contract negotiations before the law took effect. Taxpayers would have saved more than $451 million if those districts had taken advantage of the new law, estimated Wisconsin’s MacIver Institute for Public Policy.

To address a $3 billion state deficit, Walker cut state funding for school budgets by $555 per student.

“We could see [financial difficulty] was coming and did not have to make many reductions this year,” said William Hughes, superintendent of the Greendale School District, which saved about $3 million in health costs this year thanks to the new negotiating flexibility.

“But next year we’ll be struggling like a lot of districts.”

Many Wisconsin teachers will now contribute 12.6 percent of their salaries to health insurance and 5.8 percent to pensions. The law also allowed districts to net more work per salary: Teachers in the Kaukauna School District, for example, must work 40 hours per week instead of 37.5.

Alicia Constant (alicia.constant289@gmail.com) is a freelance journalist.
By Stephanie McGill

Forty-one school districts volunteered to participate in Colorado’s statewide teacher evaluation pilot program this fall, an unusual response given tepid enrollment in similar programs in other states, including New Jersey and Virginia.

Program officials said the response caught them off guard in light of strident opposition from state teacher unions and the lack of federal funding.

“We are surprised and extremely pleased,” said Toby King, senior education evaluation consultant at the Colorado Department of Education. The state originally planned for six to eight school districts to inform them of the coming changes, King said. “But now [teachers] are highly qualified and don’t have the outcome we expected.”

Low funding, among other factors, separates Colorado’s pilot programs from similar state pilots, most of which have found anemic response. Colorado lost its bid for federal grants supporting evaluation programs in 2010 using Race to the Top funds, which Maryland, Pennsylvania, and other states received.

The state board will give its recommendations on final program structure after responses are in from districts participating this fall in the pilot program. Spence estimates statewide implementation will not occur before 2014.

Stephanie McGill (stephymcgill@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.

Colo. School Districts Swarm Teacher Evaluation Pilot

A lot of other programs only focus on teacher behavior and not the student’s behavior. LEAP focuses on both.”

AMY SKINNER
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER
DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

program and other reforms progressed, Colorado’s DOE worked closely with school districts to inform them of the

Part of Nationwide Trend
In spring 2010 a similar evaluation program began in the Denver Public Schools. LEAP (Leading Effective Academic Practice) developed its approach by examining other teaching programs across the country, said Amy Skinner, a DPS communications manager.

“A lot of other programs only focus on teacher behavior and not the student’s behavior,” Skinner said. “LEAP focuses on both.”

The evaluation programs reflect a nationwide move toward improving education effectiveness.

“In the past, education has been about quality, which has been good,” King said. “But now [teachers] are highly qualified and don’t have the outcome we expected.”

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California Nears Final Regulations on ‘Parent Trigger’

Continued from page 1

into an independent charter, which would operate with greater autonomy and fewer regulations.

Other options include closing the school and allowing students to enroll in a higher-performing public school nearby or implementing the “turnaround” and “transformation” models set forth under Race to the Top, the Obama administration’s education reform program, which include replacing staff, extending school hours, and revising the curriculum.

No Teacher Union Veto

The most controversial language of the enabling regulations was removed from the final draft. Under one version of the proposed language the board discussed in April, parents seeking to convert a school into an independent charter would have been required to obtain approval from at least half the school’s teachers.

Representatives from the California Teachers Association argued the section of the state education code establishing the Parent Trigger did not amend the state’s charter school law, which requires teacher signatures for charter conversions but not startups.

Board President Michael Kirst quickly dismissed the union’s objections.

“It’s called the parent empowerment act, not the teacher empowerment act, for a reason,” Kirst said.

Former state senator Gloria Romero, the Los Angeles Democrat who authored the Parent Trigger legislation in 2010, said a legislative counsel’s opinion left no doubt that her law did not require teachers’ approval or allow for a union veto.

“There is no need for parents to ask for permission from somebody else to improve their children’s education,” she said.

‘Clear Guidelines’

The permanent regulations spell out how parents may gather and submit signatures and what school districts may—and may not—to verify petitions and implement reforms.

The state and local districts must announce when a school becomes eligible for the “trigger.” The California Department of Education will create a Web site offering more information on parent rights in the process, including a sample petition, translated materials, and more information on the turnaround options available.

Signature gatherers must disclose if they are paid, and they may not be paid per signature. The rules also bar districts from using school resources to oppose a petition drive.

Gabe Rose, deputy director of the Los Angeles-based Parent Revolution, which vigorously supported the Parent Trigger law, praised the regulations.

“There are always compromises, but these regulations give parents everything they need to organize,” Rose said. “They present clear guidelines to parents and to districts. Parents will be able to organize free from harassment. Districts will be able to comply with the law and avoid lawsuits.”

Parent Revolution last year helped parents in the south-central Los Angeles city of Compton circulate petitions to convert McKinley Elementary School into a charter school. A Los Angeles superior court judge in June ruled the petitions were invalid because they did not have a date box.

Parent Unions Proliferate

If the board approves the final rules in September, the regulations will go to the state Office of Administrative Law for final vetting and publication.

A spokeswoman for the California Department of Education could not say with certainty when the rules would take full effect, or when the Web site listing schools eligible under the law and offering model petitions for parents to download would be available.

Rose says his organization is not waiting for the final regulations to begin organizing “parent unions” across the state to mount petition drives. He says groups are forming in Pasadena, Carson, Lynwood, San Diego, Central Valley, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

“People are learning how to organize,” Rose said. “Once [the new school year] rolls around, we’ll see a lot more happening.”

Texas Taxpayer Savings Grants Halted in House Committee

By Brooke Terry

Despite a $4 billion education budget gap, the Texas legislature closed its 30-day special session without considering a bill that would have saved the state $2 billion.

House Bill 33, by state Rep. Sid Miller (R-Stephenville), would have created “Taxpayer Savings Grants” of up to $5,200 for Texas public school students.

The chairman of the House Committee on Government Efficiency and Reform never allowed the bill a committee vote, citing committee member concerns about voting on a tough bill they doubted would pass the Senate. Miller said the legislature’s solid Republican majority would likely have passed HB 33 if given the chance.

The grants would pay 60 percent of state average per-student spending or the full tuition, whichever was less, for students transferring to private schools. The other 40 percent of the funding would have remained in the state’s education budget for students still in public schools.

“The coalition supporting Taxpayer Savings Grants will not give up the fight,” said JoAnn Fleming, chair of the legislature’s Tea Party advisory committee. “Texas parents and schoolchildren deserve choice in education, and we as taxpaye,r cannot afford to ignore their cost savings.”

Brooke Terry (brookedterry@gmail.com) writes from Texas.
Continued from page 1

Congress is four years late on its scheduled NCLB reauthorization. The law’s current version demands 100 percent proficiency of the nation's schools by 2014, a target states have long said they cannot meet. Idaho and Montana recently announced they will ignore the law’s requirements this year, and Education Secretary Arne Duncan started a tempest by saying he plans to grant states waivers of the law’s requirements in return for unspecified education policy changes the Obama administration favors.

Streamline Funding, More Flexibility
HR 2218 is the second in a series of five bills Kline plans for reauthorizing NCLB. In May the committee passed the Setting New Priorities in Education Spending Act, which would repeal more than 40 of NCLB’s inactive, ineffective, or duplicative programs. The 23–16 committee vote for that measure split strictly along party lines, with Republicans supporting it and Democrats opposing.

In addition to consolidating several federal charter funding streams into state-level grants that would allow more flexibility in awarding grants for charter school start-ups, HR 2218 provides funding for expanding high-quality charters. Currently, charter operators can get federal grants only for opening new schools, not for expanding existing ones that have proven successful.

The measure also calls for “proper monitoring of authorizers and charter schools in the state” and expands the grant period from three to five years to ensure sufficient time for schools to stabilize.

“Done right, charter school authorizing creates and maintains a space for charters to succeed or fail on their own merit, protecting them from political agendas and special-interest demands,” said David Hansen, vice president of policy and advocacy for the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.

Assistance Acquiring Facilities
Hunter’s bill frees funds from two existing but little-used grant programs to assist charter schools in acquiring facilities and gives funding priority to states that ensure funding for charters equals that for traditional public schools, said Don Soifer, executive vice president of the Lexington Institute, a nonpartisan think tank.

“Securing viable and affordable facilities to house charters remains one of their greatest challenges in most constituencies nationally,” Soifer said. Charters usually receive less funding per pupil than traditional public schools, and no facilities money.

Soifer said he expects Hunter’s “very thoughtful approach” to encourage state and local policymakers to equalize funding, but he notes Washington’s ability to bring change is limited.

“The best resolutions are going to be different in different states and cities, depending on how the laws differ on who owns and controls buildings,” he said.

Encouragement to Loosen Caps
HR 2218 gives funding priority to states that agree to repeal caps on the number or percentage of charters or students who may attend them.

Also, states that allow more than an educational agency to authorize charters, provide financing to charters comparable to traditional public schools, support either full-blending or hybrid-online charter models, and use charters to improve struggling schools would move to the front of the line when seeking federal charter funds.

Supporters say removing bureaucratic obstacles, implementing innovative funding streams, and including rigorous evaluation requirements will improve the nation’s public education system by reducing the federal footprint and encouraging high-quality charter schools.

But how states administer the legislation’s provisions will “really make the greatest difference in the legislation’s overall effort being positive or negative,” Soifer said.

Soifer praised Hunter for understanding “the closer education decisions are made to home, the greater the likelihood they will benefit students.”

Jim Waters (jwaters@freedomkentucky.com) is vice president of policy and communications at the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions.
DC Fires 5 Percent of Teachers for Poor Performance

By Cheryl K. Chumley

Five percent of the District of Columbia’s teaching staff received pink slips in mid-July after a newly implemented assessment program classified them as poor performers.

Most city school districts, which routinely appear at the bottom of national test score rankings, fire fewer than 1 percent of their teachers in a given year. The DC program, called IMPACT and introduced in 2009 by then-chancellor Michelle Rhee, outlines expectations for employees and holds them accountable via ongoing feedback in five scheduled sessions throughout the school year.

One expectation is that students will score well on required achievement tests; another, that teachers will manage classroom time wisely and tailor instruction to meet varying student needs.

Leading the Way

The District of Columbia is leading the way for other districts with this type of evaluation system, said Frederick Hess, director of education policy at the American Enterprise Institute.

“We do see other districts now trying to do this,” Hess said. “How effective DC is will have an effect on what the rest of the nation does.”

Roughly 6,500 of the District’s employees are evaluated by the IMPACT method, which assesses employees with four ratings: highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or ineffective. Approximately 4,100 of the affected employees are members of the Washington Teachers’ Union, and of that number some 3,400 are teachers, according to DC Public Schools.

The latest assessment resulted in the July 15 firing of 413 union employees, 206 of whom were teachers, for poor performance.

206 of whom were teachers, for poor performance.

Duncan’s Plan to Waive NCLB Meets Backlash

By Jim Waters

Since Congress has not yet reauthorized No Child Left Behind, Education Secretary Arne Duncan says he will waive some of the federal education law’s penalties for states that adopt measures the administration supports, such as overhauling the worst schools and linking teacher evaluations to student test scores.

NCLB grants the secretary power to issue waivers, but not in exchange for states adopting policies.

Rep. John Kline (R-MN), chair of the House Education Committee, sent Duncan a letter demanding he outline his waiver authority. Duncan responded, quoting NCLB and mentioning growing distress among states that cannot meet the law’s requirements, but he offered no further specifics.

Kline said his committee plans to reauthorize NCLB by the end of the year.

Duncan is “overstepping his statutory authority in order to push the administration’s education priorities,” said Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

Most states established student proficiency targets along a curve, with lower benchmarks early on and steep jumps later, expecting Congress to change NCLB before 2014’s requirements for full proficiency kicked in.

“The states are looking now that the law is ‘punitive’ because they’re not reaching the goals they themselves set,” said Sandy Kress, an education attorney and former Bush administration official. “If they’d stop asking for federal money, I’d be totally sympathetic with their cry for relief.”

Jim Waters (jwaters@freedomkentucky.com) is vice president of policy and communications at the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions.

[IMPACT] very aggressively during development,” Hess said. “But they had limited influence because in DC teacher assessments do fall under the domain of the chancellor.”

The program includes an extensive support system. DC teachers have more than 150 mentors and 45 master educators available to give assistance, plus a library of videos and books with the latest best practices information for teaching the various subjects.

But the core facet of IMPACT is “the structured observation of teachers five times a year, where someone actually comes and sits in the classroom,” Hess said. Many evaluation systems use only one classroom visit, and teachers know visit dates beforehand. “IMPACT is a well-designed system. They spent a couple years forming it.”

Not everyone sees the firings as the direct result of IMPACT’s findings.

“This is a very small percentage of the workforce,” said Susan Burns, program manager for the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University. “I would guess that there is generally that much turnover every year in a school system that large. I would also guess that not all were dismissed for IMPACT issues.”

Turnover and Benefitting Students

The District of Columbia Public Schools’ Web site credits IMPACT with weeding out 113 staffers who received an ‘ineffective’ rating, 175 who were rated “minimally effective” for the second consecutive year, and 104 who failed to meet licensing requirements. Hess agrees some of the 200-plus teachers who were fired may have been let go for reasons other than performance. But in the end, he said, students benefit.

“Obviously, there are imperfections in any program. I’m confident that probably some of those fired weren’t awful,” Hess said. “But DC is hugely focused on helping students and driving proficiency rates, and removing those teachers will have a long-term effect.”

FREDERICK HESS
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION POLICY
AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE
The Department of Health and Human Services announced a federal grant rollout of $95 million to school-based health centers (SBHC) nationwide as part of a provision in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010. That legislation allocated $200 million for SBHC funding between 2010 and 2013.

Originally introduced in the 1970s, SBHCs relied primarily on private and local funding rather than participating in government health programs and receiving government funds. In the past decade, the number of SBHCs has continued to rise, in step with government funding for them. Approximately 1,100 of the centers were open in 2000, and there are about 1,900 today.

**States Pay Operating Expenses**

Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX) practiced medicine in Texas for nearly 30 years before his election to Congress. He worries the spiked SBHC funding will not only deepen the nation’s debt, but further increase states’ financial burdens.

“I’ve supported the concept in the past, but we are up against a really tight spot with the deficit,” Burgess said. “Why in the world would you push an additional $95 million out the front door with obligations if you weren’t sure where the funding was going to come from?”

Although the new federal funding, announced July 14, will support center construction, expansion, and equipment, operating costs must be funded by the states. Texas has 89 SBHCs and will use the new funding to construct more.

“The funding for the construction was mandatory, the funding for a doctor or nurse is discretionary, and in the 2012 budget the president zeroed that discretionary funding,” Burgess said. “We already have overtapped schools, communities, and states.”

**Doubt over Transparency, Outcomes**

SBHCs offer services similar to or sponsored by Medicaid, which costs the nation’s taxpayers about $333 billion a year. Medicaid covers doctor visits, prescription drugs, dental care, eye exams, vaccines, and more, at little or no cost to enrollees.

“Will there be an audit, for lack of a better term, in a year or two, to see how these funds were used, whether they were used, and if not, would there be a way to recapture those funds?” asked Merrill Matthews, a resident scholar at the Institute for Policy Innovation. Matthews said he doubts building funds endanger parents’ rights, but he expresses concern schools may not have to disclose their use of operational funds to taxpayers.

Independent consultant Ellen Kisker worked on one of the earliest studies of SBHCs in the late 1980s. She and her colleagues followed a group of students in 19 schools with such centers, to assess their effectiveness. They compared the students to a national sample of urban youths for changes in sexual activity, contraception use, alcohol and drug use, and academic achievement.

Though the centers increased students’ access to care and health education, Kisker said, they did not result in a statistically significant reduction of risk-taking behaviors that endanger health.

Ashley Bateman (bateman.ae@googlemail.com) writes from Williamsburg, Virginia.
Utah School District Cuts Ties with Teachers Union

By Ben DeGrow

Tough economic times have pushed a Utah school district to end formal bargaining relations with union officers and to draft a new, nonunion contract individual teachers must sign in order to keep their jobs.

On June 28, the board of the Ogden City School District (OCSD) ratified a "common contract" for teachers, formally ending the Ogden Education Association (OEA)'s exclusive right to represent district employees in negotiations for salaries, benefits, and working conditions. The decision ended 15 months of unsuccessful efforts to renegotiate a collective bargaining agreement.

“The sticking point in negotiations was the awarding of steps,” said Ogden Superintendent Noel Zabriskie, referring to automatic pay raises accrued through seniority. “We couldn’t continue using ongoing money for that when there isn’t ongoing money.”

Reconfiguring Contracts

As a preliminary measure, the board set 2011–12 salary increases between seniority-based steps for Ogden teachers at just over 3 percent—such increases previously ranged from 1.7 to 6.3 percent. Facing revenue cuts from the state and committed to avoiding tax increases, the school board has drawn from a rainy-day fund to boost compensation without cutting programs.

The district sent individual contracts to continue employment to all teachers on June 30. Zabriskie said roughly half of the 700 contracts had been signed and returned as of a week before the July 20 deadline.

Union leaders have reacted strongly, organizing several public protests to decry the end of their exclusive bargaining.

“This unprecedented act by the OCSD to bypass collective bargaining and dictate a new contract is stunning, and undermines the positive collaborative relationship teachers have enjoyed with the district for the past several years,” OEA Executive Director Rick Palmer wrote to the local newspaper.

‘A Bold Move’

Utah is one of nine states in which school boards may participate in collective bargaining but are not required to do so, according to the National Right to Work Foundation.

Local policy analysts applauded Ogden officials’ exercise of their legal discretion.

“We think the district is doing a good thing. It’s a bold move,” said Derek Monson, manager of public policy for the Salt Lake City-based Sutherland Institute.

The district is committed to working long-term with teachers to overhaul compensation, the lack of formal collective bargaining relations notwithstanding, Zabriskie said. The school board aims to phase in a full-fledged merit pay system by 2016–17, gradually tying larger shares of teacher salary to performance-based measures.

“We know there are some teachers who do better, and we need to reward that,” Zabriskie said.

Ogden’s superintendent says compensation reform has been a board conversation topic since he began working there five years ago.

Designing Performance Pay

There is a growing consensus that compensation systems should incorporate multiple measures of teacher performance, says Susan Burns, program manager for the National Center on Performance Initiatives at Vanderbilt University.

“It’s important for there to be more than just a test score or a gain score,” Burns said.

Monson said a wide range of reliable measurements can be used in deciding whether to reward classroom instructors, including an established rubric that guides principals’ performance evaluations.

Burns cautions against raising expectations or drawing definitive conclusions about what a policy change like Ogden’s might accomplish. “The solid research around performance pay is very thin,” she said. “A lot more work needs to be done.”

But Monson notes the dominant salary schedule in K-12 education has failed. “The current pay system based on experience and seat time and educational attainments doesn’t necessarily reward [teachers] for performance. It doesn’t lead to good student outcomes,” Monson said.

Students Deserve ‘Quality Education’

OCSD is one of only three of Utah’s 41 school districts that are “minority-majority.” Nearly a quarter of the district’s 12,500 students speak English as a second language, and 74 percent are eligible for federal lunch subsidies because of family poverty.

“They have special difficulties up there that a lot of school districts don’t have,” Monson said. “Those students are in difficult straits in many cases.”

Ogden’s superintendent said pay-for-performance will improve the teaching workforce and lead to improved classroom results.

“Every one of our students is deserving of quality instruction,” Zabriskie said.

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is senior education policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think in Colorado.
Utah Passes First ‘High-Quality’ Digital Learning Law

By Ben DeGrow

Online education providers are embracing Utah’s cutting-edge digital learning law, but they’re struggling for guidance as high school students enrolled in bricks-and-mortar schools sign up for virtual courses this fall.

Gov. Gary Herbert (R) signed Senate Bill 65, the first law in the nation to incorporate all 10 elements of high-quality learning proposed by the Digital Learning Council last year. For the program’s first two years, Utah students enrolled in a traditional or public charter school can take up to two high school-level courses from approved digital providers through the new Statewide Online Education Program (SOEP).

“Utah is leading the nation with a student-centric online policy that empowers parents and students with the ability to choose the course and provider that best meet their individual learning and academic needs,” said Robyn Bagley, board chair of Parents for Choice in Education (PCE), a Salt Lake City-based grassroots group.

‘Dragging Their Feet’

On June 30, more than two months after Herbert signed SB 65, the Utah State Board of Education adopted emergency rules for implementing SOEP. Adopted just before a July 1 deadline, the rules apply until the end of the calendar year, when permanent regulations must be adopted.

“They’re dragging their feet because this is bucking the status quo,” said DeLaina Tonks, director of Open High School of Utah.

Providers say the rules provide insufficient guidance on crucial details, such as how the provider will discover a student has signed up for a class.

“There’s a lot of muddy water here, and I’m not sure who can drop the chlorine into it,” said Laura Belnap, director of the Washington Online program. “It will be an experience to see how this all comes out and gets cleaned up.”

A provider can include any district or charter school that contracts with a private entity or operates its own online program. Students enrolled in private schools and those who are homeschooled can participate starting in the 2013–14 school year.

Shifting Funds, Performance Focus

A student’s home district must pay $726 for each full-year course a student opts to take online. The fiscal impact on local agencies raises concerns among some officials.

“While that’s fine for larger districts, because they can absorb those kinds of costs, charter schools and smaller districts can’t,” said State Board of Education member David Thomas. “They have the same overhead as they would have had before.”

The flat fee will be temporary, though, and providers look forward to a more sophisticated model designed for future years. Tonks said she favors “a tiered system that pays more exact amounts based on what it costs to take the class.”

Funding is also performance-based. Providers will receive half the money up front, and the other half upon the student’s successful completion.

“It shifts the emphasis to student outcomes,” said Michael Horn, executive director of education for the Innosight Institute. “If anything gets in the way of that, policymakers should move fast to correct for the unintended consequences and keep their eye on the students.”

The Utah Electronic High School receives $2 million annually to provide supplemental online courses. Starting in 2012–13, the new funding arrangement means Electronic High must compete with other providers.

Interest Building, Wrinkles to Iron

Washington Online currently serves about 1,000 students statewide with its full-time, publicly funded virtual program. As of late July, approximately 150 students had expressed interest in its new program created by SB 65.

Belnap said students are attracted to digital learning for several reasons, from not wanting to take a course from a particular teacher in their district to wanting to graduate early.

Thomas said the new law’s proscription against students taking free courses beyond the required amount has limited choices in some cases. For example, a student who previously took band and orchestra concurrently while using an online course for physical education now may end up paying a fee.

“That really needs to change for this to be truly successful,” Thomas said.

The Open High School of Utah, which currently serves nearly 400 students in its full-time online charter program, had received about 80 pre-registration inquiries by late July. Most interest from the prospective students has been in Core and Advanced Placement courses. But many students must wait to act until their school counselors return to work in August.

Jetsons vs. Flintstones

Bagley says PCE is engaged in a promotional campaign to make students aware of their new online options for the coming school year.

“The more [Local Education Authorities] who choose to join rather than resist will strengthen the success of the program and likely cause a domino effect encouraging others to do the same,” said Bagley, whose organization is also preparing to defend against anticipated 2012 legislative efforts to roll back SB 65.

As Utah reformers prepare to protect their gains, Horn notes state lawmakers can go further in devising a strong, student-centered blended learning program, especially by focusing on measures of instructional effectiveness.

“They should also think seriously about putting into place strong end-of-course assessments to make sure that incentives for completion are aligned around student needs, and not those of the providers,” said Horn.

Even as Utah struggles over implementation hurdles, Tonks says the state has taken a major step toward shifting the education paradigm.

“This is where Utah paves the way for the Jetsons generation to flourish despite the grumblings from the Flintstones-era crowd,” Tonks said.

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is senior education policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think in Colorado.
Statistics Emphasize Higher Education Cost Swamp

By Stephanie McGill

As at least half the states cut higher education funding in recently concluded legislative sessions, the U.S. Department of Education has released a wealth of college-related data to aid families in college decision-making and boost completion rates.

The data, now online, divide the most expensive 5 percent and least expensive 10 percent of colleges into six types and rank them from highest to lowest in net prices. The data also identify average student expenses and graduation rates by school. Effective this October, the department will require all colleges to post a net price calculator on their Web sites.

Government Pushing Costs Up

The cost focus reflects many Americans’ reluctance to invest time and money in higher education during the recession. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported in-state college tuition and fees rose 32 percent in one year. Fifty-seven percent of students completed college in four years in 2010, the latest data available.

“Tuition prices are rising because they can,” said Richard Vedder, Ph.D., an economics professor at Ohio University. “There are very few incentives to keep them down.”

Tuition rose when the government began paying students’ bills, Vedder said, decreasing price competition among colleges. After K-12 education and health care, higher education is usually the largest item in state budgets.

Richard Brake, director of culture and enterprise at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, attributes rising tuition costs to colleges spending more money on appearances.

“Colleges have to compete for students,” Brake said. “They have had to increase the bells and whistles that come along with the campus.”

College Search Engines

The Pope Center for Higher Education Policy recently created its own college evaluation tool, NCcollegefinder.org. In addition to tuition figures, the site offers information other sites do not, such as campus free speech policies and the difficulty of general education programs.

“One overriding reason for pursuing vocational/technical education and eschewing the traditional four-year trajectory is the recognition of the vocational/technical credential as a ticket to a good job,” said James Stone, president of the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education.

Stone noted many students pursue a technical education because they do not excel in an academic setting. He estimates government funding to technical education will decrease by 11 percent in the next year. Georgetown University’s Center for Education and Work reports 43 percent of graduates from technical and vocational schools earn higher salaries than associate’s degree graduates.

Stephanie McGill (stephymcgill@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.

Make Your Social Studies, Political Science, or Government Class More Dynamic and Fun!

Make your next class come alive with the World’s Smallest Political Quiz – a fast, fun way to measure political beliefs.

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The Quiz asks 10 questions about political issues. Based on the answers, the students learn where they fit on the political map – and they learn about other viewpoints as well. The Quiz has been used in hundreds of high school and college classrooms across America – including Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government.

Created by the non-profit, non-partisan Advocates for Self-Government, the Quiz is a break-through educational tool – which is one of the reasons the Washington Post says: “The Quiz has gained respect as a valid measure of a person’s political leanings.”

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FTE Teaches Economics to Teachers

Program has reached roughly 43 million students

By Emily Johnston

The Foundation for Teaching Economics (FTE) enlivens high school classrooms by educating teachers and demonstrating economic principles through real-life examples. FTE estimates its programs have reached as many as 43 million students in its 20 years.

FTE hosts summer programs for high school seniors, but most of the group’s programs target teachers. Offerings include Economic Forces in American History for history teachers; The Environment and the Economy for multidisciplinary teachers; seminars focused on basic economic principles, lesson plan development, and hands-on training; and various online courses.

One-day programs cover topics such as international trade, capitalism’s effect on the poor, and the economics of disasters.

“When you talk to a teacher, they’ll impact 100 students per semester,” said FTE Vice President Jim Klauder. “We are enabling teachers to be more effective.”

Nonpartisan but Pro-Market, Freedom

FTE programs are based on the principles of individual freedom, free markets, and political freedom. The lessons emphasize personal responsibility along with incentives, private property, and other basic economic principles. The foundation is politically nonpartisan.

Programs vary from half-day seminars to four-day conferences. High school teachers learn about economic principles and how to teach them effectively in their classrooms.

High school students who want to attend the organization’s weeklong Economics and Leadership seminar must complete a rigorous application process; teachers can sign up for the programs themselves. All program participants pay only for transportation to and from seminars.

“Many students write back to us,” Klauder said. “They impact their college campuses and choose to major in economics. Many go into that field and stay connected.”

‘Fantastic and Fascinating’

Many teachers have incorporated FTE materials and activities into their classrooms after attending the seminars. One such teacher is special education teacher Anthony Bombay.

Bombay teaches at Robinson Secondary School in Fairfax County, Virginia. He said FTE does an excellent job bringing in people with different backgrounds to talk about all sides of economics. This makes the programs both interesting and useful.

“I can’t emphasize enough the value of the experts they bring in,” he said.

During the Environment and the Economy program Bombay attended in February 2011, FTE brought in a Ford Motor Co. representative to explain car pricing.

Bombay also attended a program in April 2010 in which FTE took participants on two field trips. First they toured a fish oil tablet factory, where they followed the oil from the ship all the way through marketing and selling the tablets. Another day, teachers toured an oyster farm.

“It was a beautiful visual,” Bombay said. “Fantastic and fascinating.”

‘Remarkable Impact on Participants’

In a recent independent evaluation of FTE, Ina Mullis and Dana Kelly concluded, “FTE continues to provide students and teachers with an exceptional set of programs, each of which is having a remarkable impact on participants and, in turn, economics teaching and learning.”

Mullis, a professor at Lynch School of Education and codirector of the International Study Center at Boston College, and Kelly, a senior research analyst at the American Institutes for Research, evaluated FTE’s 2010 programs by questioning 450 high school students and 1,475 high school economics teachers. They compared high school students’ pre-program test scores in economics to post-FTE program test scores. In addition, they questioned 230 teachers who participated in 2009 programs.

The evaluation reported a 13 percentage point increase in pre- to post-test scores of students attending Economics for Leaders in summer 2010.

“Across programs, participants provided similar and consistent feedback: FTE program content is stimulating, clear, and appropriately challenging,” the evaluation said. “FTE activities and simulations are clear, engaging, and ready to use in the classroom. FTE instructors are responsive, knowledgeable, and engaging.”

‘A Class Act’

FTE was founded in 1976 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. In 1990 it shifted focus from K-12 solely to high school, primarily educating teachers.

In addition to other resources, Bombay employs ready-made lesson plans from FTE, taps into FTE’s multitude of online resources, and relays stories and experiences from the experts he has encountered at the seminars.

“I was so fortunate to find out about this organization,” Bombay said. “The foundation is a class act.”

Emily Johnston (ej.emily.johnston@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.
Oregon Revamps Schools, Makes Gov. Superintendent

By Emily Johnston

Oregon is in the process of almost completely revamping the state’s public school sector from kindergarten through graduate school, after passage of new legislation this summer.

The 14-bill package included laws centralizing public education—most notably SB 552, which names Gov. John Kitzhaber (D) state superintendent of public instruction, and SB 909, which creates a central education committee appointed by the governor.

The laws also increase school choice by allowing students to attend schools outside their assigned districts, increasing the number of charter school authorizers, and enabling districts to opt out of Education Service Districts that provide contracted services such as cleaning and health services.

The new laws make Oregon one of 36 states (plus Washington, DC) with an appointed superintendent of public instruction. SB 552 also requires the governor to appoint a deputy superintendent responsible for day-to-day oversight of the state’s public schools, a suggestion made by the Oregon Confederation of School Administrators.

The changes will take full effect by 2015. Detailed implementation plans are expected in December, according to the governor’s office.

The bill package, which passed in June, is the work of political compromise between Democrats and Republicans in the state House and Senate.

Centralizing Boards, Superintendent

Steve Buckstein, senior policy analyst and founder of the Cascade Policy Institute, said he is “cautiously optimistic” about the package and in particular supports the bills increasing school choice.

“Still, the bill package has downsides. I think the centralization bills are bad for the state, and the formation of the central committee is the worst change,” Buckstein said. “It is centralizing too much power in one office. The marketplace should be more involved.”

Kitzhaber takes control of the Oregon Department of Education in 2014, when Superintendent Susan Castillo’s term expires.

Gayle Rasmussen, president of the Oregon Education Association, a union representing 48,000 Oregon teachers, said, “We are truly concerned that this tips the scales in favor of any given governor’s political agenda. And that erodes the checks and balances that are in the system.”

Buckstein, however, says teacher unions have held too much power and impeded needed changes for children. In 2008, Oregon teacher unions spent $357 per teacher to fight ballot measures that would place limits on union activity.

Changing the Education Model

Kitzhaber posits lofty goals for Oregon education.

“We are going to be a national leader in explicitly changing the model for early childhood education and directly connecting that to the education system,” he said.

By 2025, Kitzhaber says, he wants 40 percent of Oregon adults to hold at least a bachelor’s degree, another 40 percent to have an associate’s degree or equivalent, and the remaining 20 percent to earn at least a high school diploma.

SB 909 places control of the state’s $7.4 billion education fund into the hands of the new board. With this single entity able to control spending from preschool through college and prioritize spending according to performance goals, Kitzhaber said he hopes students will be able to advance at their own pace.

“Right now we have a system based on seat time, and what varies is the degree of education you get. We need to flip that,” Kitzhaber said.

State Rep. Betty Komp (D-Woodburn), co-chair of the legislature’s Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education said, “I think the governor’s approach here is very wise. He’s looking at finding efficiencies in our system. Yet, we’ll be doing it in a way that uses those dollars better and makes sure they get into the classroom.”

The Oregon legislature passed 14 education bills in the 2011 session, including:

- SB 909: Puts preschool through college-level education under the direction of an Education Investment Board to provide the flexibility for students to progress at their own pace.
- SB 552: Names the governor state superintendent of public instruction.
- HB 2301: Allows up to 3 percent of students per district to be enrolled in online, or “virtual,” charter schools.
- HB 3645: Allows universities and community colleges to sponsor charter schools.
- HB 3681: Enables students to attend schools outside their local district.
- SB 250: Frees school districts from having to participate in Education Service Districts that contract for services such as cleaning and health stations. Instead, the districts can purchase ESD services elsewhere.
- HB 3474: Creates a new fund with which the Department of Education and Teacher Standard and Practices Commission are to develop teacher development and mentoring programs.
- HB 3362: Allots $2 million to fund career, vocational, and technical classes in public and charter schools.
- SB 248: Requires school districts to offer full-day kindergarten classes for free by 2015.

“I think the governor’s approach here is very wise. He’s looking at finding efficiencies in our system. Yet, we’ll be doing it in a way that uses those dollars better and makes sure they get into the classroom.”

BETTY KOMP, STATE REPRESENTATIVE WOODBURN, OREGON

Emily Johnston (ej.emily.johnston@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.
Michigan Gov. Snyder Overhauls Worst Schools, Signs Tenure Reforms

By Joel Pavelski

Just before signing four bills to restructure teacher tenure, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder (R) announced the formation of an independent, state-monitored school district designed to rescue the state’s poorest-performing schools by restoring local control.

The Education Achievement System, headed by Detroit Public Schools (DPS) Emergency Manager Roy Roberts, will encompass 34 schools in Detroit beginning in 2012. It will direct more money into classrooms by freeing principals from district demands and giving them more authority to make key decisions in consultation with teachers and parents.

Among large urban school districts, Detroit students regularly post the worst scores in the nation in reading, science, and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

“Under that system, we will free teachers and principals to make the best academic decisions for their students, and we will drive considerably more resources to the classroom so students can achieve academic success,” Roberts said in a statement.

The emergency district eventually will govern the lowest-performing 5 percent of Michigan schools, said Roy Wilbanks, chair of the Board of Regents at Eastern Michigan University (EMU).

Reforming Teacher Tenure

Snyder announced the emergency district in June. In July, he signed House Bills 4625, 4626, 4627, and 4628, which end “last in, first out” seniority rules in hiring and firing, extend from four years to five the time required for a K-12 teacher to earn tenure, and allow easier firing within the probationary teaching period.

“Making staffing decisions based on merit and performance encourages good teachers to keep doing what they are doing and helps ensure students receive the highest quality education,” Snyder said in a statement.

“Effective” rating to retain tenure, and allow easier firing within the probationary teaching period.

“Making staffing decisions based on merit and performance encourages good teachers to keep doing what they are doing and helps ensure students receive the highest quality education,” Snyder said in a statement. “We need to give teachers the flexibility and freedom to run a school and to hold them accountable for their performance,” Van Beek said. “You can create a system where principals have incentives to create high-quality schools.”

This sort of plan and its building-level focus are currently popular reform strategies, said Sarah Reckhow, an assistant professor of political science at Michigan State University who specializes in education reform.

“The Obama administration asked every state to focus on 5 percent of lowest-performing schools, and Snyder’s response to that is focusing on Detroit,” Reckhow said. “Increasing school-level decision-making and the authority of principals is popular now, but you have to increase accountability.”

Snyder’s plan creates advisory and executive committees for the new district, both of which will be collaborations among the state, DPS, and EMU.

At EMU, where the Board of Regents unanimously agreed to join the reform efforts, faculty leaders said they would not assist if doing so threatened teachers union contracts. So far, neither Snyder nor Roberts has clarified whether schools moving into the EAS would carry their teachers and union contracts with them, though Roberts has the authority as emergency manager to void union contracts.

Expanding Charters

On July 13, Roberts announced the appointment of Doug Ross, a former U.S. Secretary of Labor, to head an expanded Charter Schools Office, increasing the number of DPS-authorized charter schools from nine to 14 this fall. Ross is also the founder and CEO of University Prep Charter schools, the highest-performing charters in the city of Detroit.

“This kind of thing hasn’t been tried in Detroit before,” Van Beek said. “There’s been emergency financial managers, mayoral control, and other measures, but creating a system with school-level accountability and school-level resources and management has not been tried.”

Turnaround plans aren’t new to Detroit. Anthony Adams, president of the DPS school board, told the Detroit News he has “announcement fatigue” from hearing so many plans to fix the broken district.

DPS has lost tens of thousands of students over the past decade as parents have moved away seeking educational choices for their children, limiting district funding and reform efforts.

“For Detroit to turn around its financial situation and get a better school district, they need to stabilize enrollment,” Reckhow said. “It seems when parents have a choice they leave Detroit’s public schools.”

More Details Wanted

To combat the student exodus, Snyder and Roberts announced a scholarship plan for Detroit schools modeled after the successful “Kalamazoo Promise” to guarantee students who graduate from high school in Detroit will have the money to attend a two-year college. But few plan details—such as funding sources, parameters, or timeline—have been disclosed.

“The Promise” appears to keep parents in the district because they know if the student graduates in the district college will be paid for, and it would create an incentive for parents to stay in Detroit,” Van Beek said.

Reckhow said too many details have been absent from the governor’s plan to assess its possible effects.

“There’s no clear path to implementation,” she said. “It seems that the legislature will have to be involved to work out the finances, and we have no idea what kind of groundwork Snyder has laid to make sure that will go forward.”

Joel Pavelski (joel.pavelski@gmail.com) writes from New York City.
**BOOK REVIEW**

The Coming Fall of the Teacher Unions

Review by Bruno Behrend

Seldom have the raw power and unbridled selfishness of teacher unions been more on display than in recent months in state capitols around the country. Teachers led the union riot that shut down Wisconsin’s state government for more than two weeks, making legislators afraid to enter government buildings while angry mobs defaced public property and shouted threats of violence and political reprisal.

Terry Moe, a Hoover Institution senior fellow and author of numerous books and studies on education policy, has written a highly insightful book about teacher unions. The sheer volume and quality of information in *Special Interest: Teachers Unions and American Public Schools* make it a major and timely contribution to the debate. As one reads about how teacher unions operate, it becomes increasingly difficult to tolerate this state of affairs.

The book begins by telling the hard truth about unions: “As the most powerful group in American education, they use their power to promote [their] special interests—in collective bargaining, in politics—and this often leads them to do things that are not good for the children or the schools.”

**Progressive Roots**
The unspoken question is why our society puts up with this. One answer might be the slow process by which we all acquiesced to their control.

Public school unionism originated in the Progressive belief that the nation needed to centralize, then professionalize, education delivery. The National Education Association was originally designed as an administrative tool, not a union, established to improve teaching quality. This centralization, however, made it much easier for unions to organize, and they gradually gained the power necessary to subvert, and then control, the entire system.

Moe demolishes many myths surrounding teachers and their unions. The most important of these is the myth that teachers are unhappy with their unions and yearn to shed their yoke. Not true. Whereas 55 percent of teachers agree “tenure and teacher organizations make it too hard to weed out mediocre and incompetent teachers,” the same group opposes removing tenure, by a 77–23 percent majority.

The only good news comes in the closing chapter, where the author highlights two powerful forces undermining union power. The first is an internal battle of shifting political alliances, primarily in the Democratic Party. The second comes in the form of radical disruption by technological advances in delivering education. The slow economy, which portends declining resources for the education bureaucracy, is a force multiplier for both phenomena.

**Changing Landscape**
The political discussion is informative, but the impact of digital learning, online education, and technology-driven delivery is far more fascinating. Although the changing political landscape and economics alone would not be enough to defeat the unions’ grip on education, Moe states, “Education technology is a tsunami that is only beginning to swell.” It can’t arrive soon enough.

This brings me to my only complaint about this valuable and informative book. After detailing the havoc unions have visited upon American children and taxpayers, Moe says the coming changes “will happen gradually,” “much of it coming over two (or three) decades.” Decades! Why not two or three years?

There are reasons for optimism. Moe writes, “The most potent and direct way to undermine the teachers unions’ power, for example, is to pass new laws prohibiting collective bargaining in the public schools.” He says “this is unlikely to happen.” He apparently wrote that before Wisconsin’s new governor did exactly that. Ohio and Idaho have followed suit. And Utah has just passed an aggressive digital learning bill, with money following the child to the online providers.

Moe has given us the data and facts we need to take on teacher unions in the most important political battle of our lifetimes. It’s up to us to supply the outrage.

Bruno Behrend (bbehrend@heartland.org) is director of the Center for School Transformation at The Heartland Institute.

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**Limited Gains found in Chicago Preschool Program**

By Lindsey Burke

A new study of a Chicago pilot program for preschool finds long-term social benefits, but those benefits likely would have difficulty scaling up, experts say.

The academic journal *Science* followed 957 low-income and at-risk children for 25 years after they participated in an intensive, small-scale program of preschool and family services funded by the federal government.

Adults who had graduated the program were found to have earned an average annual income of $11,600, compared to $10,800 for those in control groups. Incarceration rates dropped from 21 percent in the control group to 15 percent for the preschool group.

“Educators have struggled for years to develop early education programs that can change the trajectory of a child’s life. Unfortunately, this study proves again there is no quick fix,” said Darcy Olsen, president of the Goldwater Institute.

States’ experiences offering universal or state-funded preschool programs have shown “disappointing” student achievement results, said Lance Izumi, senior director of education studies at the Pacific Research Institute. Internal reviews by the Department of Health and Human Services have shown for decades that the nation’s largest preschool program, Head Start, does nothing for student test scores past first grade.

Lindsey M. Burke (lindsey.burke@heritage.org) is an education policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation.
Giving College Students New Insights into Politics

By Sharon Harris

Are you liberal, conservative ... or something else? What’s the difference between the two? And what the heck is a libertarian?

A new program from the Advocates for Self-Government, a national nonprofit educational organization, will help tens of thousands of students on campuses across America find answers to these and other central political questions.

The program, “Epic Liberty,” enables campus organizations to quickly identify students who hold libertarian beliefs and give them the opportunity to engage in libertarian activities.

Through Epic Liberty, students of all political persuasions will gain new understandings of politics, their own political views, and the libertarian ideals of free enterprise, personal liberty, and limited government.

Smallest Political Quiz

The centerpiece of Epic Liberty is the World’s Smallest Political Quiz. Created by the Advocates in 1987, the quiz gives a more accurate and more sophisticated view of American politics than the old, inaccurate, but still dominant “left-versus-right” model.

Taking the quiz is easy, fast, and fun. You answer ten short questions on specific political issues. Your answers instantly place you on a five-point chart of the American political spectrum that shows who most agrees with you in the world of politics: conservatives, liberals, statists, libertarians, or centrists.

The quiz has found widespread acceptance among educators, media, and the general public. It has been praised by the Washington Post (“the Quiz has gained respect as a valid measure of a person’s political leanings”), USA Today, The Sunday Times of London (“a revelation”), and many other media outlets. It has been reprinted and discussed in dozens of magazines and newspapers and translated into several languages.

The Advocates has distributed nearly ten million quizzes in the original card-sized format. And with the advent of the Internet, the quiz quickly went global. It has been taken online more than 17.5 million times.

The quiz has been featured by some of America’s best-selling college and high school textbooks, including those published by McGraw-Hill, Prentice Hall, and Houghton Mifflin, used in thousands of classrooms across America.

The Advocates has sent tens of thousands of quiz cards to teachers and schools, at their request, for classroom use. The fast, simple, and accurate quiz livens classrooms and stimulates vigorous discussion on political issues and political identities.

“I have found the quiz to be amazingly accurate and an invaluable tool for my political philosophy courses,” reported university philosophy instructor Joel W. Cade.

“I have been using the quiz in my American Government class for about five years. Students usually find it to be an eye-opener,” said political science instructor Dr. Sean D. Foreman.

Challenges Prevailing Wisdom

The quiz challenges the prevailing “Left versus Right” political model that tries to squeeze all political views into a linear political spectrum ranging from Left to Center to Right.

The prevailing model is simplistic and misleading, with no place for the millions of people who don’t fit neatly into some variant of liberal or conservative. Try putting Thomas Jefferson, for example, along that left-right spectrum.

Over the years, the quiz has awakened millions of Americans to the political diversity of our nation. Today many, if not most, political scientists agree the American political spectrum is far more complex than just left-versus-right.

Operation Politically Homeless

The Advocates’ Epic Liberty program will bring this eye-opening multispectrum political model to tens of thousands of students on hundreds of campuses in a visible and dramatic form: Operation Politically Homeless (OPH), which uses the quiz and eye-catching designs to transform an ordinary campus outreach booth into a lively, fun event.

Libertarian organizations use OPH to quickly identify new members and sympathizers. Passersby can take the quiz and find their political “home” on a large and colorful poster of the quiz chart.

Those who score in or near the libertarian section are offered the opportunity to learn more about libertarian ideas and activities. And those who don’t score libertarian benefit from a new understanding of their political views and the American political spectrum.

The Advocates gives OPH kits free to campus libertarian organizations that agree to use them at least three times and document the results. In the past two years nearly 300 student organizations have acquired the kits. Many have reported dramatic increases in membership and activism thanks to OPH.

Epic Liberty on Campus

Epic Liberty is designed to take this success to a new level: to encourage students to use OPH, and to promote and reward other libertarian campus outreach activities. Students will earn points for completing outreach challenges including running OPH booths, getting letters-to-the-editor published, sharing success stories with other libertarians, and much more.

Epic Liberty points can be used to win prizes ranging from liberty-themed T-shirts, books, and magazine subscriptions to more expensive prizes including video cameras.

Libertarian ideas are rapidly breaking into the mainstream. With two self-declared libertarians—Texas Congressman Ron Paul and former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson—running for the GOP presidential nomination, there may be more interest in libertarianism than ever before.

Epic Liberty will give vast numbers of students new insights about libertarianism and the American political spectrum—and enroll thousands in a movement devoted to free enterprise and individual liberty.

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INTERNET INFO

Educators: Get free copies of the World’s Smallest Political Quiz for your classroom by contacting the Advocates at 800-932-1776 or quiz@TheAdvocates.org.

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Stop the War Against Standardized Tests

By Herbert J. Walberg

President Barack Obama and teachers union leaders disagree with the view of citizens that schools, educators, and students should be held accountable for their performance on standardized tests. Despite strong public support for testing programs, influential educators have defined standardized tests as beasts that should be removed from schools. To quote one prominent critic, Gerald Bracey, tests are “infernal machines of social destruction.”

Political leaders also reveal a deep misunderstanding about the purpose and use of standardized testing when they claim tests are too simple or too biased to measure up to the subjective judgments of educators themselves. Such claims are naive or deliberately misleading.

Research and experience show standardized tests are generally good at measuring students’ knowledge, skills, and understandings because they are objective, fair, efficient, and comprehensive. For these reasons, they are used for decisions about admission to colleges, graduate programs, and professional schools as well as qualification and licensing for many skilled occupations and demanding professions such as law and medicine.

Given the misleading information and expressed views of some politicians and union leaders, it is worthwhile to review here the more specific reasons for using standardized tests.

Crucial Information

Student performance is a crucial element of a metaphorical three-legged stool that also includes standards and learning. When one leg is weak or missing, educational programs may be faulty, but if all three are strong, the programs can be strong. Standardized tests are used to measure the student performance leg of this stool.

If standardized tests are misused, of course, the program and student learning may be defective. When standardized tests are used appropriately, a great deal can be learned about how well schools function. That information allows educators and policymakers to reach better-informed conclusions about how much students are learning, which in turn allows them to make better-informed decisions about improving programs.

Students benefit directly when they take tests that offer information on how well they have mastered the material intended for learning. School reading and mathematics skills, for example, can be precisely specified, and as students learn the skills, they benefit from ongoing information tailored to their specific, individual progress. Computers streamline this process by providing immediate feedback about correct and incorrect responses far more quickly and with much greater patience than teachers and tutors can provide.

Student Benefits

Educators can better help students when they know how a student’s objective performance compares with others, and standardized tests can provide such information at low costs and very little class time. Caroline Hoxby of Stanford University’s Department of Economics and the Hoover Institution has estimated the costs of tests are less than 0.1 percent of total spending on K-12 education and amount to an average of less than $6 per student.

John Bishop of Cornell University has found that countries requiring students to take nationally standardized tests showed higher scores on international tests than those in countries not requiring such tests.

Bishop also found that U.S. students who anticipated having to pass a standardized test for high school graduation learned more science and math, were more likely to complete homework and talk with their parents about schoolwork, and watched less television than peers who were not required to pass such exams.

Economic Benefits

Those who argue against standardized tests say holding educators and students accountable for only mathematics and reading encourages them to neglect history and science. But this is an argument for comprehensive and systematic testing across the entire curriculum, not an argument against standardized tests themselves.

Those who oppose standardized tests also argue the tests can measure only simple facts students can memorize. But tests assessing advanced understanding and judgment do exist. They may, for instance, require respondents to select the best idea from a group of different and compelling positions. They may require respondents to identify the best reason for action, the best interpretation of a set of ideas, or the best application of important principles.

Another complaint against standardized tests is that they cause stress among educators and students. But the world outside of school is demanding. The knowledge economy increasingly demands more knowledge and better skills from workers, which require larger amounts of intense study of difficult subjects. Yet American students spend only about half the total study time that Asian students do in regular schools, in tutoring, and in homework, a major reason for Americans’ poor performance in international surveys. Thus, reasonable pressure and objective performance measurements are advisable for the future welfare of the students and the nation.

Source of Pride

Finally, some critics of testing complain that tests cause malaise among educators. But good schools focus on student learning, not on the satisfaction of the professional staff. If the data show testing benefits students, it should be pursued even if there isn’t unanimous teacher support.

Good student performance on tests should be a source of satisfaction among successful educators. The appropriate tests can reveal strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum and instruction. Our nation’s poor achievement progress shows substantial improvements in teaching and learning are needed—and progress on those two fronts can and should be measured by standardized tests.

Herbert J. Walberg is chairman of the board of directors of The Heartland Institute. This essay is based on his new book, Tests, Testing, and Genuine School Reform (Hoover Press).
The American people have sent a powerful free-market message to Washington and state capitols across the nation. But election victories are not enough. We need to equip our new leaders with the free-market solutions they need to restore our freedom and prosperity. To support this historic effort, The Heartland Institute is making available free copies of its public policy newspapers and other publications, both on-line at the Web sites identified below and in print editions upon request. To request free copies of these publications, call 312/377-4000 and ask for Cheryl Parker.

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SOME NOTEWORTHY PRESENTERS

DR. CHARLES GLENN, Boston University
3 new books at the Mega – Book Fair:
Contrasting Models of State and School: A Comparative Historical Study of Parental Choice and State Control.
Native American/First Nations Schooling: From the Colonial Period to the Present.
African American/Afro-Canadian Schooling: From the Colonial Period to the Present.

DR. JAMES TOOLEY, Director: E.G. West Centre
2010 book: The Beautiful Tree, a story of school choice in developing countries

DR. PATRICK WOLF, School Choice Chair University of Arkansas Dept of Education Reform
Panel Title: School Vouchers at a Crossroads: What’s Next for Policy and Evaluation?

DR. ROBERT MARANTO, 21st Century Chair in Leadership, University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform
Panel Title: “The Educational Industrial Complex: Real or Imaginary (with Dirk C. VanRaemdonck).”

DR. JOHN MERRIFIELD, Editor: Journal of School Choice
Senior Co-Founder, E.G. West Institute for Effective Schooling
Co-Authored Conference Papers:
“School Choice Legislation: Impact Assessment and Fiscal Notes (with Ford).”
“The Edgewood Voucher Program: Between the Pick-Axe and the Bulldozer.”
Panel Title: Charter Law Issues - Wait List Issues and Non-Selective Admissions

DR. HARRY PATRINOS, World Bank Scholar
Panel Title: Engaging the Private: Public Policy towards Private Participation in Education Systems.
Plus He is Presenting a Paper on “School Choice in Holland”

DR. CLAUDIO SAPELLI, Chilean School Choice Scholar
Paper Title: “The Consequences of Forced School Switching on Student Performance in Chile: Comparing Peers that Choose Private and Public Schools”

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