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By Chris Neal

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In a press release, WILL included a statement by one of the Renaissance

Arizona House Votes to Repeal and Replace Common Core

By Heather Kays

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Gina Ray, an Arizona resident and mother of four, says she is happy with the House’s approval of House Bill 2190, but she knows the fight against Common Core is still going to be an uphill battle.

“I am ready to be a target,” said Ray, referring to the treatment she expects from Common Core proponents within her state after she speaks out about the standards. “I am ready to pull every one of my kids out of school and homeschool them if need be. I’m ready to stand up for liberty. The rights of parents are being violated. I have no say.”

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Homeschooling Increasingly Popular among Black Families Nationwide

By Heather Kays

A growing number of black families are choosing to homeschool their children, the U.S. Department of Education reports.

Although increasing numbers of black families are choosing to homeschool, BiShawn Biddle, who runs DropNat Nation, an education news and policy magazine, says it is difficult to know exactly how dramatic the increase has been.

“There are more black families that are taking up homeschooling,” Biddle said. “The question is how many. Currently the data we have on homeschooling comes from the U.S. Department of Education, which reports that 139,000 black children aged five through 17 were homeschooled in [the] 2011–12 [school year]. This is a 127 percent increase over levels in 2007.”

Biddle says some traditional public school administrators have been trying to decrease the number of students who drop out by counseling students to attend other schools or be home-schooled.

Fleeing Low-Quality Teaching

“Certainly black families share many of the concerns white families have about the quality of education for their children,” Biddle said. “Even in suburban districts such as Fairfax County and Montgomery County outside of [Washington, DC], black families are finding that the quality of teaching and curricula can be as low as in big-city districts.

“At the same time, black families have other concerns,” Biddle said. “Particularly for black families who are first-generation middle-class, they have found that traditional districts do poorly by black children, especially young black men. As University of Michigan sociologist Karyn Lacy detailed in her book Blue-Chip Black, black families find themselves battling with teachers and school leaders in the suburbs [as well as in big cities] so that their kids can take AP classes, gifted-and-talented courses, and other classes that help them succeed in college and in life.”

Biddle says black families are using homeschooling to ensure their children receive an adequate education.

“For these families, homeschooling and other forms of school choice are ways for them to help their kids get the education they need and deserve,” Biddle said. “At the same time, it isn’t just about education. Black families want their children to build pride in themselves and in their cultures. This includes learning about successful role models who look like them. This desire for self-pride, a reason why historically black colleges and universities continue to exist and why charter schools have thrived in urban communities, is also why some black families home-schooled.”

Overuse of Harsh Discipline

In a 2008 study, a team led by John Wallace of the University of Pittsburgh found young black men in the 10th grade are 30 percent more likely to be sent to a dean’s office for punishment than their white male peers, and 330 percent more likely to be suspended afterward than white counterparts.

“The reality for black families is that American public education can be damaging to their children,” Biddle said. “This is especially true when it comes to overuse of harsh school discipline such as out-of-school suspensions and zero-tolerance policies.”

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.
against Common Core K–12 math and English language arts standards, Ray says convincing Arizona legislators to repeal and replace Common Core has been extremely difficult. Ray spends six to eight hours working against Common Core each weekday.

**Few Legislators Listening**
Ray says one of the few legislators listening is state Rep. Mark Finchem (R-Pinal County), sponsor of HB 2190.

“HB 2190 is designed to restore normal order and the constitutional rule of law in this area of state responsibility,” Finchem said. “Arizona has been bound to standards that are not what we were promised.”

Once a supporter of Common Core, Ray became more concerned the more she learned about the standards.

“What made me flip and turn was that I started seeing that everything they promised—that our schools would be in charge of curriculum; that our children would be smarter, better critical thinkers; that this was a state-led effort—it was all untrue,” Ray said.

“I’ve seen the loss of my control as a parent and the loss of teachers’ control in the classroom. It’s just gone. It’s completely gone.”

**Visible Common Core Effects**
Ray says she is seeing changes in her children’s schools.

“Teachers are scared that if they teach the former math curriculum, students will not do well on the standardized tests, so they are scrapping the Saxon Math,” said Ray of the former math curriculum previously taught to her younger children. “Our teachers are scared that their students aren’t going to do well. They are beyond scared their students are not going to do well on their tests.”

One of Ray’s children in high school has received lessons on subjects by teachers not trained in the discipline they are teaching. Ray says her son received a lesson on the Declaration of Independence in his English class by an instructor Ray believes was not qualified to teach the subject.

“My son is] totally being taught incorrectly what these important historical documents mean,” Ray said.

“[The teacher] told her students that the Declaration of Independence was a list of complaints, and she told the students to write their own Declaration of Independence from the school. I said, ‘No, no, no. The Declaration of Independence was not just a list of complaints. It was a list of God-given rights.’ We have misinformed teachers teaching the wrong subjects.”

Karen Palmer, an Arizona resident and mother of five, says parents are being ignored when they voice concerns about Common Core.

“My youngest child used to come home with Common Core homework in math,” Palmer said. “I was not a fan of the way math was being taught, and neither were many other parents. I voiced my opinion a few times. I then noticed that eventually the Common Core math homework was no longer being sent home. They sent home Saxon homework and began to keep all Common Core math work entirely at school. I felt it was to avoid any conflict from parents.

“I feel that our teachers’ hands are tied,” said Palmer. “They are not allowed to oppose [Common Core].”

Ray says she will not stop working until Common Core is repealed and replaced.

“I feel as a parent I am losing control of what my children are being taught,” Ray said. “I have to reteach them all over again.”

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.
Ohio Bill Would Protect Students Opting Out of Common Core Tests

By Diana-Ashley Krach

The Ohio House of Representatives has passed legislation to protect students from punishment when opting out of testing aligned with Common Core standards.

House Bill 7 passed unanimously in February. If the bill becomes law, it would protect Ohio students from penalties for opting out of high-stakes testing. HB 7 states the results of the testing, or the fact students are opting out, cannot alter their ability to proceed to the next grade or obtain course credit. This applies to any testing aligned with Common Core standards.

The bill also states districts cannot release student data to an outside source or third party without permission from a parent or guardian.

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) tests align with Common Core and debuted in Ohio in early 2015. House Bill 487, which became law in 2014, protects teachers from having their job stability compromised based on PARCC testing during the first year of testing.

“Safe Harbor”


“Rep. Buchy has been instrumental in getting the main thing across, and that is the safe harbor of not having tests affect [students],” said Huber.

Buchy says HB 7 is a logical way to deal with Common Core-aligned tests. “Providing safe harbor to Ohio’s students from the PARCC testing results is a practical common-sense approach to governing,” Buchy said. “We need to continue to examine the problems arising with the implementation of PARCC moving forward to determine the best way to educate and monitor the growth of children in Ohio.”

‘Security Blanket for Parents’

A concern critics raised about the bill is it does not include a third grade language arts assessment. Currently, students are required to earn a passing score on Ohio’s Third Grade Reading Guarantee testing in order to advance to the fourth grade.

Another concern is HB 7 would apply only to the 2014–15 academic year. Huber says HB 7 is a step in the right direction because it shows parents they have control over whether to opt out of Common Core. “[Opting out provides] a security blanket for parents, because they are so accustomed to complying,” said Huber.

“The positive side to the Common Core backlash and Opt Out movement is watching parents reclaim their authority over their children’s education,” Huber said. “They are empowered and armed with the facts, thus able to resist the pressure to conform. Moms on a mission are an unmatched force.”

Dawn Randall, an Ohio teacher and member of the Ohio BATS, a group of teachers who oppose Common Core, released a video on February 26 saying the PARCC tests are a waste of valuable time that could be spent on learning. In the video Randall estimates each student loses about 300 hours of instructional learning to standardized testing. She says children who were able to opt out of PARCC testing are “free to learn” now.

Protecting Teachers and Students

Julie Aspiras, an Ohio teacher for 25 years, says she supports HB 7.

“In my opinion, HB 7 is a move in the right direction,” Aspiras said. “It allows for parents to opt out of high-stakes testing without penalizing the student or the school district. I am concerned though, that there is no mention of a safe harbor for teachers.” She says further teacher protections should have been included in HB 7.

“[These tests are] used for their evaluations,” Aspiras said. “As a teacher who works in a large school district, I understand that there are a lot of variables that affect a student’s performance at school. We deal with students from poverty and the struggles they face on a daily basis. Their growth can’t always be measured on a computer assessment, and to hold a teacher accountable for their score is unfair.”

HB 7 passed in both the Ohio House and Senate as of March 4 but had not yet been signed into law at press time.

Diana-Ashley Krach (krachkreative@gmail.com) writes from Lake Worth, Florida.

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Ohioans Against Common Core: http://ohioansagainstcommoncore.com

“Providing safe harbor to Ohio’s students from the PARCC testing results is a practical common-sense approach to governing. We need to continue to examine the problems arising with the implementation of PARCC moving forward to determine the best way to educate and monitor the growth of children in Ohio.”

JIM BUCHY, STATE REPRESENTATIVE, GREENVILLE, OHIO
Louisiana Superintendent Battles Education Reforms

By Bruce Edward Walker

B ernard Taylor, public school superintendent for the East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS), unveiled a plan in late February to create several clusters of schools to compete with area charter schools. Taylor has grown increasingly critical of charter schools and says he wants to create an alternative to the 23 charter schools in his parish.

Taylor plans to launch new courses at 17 schools in the East Baton Rouge district as part of his proposal. Many of the courses attempt to take a new approach to learning. According to The Advocate, two of the courses are Lego art and digital puppetry.

Taylor’s plan also proposes the creation of “families of schools,” which would group three sets of four schools in the district into clusters. Families living within one of the clusters would have the option of attending any of the schools in a grouping. He first proposed three clusters in 2012, but only one was formulated.

“I really don’t know how much merit there is to Superintendent Taylor’s concept of grouping schools together,” said Kevin P. Kane, president of the Pelican Institute for Public Policy, a free-market think tank located in New Orleans. “It may be a good idea, but I suspect he is a little late to the party. A growing number of people in Baton Rouge are way ahead of the superintendent and that is why we are seeing an expanding range of educational options. I wish him success in his efforts to improve schools but the real action is taking place outside of the traditional education bureaucracy.”

Taylor’s Turbulent Tenure

Taylor’s tenure has been turbulent since it began in 2012. In an August 2013 Times-Picayune article, EBRPSS School Board member Jerry Arbour described the board’s “unhealthy” relationship with Taylor and said Taylor instructed district administrative staff not to speak to board members.

The 11-member board voted not to renew Taylor’s contract in June 2014 when it expires later in 2015. The board gave Taylor a 2.27 performance rating out of a possible 4.0.

Need for Educational Options

“We find many students with a high level of academic ability who want more challenge than what they are receiving at their local traditional school,” said Southwest Louisiana Charter Foundation President John Pierre. “Many students arrive well below grade level and it takes about three years to bring them up to where they need to be. Having a public charter school option gives them an opportunity that they’ve never had before.”

Chris Meyer, chief executive officer for New Schools for Baton Rouge, a community partnership dedicated to increasing access, promoting choice, and ensuring excellence in school quality, says he and his organization support any education option if it works for students.

“New Schools for Baton Rouge was founded on the idea of recruiting proven school operators to increase choices for families seeking an excellent education for their children,” Meyer said. “As Baton Rouge faces an urgent need for high-quality school options, we believe that school choice should be rooted in quality, not type of school.”

“Too often, we see system leaders only promoting choice when they control all the options,” said Meyer. “We will continue to recruit and help launch as many proven school options [as possible] for every kid in Louisiana’s capital city. We would hope all education leaders would strive for this course instead of fearing competition that leads to better quality and more choice.”

Bruce Edward Walker (walker.editorial@gmail.com) is an information technology and telecommunications policy advisor for The Heartland Institute.

“A growing number of people in Baton Rouge are way ahead of the superintendent and that is why we are seeing an expanding range of educational options. ... [T]he real action is taking place outside of the traditional education bureaucracy.”

KEVIN P. KANE
PRESIDENT
PELICAN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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W. Virginia House Passes Common Core Repeal Bill

By Chris Neal

The West Virginia House of Delegates elected to repeal Common Core standards on February 28 by a vote of 74 to 19.

“We can do better” is a constant refrain from parents, teachers, and legislators,” said Jim Shaffer, executive director at the Public Policy Foundation of West Virginia.

Shaffer says many West Virginians who are against Common Core feel ignored by the state Department of Education.

“There’s a real sense that the Department of Education in West Virginia is not listening,” Shaffer said. “West Virginia should exceed Common Core. We reject the idea of federal standards.”

Brittany Corona, a research assistant at The Heritage Foundation, says the bill is also a pushback against Common Core-aligned testing companies like Smarter Balanced.

“Those are really the tentacles that are strapping in a lot of states right now,” Corona said of the testing consortia aligned with Common Core.

“This is the latest of many different measures of pushback across the nation,” Corona said. “It’s ultimately parents and local leadership that are pushing back against Common Core. Every child is unique and has [particular] needs. The people who best understand those needs are those closest to the students, namely parents and local leadership.

“Common Core is not something that came out of nowhere,” said Corona. “It is largely an extension of the same flawed logic we’ve seen since the [1960s]. It’s further centralization of education. One of the bigger and more beautiful things about the pushback against Common Core is that it is mostly parent-driven and it [allows] states to be innovators in their own right. They are coming up with their own ways to push back, whether it be by executive order like in Louisiana or a legislative measure like in West Virginia.”

Chris Neal (cdobro245@gmail.com) writes from New York, New York.

Some Families Face Retaliation over Choice

Continued from page 1

School parents. “With no warning, Racine Unified told us that they will stop busing,” the release quotes Shakela Johnson as saying. “But, how is my son supposed to get to school? They have yet to give me an explanation as to why this is happening. It seems like we’re being punished because we chose to attend a school in the choice program.”

Monetary Motives

Dick Komer, a senior attorney at the Institute for Justice, says such behavior is not uncommon.

“One obvious motivation for any school district is cost,” Komer said. “If by canceling bus service for nonpublic school students they can save money, that is a possible motivation. The system places the district in a position of having to provide services to families they no longer consider their constituents or customers.

“This sort of arrangement is one always rife for abuse,” Komer continued. “We always hope that the response of public school officials to the increased competition will be to try harder to better serve their remaining students, but when retaliation against those who have already left also saves the district money, you have a potential problem.”

Charter School Victimized

School choice participants have endured retaliation from district administrators all over the country. Audrey Spalding of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy says there have been several similar incidents in Michigan.

“Just last year a district closed an entire charter school because they wanted to run it for themselves,” Spalding said. “Within 30 days, a very popular Japanese-language-oriented charter school was reduced to a few boxes in a storage unit. The district dealt a major blow to that very successful school.”

Spalding says traditional public school district administrators in Michigan are often resistant to school choice programs.

“It’s this bizarre paranoia of choice,” Spalding said. “One district outside Detroit was so terrified of enrolling students in other districts that administrators would wait outside of houses to see if students actually lived there.”

Spalding was referring to an assistant superintendent in Grosse Point, Michigan who allegedly staked out houses to make sure schoolchildren actually lived there and weren’t claiming false residency. According to a Bridge Magazine report in 2013, the same assistant superintendent would peer through windows and knock on doors asking to see where the children slept to determine whether the children were legally residing in the district.

Anti-Choice Sentiments Decreasing

Although these and other questionable behaviors by traditional district school administrators continue, Spalding says she believes anti-choice sentiments in education are growing weaker.

“I think it was more prevalent years ago, but choice has proliferated,” Spalding said. “Choice is more prominent now. It’s mainstream. At least in Michigan, what we are seeing is the holdouts; the people who are still hostile to choice are just behind the times.”

Chris Neal (cdobro245@gmail.com) writes from New York, New York.
La. School Chief Seeks Review of Standardized Tests

By Ben Boychuk

Louisiana education Superintendent John White has announced plans to review the state’s Common Core-aligned standardized tests one year ahead of schedule.

If the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approves, the state’s Department of Education will examine its reading and math tests in order to fashion a “Louisiana Test” that incorporates state and national standards.

“We should begin a review of English and math standards as soon as [this year’s] results are back,” White told the New Orleans Times-Picayune.

White has been in a dispute with Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) for several months over implementing Common Core. When Jindal changed his position on Common Core in 2014, White, an appointee of Jindal’s, remained in favor of the standards. Jindal has tried everything from issuing an executive order to stop Common Core-aligned testing to sending a letter to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) asking the testing consortium to withdraw from Louisiana. He has even initiated a lawsuit against the federal Department of Education (DOE).

In the suit, Jindal says the federal government coerced state officials into signing up for Common Core standards in hopes of winning Race to the Top grant money. The suit says Education Secretary Arne Duncan and DOE “constructed a scheme that effectively forced states down a path toward a national curriculum.”

A judge recently ruled Jindal’s lawsuit would proceed.

A Costly Misadventure

Lisa Snell, director of education and child welfare studies at the Reason Foundation, says Louisiana’s Common Core testing dispute appears likely to end up as a costly misadventure.

“Will this just be another turnover of curriculum and testing, spending lots of money to do things a different way with little to show for it? I think this applies [both] nationally and in Louisiana. Five years from now, when this is settled, will we see significant gains attributable to Common Core? I am very skeptical of this.”

LISA SNELL
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CHILD WELFARE STUDIES
REASON FOUNDATION

“Once a state leaves the consortium, it’s basically almost back to normal,” Wurman said. “The state has its own test, and hence it can change the standards or stick to their—choice. “If [a state] wants to look stupid and use mediocre standards, nothing new there,” Wurman said. “Many states did that before Common Core, too. But states can start to compete again.”

Would Secure Students’ Data

Wurman says student-level testing data for states that withdraw from PARCC would not end up at DOE.

“[DOE] never possessed individual-level data before,” Wurman said. “There was no need for it anyway. There is a prohibition on making a national student database, and everyone thought that covers student data too.”

That changed four years ago, when DOE amended the regulations for the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to allow greater access to student data by private parties, including PARCC.

Wurman says data collection is part of a larger plan to expand the federal government’s control of the economy.

“If you want to do national workforce planning, you need individual student data,” said Wurman.

Ben Boychuk (b.boychuk.3@gmail.com) is a policy advisor for education at The Heartland Institute and a former managing editor of School Reform News.

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By Jeffery Reynolds

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) officials announced they will administer Common Core-aligned tests to all students, ending CPS’s attempt to limit the tests to a small group of students for the first year of testing.

In January, CPS officials announced they intended to administer the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) exams in reading and math to some but not all students. The Chicago Teachers Union initially led the effort to slow the testing implementation, along with a group of parents opposed to Common Core.

Illinois’ state superintendent of education then sent a letter to CPS officials threatening to remove their Title I federal funding and state funding if they did not administer the Common Core exams.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett, chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools, wrote the following in a March 2 letter to students’ parents and guardians:

“During the past few months, you may have heard about the implementation of Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career ... in our schools,” said Byrd-Bennett. “I am writing to let you know that, after careful consideration and discussion, Chicago Public Schools plans to move forward with the administering of PARCC District-wide beginning March 9. Although we continue to believe that a pilot in 10 percent of our schools would have been best for our students, we cannot risk the devastating financial cuts of more than $1.4 billion threatened by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the U.S. Department of Education and our students’ futures by administering PARCC to only 10 percent of schools.”

Bent to ISBE’s Will

Ted Dabrowski, vice president of policy for the Illinois Policy Institute, says he is not surprised CPS gave in to ISBE’s demands.

“It’s not surprising,” Dabrowski said. “When the powers are holding hundreds of millions [of dollars] up, it does have an impact. There’s a lot of politics involved in that. After all, the Common Core movement is very powerful out of Washington, [DC]. Of course, the funding is coming from the federal government. As it increases, it’s going to have more impact. They’re tying these things to the Race to the Top program, and the more money involved, the more it makes it difficult to separate decision making from funding. That’s certainly the case here.”

History of Bullying

Dabrowski says the Chicago Teachers Union is one of the major opponents of Common Core, which adds a layer of irony to the situation.

“It’s very ironic,” Dabrowski said. “It’s the same administration and unions that are the ones that showed their power by holding a strike and keeping 400,000 kids out of school just a few years ago. They don’t like being bullied right now, but it’s ironic that these are the same people that bullied the very kids and parents they’re supposed to take care of. They don’t see a connection there.

“That’s the whole message out of this,” Dabrowski continued. “This has nothing to do with the children. It’s all about the money and the resources. When the bureaucrats and the systems align, they will work closely together, often not in the interest of children. Sometimes, the alliances between the administration and the unions break down, and there’s a fight for that power. Again, always at the expense of the children.”

Jeffery Reynolds (jefferyreynolds@comcast.net) writes from Portland, Oregon.
By Brittany Wagner

Legislators in the Missouri House and Senate are considering bills to change the state’s 22-year-old inter-district school transfer law, which states failing districts must pay tuition and transportation costs for students to transfer to better-performing schools.

Though proposed changes will provide new virtual and charter school options, advocates of school choice expressed concern the legislature is trying to solve a nonexistent problem.

Both the House and Senate versions of the bill say a student must have been enrolled in an unaccredited school for at least one semester before transferring. The Senate version sets an annual March 1 deadline for students to apply to transfer.

Missouri attorney Joshua Schindler, who has fought on behalf of parents trying to use the school transfer law, says legislators might have placed restrictions in the bills to prevent families from moving into failing school districts just to take advantage of the transfer program. Neither bill puts a cap on the number of students who live in failing districts but currently attend private schools could not utilize the program unless they attend a failing school first.

Homelessness Problems

Lorna Kurdie, CEAM director of advocacy and outreach, says there was a woman who sought to prove residency by obtaining a lease on an apartment in the Normandy District. By the time the school officials checked on the validity of the lease, the woman had become homeless. Her children were not able to participate in the transfer program.

According to Beyond Housing, a community development organization in Normandy, 31 percent of families were functionally homeless in 2014. The annual mobility rate within the district was more than 50 percent. In addition to parents struggling to pay for private school tuition, it is common for students within a high-poverty school district to move from home to home and from district to district.

Gateway 180 Client Support Specialist Laurie Howard says homelessness can be an educational barrier.

“It’s a hard transition coming into a facility and not being able to have that transportation all the time,” said Howard. “A lot of times [parents] have to take [students] out and put them in a different school.”

Schindler continued his involvement in the transfer case after MBOE gave Normandy a special accreditation status, preventing as many as 650 students from transferring to the Francis Howell School District. In February, a St. Louis County judge ruled Normandy was unaccredited and students had the right to transfer, ultimately overturning MBOE’s actions.

The judge stated in his ruling, “To force students who seek little more than an adequate education to remain in this unaccredited district—rather than allow them to continue their education in accredited school districts—will cause them irreparable harm. This harm cannot be repaired after the fact.”

Schindler says there is a strong chance provisions blocking transfers could lead to more lawsuits.

“If a parent comes to me and that parent has a legitimate reason to move into a district that has nothing to do with taking advantage of the transfer statute, that is a person or a plaintiff I’d be very interested in representing,” Schindler said.

Brittany Wagner (brittany.wagner@showmeinstitute.org) is an education policy research assistant at the Show-Me Institute.

Missouri Legislators May Change School Transfer Law

“People are working three jobs just to be able to afford private school tuition. [Parents] can’t afford to move to another school district.”

CRYSTAL WASHINGTON, PARENT

Thousands of Students Transfer

In 2013, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education classified the Normandy and Riverview Gardens school districts in St. Louis County as “unaccredited” because the performance of the district’s students was too poor to warrant accreditation. More than 2,000 students transferred, obligating the Riverview and Normandy districts to pay tuition ranging from $8,000 to $21,000 per student.

Officials from Normandy Schools Collaborative, the lowest-performing district in the state, reported the district might go bankrupt after paying $11 million for 1,000 transfers.

In June 2014, former Normandy Superintendent Ty McNichols claimed families had rented cheap apartments just so their children could transfer. He cited evidence in occupancy permit applications. Concurrantly, the Missouri Board of Education (MBOE) ruled only students who attended public school in Normandy for at least one semester could transfer. The new guidelines prohibited transfers of children who had not yet entered kindergarten or who had previously attended private schools.

Forced Into Unaccredited Schools

Crystal Washington, a parent with the Children’s Education Alliance of Missouri (CEAM), says forcing students to attend unaccredited schools is unacceptable.

“People are working three jobs just to be able to afford private school tuition,” Washington said. “[Parents] can’t afford to move to another school district.”

Under the new proposed legislation, students who live in failing districts but currently attend a private school

Judge Overruled Board’s Evasion

James Shuls, “Missouri School Transfer Law”: https://www.heartland.org/podcasts/2015/03/02/james-shuls-missouri-school-transfer-law
Education Savings Accounts Catch on in More States

By Ashley Bateman

Education savings accounts (ESAs) were first approved in Arizona in 2012 as a statewide reform, and an ESA program in Florida was implemented quickly in 2014, allowing 1,600 students to receive funds for the 2014–15 school year.

ESAs have now moved from a two-state phenomenon to potential legislation in more than a dozen states. Some of these bills serve all students and others are designed to assist specific populations only, such as disabled students.

ESAs are one of 2015’s hot topics, much like their reform predecessor tax credit scholarships were several years ago. Matthew Ladner, a senior advisor for policy and research at the Foundation for Excellence in Education, says ESAs are a significant upgrade over scholarships. Ladner even compares tax credits to rotary phones and ESAs to iPhones in the evolution of the education market.

“Tax credit scholarships and vouchers only do one amazing thing,” Ladner said. “The sort of options that an ESA gives you is the difference between exercising choices between schools and choices between [forms of] education. There is versatility and the ability to customize the education of your child.”

Parents with access to ESAs can customize their children’s education, using the funds to create a unique blend of approved services such as private tutoring, therapy, online courses, and private school, as well as saving for postsecondary education.

“We are in the very early stages of this, but it’s clearly a superior technology,” Ladner said.

Early Success

“ESAs have given us a ton of positive evidence, [in terms of] student achievement for participants and positive impacts they have had on traditional districts,” Ladner said.

Polls in Florida show parents are more satisfied with their children’s education given the choice of ESAs, regardless of whether they took advantage of the funds.

“Arizona show[s] you could put parents in charge of a child’s education finances, and Florida is following in those footsteps,” said Patrick Gibbons, public affairs manager for Step Up for Students. “ESAs really are the next step in a long line of steps public education is taking to customize learning for each child.”

Step Up for Students, an organization managing the Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts program in Florida, has found ESAs empower parents in ways that have improved academic outcomes.

“We are finding in Florida that most of the parents are making smart decisions on services that are easily defined as truly educational,” Gibbons said.

Demand and Supply

Demand is high for low-cost, parent-driven reform measures, and ESAs meet the need, says Andy Smarick, a partner at Bellwether Education Partners. He says the nation is still waiting to see the long-term effects of ESAs.

“Charter laws were really good about thinking of the supply of schools, not just demand of parents, and that enabled a new wave of charter schools to be developed,” Smarick said. “ESAs are good at responding to demand, but we have yet to see how it will affect supply. I’m encouraged, but it’s too early to see [based on current policy].”

Ladner says the ESA model creates a very powerful incentive for education providers to offer competitive costs for quality services.

Arizona ESAs ranged from $4,600 to $5,400 for students in grades 1–12 this year, with additional funding allotted for disabled students. These figures are far below average public school per-pupil spending in the state.

“One of the allowable uses of the ESA program is to save money for future higher education, up to a limited amount,” Ladner said. “Basically, what this does on the provider end is it creates a powerful incentive to provide as much bang for the buck [as possible].

“By putting the money in the hands of parents, we are discovering needs and wants no one considered before,” Gibbons said. “It also enables parents who have students with special needs to enlist the help of health care professionals and others who were previously excluded from the education marketplace. We can’t predict exactly how the market will evolve, but we know it’s going to be parent- and student-focused.”

Public and Private School Mix and Match

The majority of ESA funds go toward private school tuition. “[About 35 percent of parents in Arizona] mix and match services in the first year,” Ladner said.

“The public school system and interest groups lobbying tend to view [ESAs] as very threatening,” Ladner said. “Last time anyone surveyed Arizona, there were 30,000 private school seats in the state and well over a million public school kids. The reality is we could shift the entire funding system such that every child’s parent or guardian used a restricted debit card ... but there would [not be enough private school slots] to move every student. The difference would be, they would all be [in public schools] by choice, and we would still have a public education system, but it would be run by the parents in a [fundamentally different] way.”

Ashley Bateman (bateman.ae@googlemail.com) writes from Alexandria, Virginia.
By Heather Kays

A federal judge ruled Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal’s (R) lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Education regarding Common Core will proceed. The judge denied a motion by the Department of Justice to dismiss the case.

Jindal is grateful the lawsuit is moving forward, according to a press release issued by his office February 26:

“We are pleased the Court agreed that we have the authority to challenge Common Core and the federal programs that are tied to it,” wrote Jindal. “Common Core is the latest attempt by Washington, D.C. to federalize the education system and it must be stopped.”

Jindal’s lawsuit asserts the federal government coerced states into adopting Common Core standards and into participating in federally backed testing consortia.

**Seen as Important Victory**

Lance Izumi, a senior fellow at the Pacific Research Institute, says Jindal’s lawsuit moving forward is an important victory for Common Core opponents.

“The ruling by the federal district court judge that Gov. Bobby Jindal’s lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Education can proceed is an important procedural victory for the governor and opponents of Common Core.”

LANCE IZUMI, SENIOR FELLOW
PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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**‘Gives Hope to Families’**

Gene Mills, president of the Louisiana Family Forum (LFF), says there are four main reasons his organization opposes Common Core: a growing lack of parental support, federal interference in education, student privacy concerns, and the cost and feasibility of administering Common Core-aligned testing.

“LFF fully supports Gov. Jindal’s attempts to free Louisiana education from the constraints of Common Core,” Mills said. “No one is against high standards. We just think Common Core has become problematic.”

“Common Core opponents have been making this point for the past five years, so adjudicating this federal overreach, with its damage to the Tenth Amendment, is critically important,” Izumi said. “While it is unclear how the court will decide the case on the merits, allowing the lawsuit to proceed will mean that Common Core’s negative impact on state and local control of education will receive a transparent public airing—something that Common Core crafters and supporters have largely failed to do. For that, Gov. Jindal is to be thanked.”

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.
How Rewarding Students Can Improve Educational Outcomes

By Jay Lehr, Ph.D.

Parents and grandparents often look to experts in child development and psychology such as Dr. Benjamin Spock, Dr. Barry Brusselston, Jean Piaget, or William Glasser for advice. Now there is an even more insightful book to help guide the healthy growth and future success of your child or grandchild. That book is Rewards: How to use rewards to help children learn—and why teachers don’t use them well by Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Bast.

Walberg and Bast conducted meticulous research while putting Rewards together, which is evidenced by the 384 footnote sources of information provided in a book just over 200 pages long. The authors’ central claim is giving incentives to students can enhance their educational experience and increase their chances of success. Walberg and Bast bring the normally dry research associated with educational academic literature to life in their wonderfully written book.

The authors explain why rewards are a necessary part of effective schooling, refuting the naysayers while exposing the conventional wisdom of psychologists and economists on this subject. They show how goals should be set, why they are important for teachers to accelerate learning, and how they fit into computerized or digital learning and nontraditional programs in charter schools, school choice programs, and voucher systems. At the outset, Walberg and Bast, the chairman and president, respectively, of The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News, indicate how far the educational system has moved from the common-sense recommendations in their book. “The well-designed reward systems we describe do not include the unearned praise and uncritical recognition associated with the self-esteem fad that swept the U.S. in recent years,” write the authors.

Using Rewards as Motivation

In a chapter titled “The Economics of Incentives,” Walberg and Bast offer a highly relevant quotation from Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations: “Better than relying on intrinsic motivation, is to have people compete with one another for rewards.” They bring a host of other economists and psychologists into the debate as well. Even Aristotle appears frequently, with his comments on motivation.

The overwhelming volume of research Walberg and Bast have studied leads them to conclude the current U.S. public education structure impedes academic success. “Economists and political scientists have found inefficiency and bureaucracity are natural consequences of systems that aren’t exposed to competition and consumer choice,” write the authors. “Bureaucracies are clumsy, expensive and often ineffective substitutes for market processes that otherwise reward responsible innovation and punish failure, inefficiency, and laziness.”

Perhaps the most complex chapter in the book is “Setting the Right Goals,” as illustrated by their final two sentences: “The best that can be hoped for is that educators, parents, and students themselves will have a hand in goal setting and creating incentive systems. It can be a difficult balancing act requiring the best efforts of everyone involved.”

The chapter “Rewards at Home” is a simple guide for encouraging children to become better-than-average achievers. Walberg and Bast warn, “Parents should not be misled by popular writers into thinking rewards are inappropriate or counterproductive in the home learning environment. Experience and research show just the opposite.”

Importance of Consequences

Although the authors are strongly opposed to Common Core standards, which result in teaching to tests, they are in favor of testing. Walberg and Bast write, “Simply letting [students] avoid tests during their K–12 careers isn’t doing them any favors since tests with consequences will be a challenge they will face later in higher education and adult life.” They emphasize the rewards for testing should align with specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic goals.

The authors quote Frederick M. Hess, a former teacher and currently director of education studies at the American Enterprise Institute, explaining the plight of today’s public school teachers in a paragraph worth the price of this book: “‘Teachers are hired, essentially for life, through drawn-out recruiting processes that pay little attention to merit and alienate many highly qualified candidates. Little or nothing about teachers’ or administrators’ performance affects their career or job security.”

Educators who propose new approaches or new efficiencies are treated with suspicion by district officials and must run a gauntlet of official and cultural resistance in order to try anything new. There is little systemic recognition for excellent educators …”

Walberg and Bast quote many other educators who describe the problem in equally brilliant and prescient terms. They then lay out a detailed plan of how these things could be changed, including establishing a program to pay public school teachers based on their performance. They also explain why these problems tend not to exist for private school teachers, where many of the authors’ ideas are already in place.

Chapter 11 focuses on school choice rewards and the desperate state of public education today, documenting how choice programs can improve educational outcomes for students. They describe the best of the charter school programs, voucher systems, scholarship programs, and parent trigger. This book should be in the hands of every official charged with planning children’s education and every parent whose voice must be raised to demand a better education for their children.

Jay Lehr, Ph.D. (jlehr@heartland.org) is science director at The Heartland Institute.

PODCAST INFO

Rewards, Education, and the Culture of Poverty

Editor’s note: This is an excerpt from the book Rewards: How to use rewards to help children learn—and why teachers don’t use them well, published by The Heartland Institute. It is taken from Chapter 5, “Rewards at Home.”

By Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Bast

For some children, a “culture of poverty” severely limits the opportunities they have to benefit from structured play and enrollment in out-of-school programs. This culture may include machismo, severely authoritarian decision-making, and disdain for education. The culture may accept resignation and passivity before life’s challenges and even caregivers abandoning their children because of substance abuse.

Some individuals living in a culture of poverty seem to live for the moment, ignoring the past and opportunities to plan for the future. Nevertheless, some children rise above such circumstances. Connecting with other children and their families through after-school programs is often a constructive lifeline for these children.

Income Disparity, Cultural Divide

Access to out-of-school resources is especially important for children from impoverished or broken homes. Cultural and economic conditions limit parents’ goal-setting and incentives for their children, whereas higher family income and wealth allow parents to provide better opportunities for their children—starting with where the family lives, which can be a determining factor in the quality of the schools, personal safety, and access to other community assets. Wealthier families can afford to send their children to private schools and pay for uniforms and equipment for sports teams. They may have multiple vehicles for transporting children back and forth from practices, rehearsals, and events, and perhaps a stay-at-home parent who can oversee the complicated schedule.

Nevertheless, middle-income and even poor families often can provide their children with similar but less-costly opportunities to learn outside school. One way is to utilize the extensive network of free or inexpensive clubs and facilities that often are nearby. YMCAs, YWCAs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, park district or city-sponsored sports leagues, libraries, and programs provided by colleges and many private clubs are just some of the opportunities located in middle- and low-income communities.

Surrogate Parents Can Help

“Surrogate parents” can extend social capital’s lifeline to young people who otherwise would drift away. Asemah Andrews, principal of the Ferguson Academy for Young Women in Detroit, presides over a school that enrolls only pregnant, unwed teen mothers very likely to drop out of school, yet the school graduates 95 percent of its students. The school admits young mothers, often born themselves to unwed mothers who dropped out of school, and attempts to break that cycle of poverty. It offers a full-day nursery for their children while the mothers study and attend class.

This environment—and Andrews’ no-nonsense, motherly approach—enriches these young women’s impoverished social capital by introducing them to words, ideas, and experiences far beyond their dingy apartments and streets. “There are estimates that by age 3, poor kids have heard 30 million fewer words than kids in middle-class families,” Andrews says. “That 30-million-word deficit keeps me awake at night. We’re trying to teach teenagers to talk to their babies. Well, there’s a whole vocabulary attached to a garden that these teenagers can share.”

Children coming from poor or dysfunctional families face special challenges, but research suggests incentives and rewards are no less and perhaps even more important in helping them learn life skills.”

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“This book darn near made me cry. It is so hopeful, so persuasive, so sincere that I can’t imagine a young person reading it and not feeling, for the rest of his or her life, that voluntarism is the only truly moral and proper way to run a society.”

Joseph Bast, President, The Heartland Institute

The author of Take Me to Your Government, James Payne (“Count Nef”) has taught political science at Yale, Wesleyan, Johns Hopkins, and Texas A&M. His recent books include A History of Force (2004) and Six Political Illusions (2010).

For more information and to request examination copies visit www.PrincessNavina.com
Virginia May Allow Homeschool Students on Public School Teams

By Heather Kays

A bill proposed in Virginia would give public schools the option of allowing homeschool students to participate in their athletic programs and other activities.

The proposed legislation, House Bill 1626, is nicknamed the “Tebow bill” after former NFL player and Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow, who played for a public high school team while he was homeschooled in Florida.

The bill passed the General Assembly and could become law if signed by Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D), Del. Rob Bell (R-Charlottesville) and Del. David I. Ramadan (R-South Riding) introduced the bill.

Robert Holland, a senior fellow at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News, says although adopting Tebow laws has become a popular issue, creating such reforms is not in the best interest of homeschooling families.

“Naming equal-access bills after Tim Tebow was a brilliant move,” Holland said. “The very name suggests that if states do not enact laws as Florida did to allow homeschooled kids like Tebow to play high school sports, primarily football, tomorrow’s heroic Tim Tebows will languish in obscurity, flipping burgers instead of winning national collegiate championships. The measure could just as well be dubbed ‘No Tebows Left Behind.’”

Holland says enacting Tebow laws poses a danger of parents losing the autonomy and freedom homeschooling creates.

“The problem is that such a bid for selective special privileges within the governmental school system inevitably weakens the homeschooling independence that pioneering parents worked so hard for decades to gain, sometimes at the risk of prosecution,” Holland said. “As homeschoolers engaging in public school sports, clubs, and even occasional classes come under state regulation, political pressure will mount to bring all of homeschooling into conformity.”

Homeschool Families Push Back

Although the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) takes a neutral position on Tebow laws, HSLDA Senior Counsel Scott Woodruff says homeschooling parents have fought hard for Virginia’s Tebow bill.

“A bunch of homeschool families got together to push back [against the public school administrations],” said Woodruff. “Each individual high school still has the option to allow homeschoolers to play or not, even if this becomes law.”

Woodruff says at meetings he attended that addressed the Tebow bill in Virginia, some opposing the bill claimed it would allow “uneducated” students to play on the teams.

“One of the arguments against the bill [has been] if you let homeschoolers join the team, all these bad things might happen,” Woodruff said. “All those terrible things are not going to happen. I suspect it would go very smoothly.”

Fighting a Stigma

Woodruff says homeschool families are always fighting a stigma.

“Frankly, [opponents’ claims] were all silly arguments,” Woodruff said. “Opponents said, ‘No, no, no. We can’t let them on the team because they are not part of our community.’ But homeschoolers are in the community. They go to the churches in the community. They shop in the stores in the community. They live in the neighborhoods in the community. Allowing the homeschool students on those teams would allow homeschoolers the chance to complete the concept of being part of the community.”

Several states already have adopted Tebow laws.

“There’s a very strong nationwide trend of states allowing homeschool students to try out for athletic teams,” Woodruff said.

Proving Critics Wrong

For years, homeschool families have worked to provide ways to socialize their children, contrary to one of the most common criticisms of homeschooling, Holland says.

“In proving their critics wrong, home educators have taken justifiable pride in finding creative solutions to such supposed problems as lack of ‘socialization’ for their children by forming homeschool co-ops, leading regular field trips, and organizing clubs and, yes, athletic leagues,” said Holland.

“Indeed, many homeschooled athletes have won NCAA scholarships and have even played for professional and Olympic teams without the crutch of Tebow laws.”

Holland says being on traditional public school teams is not worth the risk of greater government regulation and influence.

“Home educators ought to continue to be models of creativity instead of seekers of government favors,” Holland said. “The ability to homeschool without government interference highlights the centrality of parental rights in education, and hence is critical to the broader school choice movement.”

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.
Oklahoma Lawmakers to Rework AP History Bill

By Bruce Edward Walker

Oklahoma lawmakers are reworking a bill that would grant authority to the State Board of Education to replace national Advanced Placement (AP) history courses with state-drafted curricula. The original legislation, House Bill 1380, was introduced by state Rep. Dan Fisher (R-El Reno). Fisher pulled the bill on February 17 after it passed the House Education Committee.

The bill drew national attention after Fisher described current AP history courses as negatively characterizing the United States as a “nation of oppressors and exploiters.” Some educators and journalists speculated Fisher was seeking to do away with AP history courses because the original draft of the bill included language that would have placed conditions on funding for AP history classes.

The proposed bill prohibited “the awarding of grants or expenditure of money for any Advanced Placement United States History course until certain conditions are met.”

Reuters reported on February 19 that Fisher said the first draft of the bill was ambiguous and needed rewriting.

Called for State-Drafted Curriculum

HB 1380 recommended a state-drafted curriculum, including speeches delivered by Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush and the Ten Commandments. It also recommended excerpts from the following: *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck’s anti-capitalist novel set during the Great Depression; the “Bullet or Ballet” speech of Malcolm X; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech and his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”; and President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Great Society” and “The American Promise” speeches.

The inclusion of the Ten Commandments was one of opponents’ most criticized aspects of the proposal. The Ten Commandments were included as one component in a lesson on the development of the rule of law, which also included the Magna Carta and John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*. Also included in the proposed curriculum were President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address and his “Decision to Go to the Moon” speech. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Day of Infamy” and “Four Freedoms” speeches were also included, along with writings and speeches by William Jennings Bryan, Emma Lazarus, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Booker T. Washington.

Despite the inclusion of this wide variety of documents, some influential politicians and pundits say Fisher attempted to stop students from learning. The *Washington Post*’s Catherine Rampell wrote, “[Fisher’s bill is] trying to ban the teaching of U.S. history.”

‘Empower Parents’

The cost of implementing HB 1380, had it passed in its original form, was projected at $3.8 million. Similar measures are being considered in Colorado, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.

Brandon Dutcher, senior vice president of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs says the controversy over AP history is not surprising.

“We’re often told that public education is ‘the cornerstone of a democratic society,’ as the Oklahoma Education Association puts it, and that public education brings together people of disparate backgrounds and helps create social harmony. Oklahoma’s current dust-up over AP history reminds us that’s just not the case. Whether the conflicts are over history or phonics or evolution or sex education or whatever, we continue to see these fights in which the government picks winners and losers.”

BRANDON DUTCHER
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
OKLAHOMA COUNCIL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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By Tom Gantert

Florida Gov. Rick Scott (R) has issued an executive order that suspends one test in his state’s schools for 11th grade students and called for legislation to review and reduce other testing.

After an investigation into the frequency of testing done in Florida schools, state education officials determined schools were administering too many standardized tests. The state officials looked at the frequency of testing on the district level, the purpose of the tests, and whether there was redundancy.

“A quality education prepares students to succeed in college or a career so they can pursue their dreams,” Scott said in a February 24 press release. “It’s important to measure students’ progress and achievements, but we must not lose sight of our goal to provide every student with the very best education. As I have traveled the state, I have heard from parents and teachers that there are too many tests, and I agree.”

Scott’s decision is part of a national trend toward reducing testing. A U.S. Senate committee in January questioned whether the nation’s schoolchildren were taking too many tests.

Myths About Testing

The Foundation for Excellence in Education (FEE), based in Florida, defends testing and uses the motto “Fewer tests. Better tests.”

FEE says several myths about testing are prevalent in Florida. One myth is the state is requiring the administering of hundreds of additional tests due to a teacher evaluation law. On average, students spend only 1 percent or less of the school year’s 900 hours of instruction time taking statewide standardized tests.

Districts have to use student learning as part of teacher evaluations, but FEE says the districts have complete flexibility when determining how to measure student learning in subjects not mandated for statewide tests. Districts can create their own tests, such as a creative writing essay for a writing class or a piano recital for a music class, and refrain from using traditional paper-and-pencil exams.

“Testing that provides honest, helpful information on how a student is doing is important to teachers and parents, and, most importantly, to children, because we care,” said Allison Aubuchon, FEE’s director of state communications.

“We don’t want [children] falling through the cracks,” said Aubuchon.

“Research shows the number of tests varies widely from district to district. There should be a look at the frequency of tests, particularly at the local level, as well as reducing duplicative tests and providing results in a timely manner to aid in classroom decisions.”

Push for More Testing

Kyle Olson, CEO of the Education Action Group, says Common Core standards have created a push for more testing. He says standardized testing is important but thinks there is too much of it.

“[Testing] can show how a school is doing and how a teacher is doing,” Olson said. “It gives parents an unbiased view of how their child is doing. But at the same time, in the zeal to figure out why schools aren’t doing as well as they should, there has been a move towards too much testing.”

“Is there too much testing? Yeah. I think there is,” Olson said.

Olson says more states may follow Florida’s example and reduce the amount of testing.

“A lot of parents are unhappy with the Common Core testing,” Olson said. “They are unhappy with the amount of data collection in those things. You have unions that don’t want teachers held accountable for their performances. One way to reduce the political pressure is for governors to cut down on testing.”

Tom Gantert (ganert@mackinac.org) is senior capitol correspondent for Michigan Capitol Confidential, a daily news site of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.
**By Ashley Bateman**

Georgia education leaders face a dilemma mirrored in many states nationwide: Too many schools are failing too many students.

Nearly 150 public schools in Georgia, excluding alternative, special education, and nontraditional schools, were deemed failing between 2012 and 2014, scoring below 60 out of 100 on the College and Career Performance Index for three consecutive years.

Although Georgia has implemented additional accountability measures in the past two decades, they have had little effect in turning around failing schools, all of which are located in high-poverty areas. School officials spent approximately $100 million on turnaround efforts at 40 failing schools since 2013, but a state analysis conducted in 2014 indicates there has been little or no improvement. Some schools have even regressed.

**Expensive Turnaround Failures**

Turnaround efforts are notoriously ineffective and costly, but some states have found success in overhauling entire districts, lifting school zones to allow students to attend their school of choice and decentralizing decision-making to local control, according to research by school choice advocates.

Georgia education officials are looking to neighboring states’ successes, particularly in Louisiana and Tennessee, with the goal of adding a reform movement to the governor’s education agenda.

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal (R) says he hopes to retool and reinvent the Opportunity School District (OSD) method New Orleans adopted and began to build just before Hurricane Katrina destroyed the city’s schools in 2005.

“While Georgia boasts many schools that achieve academic excellence every year, we still have too many schools where students have little hope of attaining the skills they need to succeed in the workforce or in higher education,” Deal said. “We have a moral duty to do everything we can to help these children. Failing schools keep the cycle of poverty spinning from one generation to the next. Education provides the only chance for breaking that cycle.

When we talk about helping failing schools, we’re talking about rescuing children. I stand firm on the principle that every child can learn, and I stand equally firm in the belief that the status quo isn’t working.”

**Replicating Success**

“New Orleans is an urban district where almost all of the schools are being run in nontraditional, nonconventional ways,” said Kevin Kane, president of the Pelican Institute for Public Policy. “I think it’s difficult to replicate the New Orleans model if you’re not doing something as comprehensive as what’s been done here. Having 40 schools in one city that have exited the old system is just a different dynamic than 40 schools scattered around the state.”

Kane says the principles of accountability, giving students more choice and freedom, and allowing schools to operate with greater autonomy and allowing them to replace teachers who don’t perform, have worked across Louisiana and can be replicated elsewhere.

The Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) recently published a report on the success of New Orleans’ public education system improvement measures.

“The basic tenets that New Orleans tried to do are things a lot of other cities are [replicating] on a smaller scale,” said Robin Lake, director of CRPE. “Certainly from a state takeover perspective, other states have done something similar to the [Recovery School District] governance model. The best example is probably Tennessee. Early results in Tennessee and New Orleans are looking pretty good. … They seem to be committed to continuous improvement.”

“You’re talking about creating a system that warrants real accountability,” Kane said. “That’s the first critical step, and I think that’s what Georgia is doing.”

**A Targeted Approach**

“This is a targeted approach,” said Jen Talaber, Deal’s communications director. “The Opportunity School District would take in no more than 20 schools per year, meaning it would govern no more than 100 at any given time. Schools would stay in the district for no less than five years but no more than 10 years.”

Ninety-six percent of the districts with eligible schools currently spend at or above the state’s average per pupil cost of $8,400, and a quarter of all eligible schools are in districts that spend significantly more.

Deal’s plan would create an extra fund to direct money to “innovative and wrap-around service programs” in OSD schools, according to an OSD plan document.

According to a document Deal published summarizing OSD implementation, OSD would act with the authority of a Georgia Local Education Agency, with a governor-appointed superintendent, and operate under the Office of Student Achievement.

If passed into law, implementation would begin as early as the 2017–18 school year.

“We are still looking it over and learning more about it,” said Matt Cardoza, director of communications for the Georgia Department of Education. Cardoza says it is likely the Office of Student Achievement, specifically named in the bill, will play a larger role than the state’s Department of Education (DOE).

Deal and Georgia DOE Superintendent Richard Woods plan to travel to New Orleans to see the system firsthand.

“I would like nothing more than for the need for the Opportunity School District to decline every year; that would show our reforms are working,” Deal said. “But everyone, regardless of where they stand on this issue, can agree that today there is a need. We know from other states, such as Louisiana and Tennessee, that these programs can produce positive results for students and communities.”

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Governor’s Report: New York’s Schools Are Failing

By Bruce Edward Walker

Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) is seeking to implement several new education reforms in response to a study his office conducted that concludes New York’s public education system is failing.

The report, titled “The State of New York’s Failing Schools: 2015 Report,” gave failing grades to 91 schools in New York City, where 50,000 students attend schools with a 50 percent or lower high school graduation rate.

“Our education system needs dramatic reform, and it has for years,” Cuomo said in his annual State of the State address. “I believe this is the year to do it.”

Among the fixes proposed by Cuomo are: adopting new standards for teachers in light of the evidence only two-thirds of new teachers were as adept at reading as a high school senior; adding 100 charter schools; and granting additional authority to state government officials to turn around failing schools.

Cuomo also recommends using state funds to cover tuition for high-achieving college students who agree to teach at least five years at a New York school, rewarding high-performing teachers with a $20,000 bonus, and allowing tax credits for personal donations to private and public schools.

“Gov. Cuomo’s education agenda fights a monopoly the only way you can: with competition,” said Derrell Bradford, executive director of the New York Campaign for Achievement Now (NYCAN), which is part of a national network of state-based education-reform advocacy groups. “The plan would increase the number of charter schools by 100 and eliminate a secondary cap, based on region, in the law. It also includes [the] Education Investment Tax Credit, which would incentivize donations by business and individuals to scholarship-granting organizations like similar programs in Florida and Pennsylvania.”

‘Pushing the Envelope’

Charles Sahm, education director at the Manhattan Institute, says he applauds Cuomo’s education agenda.

“He’s really pushing the envelope with teaching evaluations,” Sahm said. “I like the idea of raising the bar to qualify teachers as well. I think it’s great and courageous in a lot of ways.”

Bradford said, “It’s unprecedented and welcome for a Democrat in a highly unionized state to take on these issues, and the kids of New York can’t wait one more second for them to become law.”

According to the report, 4,530 public and charter schools are responsible for educating 2.7 million students in New York. The state also has 1,768 private schools.

The study reports average spending per student increased from $11,546 in 2002–03 to $19,552 in 2012–13, resulting in New York spending more per pupil than any other state since 2005–06. Currently, the state spends 84 percent more than the current national average of $10,968.

Nearly a Quarter-Million in Failing Schools

The report gives 178 schools failing grades, with many showing no improvement over the past decade. The study estimates almost 250,000 students are attending failing schools.

The report states, “It is incongruous that 99 percent of teachers were rated effective, while only 35.8 percent of our students are proficient in math and 31.4 percent in English language arts (ELA). How can so many of our teachers be succeeding when so many of our students are struggling?”

“The results are stunning but not surprising, and they tell us what we already know,” Bradford said. “New York is one of the highest-spending states for public education in America, spending almost twice the national average to get the kind of soul-crushing results you see in the governor’s failing-school study. And even while people like Karen Magee, president of New York State United Teachers, tell us there is no crisis and that poverty trumps all, they have their hand out for another $2 billion in school aid. They want the money, but not the responsibility, and our kids deserve better.”

‘Breach of Social Contract’

Proficiency tests for New York students in grade 3 through grade 8 showed dismal results. Citing the proficiency statistics in math and English, the report stated, “Thus approximately two-thirds of students are NOT proficient in these two subjects. Nationally, New York is ranked 32nd in both 4th and 8th math scores, and 20th and 32nd in 4th and 8th grade ELA scores, respectively.”

Cuomo called the poor results “a fundamental breach of the social contract.”

Sahm says he is pleased Cuomo is raising the cap on charter schools while seeking to make charters more accountable.

“Many charter schools are positively transforming the education landscape of New York City,” Sahm said.

Sahm says several charters are severely underperforming and should have their charters revoked. He cites the United Federation of Teachers Charter School as an example of school closure due to consistently poor student performance.

Bradford says the report effectively indicates the shortcomings of the state’s education system.

“Monopolies drive up cost and decrease quality,” Bradford said. “And if you are a low-income or minority kid in New York City, you have a high chance of being zoned to a school that does not work for you, where you are more likely to get an ineffective teacher, and very likely to have the teachers union leadership look the other way on your education.”

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For 31 years, The Heartland Institute has supplied the nation’s elected officials with reliable research and commentary on the most important public policy issues of the day.

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