

EDUCATION DAILY®

The education community's independent daily news service

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

House passes \$6.5B school construction bill

Republicans criticize spending priorities; White House vows veto

By Frank Wolfe

The House this week passed by 250-164 a bill that would provide \$6.4 billion for school construction in FY 2009 to fix crumbling schools and another \$100 million to aid southern schools ravaged by the 2005 hurricanes. During the next five years, the bill would authorize as much as \$20 billion for school construction.

Some Republicans criticized the measure for its spending priorities, and the White House has issued a veto threat.

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H.R. 3021, the 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act, requires that funds be used for projects that meet one of three widely recognized green standards: the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System; ENERGY STAR; or Collaborative for High Performance Schools or an equivalent state or local standard. Districts may partially waive that green requirement — for 50 percent of funds in 2009, 40 percent in 2010, 30 percent in 2011, 20 percent in 2012, and 10 percent in 2013 — if the circumstances make the requirement impracticable.

“Substandard conditions in many schools make it harder for teachers to teach and children to learn,” said Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee.

And a recent study by the 21st Century School Fund and the Economic Policy Institute, *Good Buildings, Better Schools: An economic stimulus opportunity with long-term benefits*, agreed. The study claimed that schools need massive new federal investments in construction to ensure students receive a quality education.

Miller said the bill “boosts the economy by creating new construction jobs and helps the environment by making our schools more energy efficient. This legislation is a win for children, workers and the planet.”

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Today's Highlights

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NCLB IMPLEMENTATION

Education Department expands SES 'switch' pilot

Program to switch order of sanctions echoes proposed Title I regulations

By Sarah D. Sparks

After getting a jump start on NCLB reauthorization by proposing sweeping changes to Title I regulations, the Education Department is getting a jump start on the not-yet-finalized regulations by expanding its supplemental education services pilot program.

In a letter to state chiefs Wednesday, Assistant Deputy Education Secretary Doug Mesecar announced that the department would expand its three-year-old pilot program that allows school districts to

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Computer-based student testing remains in 'infancy'

Schools' technological infrastructure, lack of research stunt 21st century testing

By Erin Uy

Technology has the potential to assess students' content knowledge, exploratory skills and comprehensive reasoning. But most states are still grappling with the task of transferring a standard multiple-choice, content-focused test from paper to the computer screen.

The progression from paper to digital formats has offered challenges across states, where varied technological capacities in schools and districts have limited wide-scale implementation. As most states continue to figure out how to implement the first cohort of technology tests, researchers are working on the complicated job of engineering the next generation of assessments that measure applied knowledge.

The necessity for such tests will inevitably grow as initiatives to implement curriculum that focus on students' 21st century skills increase. Also, administrators are eager for computer-based tests, saying they would be key time-savers that allow for easier administration, grading, and a means to disaggregate and distribute data, said educators and researchers at a recent National Coalition for Technology in Education panel.

"It's a developmental and incremental process," said Randy Bennett a scientist with the Educational Testing Service research and development division.

"We are at the infancy of using technology in assessments."

Virtual barriers

Federal officials are also hitting roadblocks with their efforts to administer the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The problem became apparent this year when the National Center for Education Statistics began field-testing computer-based items for the 2009 science exam. Districts' varied Internet and technological capabilities demonstrated the challenges to administer a unified test.

Among states, Virginia is a leader in developing technology-based assessments. All high schools have standardized, computer-based tests, as do 82 percent of middle schools and 4 percent of elementary schools, said Lan Nugent, Virginia Education Department assistant superintendent for technology.

To support the high access, Virginia is managing problems that rise with high use of bandwidth. Schools of students taking online tests coupled with teachers' and students' everyday computer use can pose the infrastructure for an overload.

"The system would fall to its knees," Nugent said.

Until the state makes the "massive and expensive" investment of beefing up bandwidth and technological capabilities for all of its school districts, Nugent said the technology department is working on alternative solutions. To deal with limited bandwidth, a common problem for states, Virginia funnels data into a cache — a temporary storage base — to free up access.

Next generation

As states develop infrastructure to support basic content-driven tests, scientists are developing 21st century skills assessments. That testing strategy is complex and far from realized, said Bennett of ETS.

How a student goes about solving a comprehensive problem can indicate her applied knowledge skills. For example, in a word problem that involves research on the Internet and experiments, a computer-based test has the ability to capture students' inquiry processes. How efficiently students search for data and what resources they click on to investigate are telling indicators of 21st century skills, Bennett said. Measuring those abilities and developing a grading scale is extremely complicated but can capture meaningful data, he added.

"I believe we can successfully measure 21st century skills in a way that cannot be measured in paper and pencil tests," Bennett said

Yet until assessments and technological capabilities reach some type of national alignment, test publishers will continue to be hesitant to invest in expensive test development, said John Tanner, director of the Center for Innovative Measures at the Council of Chief State School Officers.

"Publishers would love to help us find a way" to administer technological tests, Tanner said.

"But states are not swimming in resources."



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Utility of growth models hindered by proficiency deadline

Experts say value-added analysis could inform differentiated consequences

By Stephen Sawchuk

The parameters established by the Education Department on state growth models under NCLB may prevent states from obtaining a useful picture of the growth of their lowest-performing students, said researchers who study student achievement data.

The use of the models, which measure student achievement growth throughout time, does not appear to have resulted in more nuanced accountability decisions than the regular “status” accountability calculation, which is based on student test scores at one point in time. Earlier this year, an *Education Daily*® review found that most states using growth models under ED’s program did not dramatically increase the number of schools meeting proficiency targets compared to the status calculation.

To identify which schools best accelerate learning for underperforming children, growth models may need to be freed from grade-level proficiency goals, researchers said at a forum hosted by The Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

“If we do choose to maintain test-based accountability, we need a different approach to determining which schools are effective and ineffective,” said Adam Gamoran, director of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

A bit of history

NCLB requires all students to attain grade-level proficiency in reading and math by 2014. In 2005, ED began allowing some states to base accountability determinations on students’ year-to-year growth, rather than the one-shot-in-time test.

To participate, the states’ growth models required students falling below set proficiency levels to improve at a faster rate than other students in order to be deemed proficient. The purpose of this stipulation was to maintain the goal of closing achievement gaps between groups of students by 2014.

Most of the models ED accepted expected students to be on a three-year trajectory to proficiency, and all the models maintained the 2014 deadline.

But these growth models may not account for gains among students who are the furthest behind. In some cases, these students might make significant growth but not at a pace that is rapid enough to meet these parameters, the researchers said.

The issue hinges on a distinction between the way NCLB growth models operate and the way a group of “value-added” methodologies used to analyze student achievement growth over time operates.

“True” value-added models measure student, class, grade and school performance relative to other students, classes, grades and schools, rather than to a predetermined proficiency level, researchers argued. “The problem is that everyone thinks

Using growth for differentiation

Below are selected state applications for the Education Department’s differentiated accountability consequences pilot.

Differentiation Method	States
<i>Growth measurement:</i> Include a model as part of the differentiation; schools that demonstrate student growth get more flexibility and less stringent interventions.	Pa., Tenn.
<i>Risk assessment:</i> Schools have detailed data analysis of the type and severity of problems in different subgroups, looking at how many groups missed targets and by how much. This may include a projection of how much a school must improve to make AYP in future years. Interventions are adjusted accordingly.	Ind., La., Ohio, Tenn.

Source: Education Department.

these [NCLB] growth models are value-added models, and they’re not,” said Douglas Harris, an economist and assistant professor of educational policy studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. “They’re still rooted in a proficiency level.”

Outlining the options

As such, the researchers said the question is how to tweak NCLB to permit states to use growth methodologies that better determine how significantly underperforming students progress.

First, the researchers underscored the importance of measuring schools’ overall progress toward grade-level proficiency goals. “I don’t think we want to move to a world that’s entirely relative,” Gamoran said. “We have to have some absolute standard.”

But states, they argued, could supplement this information by conducting additional growth analyses using methodologies uncoupled from this standard. For instance, Harris suggested permitting states to use value-added to distinguish among schools that fall short of annual proficiency targets. Schools could be categorized based on how much growth occurred among subgroups and then be offered different interventions accordingly.

States, it appears, have already fixed upon value-added as a promising way to tailor school improvement efforts. In their applications for ED’s differentiated consequences pilot, Tennessee and Pennsylvania proposed basing different interventions on growth calculations. Others proposed adding growth measures as part of an overall “risk analysis” (see chart).

ED is expected to approve this month more states to use growth models for accountability and to approve this summer several differentiated consequences proposals.

Report: To achieve 21st century goals, align NCLB, Perkins

By Erin Uy

Education stakeholders are clamoring for a system that prepares students for workforce and postsecondary readiness, but experts say the first step is to align federal and state policies.

The problem is overcoming the separation of career and technical education from academics. By aligning the career goals of the Perkins Act with the academic goals of NCLB, these separate silos could instead integrate assessments, professional development, evaluations and other components. Those were among the policy recommendations made Wednesday by the American Youth Policy Forum.

"We seem to have this split in our heads," said Betsy Brand, director of AYPF. "We think it's OK to split academic and applied knowledge teaching and learning, and you really can't do that."

In 2006, a reauthorized Perkins did go some distance in linking with NCLB. Formerly, Perkins allowed CTE programs to report achievement based on a range of indicators such as student grade-point averages and state test outcomes. The new law requires states to report achievement based on state assessments.

Integrated policies

Federal legislative initiatives could provide states with the guidance and resources needed to fuse CTE and traditional academics, according to the AYPF report. The recommendations in *Supporting High Quality Career and Technical Education through Federal and State Policy* reflect a growing consensus. Similar recommendations have come from the Southern Regional Education Board and the Association of Career and Technical Education.

"We do believe that there are two distinct purposes for the two laws," said Steve DeWitt, ACTE senior director of public policy. "But there are times when they are not working together as they should."

Policies would have to support curriculum offering students preparation in multiple career or postsecondary pathways, the AYPF report said. Federal and state leaders would have to define a high school framework, which could be based on the 16 career clusters already established by the Education Department.

States should be responsible for providing technical assistance to address the CTE and academic components of any program, the report added.

In turn, assessments should reflect the goals of a new curriculum. Such assessments should include multiple measures that include academics, applied and contextual knowledge, critical thinking, workforce readiness, and social and civic engagement skills. States should be able to develop a framework defining knowledge and skills standards and then be responsible for testing, the report said.

Additional incentives

Some states have already established workforce-readiness certifications and credentials to complement high school diplomas. The additional assessments were in response to industry complaints that students were graduating without the ability to apply academic knowledge to work-related duties and problem solving.

The report noted, however, that the federal government would likely have to create support or incentives for more states to add that extra layer of assessments.

Further, integrated curricula and assessments would create more challenges for teachers in need of professional development. The report suggests that NCLB funds be made available for CTE teachers to achieve highly qualified status. Perkins funds may already be used to train academic teachers to teach CTE courses.

"All future teachers will need these skills," the report said.

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CONSTRUCTION (continued from page 1)

Opposition mounts

Many Republicans opposed the bill, saying it would divert monies from areas like Title I and IDEA, where it is needed more.

The measure, they argued, would also cause states to rely on a new federal funding stream rather than honor the long-established practice of building and repairing schools with state and local money. Ranking member of the House Education and Labor Committee Rep. Buck McKeon, R-Calif., said the Davis-Bacon prevailing wage protections and environmental stipulations would drive up federal costs.

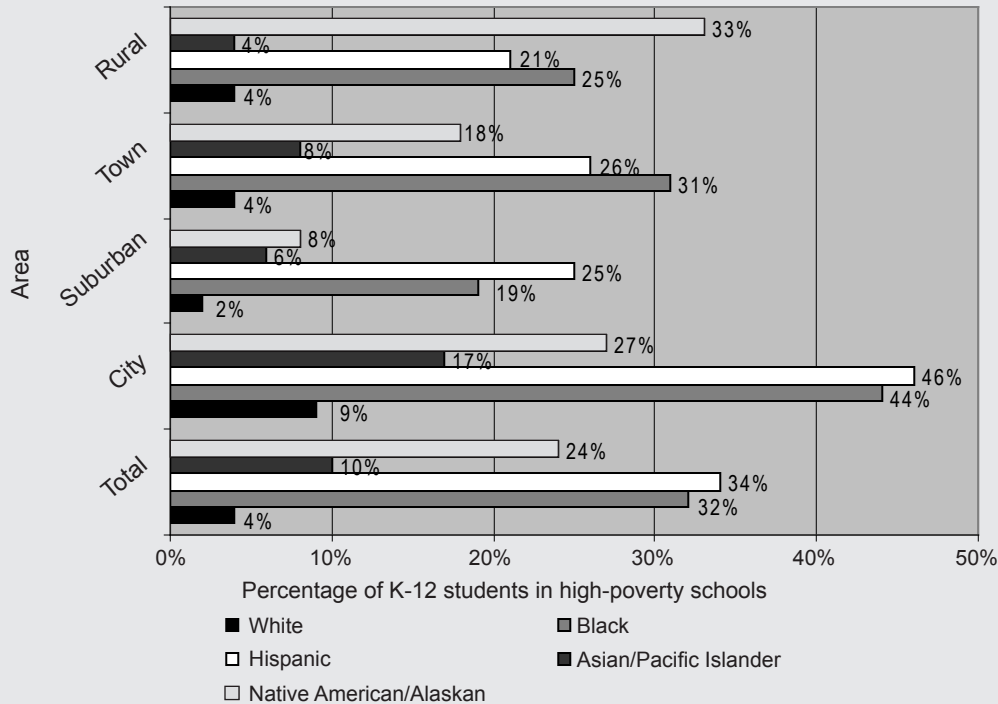
"Schools are being forced to cut back on staff, limit field trips and school activities, increase the price of school lunches, and even reduce the number of school days because of record-high fuel prices," McKeon said. "But Democrats are ignoring these needs so they can create a new program that allows Washington bureaucrats to tell our communities how to build their schools."

In a Statement of Administration Policy this week, the White House said the federal role should not be expanded to fund school modernization and repair. The Bush administration argues that those functions should remain with state and local governments.

Minority students more likely to attend high-poverty schools

NCLB is often considered focused on the achievement gaps in inner-city schools, but according to the National Center for Education Statistics, minority students are more likely than white students to attend schools with high concentrations of poverty in each area. Students in schools where 75 percent or more children live in poverty have compounded challenges to academic achievement.

Percentage of K-12 students in high-poverty schools, 2005-06



NCLB IMPLEMENTATION

PILOT (continued from page 1)

offer tutoring rather than school transfers in the first, rather than second, year a school is identified for improvement. The change for the 2008-09 school year would lift the cap on the number of states that can apply and the number of districts within a chosen state that can offer SES early.

Changes to the pilot echo the department's proposed new Title I regulations. Besides switching the sanctions order, it would allow participating districts to count money they spend on parent outreach for SES toward the Title I set-aside for SES and school choice — as much as 1 percent of the 20 percent total. Districts would also have to prove they are taking steps to increase their capacity to provide tutoring and notification of parents in a “timely” manner. If the regulations become final without substantive changes, that would mean notifying parents at least 11 days before the start of school, in multiple print and online media.

As of 2007-08, districts in Alaska, Indiana, North Carolina and Virginia have switched the order of their sanctions. The change increased SES participation in some districts and has proved a

popular change among states applying for ED's differentiated accountability pilot earlier this year. Virginia's entire proposal for that pilot turned on the timing and format of SES for different schools.

The SES switch pilot also acts as a goad for the 18 states that still have not earned full approval for their standards and assessment systems. In a June update about the systems, the department admitted that it is “unlikely” that the remaining states would win approval in this school year. It stressed that states without a fully approved system would be barred from participating in any ED pilots, unless a state is only waiting for review of updates to a previously fully approved system.

In addition, to apply a state must:

- Prove it has conducted or is conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of its SES providers.
- Have made AYP determinations for 2006-07 and 2007-08 before the start of each school year.
- Justify why it needs the flexibility and how its participating districts will use the pilot to increase SES participation.

For more information, e-mail stacy.kreppel@ed.gov or kelly.rhoads@ed.gov. States must apply for the pilot on behalf of their districts by July 2 at 5 p.m.

Capitol Hill Watch

Congress approves FY 2009 budget resolution

The House on Thursday approved on a vote of 214-210 an FY 2009 budget resolution with more than \$1 trillion in discretionary spending — a level that exceeds President Bush's requested \$991.6 billion level by about \$24 billion. The House action followed the Senate's approval a day earlier of the resolution, S. Con. Res. 70, on a vote of 48-45.

The resolution contains \$84.3 billion for Function 500 — a category that funds education, social services, employment training, and several arts and humanities programs in the Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor departments.

Committee markups on the 12 annual appropriations bills can now move forward, although it is likely that the Democratic Congress will hold back final action on many of the bills in hopes that Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., can win the White House. The resolution could serve as a budget blueprint for his first year in office, should he win.

"This agreement charts a new course," House Budget Committee Chairman John Spratt, D-S.C., said of the resolution. "It accommodates tax cuts for middle-income families; supports investments in energy, education and infrastructure; and returns the budget to balance."

Education Department

OSEP to replace special education center with Technical Assistance Coordinating Center

OSEP is soliciting applications to create a Technical Assistance Coordinating Center that will take the place of the Federal Resource Center for Special Education, operated by the Academy for Educational Development.

The center will continue to work with the five Regional Resource Centers. In addition, it will foster closer communication among the many other technical assistance groups funded by OSEP as well as certain other initiatives supported by ED.

The center will also operate the Communities of Practice Web site, which brings people with like interests together in electronic communities, and maintain a database of OSEP discretionary grants, grantee products and related events.

The center will also produce the widely used "placement" that lists all OSEP-funded initiatives, available in linear form on the current center's Web site.

OSEP is offering \$1.8 million per year to run the center. Eligible groups include SEAs and LEAs, charter schools with LEA status, institutions of higher education, other public agencies, private nonprofits, tribal organizations and for-profit groups.

The deadline for applications is July 7.

Across the Nation

New York

Parents of children with autism worry about program's possible nonrenewal

Parents of children with autism in the New York borough of Queens are worried that city money that supported a program for their children might not be renewed for the fiscal year beginning July 1, *The New York Times* recently reported.

The Times said New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has asked city agencies to scale back their budgets by about 4.3 percent for the next year. The mayor and the city council will negotiate those cuts during the next few weeks, and "legions of beneficiaries of city money will be on tenterhooks," according to the newspaper.

One parent told the newspaper that without the program, "We have nothing."

Some advocates told the newspaper that the program's one-year-old existence means that it's not very established, and while some city programs have "multiyear" funding, the autism initiative has just "one-year money," meaning none is guaranteed after July 1.

Newsmakers

New Guam superintendent resigns

Two weeks in, and the new superintendent of the Guam Public School System has already given his two weeks' notice.

Giovanni "Bunny" Sgambelluri resigned Wednesday, citing medical reasons. The school board will reopen the recently closed superintendent search Monday and continue for three weeks, with a week of interviews following. Three of the eight original candidates told the school board that they would reapply: Geraldine James, Guam Community College associate dean; Manny Cruz; and Deacon Anthony C. Leon Guerrero.

The territory has not had a steady superintendent since school board member Rosie Tainatongo retired in 2003. Nerissa Bretania-Shafer served eight months as interim superintendent, and the two superintendents hired after her, Luis Reyes and Juan Flores, were each let go within two years, local news agencies reported.

Former High Court justice backs edugames

Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is leading a push to interest middle school students in law through online role-playing games.

O'Connor announced at the 2008 Games for Change festival that she will lead Our Courts, a free civics Web site sponsored by Georgetown University's law school and Arizona State University. In her keynote speech, O'Connor said young people have become more politically engaged through online media such as blogging and social networking sites.

"Through these mechanisms, young people can take leadership roles," she said.

The Our Courts site offers resources about state and federal government and political systems, but as of September it is expected to include classroom lesson plans and an interactive game in which students take the role of lawmakers, executives or judges and act through historic policy problems, such as student free speech rights in the recent *Morse v. Frederick* High Court case.

A more detailed interactive civics curriculum will be piloted at schools through the Web site and rolled out nationally during the next two years.

The Web site is available at www.ourcourts.org.