Ohio May Let Some Schools Create Own Tests

By Chris Neal

Ohio may soon give certain school districts the option of creating their own exams.

As criticism of Common Core continues, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is considering implementing what it calls the Innovative Learning Pilot program, which would permit 15 science, technology, engineering, and math-focused school districts to develop their own tests.

“The Ohio Department of Education will seek a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education that would allow these schools to use locally selected or developed innovative assessments in place of state tests,” ODE stated in an April 6 press release. “Any alternative tests the schools administer would

Mississippi Governor Vetoes Commission on Common Core

By Heather Kays

A large and growing grassroots effort against Common Core has yielded unsatisfying results for many parents, activists, and officials in Mississippi.

Instead of repealing and replacing Common Core, as opponents of the K–12 math and English standards wanted, the state legislature passed legislation that would have formed a commission to review Common Core. Gov. Phil Bryant (R) vetoed the bill on April 23.

If Bryant had signed Senate Bill 2161 into law, a 15-member commission would have made recommendations by December to the state's Board of Education.

Montanans Fight Common Core in Court — 6

Parents, Activists Raise Student Privacy Concerns — 11

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Virginia Tebow Bill Vetoed

A bill that would have allowed homeschooled students to compete in public school sports passed both Virginia’s House and Senate, but Gov. Terry McAuliffe vetoed the measure.

NYC Teacher Tenure Lawsuit

A Staten Island judge ruled a lawsuit challenging New York State’s teacher tenure and dismissal statutes may proceed.

Arkansas OKs Voucher Plan

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson signed legislation that creates school vouchers for children with disabilities.

Albuquerque Virtual Program

The Albuquerque Public School System plans to implement a new virtual school in an attempt to keep students in the district.

Nevada Establishes Choice

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval signed into law a bill creating the state’s first school choice program.
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How Common Core Diminishes the Teaching of Classic Literature

By Vivian Hughbanks

Schools are shifting away from teaching classic literature, according to a report by the Brown Center. Michael Godsey, a high school English teacher at San Luis Obispo High School in California says the culprit, at least in part, is Common Core standards. The national K–12 standards for English language arts focus on text comprehension and communication techniques and deemphasize reading of imaginative literature such as fiction by iconic authors such as Austen, Dostoyevsky, and Homer.

“There’s been a definite shift away from the classics and toward the teaching of reading and writing skills,” Godsey said.

Common Core supporters tout the standards’ inclusion of a requirement to teach one Shakespeare play and one American literary work, but there is no way to be certain the underlying themes and meanings of these texts will be taught or gauged, says Emory University English professor Mark Bauerlein.

“Those are just recommendations; they’re not requirements,” Bauerlein said. “If it’s not going to be tested, teachers and developers are probably going to ignore those standards.”

Less Classic Fiction

Teachers are including more nonfiction articles and less classic fiction in their classes because of Common Core. According to a 2015 Brown Center report on American education, fourth-grade teachers are teaching 8 percent more nonfiction works than in 2009.

“The Common Core English language arts standards call for teachers to shift the content of reading materials away from stories and other fictional forms of literature in favor of more nonfiction works than in 2009.”

Common Core supporters tout the standards’ inclusion of a requirement to teach one Shakespeare play and one American literary work, but there is no way to be certain the underlying themes and meanings of these texts will be taught or gauged, says Emory University English professor Mark Bauerlein.

“Those are just recommendations; they’re not requirements,” Bauerlein said. “If it’s not going to be tested, teachers and developers are probably going to ignore those standards.”

Less Interested in Reading

Technology is helpful in many teaching situations, but it can also be incredibly distracting for youngsters, Bauerlein says.

“Teachers find students in middle school and high school are less and less interested in reading, in part because they’re so caught up in the media and television,” Bauerlein said.

Television, social media, and other Internet outlets have shortened students’ attention spans, says Godsey.

“Young adult literature is generally not as well-written as the classics, because they’re not classics,” said Stotsky. “That’s the point.”

Relevance of Classic Literature

Bauerlein says ignoring the wealth of wisdom available in classic literature seems irresponsible, yet that’s what Common Core does.

“When I do see students reading for pleasure, it’s usually [popular contemporary young-adult fiction author] John Green, and it used to be The Hunger Games,” Godsey said.

Simpler books are more appealing to students today, many of whom have short attention spans, says Godsey.

“The lack of depth has taken a toll on consumption of classic literature, says Stotsky.

“When I do see students reading for pleasure, it’s usually [popular contemporary young-adult fiction author] John Green, and it used to be The Hunger Games,” Godsey said.

Simpler books are more appealing to students today, many of whom have short attention spans, says Godsey.

“People who are part of my school’s administration explicitly encourage us to teach less literature,” Godsey said.

At a reading conference Godsey attended, the keynote speaker advised teachers to “ditch literature” because “literary fiction is not critical to college success.” The speaker suggested teaching a module on Internet use instead.

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Miss. Governor Vetoes Panel on Common Core

Continued from page 1

of Education about what academic standards to use.

Recommendations could have included minor changes or a complete overhaul of the standards, state legislators say. The governor, lieutenant governor, Speaker of the House, and Department of Education would have appointed the commission’s 11 voting members. The other four would have been nonvoting members.

Hope for the Future

State Sen. Angela Hill (R-Picayune) says she does not understand why Bryant vetoed the bill while creating several other task forces to examine other issues. She says she hopes for a special session to address Common Core or for a special other task forces to examine other issues. She says she hopes for a special session to address Common Core or for a special

Panel on Common Core

Common Core repeal-and-replace legislation to pass during the next legislative session to address Common Core or for the lack of strong repeal-and-replace legislation.

“The data protections in the bill the governor vetoed were pretty significant, including prohibitions against sharing biometric data, religious and political beliefs, and conducting psychological and socio-emotional surveys on students,” said Hill. “I’ve not seen another privacy bill considered in the Mississippi legislature, though several have been filed over the last couple of years.”

Chamber of Commerce Pressure

Hill says the Mississippi Economic Council (MEC), the state’s chamber of commerce, deserves much of the blame for the lack of strong repeal-and-replace legislation.

“I believe the state chamber of commerce’s support of Common Core is the greatest hindrance to getting a strong bill out of the legislature,” Hill said. “[Its] corporate influence has helped shape education policy such as state-funded pre-K and putting more students under the jurisdiction of the Mississippi Department of Education, whose track record of immense support for Common Core down to the K–3 level is contrary to the will of the electorate.

“The MEC has the strongest lobbying presence in the legislature. They do some good work on freeing up businesses from regulation, but they are way off base on supporting Common Core.”

ANGELA HILL
STATE SENATOR
PICAYUNE, MISSISSIPPI

Restoring Local Control

Hill says she is confident Common Core will not remain in Mississippi permanently. Repeal-and-replace legislation will pass or the standards will be dismantled one piece at a time, Hill says.

“Reduction in federal control, the Constitution clearly gives [only] the enumerated powers to the federal government, and education is clearly a power reserved for the states,” Hill said. “The comingling of the powers that are deliberately separated in the U.S. Constitution usurps individual rights as well as state sovereignty. How long can a republic last if the Constitution continues to be ignored?”

Hill asked. “Redistribution of funds to states with federal mandates attached may be our demise.”

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.

“An Unwelcome Compromise

Forest Thigpen, president of the Mississippi Center for Public Policy, says no one seemed happy with the compromise presented in SB 2161.

“A lot of grassroots people, a lot of parents, and a lot of superintendents do not like Common Core, and they want it changed,” said Thigpen. “There are other superintendents who are happy with Common Core.”

Thigpen says MEC was less vocal in its support of Common Core than in previous years.

Reducing Federal Control

Thigpen says there were some positive provisions in SB 2161.

“It certainly takes steps in that direction to mitigate our acquiescence to federal control,” Thigpen said. “The legislation has some student data provisions that would be good. The steps that it takes towards protecting us from a national curriculum are better than no steps being taken in that direction.

“However, the commission that would be created under this bill has the potential to simply endorse the current standards and not change anything, which would not be good.” Thigpen said, adding there was no way to know whether the commission would have been useful because it would all have depended on who was appointed.

““A lot of grassroots people, a lot of parents, and a lot of superintendents do not like Common Core, and they want it changed. There are other superintendents who are happy with Common Core.”

FOREST THIGPEN, PRESIDENT
MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY
By Chris Neal

The West Virginia Senate has made serious changes to a bill that would repeal the state’s Common Core State Standards.

House Bill 2934, designed to replace Common Core with state-specific standards, passed the House in February. The Senate then rewrote the bill to postpone a repeal decision for two years.

An education subcommittee in the Senate determined a comprehensive review committee, made up of parents, school administrators, and legislators, would complete a thorough review of the content of the Common Core standards and report back to the legislature by the beginning of 2017.

West Virginia Gov. Earl Tomblin (D) says he does not support a full repeal of Common Core, according to West Virginia Public Broadcasting.

Ignoring Anti-Common Core Movement

Citing her experiences in Oklahoma, Jenni White, president of a pro-reform group called Restore Oklahoma Public Education, says she has dealt with similar efforts to rebrand or simply disregard the anti-Common Core movement in her state. White says state senates have often been an obstacle in efforts to repeal the Common Core standards.

“The Senate has been a ‘problem’ in every state I can think of when it comes to Common Core repeal,” said White. “There’s probably some root historical significance of the snobbery and snobbery found in so many state senates, but historical significance or not, this trend is becoming obnoxious.

“Though Oklahoma’s House of Representatives originated and even championed our Common Core repeal bill, our Senate refused to hear the bill in committee, forcing a few brave senators to tackle the issue on the floor via amendment to another bill,” White said. “The public has got to start understanding the legislative process and not only calling their legislators on the carpet for stymieing the will of the people, but actively opposing, directly in their capitols, the kinds of actions seen in Oklahoma and West Virginia.

“For the West Virginia Senate to so blatantly thwart the will of the people is a sad state of affairs, which citizens should not allow to stand,” said White. “Parents should be creating lists of senators to actively oppose for reelec-
tion based on their vote on HB 2934.”

Prefers Repeal

Lindsey Burke, an education policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation’s Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity, says fully repealing Common Core is a state’s best option.

“States that want to reclaim their education decision-making authority need to fully [abandon] the Common Core standards and tests,” Burke said. “The water is warm: four states never adopted and four more worked to exit the standards and tests in 2014.

“West Virginia can be a leader in reclaiming control of the content taught in local schools, to ensure that it reflects the education priorities of West Virginia’s teachers and families,” Burke said. “Ultimately, if West Virginia wants to improve its education system, all roads lead to school choice, which is sorely missing in the state to date.”

Chris Neal (cdobro245@gmail.com) writes from New York, New York.
Montanans Fight Common Core in Court

By Ashley Bateman

Montana parents, activists, and educators are questioning the constitutionality, federal government overreach, and testing associated with the Common Core K–12 math and English standards.

“Common Core came into this state without a vote of the citizens,” said Eric Olsen, Eagle Forum state president. “We already have too much government control.”

House Bill 377, which would repeal Common Core, passed in the House by a 54–46 vote. The bill was sponsored by state Rep. Debra Lamm (R-Livingston).

“I think the most important thing is that [the standards were accepted] without public input or legislative decision-making or review of [the] huge policy changes,” Lamm said. “The Office of Public Instruction basically obligated us [to implement Common Core].”

“They were adopted before there was a fiscal note done by the legislature, which is unconstitutional,” said Kari Zeier, state co-director of Concerned Women for America.

Seen as Federal Overreach

“Parents were totally unaware, and many school boards were unaware until it was rolled out,” Lamm said. “It was a huge federal overreach in an area where the people and public [officials] responsible for education were left out of the process.”

Transparency of the student testing process is also a major concern for parents, Olsen said.

Zeier has three children in public schools, and she says she will remove her children from the public school system after the 2014–15 school year.

“As a parent, I started waking up several years ago [to Common Core],” Zeier said. “We hadn’t heard about [the standards] until they were implemented at the state level. What a slap in the face it was to parents that this huge educational shift took place in our state and parents were not notified about it.”

Student Privacy Concerns

Parents are also concerned about the collection of student data and other student privacy issues related to Common Core testing. Originally, Lamm included language addressing privacy concerns in HB 377, but she then decided to draw the issue out as a separate piece of legislation.

Lamm says legislators tabled the privacy bill and may offer some amendments.

Smarter Balanced tests, standardized tests aligned with Common Core, have been put on hold as tensions rise.

“We just experienced a halt to the rollout of testing this week due to ‘data problems,’ but we don’t know what those are and what it means,” Lamm said.

When Zeier approached her daughter’s school to opt her out of the Common Core-aligned testing, she found the local code, not state law, dictates standardized tests are now compulsory.

“My child is not a number; my child is not a dollar amount,” said Zeier.

Poor Prospects in Legislature

“We have 13 Republicans who are voting with Democrats and not giving us a majority,” said Olsen. “Our governor would veto even if [HB 377] did pass the Senate and House.

“If we could get more conservatives in the Senate and House and a governor who would work with us, we could do an entire retrofit of the education system here, get rid of federal funds, and draft a ... modern education system that is more comparable with the rest of the world,” Olsen said.

Lamm says implementation of Smarter Balanced tests was difficult for school officials and educators.

“The Senate also heard from our rural education association, and they are very concerned with how the testing has disrupted their schedules,” Lamm said. “I hope the committee that heard those things will give them some thought.”

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

School Vouchers May Become a Reality in Tennessee

By Jeff Reynolds

A bill under consideration by the Tennessee General Assembly would allow school vouchers in the state for the first time. The bill is similar to a failed measure proposed by Gov. Bill Haslam (R) in previous sessions.

House Bill 1049 and Senate Bill 999 are companion bills that would allow low-income families with students in the bottom 5 percent of schools to opt their children out of their local public school and enroll in a school of their choice, including private schools.

Tony Niknejad, Tennessee state director of the American Federation of Children, lauded the voucher bills.

“School voucher programs have an excellent track record in improving outcomes for students. Study after study has shown that introducing choice and competition only helps. Moreover, in every state that school vouchers or private school choice has been enacted, the school system saves money in the long term.”

Tony Niknejad
State Director of Tennessee
American Federation of Children

Jeff Reynolds (jeffreyreynolds@comcast.net) writes from Portland, Oregon.

“I think the most important thing is that [the standards were accepted] without public input or legislative decision-making or review of [the] huge policy changes.”

Debra Lamm
State Representative
Livingston, Montana
Alabama Supreme Court Upholds School Choice Law

By Bruce Edward Walker

The Alabama Supreme Court overturned a lower court’s ruling against the Alabama Accountability Act (AAA) school choice program. In an 8–1 vote, the court ruled in favor of preserving AAA, which has provisions for school vouchers and individual refundable tax credits.

AAA became law in 2013 and was immediately challenged in court by state Sen. Quinton Ross (D-Montgomery) and a school superintendent who claimed the school choice program appropriates public monies for private education. In March, the court rejected those claims and upheld the constitutionality of the law.

“In layman’s terms, money goes to parents—not schools,” said the court in its majority opinion. “That makes it constitutional.”

“While it is important to keep track of the progress students are making, and accountability,” said Leslie Hiner, vice president of programs and state relations for the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.

Katherine Robertson, vice president of the Alabama Policy Institute (API), a free-market think tank based in Birmingham, says her organization is satisfied with the court’s decision.

“API filed an amicus brief in the case, so we are very pleased, yet not surprised, that the Alabama Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Alabama Accountability Act,” Robertson said. “The court wisely rebuffed the politically driven attempt to do away with a law that has delivered hope to so many Alabama families in the form of school choice. This decision should be of great encouragement, not only to the beneficiaries of the act but [also] to the many individuals and businesses who have supported it through donations to scholarship programs.”

Ohio May Let Some Schools Create Own Tests

Continued from page 1

still have to meet state guidelines for rigor and other expectations. The earliest that department officials expect the schools to begin piloting the alternative tests would be the 2016-17 school year.

ODOE says schools would be allowed to use their own tests in educators’ and students’ performance assessments.

“The districts and schools also may use these innovative assessment systems to inform teacher and principal evaluations, as well as state-issued school and district report cards,” said ODOE in its release. “Ohio currently considers state test scores in these accountability systems.”

Increases Local Control

Greg Lawson, a policy analyst with the Buckeye Institute, says he is pleased Ohio is taking a step toward restoring local control of education.

“Given the many concerns parents have regarding Common Core and the associated PARCC assessments, it only makes sense to offer alternative options,” Lawson said. “A one-size-fits-all response to education has never made sense. The main challenge will be finding a way to make meaningful comparisons between districts that keep PARCC and those that eventually do not.”

Lawson says the pilot program also addresses the current excessive testing regimens.

“While it is important to keep track of the progress students are making, the number of hours spent in testing has taken on too much of a life of its own,” Lawson said. “Alternatives that can reduce some of this burden make sense.”

Seen as First Step

Doran Moreland of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice says the pilot program is a step in the right direction. Moreland says one-size-fits-all testing standards monopolize valuable instruction time and tend to be problematic for students and teachers.

“The Friedman Foundation is always supportive of efforts to reduce regulations on schools,” Moreland said. “Currently, students are tested too frequently, and we believe true accountability exists with families who decide to join or leave a school on their own accord. Ideally, schools should be able to tailor lesson plans and testing to meet the unique needs of their students. This proposed legislation seems to be a positive step in this direction.”

Heidi Huber, founder of Ohioans Against Common Core, says the pilot program is an extension of Common Core and an extension of the Race to the Top grant program.

“This falls under a program coordinated by the [Council of Chief State School Officers, one of the two copyright holders to the Common Core State Standards], called the Innovation Lab Network [ILN],” Huber said. “Local districts working directly with the U.S. Department of Education and seeking its approval is an affront to local- and state-level control of education and a huge blow to local autonomy and accountability.”

While it is important to keep track of the progress students are making, the number of hours spent in testing has taken on too much of a life of its own.”

GREG LAWSON
POLICY ANALYST
BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

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Catherine Candisky, “Ohio may allow some school districts to develop their own tests,” The Columbus Dispatch, April 7, 2015: http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2015/04/06/alternative-testing.html


“Ohio Prepares to Study Alternatives to State Tests,” Ohio Department of Education: http://education.ohio.gov/Media/Media-Releases/Ohio-Prepares-to-Study-Alternatives-to-State-Tests#.VSx6zPnF-Ul

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Chris Neal (cdobro245@gmail.com) writes from New York, New York.
Fla. Bill Would Streamline Charter School School Approvals

By Jeff Reynolds

The Florida House of Representa-
tives is considering a bill that would streamline the charter school approval process and fast-track the closing of underperforming charters.

House Bill 7037 would create a state-
wide institute whose mission would be

to assist in the opening of proposed
charter schools. It would use a standardized
checklist to determine important infor-
mation in need of collection. The infor-
mation would be used to help indicate
future success for proposed schools.
Sponsors say this should increase
the quality of future charter applications
and lead to greater academic success.

The bill also includes a provision
requiring termination of any charter
school receive two consecu-
tive “F” grades from the state.

Ensuring Charter Quality

Allison Aubuchon, spokesperson for the
Foundation for Florida’s Future, lauded
the bill.

“A statewide institute would provide assistance to charter applicants, ensur-
ing [charters] of the highest quality are
opening for our students,” Aubuchon
said. “It would better ensure charters
are financially viable and able to pro-
vide an excellent education to Florida
children.”

Aubuchon says it’s important to max-
imize school choice options for parents
and students.

“This bill will help ensure more high-
quality charter schools can get into the
highest-need communities,” Aubuchon
said. “It is important that we work to
provide great school choices to serve the
needs of Florida students and make it
easier for effective out-of-state charters
to enter the state.”

Positive Results of Charters

Bill Mattox, a resident fellow at the
James Madison Institute, says in the
approximately 15 years since school
choice has been expanded in Florida,
academic results have demonstrably
improved, particularly among students
who weren’t properly served in tradi-
tional public schools.

“Our special-needs students now per-
form better in testing than any other
special-needs population in the United
States,” said Mattox. “Our special-
needs kids rank number one in perfor-
mance in testing. This is seen both in
private schools and in public schools
because competition has entered into
the education market and public schools
have raised their game.”

Mattox says both choice and account-
ability have contributed to the success.

“Since all of the reform initiatives
[were] ushered in about 15 years ago,
there was a dramatic turnaround in
terms of achievement of Florida stu-
dents,” said Mattox. “How much of it
was due to choice innovations, and how
much of it was due to accountability
measures—like report cards for schools
and things like that—it’s difficult to say
how much each part played. But some-
thing positive happened here, and we
ought to continue to promote these poli-
cies to further our advancement.”

Expanding Choice Beyond Charters

Mattox says it is important for the
school choice movement to expand
beyond charter schools.

“Given that so much progress has
been made in our state, we never want
to see the conversation begin or end
with charter schools,” Mattox said.
“We want to see school choice across
the board. For that reason, we look to
see every part of the choice movement
advance simultaneously. So, at the
same time that we’re promoting open
enrollment and charter school innova-
tions, we’re also pushing for expansion
of our new education savings accounts.
At the same time, we’re progressively
helping to defend taxpayer dollars in
funding against attacks through the
legal system by the teachers unions.”

Mattox says the most important mea-
sure of school choice’s effectiveness
is parental feedback.

“The most important accountability
measure is parental satisfaction,” Mat-
tox said. “What we have found is that
parents like school choice. The more
familiar they are with choice, the more
they like it. When they have a choice,
they show high satisfaction with the
choices they choose for their children.

Ultimately, in a market-based sys-
tem, consumer satisfaction, or in this
case parental and student satisfaction,
should be a very strong consideration
in measuring success,” Mattox said. “If
you get the choice part of the puzzle
right, a lot of the accountability part
will take care of itself. Schools will
either raise their game or lose busi-
ness.”

Jeff Reynolds (jefferyreynolds@comcast.net) writes from Portland,
Oregon.

How To Fix
Our Schools

Lessons of Hope is Joel
Klein’s inside account of his
eight-year mission to improve
New York City’s schools. Klein
demanded accountability,
eliminated political favoritism,
and battled a powerful teachers
union that seemed determined to
protect a status quo that didn’t
work for kids.

Klein’s initiatives resulted
in more school choice, higher
graduation rates, and improved
test scores. The New York City
model is now seen as a national
standard for meaningful school
reform. But the journey was not
easy. Klein faced resistance and
conflict at every turn.

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Kathleen McGrory and Jeffrey S.
Solochek, “Florida lawmakers eye
charter schools,” Miami Herald,
March 5, 2015: http://www.
miamiherald.com/news/local/
education/article12721652.html
‘Tebow Bill’ Vetoed by Virginia Governor

By Ashley Bateman

A bill to allow homeschooled students to compete alongside their public school peers in sports passed both Virginia’s House and Senate this February, but instead of signing House Bill 1626, as supporters of the bill had hoped, Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D) vetoed it in late March, along with several other legislative items.

In a press release summarizing a March 30 press conference in Richmond, the governor’s office characterized the bill as creating “a double standard” because homeschooled students “are not subject to academic or attendance requirements of public schools.”

Sponsored by Del. David Ramadan (R-Loudon) and Del. Robert Bell (R-Charlottesville), HB 1626, also known as the “Tebow Bill,” would have given public school districts the option of allowing local homeschoolers to participate in athletics.

“Affording our constituents’ kids the opportunity to play sports at their schools, schools that their parents pay taxes to build, is simply a fairness issue,” Ramadan said.

“Special-interest [groups] and organizations that circle around the school system have decided [the bill] would take away from their power, and they don’t want to give up that total domination,” Ramadan said. “The veto killed the aspirations of thousands of our constituents.”

Part of the Community

“Homeschool kids tend to be incredibly smart, advanced academically from their peers, and they tend to be principled kids,” Ramadan said. “If our kids just want to be part of their communities and play sports, they should [be allowed to do so].”

Partnering with homeschoolers is something many Virginia schools have already chosen to do in academics.

The schools do allow them to go in for academics and choose [up to] three classes,” said Renee Fornshill, co-director of Skye Chase Co-Op in Alexandria, Virginia. “It seems that it would be a natural development of that relationship.”

Limited Field of Play

McAuliffe said in his press release that “the wide availability of athletic programs that operate outside the public school system” present enough athletic opportunities for homeschooled children.

Athletic programs are widely available in the state, but they exclude many traditional high school sports. In Northern Virginia, the only football league open to homeschooled students is in Manassas.

After 8th grade, the range of league sports is very limited, Fornshill says.

“As far as playing lacrosse, football, wrestling, [my son] doesn’t have the opportunity to pick those as an option,” Fornshill said. “As a practical [issue], it limits college scholarships.”

Big Organizations Stayed Neutral

Although many homeschool parents advocate access to public school sports, some big organizations remained politically neutral on the bill.

“It is not in our purpose to get homeschooled students back into public schools,” said Yvonne Bunn, director of Home Educators Association of Virginia. “We understand that there are students, particularly in rural areas, who would benefit from this, and it’s the parent’s right to choose what is right for their children.”

The Virginia Home School Athletic Association (VHSSA) also took a neutral stance as an organization, but Jason Weatherholtz, VHSSA commissioner and a homeschool parent, doesn’t see a need for the Tebow bill.

“In my opinion, the choice is homeschool, private school, or public school,” said Weatherholtz. “In Virginia, there is something within an hour drive for every homeschooler. There are sports in all areas of the state. … We don’t need to have access to public schools.”

Weatherholtz personally agrees with the governor’s decision to veto.

“There are so many recruiters and tools to be found if you [excel] at a sport,” Weatherholtz said. “You don’t have to go to public school to get a scholarship.”

Ramadan says he will continue to support similar legislation in the future.

Nationwide Trend

Several states, including Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, North Dakota, Oregon, and Washington, already allow homeschool students to participate in public school sports, according to the Home School Legal Defense Association. The measures are called “Tebow laws” after former NFL player and Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow, who was homeschooled in Florida and played for a local public high school team.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, which is a part of the U.S. Department of Education, 1.77 million students are currently homeschooled in the United States.

Ashley Bateman (bateman.ae@googlemail.com) writes from Alexandria, Virginia.
New York Judge OKs Lawsuit Targeting Teacher Tenure

By Ben Boychuk

A Staten Island judge ruled a lawsuit challenging New York State’s teacher-tenure and dismissal statutes may proceed.

On March 12, New York Supreme Court Judge Philip Minardo denied a motion by New York City’s Department of Education and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) union to dismiss the lawsuit initiated by the Partnership for Educational Justice and the New York City Parents Union.

“This court ... will not close the courthouse door to parents and children with viable constitutional claims,” Minardo wrote in his decision.

The case, which combines two lawsuits filed in 2014, allegies New York’s laws protecting teachers’ employment “have a negative impact on the quality of education in New York, thereby violating the students’ constitutional right to a sound basic education.”

The plaintiffs, including 11 New York City students, argue 97 percent of the city’s teachers obtain tenure and are therefore “virtually guaranteed lifetime employment, regardless of their in-class performance or effectiveness.”

They also contend the current teacher evaluation system, negotiated in 2005 by former Mayor Michael Bloomberg (I) and Joel Klein, the former city schools chancellor, is “non-uniform, superficial and deficient.”

UFT will appeal Minardo’s ruling, according to Michael Mulgrew, president of UFT.

Justice for Students

The New York lawsuit, modeled after the Vergara v. California suit, would weaken teacher tenure and job protections. The Vergara decision is currently under appeal in California.

“The judicial system is coming down on the side of children by rightly ignoring the tired, self-interested bleating of the teacher unions,” said Lance Izumi, senior director of education studies at the Pacific Research Institute in California. “Protecting bad teachers is bad for children, and the courts are beginning to understand that.

“It’s like the days when railroads and other special interests bought and controlled legislatures,” Izumi said. “The teacher unions have become Thomas Nast caricatures of monopoly power.

“The course of these families to become plaintiffs is inspiring, and it looks like these modern-day Davids may end up slaying the union Goliaths,” Izumi said.

Replicating Quality Teachers

Izumi cited a 2011 study by researchers from Harvard and Columbia universities, which analyzed 20 years of student test results and found bad teachers hurt students’ higher education opportunities and lifetime earnings.

“No wonder the Harvard coauthor of the study said, ‘The message is to fire people sooner rather than later,’” Izumi said.

Some researchers are skeptical litigation will achieve the goal reformers seek.

Joshua Dunn, associate director of the Center for the Study of Government and Education Studies at the Pacific Research Institute, warns a judgment in favor of the New York City plaintiffs won’t necessarily lead to better teaching outcomes.

“You have to really pay attention to the fine print,” DiSalvo said.

DiSalvo says even as the 2005 New York City contract improved teacher evaluations and allowed principals to reject tenured teachers’ transfer requests, the rules still made no provision for firing substandard teachers.

As a result, DiSalvo estimates about 1,200 teachers have been added to New York City’s “absent teacher reserve” over the past decade, where they continue to collect a salary and benefits and cannot be let go.

“A saner system either would have longer and stronger evaluations at the front end, or would allow weaker evaluations but give principals more leeway when it comes to hiring and firing,” said DiSalvo.

Ben Boychuk (bboychuk@heartland.org) is an associate editor of the Manhattan Institute’s City Journal and education project manager for The Heartland Institute.
N.J. Parents, Activists Raise Student Privacy Concerns

By Heather Kays

Parents and other interested parties in New Jersey skirmished with state education officials in March over reports Pearson testing company monitored students’ social media posts regarding Common Core-aligned Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing.

Pearson contacted the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) to report a tweet the company found objectionable posted by a student. NJDOE then contacted the school district of the student who posted the tweet, and the student removed the post. Parents came forward to say they have concerns over student privacy and the free-speech rights of students.

“This issue is both a free speech and a privacy issue,” said Leoney Haimson, executive director of Class Size Matters and co-chair of the Parent Coalition for Student Privacy. “Pearson has good reason to suppress any discussion of its exams, which have been shown to be very low quality in the past.”

Upset Parents

“Parents are upset across the spectrum,” said Julia Rubin, a volunteer for Save Our Schools NJ. “Nobody knew what was going on. Not just that they were monitoring. I think it’s the idea that they are monitoring in coordination with the NJDOE. NJDOE then went to the district.”

Rubin says students were not told they couldn’t talk about the testing at all, but had only been told they couldn’t take photos of the tests.

“I put a lot of the blame on the NJDOE,” said Rubin. “This type of behavior may lead to an environment where students are afraid to talk about standardized tests at all.

“You get to a point where students don’t know what is and is not allowed, which means you might not say anything,” Rubin said. “That definitely infringes on the free-speech rights of these students.”

Haimson and Rubin question how realistic and plausible it is to keep students as young as 8 years old from speaking about testing, which takes place over the course of a month. Many parents and activists say students should be able to talk about the tests, including talking about questions and content after the taking the tests, unless they are doing so in order to cheat.

Massive Data Collection

In Colorado, “[Pearson representatives] provided staggering information about the personally identifiable information that [Colorado school] districts upload to the Pearson testing system, as well as ‘device and response’ information they gather during test administration,” said Rachael Stickland, co-chair of the Parent Coalition for Student Privacy.

Among the information collected during PARCC testing is data on economic status, race, and ethnicity, whether a student has migrant or immigrant status, whether a student is homeless, and even whether a student has ever been expelled, Stickland says.

“Pearson told our state board that any student data they collect belongs solely to the state and that [Pearson is] expressly limited in [its] contract with ... Colorado to ‘use’ student data only under specified terms,” said Stickland. “I would like to know if there is a provision in the contract that allows Pearson employees to access student-level information in [its] database to identify individual students with the intent to locate those children.

If so, this puts children at great risk of identity theft as well as other vulnerabilities. If not, how will the Pearson employees be disciplined for unauthorized access to student records?”

Another Data Dump Halted

Both Stickland and Haimson say the Colorado case is not the only example of unauthorized uploading of large amounts of student data without consent from parents.

Parents in several states fought for more than two years to stop inBloom, which eventually shut down following public outcry. Officials in those states were uploading personal student data to third-party vendor inBloom. The data sometimes included Social Security numbers; details of familial relationships, such as whether a student was a foster child; and when a student left school as a victim of a violent incident, as well as other enrollment changes.

Pearson’s monitoring of social media posts is considered a common business practice, but the amount of information and what the information is being used for raise questions for parents and activists, Haimson says. Pearson uses Caveon Test Security, a subcontractor, to monitor social media posts regarding PARCC testing. Pearson and Caveon say searches pull only from publicly available websites, which are viewable by anyone.

“We are also very concerned that Pearson and its tracking vendor Caveon are monitoring students and locating them through the data they’ve scooped up through PARCC,” Haimson said. “PARCC itself has a very weak privacy policy. Like inBloom, it is a way for states to get access to a huge amount of personal student data and share it with third parties without parental notice or consent—and Pearson claims the right to use this data to help states and districts decide which kids should be held back and how teachers and schools should be rated.

“In [the New Jersey] case, either Pearson or Caveon apparently reported erroneous information to the NJDOE claiming the student had posted a photo of the exam, which was incorrect,” said Haimson.

Legislation Proposed

New Jersey Assemblyman Ralph Caputo (D-Essex), Assemblywoman Mila Jasey (D-Essex), and Assembly Education Committee Chair Patrick Diegnan, Jr. (D-Middlesex) are sponsoring a bill to require employees of state-contracted companies to undergo the same background check as public school employees before receiving access to students’ personal information.

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.
Minnesota Considers Bills to Reduce NCLB Testing

By Bruce Edward Walker

Minnesota legislators have introduced bills to relieve the state of some of its No Child Left Behind (NCLB) testing requirements.

The state received federal testing waivers from NCLB in 2012 and is seeking to make them permanent. Meanwhile, Rep. John Kline (R-MN) has introduced legislation in Congress to relax NCLB testing requirements nationwide.

Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton (D) in March announced a plan to cut the number of school tests by one-third. Two companion bills were introduced subsequently, HF 1591 and SF 1495, by state Rep. Sondra Erickson (R-Princeton) and state Sen. Charles W. Wiger (DFL-Maplewood), respectively. At the federal level, Rep. John Kline (R-MN), Education and the Workforce Committee chairman, and Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Chairman Todd Rokita (R-IN) introduced the Student Success Act in February.

“The Student Success Act replaces No Child Left Behind with reforms that reduce the federal footprint, restore local control, and empower parents and education leaders to hold schools accountable,” said Lauren Blair Aronson, press secretary for the U.S. House of Representatives Education and the Workforce Committee. “It repeals onerous federal requirements for governing accountability, teacher quality, and how states spend their taxpayer dollars.”

Multiple Tests Required

According to a March release from the Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Services, “[T]he average student in Minnesota schools will take 21 standardized exams between grades three and 12.”

Additionally, high school students will take several “career and college-ready” exams and, due to requirements adopted by the Minnesota legislature early in 2015, are required to take the ACT college entrance test regardless of whether they plan to seek an undergraduate degree.

“Since we received the waivers in 2012, we’ve been allowed to develop new education models that look at student growth as the most important factor over time,” said Josh Collins, communications spokesperson for the Minnesota Department of Education.

“All the extra testing is not helping the goal of quality education,” Collins said. “The state wants to take the national pressure off schools and allow them to develop a model that better serves the students.”

Collins says the Multiple Measurement Rating System is “more robust” than measurements obtained from standardized testing alone. He says the main difference is the Minnesota system “is not a punitive system that merely measures degrees of failure.

“Instead, we measure success in closing achievement gaps,” Collins said.

 “[The Student Success Act] will also end the era of federally mandated, high-stakes testing, while ensuring parents, taxpayers, and education leaders have the information they need to hold their neighborhood schools accountable,” said Aronson. “[It] will get the federal government out of the business of dictating education policy by returning responsibility for education to moms, dads, teachers, and state and local leaders.”

Bruce Edward Walker (walker.editorial@gmail.com) is an information technology and telecommunications policy advisor for The Heartland Institute.
Anti-Common Core Effort Still Growing in Arizona

By Heather Kays

They call themselves the “Mommy Lobby,” and even after two anti-Common Core bills failed to become law in Arizona, the growing group of parents and grassroots activists vows to continue to fight Common Core until it’s repealed.

Gina Ray, a mother of four and member of the Mommy Lobby, says Gov. Doug Ducey (R) is responsible for the Common Core repeal-and-replace legislation not passing. Speaking during an Arizona Board of Education meeting in March, Ducey called House Bill 2190, which would have repealed and replaced Common Core, “unnecessary.”

“It sends the message to senators to kill the bill,” said Ray. “It seems like the governor is saying he doesn’t want it to come to his desk, [that] he wouldn’t sign it.

“I should feel really discouraged, but I really don’t, because I see more and more people waking up,” said Ray. “I do have this little lump in my throat. This is a sad little lump, but I don’t feel defeated, because the momentum is picking up.”

Feeling of Betrayal

Rep. Mark Finchem (R-Pima County), who sponsored HB 2190, says he will continue to fight Common Core.

“While I am disappointed that the bill did not pass, my disappointment pales in comparison to the feeling of betrayal that southern Arizona voters have expressed over the actions of the Senate and the remarks from the governor,” Finchem said.

“My constituents are very dissatisfied with the outcome and are already gearing up to fight the special interests that worked overtime to kill the best chance we had to repeal and replace the Common Core program,” said Finchem. “We will have to see what comes of Gov. Ducey’s stated commitment to have the State Board of Education and the state superintendent refine the standards in the Common Core program. That said, HB 2190 was about much more than just standards. The bill also sought to force the shutdown of data harvesting [such as non-cognitive data], inappropriate data sharing, and more.”

‘They Aren’t Going Away’

Finchem says he thinks Arizona’s grassroots effort against Common Core will continue to grow.

“The Mommy Lobby is motivated, and they aren’t going away,” said Finchem. “The lobby will be a force to be reckoned with in the months and campaigns to come.

“It is likely this issue will be a major one in the next election cycle,” Finchem said. “I urge parents and teachers to look at what is happening in our education system and pay attention to the changes that they will see. Don’t settle for well-packaged corporate buzzwords and edu-babble.”

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.

Arkansas Creates School Voucher Program

By Heather Kays

The Arkansas Senate passed House Bill 1552, creating a school voucher program for children with disabilities.

The bill passed the state’s legislature with bipartisan support on March 31 and Gov. Asa Hutchinson (R) signed the measure into law in early April.

According to the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, Arkansas is now the 25th state to adopt a school choice program. The program will allow parents to use public funding to send their special-needs children to the school of their choice. Scholarship awards will first be available for use beginning with the 2016–17 school year.

Dan Greenberg, president of the Advance Arkansas Institute, says the voucher program is the first step toward providing educational choice for all families in Arkansas.

“As a leader in school choice, when our legislature passed a measure that guarantees choice in education to disabled kids,” Greenberg said. “Especially in a rural state like Arkansas, in which our population is broadly dispersed, making sure that special-needs kids have the best of educational opportunities is crucial. And I look forward to the day that policymakers realize that choice will have wonderful consequences for everyone, not just families with special-needs kids, and expand this program accordingly.”

Betsy DeVos, chairman of the American Federation for Children, said in a statement, “Parents and families in Arkansas can celebrate the passage of House Bill 1552, which will create new educational opportunities for children with special needs. We applaud the legislature for its bold leadership and putting the needs of students first by passing this important legislation.”

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.

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Alabama Governor Signs Law Allowing Charters

By Diana-Ashley Krach

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley (R) has signed into law a bill allowing charter schools in the state.

State Rep. Terri Collins (R-Decatur), sponsor of the School Choice and Student Opportunity Act, says the new charter law will provide additional educational options for families and an opportunity for innovation within schools. Charter schools could open as soon as fall of 2016. Bentley signed the bill into law in March.

“There were over 2,000 students at the School Choice Rally,” Collins said, referring to a rally held at the Alabama State Capitol in January. “When asked what is important to them, the answers varied greatly. Some wanted to get away from bullying, some weren’t feeling comfortable at their current school, and some felt they weren’t being challenged enough.”

Collins says school choice is necessary for many reasons, including some students needing an environment that addresses specific educational, creative, or social needs.

**Allows 50 Schools**

The new law allows the creation of up to 10 schools per year for the next five years. Schools operating under a charter school contract must be open to any student in Alabama.

There will be two types of charter schools: start-ups and conversions. Start-ups will be brand new schools and conversions will be former traditional public schools in the process of converting into charter contracts.

The 11 appointed members of the Alabama Public School Committee will be responsible for monitoring the charter schools’ quality.

Opponents of the new law have expressed concerns funding for charter schools will reduce money for traditional public schools. Proponents of the new law say tax money following the student to a public charter school is not a bad thing.

**More Choices for Poor**

Duncan Kirkwood, state director of the Alabama Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), says the charter law is a win for parents in low-income districts.

The new law will allow the creation of up to 50 schools.
New Jersey Considers Raising Teacher Education Standards

By Bruce Edward Walker

New Jersey is the latest state to consider raising standards for students entering the state’s university-level education programs. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is considering several recommendations, including doubling student teaching from one semester to a full year and requiring students pursuing a teaching degree to teach in two different school settings, one of which would include spending time with special-needs students.

State officials are also considering stronger requirements for substitute teachers. Under the proposal, eligibility to be a substitute teacher would require a bachelor’s degree instead of just an associate’s degree or 60 college credits, the current requirements.

According to a February 2015 presentation by NJDOE to the State Board of Education, teacher quality contributes 35 percent of a school’s total impact on student achievement. NJDOE also says three out of five teachers say their schooling didn’t prepare them for the realities of teaching. Less than one-quarter of teachers nationwide graduated in the top third of their class, and only 14 percent of the top-third graduates go on to teach in high-poverty schools.

NJDOE proposes four reforms it says will help improve education outcomes. The first is attracting stronger candidates for teaching programs. Second, NJDOE recommends enhancing teacher preparation. Third, it proposes closer monitoring of students in teacher preparation programs throughout their academic career. Fourth, NJDOE recommends sharing performance data of teaching candidates and offering support programs for underperforming prospective teachers.

‘Bar Set Really Low’

Sandy Jacobs, vice president and managing director of state policy for the National Council on Teacher Quality, says she’s pleased with the developments in New Jersey.

“The bar has been set really low in the past,” said Jacobs.

Jacobs says Delaware, New Jersey, and Rhode Island are making great strides in “raising the floor for teachers.” These states are moving forward with more rigorous entrance requirements and teacher education programs.

“We’re at a time nationally where we’re raising our standards dramatically,” Jacobs said. “More importantly, as we’re focusing more on raising the standards for educating our students, it’s time we raised the standards for those who teach as well.”

Overregulation or Reform?

Robert Holland, senior fellow for education policy at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News, disagrees with Jacobs.

“Evidently, the state overseers of New Jersey public schooling view reform of teacher preparation just as one might expect of managers of monopolistic operations,” said Holland. “Just add more time-consuming and expensive requirements, advertise the bureaucratic changes as certain to generate more rigor in education, and trumpet it all as ‘reform.’”

Bruce Edward Walker (walker.editorial@gmail.com) is an information technology and telecommunications policy advisor for The Heartland Institute.
After a lengthy legislative session and multiple amendments, Mississippi became the third state in the nation to pass an education savings account (ESA) bill, which will allow disabled students a state-funded scholarship account to customize individual learning tracks.

Senate Bill 2695 would establish the Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs (EOSSN) program. EOSSN would allow customization of education for disabled students by directing funds into parents’ hands while reducing the average annual spending per disabled pupil to $6,500, the maximum amount of each scholarship. The program will allow 500 students to access funds in its first year and will allow a total of 1,000 students in its second year.

Currently, only 23 percent of Mississippi special-needs students graduate high school.

Reflects Renewed Interest in ESAs
Education scholarship accounts, also known as education savings accounts, have been available for years in federal-government forms, such as Coverdell Education Savings Accounts, but state-funded programs are a newer phenomenon.

State Sen. Nancy Collins (R-Tupelo) proposed SB 2695 because she says similar programs in Arizona and Florida prove ESAs provide quality educational opportunities for those who have access to them.

Patricia Levesque, chief executive officer of the Foundation for Excellence in Education, says she supports Mississippi’s new legislation.

“All students should be afforded every opportunity possible to achieve success in school and life, and parents should be the key decision makers,” said Levesque. “The Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs Act recognizes this by allowing parents to customize individual education and therapy plans for their children with special needs.”

Successful Grassroots Campaign
In 2014, a similar bill died on the Mississippi House floor. The 2015 version of the bill passed following the implementation of several amendments and a lengthy pre-session campaign.

“We went to work immediately building support for this initiative at the grassroots level,” said Grant Callen, founder and president of Empower Mississippi. “We hosted discussion groups with special-needs parents all over the state and worked district by district to build local support. One by one, legislators heard the outcry from parents and began to support the bill.”

Gov. Phil Bryant (R), Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves (R), and House Speaker Philip Gunn (R-Clinton) worked to convince individual legislators to pass SB 2695, Callen said.

“Gov. Phil Bryant has been an enthusiastic supporter of this bill from day one,” Callen said. “He advocated for it [in 2014], talked about it this year in his State of the State address, and worked this year to help secure the votes for its passage.”

“Mississippi became the third state in the nation to empower the parents of students with special needs, providing them with a broad array of educational choices,” Reeves said in a statement. “For two years, we fought to give these students an opportunity at an education that best fits their needs. I congratulate the parents and students who worked so hard to pass this important next step in Mississippi’s education reform efforts.”

Awaiting Governor’s Signature
Bryant signed SB 2695 into law on April 16.

“As Gov. Bryant is a school choice supporter and a great champion for this special-needs ESA program,” Callen said. “I think if we prove that the ESA model can work for meeting the educational needs of students with special needs, legislators may want to consider expanding this program to other underserved students. This program was intentionally small in scope at the start ... But whether it’s ever expanded or not, for those families who choose to participate, I’m confident it’s going to be a life-changer.”

By Ashley Bateman

Mississippi 3rd State in Nation to Approve ESAs

Ashley Bateman (bateman.ae@googlemail.com) writes from Alexandria, Virginia.
Do High-Stakes Exit Exams Improve Student Achievement?

By Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Bast

John H. Bishop, a professor of human resource studies at Cornell University, has devoted much of his career to studying the effects of high-stakes exit exams on student achievement.

Bishop argues one reason American high school students don’t perform as well as students in other countries is “that they devote less time and intellectual energy to their schooling. Learning takes work, and that work is generally not going to be as much fun as hanging out with friends or playing Grand Theft Auto.” Exams with real consequences for college admission and other rewards can cause students to perceive that hard work is worthwhile.

High Stakes, Positive Results

Other countries reward students who score well on high-stakes exams prior to high school graduation with admission to elite universities and desirable academic programs, such as engineering and pre-medicine. Bishop’s research shows the incentives created by such exams raise achievement by 1.3 grade levels in science and one grade level in math compared to students in other equally developed countries.

Bishop’s research also shows U.S. students living in states requiring them to pass tests before getting a high school diploma learned more mathematics and science than students who did not. These students were more likely to complete homework, talk with their parents about schoolwork, and watch less television than their peers, all good habits necessary for high achievement.

Such laws, which existed in 17 states in 2004, test only for basic skills and establish a minimum level of academic competence for graduates rather than acting as a reward for advanced achievement.

External Exit Examinations

More promising are what Bishop calls “curriculum-based external exit examinations,” such as those administered in Canada and in Michigan, New York, and North Carolina. These countries and states reward students who score high on more-rigorous exams.

“Colleges consider [New York’s] Regents diploma a mark of significant achievement,” wrote Bishop, “making it worth students’ while to learn the tested subjects. The Regents exams give students a lofty goal to aspire to, rather than a low hurdle to jump over.”

Passing the Regents exams is also financially rewarding since high scorers gain free tuition to New York state universities.

Bishop’s research on student achievement in several countries shows curriculum-based external exit exams have positive effects on college enrollment, job success, and scores on international achievement tests. They also provide better measures of students’ achievement levels than minimum competency tests.

Not All Tests Are Equal

Bishop stresses not all tests are equal.

“The energy that students devote to cracking the narrow SAT-1 and the ACT would be better spent reading widely and learning to write coherently, to think scientifically, to analyze and appreciate great literature, and to converse in a foreign language.”

JOHN H. BISHOP, CORNELL UNIVERSITY

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JOHN H. BISHOP, CORNELL UNIVERSITY

It is important to acknowledge what the data on high-stakes testing do not prove. Aristotle elevated beauty above pleasure and material advantage, but any one of these may motivate people to a greater or lesser extent. Some students may be highly motivated to gain knowledge for its own sake, while others may be motivated more by the prospects of pleasure or material advantage.

Similarly, students in any given class or grade may vary greatly in their responsiveness to immediate and deferred rewards. For example, in Japan students try hard not to let down their small work groups (han) within their classes. Awareness of such individual and cultural variations, and using rewards that take them into account, can make incentives more effective.

Herbert J. Walberg (hwalberg@yahoo.com) and Joseph L. Bast (jbast@heartland.org) are chairman and president, respectively, of The Heartland Institute and authors of Rewards: How to use rewards to help children learn—and why teachers don’t use them well.
By Heather Kays

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval (R) signed into law a bill to create the state’s first private school choice program. The Nevada State Senate voted 11–9 in April to pass the Nevada Educational Choice Scholarship Program, which will create a business tax credit to fund scholarships. The program cap is $5 million for the first year and $5.5 million the second year. The program will serve students from low-income families, providing $7,755 per year in scholarship funds for students to attend the private school of their parents’ choice.

Nevada Creates State’s First Choice Program

Increases Educational Freedom
Chantal Lovell, deputy communications director at the Nevada Policy Research Institute (NPRI), says the tax credit scholarships are a victory for Nevada families. “Today, NPRI celebrates with families across ... Nevada over the creation of Opportunity Scholarships in the Silver State,” Lovell said. “Opportunity Scholarships open the door for more families to have greater freedom in where their children will be educated, ensuring that more of Nevada’s kids have a chance to succeed.”

Lovell says Nevada needs more school choice. “The traditional one-size-fits-all education system has failed Nevada students for decades, so it’s high time we allow children to take advantage of individualized education that can help them meet their full potential,” said Lovell.

“By allowing businesses to donate to a scholarship fund in return for tax credits, Nevada’s companies can help to create the educated workforce they need to make this state better for generations to come,” Lovell said.

‘Joining the Education Revolution’
“Nevada is on the verge of joining the education revolution by empowering parents with access to more quality educational options,” said Betsy DeVos, chairman of the American Federation for Children, in a press release. “We would like to thank Gov. Brian Sandoval, Senate Majority Leader Michael Roberson, and all the members of the legislature who stood up to the status quo and embraced educational choice.”

Lovell says the state needs much more educational choice than just the limited scholarship program to improve education for all students in Nevada. “Though Opportunity Scholarships are a great step for Nevada, the work is not over,” Lovell said. “Nevada lawmakers must work to expand school choice by allowing more charter schools to open in the state and creating an education savings account program so that all children, regardless of their own abilities or their family’s economic status, may access the educational program that best suits their unique needs.”

Heather Kays (hkays@heartland.org) is a research fellow with The Heartland Institute and managing editor of School Reform News.

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