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SPECIAL ISSUE EDUCATION



Introducing ALEC's 17th Edition of the
Report Card on American Education

By Monica Mastracco

Creating Capacity and Change in
Consistently Challenging Schools

By Rita Pin Ahrens

Education Savings Accounts:
The Next Frontier for School
Choice

By Jonathan Butcher



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The “Catch-22” of Higher Education

BY SEN. CURT BRAMBLE

The term “Catch-22” has become an idiom in American policy discussions since a book by that title was published in the 1960s. A “Catch-22” is what computer programmers would call a closed loop—an input which creates an output which leads back to the original input.

An example of a Catch-22 situation is the current issue confronting students who want to attend career-oriented colleges and universities. The federal Department of Education has two rules which directly affect the ability of minority and low-income students to attend an accredited institution of higher education.

These rules are aimed specifically at career-oriented or for-profit colleges and universities. It is important to note that to participate in any federal grant or loan-guarantee programs these schools have to pass the same rigorous accreditation reviews as any private college or state university.

The rules—known as the 90/10 rule and the Gainful Employment rule—have the stated purpose of protecting young, financially-unsophisticated students from being misled into signing up for a degree or certificate program for which they may not be qualified and paying for that program with loans they may have great difficulty repaying.

The current state of the economy has placed enormous strains on exactly that portion of the U.S. population which has the most to gain from a college degree: minority, lower-income, at-risk individuals. A recent NPR program stated that the teen unemployment rate across the country stands at 25 percent. In some places, like Washington, D.C., that rate was 49 percent in June.

Across all age groups, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' July 2011 data showed Whites had an unemployment rate of 8.1 percent, Hispanics 11.3 percent and Blacks 15.9 percent.

Study after study has shown that the best predictor of employability is the attained level of education. High school dropouts (of all races) had an unemployment rate of 15 percent in July. The unemployment rate for college graduates stood at just 4.3 percent—a 71 percent decrease due solely to education level.

The 90/10 rule requires that schools show that grants and loans total no more than 90 percent of the tuition and fees paid by students. Students must provide 10 percent of their educational costs in cash.

One does not have to be the Secretary of the Department of Education, or have a Ph.D. in economics to realize that times like these, when unemployment is intractably at 9 percent and the GDP grew at an anemic rate of only 1.3 percent in the second quarter of 2011 fall hardest on those least able to find a pathway to achievement.



Another issue befalling these students is the dire straits in which many states find themselves. State and country governments have spent decades building an interlocking pater of vocational schools, community colleges, and public university systems. Now, because of their budget issues, they find themselves in a situation where there are far more students trying to get into their community colleges than there are classrooms and teachers and tuition and fees at the four-year universities in many places is close to \$30,000 per year, pricing many students out of their schools.

This is not the time for the U.S. Senate or the Department of Education to try and downgrade the reputation of for-profit colleges and universities. They are filling a massive void between what public institutions can or will provide and what students are looking for. If Congress wants to be helpful to their most educationally and occupationally vulnerable constituents, they should take steps to remove both the 90/10 and the Gainful Employment rules if only as temporary measures until the unemployment rate comes down to a tolerable level.

As the situation now stands, the ability of our most at-risk student population to find a job so they can save enough money to be able to afford a college degree so they can find a job and start saving money is a cruel but all-too appropriate example of Catch-22.



Senator Curt Bramble represents Utah's 16th Senate District, and currently serves as an ALEC Board Member.

Accountability and Transparency in Education

BY GOV. MARY FALLIN

In Oklahoma, we have been fortunate to avoid the full brunt of the national economic recession. While we did feel the effects of the recession including significant shortfalls, we have been able to balance our budget without raising taxes. Because of this, our economy is trending upward. Since January 2011, more than 80 companies have started up or expanded operations in Oklahoma resulting in the creation of more than 5,000 jobs in our state.

To ensure we continue this forward momentum in our economy, we know we have to address education reform in Oklahoma. It's not only the right thing to do to ensure students receive the best education possible; it's the economically smart thing to do. That's why I pushed through an aggressive education reform agenda in my first months in office that will ensure our students receive a quality education while producing the skilled, talented workforce our businesses need to compete in the 21st-century economy.

I believe the reforms we passed into law this year will increase accountability and transparency in education, get more money into the classroom where it can do the most good, and raise the bar for students and teachers.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush visited our state earlier this year to tell us of his state's success with education reform. Taking a page from Gov. Bush, in Oklahoma we implemented an "A-F" grading system for public schools. Parents need the ability to quickly and easily evaluate the quality of a school they are sending their children to. Assigning an "A-F" grade for each school based on performance and improvement brings more accountability and transparency to our system. Florida has achieved incredible results in education with a similar system.

Additionally, we ended the practice of "trial de novo" to empower local school officials with the ability to let go ineffective teachers. Before this reform passed, a teacher in Oklahoma who was terminated for poor performance could initiate a lengthy legal appeal process known as "trial de novo." It had been unaffordable and nearly impossible to fire a teacher who wasn't getting results. That was unfair to students as well as teachers who performed their jobs well. Ending this practice frees up school officials from lengthy and expensive legal challenges.

It has been said that from kindergarten to the third grade, a child "learns to read," but from the fourth grade on a child "reads to learn." Unfortunately, many Oklahoma schools continued to promote some third graders who could not read to the fourth-grade level in an effort to keep them with peers in their age group, a process known as "social promotion." The result was a continuing

cycle of failure, as children who are behind in their reading skills are not able to catch up and are unable to learn new material without the ability to read at grade-appropriate level. We ended that practice in Oklahoma.


Another measure I signed into law was the Oklahoma *Equal Education Opportunity Scholarship Act*. Individuals and corporations are eligible for a 50 percent tax credit for their contribution to the scholarship program. Students who meet certain financial requirements or attend schools that have been identified for improvement under No Child Left Behind are eligible for the scholarships. This measure will help remove the barriers to achievement facing many low-income children and will help them to build better lives.

We also streamlined the operations of the state Department of Education. We gave the state superintendent the ability to truly manage the department. Voters in Oklahoma elect the state super-

"I believe the reforms we passed into law this year will increase accountability and transparency in education, get more money into the classroom where it can do the most good, and raise the bar for students and teachers."

intendent and that office holder, not the unelected state Board of Education, should have the power to manage the Education Department in the best manner they see fit.

Finally, we know dollars spent on teacher salaries, school equipment and in-classroom costs are the ones that most directly benefit our children and improve the quality of their education. Unfortunately, an unacceptably large amount of tax dollars are diverted to pay for administrative and bureaucratic costs and we are working to end this inequity.

I am proud of our work and believe these reforms will have a lasting impact on the quality of our schools and the success of our children. These reforms are a great start, but we know there are more steps we can take as a state to deliver the kind of high-quality education our children need and deserve. Our future, our economic success and the success of our children depend on it. 



Mary Fallin is the 27th and current Governor of Oklahoma. She was a U.S. Representative for Oklahoma's 5th congressional district from 2007 until 2011. Prior to that, she served as an Oklahoma State Representative, and was recognized as an ALEC Legislator of the Year.



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Internet Essentials: Closing the Digital Divide for Our Students and Families at Home

BY REP. DAVID CASAS

Access to the Internet at school, work and home is essential. It is a game changing technology. With it, we can communicate faster and more efficiently; go beyond traditional learning with interactive lesson plans and access to an infinite array of research and commentary; and have more control over our lives from our healthcare to our energy consumption.


However, despite the Internet's growing importance, one-third of American households still lack Internet service. This has given rise to a digital divide between those families with and those without access to the Internet. Families without access to the Internet not only have less information available to them, they are increasingly isolated as jobs and government resources are only posted online, newspapers become digital, and the social network continues to grow.

As Chair of the American Legislative Exchange Council's Education Task Force, I know the impact the Internet can have on a family, and in particular, on their children. That is why I worked with the Education Task Force to create the new Digital Learning Subcommittee, which is focused entirely on enhancing digital literacy opportunities. By giving children access to the Internet and unlocking its vast array of resources, we can ensure that our next generation will be our greatest generation.

In this context, I wanted to look at what the private sector, and in particular, one provider is doing to address the digital divide. With its *Internet Essentials* program, Comcast is offering families with a child receiving a free lunch under the National School Lunch program—those who can least afford broadband services at home—access to the Internet for as long as the child is in school. No computer? They offer a deeply discounted computer to these

families as well. Not sure about how to use a computer? The service comes with access to online, in-print, and in-person digital literacy training.

Rolling out in more than 4,000 school districts in 39 states plus Washington, D.C., where Comcast provides service, *Internet Essentials* is the largest broadband adoption experiment ever and represents the kind of innovative program and creative thinking that America needs if we are to overcome this divide. Even better, it is a private program built out of Comcast's long history of addressing digital literacy issues in our communities through philanthropic investments such as Digital Connectors, LULAC Tech Centers, and Boys and Girls Club Tech Programs.

As state legislators we can, and must, join private-sector partners like Comcast in working to close the digital divide by spreading the word about programs such as *Internet Essentials*. Call your local school district superintendent, let them know about the program, and encourage them to include information with school materials they provide to families. Reach out to your communities and continue to stress the importance of bringing Internet home for our students and their families. And visit InternetEssentials.com/partner to learn more about the program and download materials such as posters, flyers, and brochures. 

Representative David Casas is a state legislator in the Georgia House of Representatives and serves as Vice Chairman of the House Education Committee.

Introducing ALEC's 17th Edition of the *Report Card on American Education*

BY MONICA MASTRACCO

With President Obama's Race to the Top competition, it seems as though the United States is on a one-way street to federal-level education reform. However, some states are hitting the brakes and taking matters into their own hands. While the United States continues to fall behind other countries in global academic performance, the 2011 legislative session ignited reform efforts to dramatically alter the face of the public education system.

To properly assess these unprecedented reforms, the American Legislative Exchange Council is set to release the 17th edition of the *Report Card on American Education*, which designates a letter grade to all 50 states, evaluating their newly implemented educational reform, and gives a rank to each state based on student achievement.

The authors, Dr. Matthew Ladner, Senior Advisor for Policy and Research at the Foundation for Excellence in Education and Dan Lips, Senior Fellow at the Goldwater Institute evaluate each state in two ways: by educational performance rank and current education reform policies. Performance rankings are based on a combination of the overall National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) scores for low-income children, as well as the change in these scores over time. The states receive a letter grade based on how well they provide certain reforms such as increased school transparency, parental choice, online learning opportunities, and merit-based pay for teachers.

In addition to these rankings among the states for their overall gains and achievements, the book also explains why this particular session boasted such record-breaking numbers of K-12 reforms.

Indiana, which is lauded throughout the publication, is one such state that made extraordinary leaps in K-12 reform this year. This bipartisan effort paved the way for additional critical reforms to be

enacted, allowing for the vast expansion of school options for all Indiana students.

"It's refreshing to see another state take what we've learned from Florida and run with it," David Myslinski, Director of ALEC's Education Task Force says. "Indiana legislators and Gov. Mitch Daniels have followed in Gov. Jeb Bush's footsteps, providing a new face to reform. It's exciting to see federalism hard at work, allowing for strong competition among the states."

In the 17th edition of the *Report Card*, state legislators are able to compare their public education system's successes and weaknesses to the rest of the country. States can use this data to make effective changes to their educational system, steadily closing the ever-present achievement gaps.

With most state budgets in the red, the efficiency of the public education system has been a large concern for most state legislators. Indiana was one of the lucky few with a small surplus, but legislators still wished to reform public education by shifting focus back to the student, while being efficient with scarce taxpayer money.

It has been the goal of reformers in Indiana to maximize the utility of state education dollars. As part of the new reforms, school funding contracts are limited by two years, "so that a school board cannot commit itself to spending out into the years where it has no idea how much money it may actually have," said Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, at a recent policy event at the American Enterprise Institute.


The Indiana reforms provide students with the choice of how to learn, in order to best suit their individual needs, but they are still held equally accountable. All Indiana schools are held to the same standards and all students take the same state tests, regardless of attending a private, public, or charter school.

The *Report Card on American Education* also looks to the future, emphasizing the importance of online learning opportunities for proper student advancement. It discusses the Digital Learning Now initiative, which offers suggested reforms legislators

take to "transform their state's education systems to facilitate high-quality digital learning." It recommends taking a "two-pronged" approach for the states, to both "expand the supply of high-quality digital learning programs," and "create demand by giving families the power to choose the best education possible, including digital learning options." Two success stories in particular are illustrated in the publication, including the Khan Academy and the Carpe Diem Academy, both of which have experienced supreme results from the integration of digital learning into their educational curriculum.

Other states such as Arizona have proven that integrating some part of digital education into the classroom is cost-effective. It's basic supply and demand; when legislators provide a supply of options, empowered parents create the necessary demand. These parents and their students profit from a more flexible, customizable learning environment, while states see an extreme lowering of costs, and in turn, healthier budgets.

The *Report Card on American Education* further analyzes these costs and benefits of adding digital learning components to the U.S. educational system, including the findings in their rankings. "States have an unprecedented opportunity to completely revitalize the meaning of the word 'reform,'" says Myslinski, "and our publication can help you do it."

While Indiana was the ultimate front-runner in 2011 for the massive expansion of K-12 reforms, it is still anyone's game. Will your state come out on top next? With the help of the 17th edition of the *Report Card on American Education*, it absolutely could be. 



Monica Mastracco is the Legislative Analyst for ALEC's Education Task Force.

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REPORT CARD

ON AMERICAN EDUCATION

RANKING STATE K-12 PERFORMANCE, PROGRESS, AND REFORM

-By-

Dr. Matthew Ladner and Dan Lips
Foreword by Gov. Mitch Daniels

17TH EDITION

Creating Capacity and Change in Consistently Challenging Schools

BY RITA PIN AHRENS

In this extraordinarily challenging economic and political climate, the time to look beyond short-term fixes is now. Our nation's education system faces many challenges, ranging from antiquated buildings to high teacher turnover rates, and we have sought, despite being told it does not exist, the silver bullet to fix our schools. What we must accept is that lasting change takes time, planning, foresight, and the political will to begin and finish a process that will disrupt the status quo.

Disruption, however, isn't enough. We have to ensure that the initiatives we undertake today do not have unintended, lasting consequences that mitigate short-term benefits. So where do we begin?

Research tells us that the quality of the teacher is the most important school-based influence on student achievement. We can try to fire the worst teachers in our schools and hire and retain only the best teachers, but that approach will only work if we have the appropriate teacher evaluation systems and effective teacher preparation programs in place. States and districts across the nation are currently undertaking the extraordinary work of the first, but it will take more time than we can afford.

We lose one-third of our new teachers every three years, half of them within five years. These figures are even more egregious in our lowest performing schools, which lose quality teachers, veteran and new teachers alike, to more affluent or better performing schools, plus the ones who are leaving the profession altogether. The cost of teacher turnover alone is over \$7.3 billion each year. This is not a price we can continue to pay in these challenging times, and this disregards the price paid by our students in the schools that have a continual churn of teachers.

If we truly believe that having the best teachers matter, we must continue to encourage the best and the brightest to enter the teaching profession while finding ways to remove poor teachers from the classroom, but we must also put the programs in place to keep them there. We need to create the capacity within schools to promote and sustain both teacher and student learning by focusing on instructional improvement. We must start with discarding the idea that one day, one-size-fits-all professional development with no accountability measures will make an impact on instructional practice. We must acknowledge the research that tells us sustained, job-embedded professional development spread over the course of the year impacts instructional quality and student achievement. We must commit ourselves to change that isn't easy, that will disrupt the status quo, but will produce real and lasting effects for both teachers and students.

Here is the story of one struggling school that committed itself to change.

In 2006, Julius Corsini was a historically struggling school. Academic performance scores scraped bottom in Palm Springs Unified District and fell within the lowest ten percent of all California schools, placing it on the list for Program Improvement for consistent failure to meet annual yearly progress. Between half to three-quarters of the teachers left every year, and no principal had stayed more than three years. Fewer than one in five parents attended Back to School Nights. Parent-teacher conferences also saw abysmal attendance, with less than half of the parents participating.

On top of the academic and morale challenges, the school faced other demographic and socio-economic demands. 95 percent of the students were English language learners. The same number of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The surrounding community, Desert Hot Springs, had not only high levels of poverty, but also the highest crime rate per capita in the region because it absorbs a continual influx of inmates released from the penal system.

Julius Corsini was a consistently challenging school that seemed impossible to change. In 2007, however, the new principal, Kiela Bonelli and her staff would prove otherwise.

Change began with commitment. Principal Bonelli approached her staff and offered to drop all the typical professional development workshops and classes that the staff had undergone year after year, professional development that saw few results in the classroom, in exchange for their commitment to a true professional journey. Instead of the usual one day workshops, university classes, or weekend seminars, Bonelli asked the staff to engage in a more intensive, nearly year-long, job-embedded professional development program. The entire staff, consisting of 43 teachers, one reading coach, and two administrators, agreed to pursue *Take One!*, a program offered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Excited, Principal Bonelli, already a National Board Certified Teacher, led the charge, enrolling herself in *Take One!* as well.

Teaching and learning in Corsini was about to transform. Each week, in collaborative teams, the entire staff of Corsini focused



on the National Board's standards for accomplished teaching, as applied to their classrooms. They engaged in deeply reflective activities, including video self-critiques, that shifted the conversation from the challenges they faced to solutions for the demands they needed to meet. They created a professional learning community that was committed to enhancing student learning through improving teacher effectiveness. Near the end of the year, they submitted portfolios that documented their work and progress and held them accountable for what they had learned.

The results were not only immediate, they were also extraordinary. Julius Corsini needed only eight points on California's Academic Performance Index to meet its annual yearly progress goals. In the 2007-2008 school year, the same year that Corsini staff committed to change, student test scores rose by 55 points. The following year, in which the entire staff continued to eschew traditional professional development programs for *Take One!*, student test scores rose by another 49 points, far exceeding the five point target needed. In 2009, Julius Corsini was one of only four schools in California to exit Program Improvement Year Five. In recognition of this incredible achievement, Julius Corsini won one of the six 2010 National School Change Awards offered by Panasonic and the American Association of School Administrators.

The changes did not end there. Not only was there clear evidence of sustained progress in student learning, teacher and parental commitment were also transformed. The school went from losing between half to three-quarters of its teachers each year to just two at the end of the 2007-2008 school year. The following year, Corsini lost only one teacher to retirement. Back to School nights and parent teacher conferences now see over 90 percent attendance rates, motivating parents to become more involved in

the school's activities. Julius Corsini became the school that teachers and parents not only did not want to leave, but the school students, parents, and teachers were proud to be a part of which.

Everyone knows a school just like Julius Corsini, a consistently low-performing school that struggles against the odds of poverty, limited resources, and low student, parent, and teacher morale. Julius Corsini is not unique in its challenges, and it should not be unique in its extraordinary success. The question is whether everyone can commit to creating capacity and change as Julius Corsini did.

Can we move past the fly-by-night professional development workshops? Can we commit to programs that truly challenge and develop effective teachers, that make the best teachers even better, and that encourage those who can't meet those standards to re-evaluate their practice and their commitment to the profession? National Board Certification and *Take One!* are one of many places to start when we finally decide to step forward and make that commitment. 🌀



Rita Pin Ahrens is Director of Policy at the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and a former middle school math teacher. She is a refugee from Cambodia and the beneficiary of an outstanding K-12 public education in Idaho.

Education Savings Accounts: The Next Frontier for School Choice

BY JONATHAN BUTCHER

Arizona’s latest education policy innovation allows parents of special-needs students to customize their child’s education like never before.

S.B. 1553 created the nation’s first state-funded Education Savings Account (ESA) program for students in K-12. ESAs are a harmonious combination of the concepts behind Coverdell Education Savings Accounts and voucher programs operating in many states around the country.

Under federal law, Coverdell ESAs allow parents to save money, which will grow tax free, for K-12 or college expenses using an account that functions similar to a retirement savings account. Parents make withdrawals for approved education expenses, such as textbooks or tuition. The deposits are private contributions, not public money, and are capped at \$2,000 annually per child. While providing a helpful way for families to save for college, Coverdell accounts result in only modest K-12 opportunities for families seeking educational options.

In contrast, state voucher programs provide state funds to parents or to a school of choice on a parent’s behalf to be used expressly for the purposes of tuition.

Establishment groups such as teachers unions and the ACLU actively oppose vouchers, and, in Arizona, the state Supreme

Court ruled two voucher programs unconstitutional in 2009 after a union challenge. Voucher programs for foster students and a program for special-education students were struck down in *Cain v. Horne* because the court ruled they violated state constitutional provisions that prohibit public money from being used for private or religious purposes.

The prohibitions against public money being used at religious institutions exist in many other state constitutions and are known as “Blaine Amendments.” Vestiges of anti-Catholic bigotry, these amendments have an ignominious history. Today, unions regularly cite these amendments in order to stall or upend school choice programs.

In *Cain*, school-choice advocates argued that a school voucher is an aid to parents, not a direct aid to schools. Although the court ultimately disagreed, discussion during oral arguments implied that if the parental-choice program were broader—enabling parents to select from other educational services in addition to tuition expenses—it may not violate these clauses.

This set the stage for the creation of the most fundamentally liberty-enhancing school choice program in American history.

In an effort to help special-education students formerly served under the voucher program, Arizona’s new savings accounts provide these families direct access to 90 percent of the funds otherwise set aside for them through the state’s funding formula. The state will deposit funds in a bank account, and parents can use the money for

PROGRAM	ELIGIBILITY	FUNDING	CHOICES
Coverdell Savings Accounts	Any beneficiary under 18 years old.	Personal contributions that grow tax-free (\$2,000 annual limit).	K-12 and higher education expenses, including books, tutoring, and tuition.
State vouchers	Varies according to state.	Varies according to state.	K-12 private school of choice.
Arizona Education Savings Accounts	Arizona special education students who in the previous year either a) attended a public or charter school or b) used a tax credit scholarship to attend a private school.	90 percent of student allocation through the state funding formula.	K-12 and higher education expenses, including books, tutoring, and tuition.

a wide variety of approved expenses, including tutoring services, virtual education programs, and private school tuition (much like the range of options provided through Coverdell Savings Accounts). In exchange for an agreement not to enroll their student in a public or charter school, parents can decide how to use nearly all of the money that would have otherwise been under the public system's control. This results in a savings for the state with every participating student.

For states with Blaine Amendments, Arizona's program provides a public policy model that not only falls within constitutional provisions but also creates a school choice program that offers even more choice for families than voucher systems. Because ESA funds are deposited in an account owned by the families, the money becomes private money, strengthening arguments that the program falls within constitutional provisions. Parents have control over the funds throughout their child's K-12 experience and can even use the money for college expenses.

Though Arizona families have more freedom with this program than ever before, all is not won.

First, members of the education establishment have already written to the Attorney General in opposition.

Second, and common to many states, Arizona's student reporting system is coupled to a dizzyingly complex funding formula. Arizona uses a variety of funding weights for students and a procedure that attempts to equalize funds across districts. This combination results in a myriad of per-pupil funding levels. To efficiently administer education savings accounts, officials will have to make a precise determination of a student's funding (something they do already) and be able to account for this student's transfer out of the public system.

Funding complexities such as these are not unique. Earlier this year, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute released a study on special education in the U.S. and wrote, "Accurate accounting of state, district, and school-level spending on special education simply does not exist," and a "makeover" is in order. "But we can't get there until we peel back the layers of financial and operational opacity that currently shroud the field," write the Fordham authors.

Public education funding typically makes up the lion's share of state and local budgets. Because of the various funding streams that feed the system, discovering exactly how much taxpayers spend per student is more like deciphering a riddle than reading


a balance sheet. As a result, taxpayers find it difficult to evaluate the system based on a precise evaluation of performance and efficiency. Funding students through a transparent process where state aid follows children would strengthen accountability systems and promote the efficiency of programs such as education savings accounts.

Outdated student information systems and bureaucratic layers often insulate public school systems from the effects of parental choice. More immediate adjustments would create a stronger incentive for schools to improve their services in order to retain students—creating a better situation for all.

The current form of Arizona's ESA program is just the beginning. The program now serves students with special needs, but the potential exists to revitalize an entire system—and its funding formula—based on parental control over their child's education.

The proliferation of online services now available to families is striking. The replication of virtual delivery systems by companies like K¹², Inc. and Connections Academy, along with the model Florida has set for other states to follow with its wildly popular state virtual school, has created a new universe of innovative educational options. Parents have only begun to tap the potential of these new offerings. Research now under way by the Goldwater Institute will explain how ESAs can allow parents to customize their child's education through these online services.

Other states are not far behind Arizona. In late 2010 and early 2011, Florida Gov. Rick Scott worked with lawmakers to propose a statewide ESA program for all students. While this proposal failed in the 2011 session, Ohio lawmakers enacted the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program, which will begin in 2012-13. While still called a "scholarship" program, as opposed to a savings account, the program will allow families limited access to additional services as well as tuition.

The timing for this concept couldn't be better. With virtual schools, delivery models that blend virtual delivery systems and face-to-face instruction, and a host of new online resources, ESAs can enable parents to tailor their child's education to meet his or her specific needs. Vouchers provide a way for parents to choose the best school for their child, a crucial choice, but education savings accounts allow parents to shape a child's entire educational experience, take advantage of new, innovative systems, and use a variety of tools to prepare them for the future. 



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Carpe Diem Academy: A Unique and Innovative Approach to Seizing the Day

BY MONICA MASTRACCO

During a time when the budget and stock market crises in Washington are at the forefront of most Americans' minds, many have begun to wonder if economic and educational innovation has reached a stalemate. With growing unemployment rates, combined with increasing inflation, and a plunging Dow, the odds for future generations attaining the American Dream are not in their favor. The methods for attaining that dream are evolving as states look to new, innovative and creative ways to advance American public education.

Enter Carpe Diem Academy: Yuma, Arizona. This innovative charter school uses a hybrid model of learning that incorporates a mixture of both traditional classroom elements and computer-assisted instruction (CAI), ensuring students' individual needs are being more properly met. CAI teaches the core principles of a lesson in the morning, which is then followed by afternoon workshops with the on-site instructors. This enhances what the students have already learned, expanding their critical thinking skills.

According to Rick Ogston, founder and director of Carpe Diem Academy, Carpe Diem is unique to other virtual schools because they are "a school with a 21st century learning pedagogy that leverages technology to create a new educology of learning, a new learning environment ecosystem. . . In [their] system, teachers and time are used more effectively and strategically."

And when it comes to reforming the public education system, Carpe Diem is in a class all its own. Focusing on both student character and academic proficiency, Carpe Diem currently holds a state proficiency rating of 92 percent, as compared to the 65 percent among their counterparts attending public schools throughout Arizona. Students are not simply completing a given subject; they are mastering it.

In an increasingly digital society, this mixture of online and traditional learning provides the best of both worlds for today's children, allowing for flexible and strategic instruction. Ogston continues, "students and parents are better able to take charge of education, moving at their own pace and depth, while stimulated and challenged to go deeper by onsite teachers. Student responsibility and self-monitoring is a large component of our model."

Carpe Diem is both effective and efficient, proving to be a more affordable means of education for taxpayers and their students. While the current national cost per pupil is over \$10,000, Carpe Diem is educating students for about half that spending \$5,303 per student while simultaneously producing greater results.


This unique model of blended-learning encourages students to take a pro-active role in their own education, and "allows students to see in real-time their quality and quantity of work thereby helping them make better decisions about the usage of their time," says Ogston. They're provided all the essential tools to excel in their academics, having the flexibility to progress at their own pace,

incentivizing them to maximize their learning potential. It instills in them a strong sense of personal responsibility, one of the main facets of Jeffersonian ideology, and an essential quality when striving for the American Dream.

However, in a time when public officials are desperately trying to balance state budgets and supply superior public education, many American students are receiving the short end of the stick. Carpe Diem's model offers an excellent start to rectifying this problem, but according to Ogston, there is much more to be done in the world of K-12 education reform. "Our next steps are currently limited by policies designed for 'old school' models and technology that exists but not in the education world...Competency based learning could take off were it not for some of these limitations."

State Senator Rich Crandall, Arizona Senate Education Chair says, "Very few individuals have accepted the new school funding reality that exists today as a result of state fiscal challenges and emphasis on a balanced federal budget. One of the exceptions is Rick Ogston, [who] uses technology to obtain high academic results at a lower per pupil cost. Rick will be the first to tell you that his model is not for everyone, but for those students who choose to attend Carpe Diem, their academic gains far surpass like students in neighboring schools and districts."

And here we see federalism at work in public education. By allowing the state and local school boards of Arizona to make the best decisions for their students, we are able to witness innovation at its best; a personalized, ground-breaking, blended model of instruction and learning that is not only excellent theory, but excellent on paper.

So for most who hear the phrase "carpe diem", the Latin translation of "seize the day" immediately comes to mind. But for the students and parents in Yuma, Arizona, this popular phrase has a much more personal and tangible connotation. For them, it simply means "seize the future"—and all the innovations that come with it. 

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Sentencing Reform in Ohio: A Bipartisan Victory

BY CARA SULLIVAN

In today's fiscal climate, many states are looking to reduce corrections spending without sacrificing public safety. In Ohio the corrections situation was dire. Ohio state prisons currently operate at 133 percent capacity.¹ Further, without the sentencing changes brought about by the new legislation, Ohio faces a projected 3,000 inmate increase and an additional \$500 million in prison construction over the next three years.² In order to correct these problems and prevent future ones, Ohio leadership formed a broad coalition of individuals from both parties who reached across the aisle to produce successful corrections reform. This bipartisan working group suggested reforms that align with several of ALEC's corrections and reentry policies. These policies provide proven solutions for states that need to reduce corrections spending without endangering the safety of their citizens.

The recent "Saving Dollars and Protecting Communities: State Successes in Corrections Policy" educational session at ALEC's 2011 Annual Meeting showcased a panel of four state legislators and their firsthand experience of researching and proposing sound corrections policy reform. The panelists discussed how their states were able to incorporate methods of victim restitution and modify offender rehabilitation programs to transform criminals into law-abiding, taxpaying citizens who contribute to the economy. One workshop panelist, Senator William Seitz of Ohio, shared the experience of his state's three year sentencing reform journey. "We had to reengineer the system because we had 15 years' worth of sentencing-enhancement bills matched up against 15 years' worth of legislative unwillingness or inability to build new prison capacity," Seitz said. "As the old saying goes, 'You can't fit 10 pounds into a 5 pound bag,' so something had to be done."

Like many states around the country, Ohio realized its corrections policy fell short when dealing with perpetual prison overcrowding and escalating corrections spending. Low-level and non-violent offenders were being incarcerated and occupying costly prison beds needed for violent, sexual, or predatory criminals. The problem extended outside prisons as both the probation and community corrections programs consisted of patchworks of regulations that lacked statewide standards.



To address these concerns, in 2009, Ohio leaders appointed state legislators, state agency directors, and Ohio Supreme Court officials to the inter-branch Justice Reinvestment in Ohio working group. This bipartisan group developed a set of recommendations that were then incorporated into corrections policy reform legislation. The Ohio House companion bill to the reform legislation sponsored by Senator Seitz was signed into law this past June with overwhelming support. The support for the bill mirrors the tremendously bipartisan nature of the broader movement of corrections policy reform in the states. Individuals across the political spectrum agree: corrections costs must be kept down, but not at the cost of public safety. The Ohio legislature did just that.

Ohio's reforms are projected to reduce the state prison population by nearly 7,000 inmates and save \$78 million by 2015.³ Ohio's new legislation will keep corrections cost down by implementing evidence-based rehabilitation programs both within and outside of the prison to decrease the costly prison population. The programs have reduced recidivism in the past, with the goal that they will now do the same on a larger scale. Reduced recidivism rates will also signal an increase in public safety.

The 420-page Ohio bill (Am. Sub. HB 86) covers a broad spectrum of issues centered on four themes: sentencing reform, improving probation, aligning community corrections dollars with needs and best practices, and improving the employability of rehabilitated offenders.

Ohio's key sentencing reforms are aimed at reducing the prison population of the state. These reforms include:

- Expanding (from 1 to 5) the number of days per month that an eligible inmate can earn off his sentence by active participation

¹<http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/Boards/Sentencing/resources/Publications/MonitoringReport2011.pdf>

²2011 State Legislation on Sentencing and Corrections: Selected States August 2011. The PEW Center on the States.

³Ibid.

in prison education and job training programs. Eligibility is restricted to prisoners newly sentenced after the bill's effective date, is capped at 8 percent of sentence, and sex offenders and violent offenders are ineligible.

- ▶ Proven alternatives to incarceration such as halfway houses or work release programs for those that fail to pay child support, “intervention in lieu of conviction” sentences for drug offenders, and probation instead of prison for first time, low-level felony property and drug offenders.
- ▶ Decreasing the overall prison population by doubling the dollar level at which theft becomes a felony offense, decreasing the maximum sentence for most intermediate level felonies from five to three years, equalizing penalties for crack and powder cocaine at a blended level, and removing certain drug mandatory sentences for marijuana and hashish offenses.
- ▶ The broadened use of “judicial release” for offenders who have served 80 percent of their sentence and a new, front-end program where low risk offenders can be sentenced to 80 percent of their sentence subject to completing appropriate prison programming.

Ohio's sentencing reforms not only ensure there are enough prison beds for violent offenders, but also that violent offenders are incarcerated for longer periods of time by increasing the maximum term for the most serious felony offenders.

On the probation front, Ohio standardized practices by establishing statewide training standards for county probation officers, requiring that all probation decisions be reported to the Supreme Court, mandating the use of a statewide uniform risk assessment instrument, and barring the practice of a single offender being subject to jurisdiction by multiple probation departments. Similarly, in regards to community corrections, Ohio aligned its dollars with best practices by declaring that it would no longer pay counties to house first time, low-level, low to moderate risk offenders in community based corrections facilities. Rather, these facilities would be reserved for those who violate probation or are at a higher risk.

Finally, Ohio created a mechanism for rehabilitated newly released prisoners to attain a certificate of employability through the State Corrections Department. Employers who hire such individuals receive tort immunity from claims of negligent hiring if the employee reoffends.

These efforts place Ohio's corrections dollars where they will have the most impact. “Key to the success of this comprehensive bill is that a portion of the savings we realize will be rebated to probation departments and other community-based intervention programs, and to augment prison education and job training programs,” Seitz explained. “If we just pocket the incarceration savings without following through on the other end, we will not be successful.”

Ohio's recent reforms are consistent with several of ALEC's policies. Ohio's legislation is centered on key principles found in ALEC's policies on sentencing, corrections, and reentry. ALEC's policies include:

▶ **Recidivism Reduction Act**

Implements research-backed programs and procedures for the supervision of offenders. This includes the utilization of a risk-needs assessment tool to set the conditions of supervision and to assign programming. Requires a percentage of state funds for offender programming be spent on programs that are evidence-based.

▶ **Swift and Certain Sanctions Act**

Institutional and community-based sanctions that provide swift, certain and proportionate responses to violations of probation and parole and the authority to community corrections agencies to assign—and reassign—offenders to those sanctions.

▶ **Earned Compliance Credit Act**


Reduces the time low-risk, non-violent offenders are on active supervision for each month they are in full compliance with their conditions of supervision. Focuses staff, services, and sanctions on higher risk offenders and helps motivate offenders to successfully reenter society.

▶ **Community Corrections Performance Measurement Act**

Provides community corrections agencies with systematic performance measures which provide regular, objective, and quantitative feedback on how well agencies are achieving their goals. Without measurement, policymakers cannot determine if programs are accomplishing their goals.

▶ **Community Corrections Performance Incentive Act**

Provides probation departments a share of the savings to the state in reduced incarceration costs when probation departments reduce both new offenses by probationers and revocations to prison.

Ohio's recent experience with corrections policy reform is a good example of a state that replaced costly over-incarceration policies with measures that successfully reduce recidivism. The interbranch aspect of the Justice Reinvestment in Ohio working group greatly aided in the reform. Further, the effort was broadly bipartisan as Senator Seitz's legislation was championed by former Democrat Gov. Ted Strickland and current Republican Gov. John Kasich. Groups as diverse as ALEC, the ACLU, the Buckeye Institute, and the Ohio Chamber of Commerce found common ground in Ohio's sentencing reforms.⁴ Because both parties worked together on the legislation, Ohio has been able to prove that states can save taxpayer dollars without sacrificing public safety. 

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³Senate Judiciary Criminal Justice Committee Testimony of Senator Bill Seitz, February 15, 2011

The Impact of Chronic Conditions: Atrial Fibrillation and Stroke

BY DR. JOSE ZAMBRANO

Introduction

Chronic diseases—such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and arthritis—are the most common and costly of all health problems in the United States, as well as the leading causes of death and disability.¹ Seven out of 10 deaths among Americans are caused by chronic diseases, with heart disease, cancer, and stroke accounting for more than 50 percent of all deaths each year.² In 2009, 145 million people—almost half of all Americans—lived with at least one chronic condition.³ Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is one type of chronic cardiovascular condition that is prevalent and very costly to the United States healthcare system.⁴

Symptoms of Atrial Fibrillation

With atrial fibrillation, the upper chambers of the heart do not beat the way they should resulting in abnormal pumping and blood flow. The irregular rhythm may cause blood to pool and a clot to form. This clot can break away and travel to the brain where it can block an artery and cause a stroke.⁵

Many people with AFib do not have any symptoms. Others may experience symptoms including:

- Racing, irregular heartbeat
- Fluttering in the chest
- Heart palpitations
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Weakness
- Faintness
- Fatigue when exercising
- Sweating

Prevalence

AFib is the most common sustained heart rhythm disorder in the United States, affecting more than 2.3 million adults, 80 percent of whom are 65 years and older.⁶ As the United States' population continues to age, this number is expected to more than double to 5.6 million Americans by 2050.⁷ One in four individuals aged 40 years or older will develop AFib during their lifetime,⁸ and among those over the age of 65, AFib is one of the most common serious heart rhythm disorders.⁴ Although AFib prevalence varies by age, it also varies greatly by state. In the United States, the concentrations of counties with the highest AFib hospitalization rates are located in Appalachia, along the southeast coastal plains, in central Maine, and around the

Chicago metropolitan and the greater St. Louis areas.⁹

AFib and Stroke

AFib is associated with up to 15 percent of all strokes in U.S.⁶ Stroke is the most common complication associated with AFib and can lead to life threatening and costly consequences.⁴ Stroke may cause paralysis of one side of the body, speech and language problems, memory loss, vision loss, lasting brain damage, and even death.¹⁰

Individuals with AFib are nearly five times more likely to have a stroke than individuals without the condition¹¹ and 35 percent of AFib patients are expected to suffer a stroke in their lifetime.¹² AFib-related strokes are twice as likely to be fatal or severely disabling as non-AFib-related strokes.¹³ Seventy percent of AF patients who have strokes will die as a result.¹⁴

Three out of four AFib-related strokes can be prevented, but many patients do not take action to reduce their risk of stroke.¹⁴

Cost & Government Programs

The costs associated with AFib and its complications are an increasing economic burden on the United States healthcare system. A 2008 study indicated that Medicare alone

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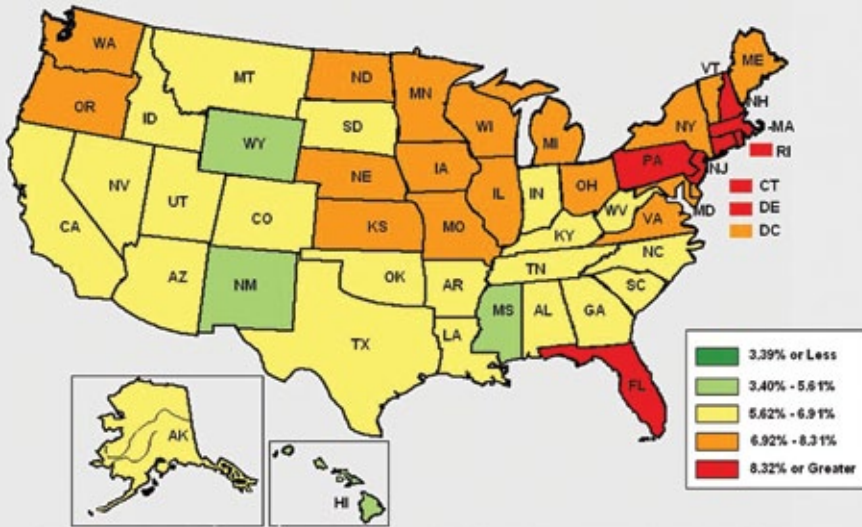
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Atrial Fibrillation Prevalence – 2006, Age 65+



Source: National Minority Quality Forum – Afib Atlas; <http://www.2-stroke.com/>; NMQF used the following sources for data collection: CMS (100% Medicare and Medicaid files), NHANES / BRFSS, MEPS (AHRQ), HCUP, US Census data

pays \$15.7 billion annually to treat newly diagnosed AFib patients.¹⁵ These costs are largely driven by the greater utilization of healthcare services associated with AFib complications, particularly stroke. The estimated direct medical cost of stroke alone (including, but not limited to, AFib-related stroke) for 2007 was \$25.2 billion. This includes hospital outpatient or office-based provider visits, hospital inpatient stays, emergency room visits, prescribed medicines, and home health.¹⁶ While most AFib patients are covered under Medicare, Medicaid also bears some of the costs of

providing AFib treatment.¹⁷

Recently, four states (Illinois,¹⁸ Iowa,¹⁹ Missouri²⁰ and North Carolina²¹) passed resolutions recognizing the significance of atrial fibrillation and stroke. The resolutions recommend that the respective state Departments of Public Health assess chronic disease management of stroke prevention in atrial fibrillation, with the intent of identifying opportunities to improve quality of care and reduce the financial and clinical burden of AFib-related strokes upon the state's public programs.^{18,19,20,21}

Conclusion

Given the prevalence and severity of AFib-related stroke, as well as the financial burden the condition poses on the United States healthcare system, policymakers should consider pursuing several action steps to increase visibility of AFib as a priority area for the healthcare agenda:

- Establish patient education programs to increase awareness of the condition, increase treatment adherence, prevent stroke, and improve patient outcomes;
- Assess the need for better chronic disease management of stroke prevention in AFib in an effort to identify opportunities to reduce the financial and clinical burden of AFib-related strokes on state and public programs, including Medicare and Medicaid;
- Establish mechanisms to encourage adherence to evidence-based clinical practice guidelines in AFib treatment and stroke prevention;
- Ensure that clinical practice guidelines and quality measures adopted in public programs are based on the most robust and up-to-date evidence available.

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