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Letter from the President



Dear educators and parents,

It's been a challenging year in so many ways. As I listen to our educator friends I hear their frustration over tight budgets and their uncertainty about funding, jobs, and the future of education. But I also hear an endless stream of that amazing and undying enthusiasm for educating

students. Educators never cease to amaze me with their passion for what they do.

I am proud to be in the business of helping the young students of today reach their full potential. However, our mission would be left unfulfilled if it weren't for the dedicated parents, educators, and tutors who lead these struggling students to academic achievement with their unconditional support.

We are so grateful for these education leaders who believe so strongly in helping youth reach their full potential and achieve academic success. As a token of our appreciation, we will be rewarding these leaders by giving them the best discounts and giveaways possible throughout the year. I know you have a choice in test-preparation materials, and we will not reduce the quality of our materials but try to offer them at the best prices possible to you. I also think you will enjoy the little surprise tokens of appreciation we enclose with every order as just one more way we can say "thank you" for being as passionate as we are in making a difference in the lives of students.

Sincerely Yours,

Cindi Englefield
CEO and President



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Proposed revisions to ESEA call for 'college and career readiness'

In the recently released proposal for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), President Obama and the U.S. Department of Education have marked their path to education reform around Common Core Standards; accountability monitoring of states, districts, schools, principals, and teachers; equal distribution of effective teachers and principals; and fostering innovation through competition, among other initiatives. Though the document calls for "college and career readiness" — the new catch phrase of current education reform — there's no clear and concise definition offered.

So the question remains: What is 'college and career readiness'? The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) has provided a sensible definition to these perplexing words. In its article "What is 'Career Ready'?", the ACTE explains that "career ready" and "college ready" cannot be grouped together, although skill sets may overlap between them.

According to the ACTE, both college and career readiness require students to have foundational academic knowledge of math and English so that no remediation course is needed in higher education. (According to the ESEA proposal, four of every 10 students enrolling in a 2–4 year college need to take at least one remedial course.) And while some of the employability skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and teamwork, creativity, responsibility, ethics, and information and technology application, are common between 'college and career readiness' standards, according to ACTE, 'career readiness' requires students to go one step further.

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Does Cash Motivate Students?

When Harvard economist Roland Fryer, Jr. paid \$6.3 million to 18,000 students in four major cities during randomized experiments, he learned that while students may be motivated by monetary rewards, if they don't know how to achieve "good grades" or "raise test scores" money can have no impact on achievement. This controversial study was featured in the *TIME* magazine article "Is Cash the Answer?" by Amanda Ripley on April 19, 2010. Below are Fryer's findings:

Dallas

Second graders dramatically increased reading comprehension scores after earning \$2 for every book they read and succeeded on a comprehension quiz.

Chicago

Standardized test scores remained unchanged, but ninth-graders cut fewer classes and got slightly better test scores when given \$50 for each A, \$35 for each B, and \$20 for each C.

Washington, D.C.

After being rewarded up to \$100 every two weeks for five different actions, including attendance and behavior, middle schoolers seemed to improve reading skills.

New York City

Paying \$25 to fourth-graders and \$50 to seventh graders per test for higher test scores had no measurable effect on student achievement.

Proposed revisions to ESEA call for 'college and career readiness'

Continued from Page 2

ACTE states that 'career ready' students must be proficient at technical writing; analyzing information, data, and statistics; and be able to reason and solve mathematical problems. They must also acquire employability skills, such as critical thinking, adaptability, and teamwork, to be able to advance in their careers.

Employers also reported that students must possess some level of job-specific knowledge and skills prior to employment. The States Career Clusters Initiative, www.careerclusters.org, has used business and industry leader input to identify key knowledge and skill statements for 16 career clusters and 79 specific career pathways. The statements represent knowledge and skills students must have to succeed in a specified career area.

According to a report by Achieve this year, 31 states now have 'college- and career-ready' standards. This is a notable increase from the three states Achieve counted five years ago.



And with President Obama's new goal of taking back the United States' first-place world position in college completion by 2020, 'college- and career-ready' standards seem to have secured their place in this next era of education reform.

**Download U.S. Department of Education's
"A Blueprint for Reform"**

(ESEA reauthorization proposal) at:

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf>

Download the ACTE article "What is 'Career Ready'?" at:

http://www.acteonline.org/uploadedFiles/Publications_and_Online_Media/files/Career_Readiness_Paper.pdf

View career cluster standards at:

www.careerclusters.org

Delaware and Tennessee win first round of Race to the Top

Funding News

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced in March that Delaware and Tennessee won \$600 million in the first round of Race to the Top competitive reform grants. Both states secured their lead over 38 states and the District of Columbia by writing new laws to support new education policies and by gaining overwhelming support from teachers, school districts, business leaders, and other key stakeholders for their comprehensive school reform plans.

Race to the Top competition favored states that accepted and made great strides towards adopting the goals President Obama considers crucial to education reform. These include expanding the use of charter schools, revising teacher evaluation systems, improving states' student data tracking systems, and turning around the lowest performing schools.

Delaware proposed a new state law that allows teachers rated as "ineffective" for three years to be removed from the classroom — even if they have tenure.

Tennessee passed a law that allows the state to intervene in failing schools and permits educator evaluations based on students' academic growth.

From 41 applicants, 16 finalists were chosen on March 4; they included Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Tennessee.



In a 500-point scoring rubric, Tennessee earned 443.4 points during its Tier I evaluations and will receive \$500 million. Delaware followed with 438.4 points and will receive \$100 million. The District of Columbia placed last among the 16 finalists with 402 points.

All states except the first round winners are eligible to submit applications for round two Race to the Top funding. Duncan said he will probably pick 10-15 states as winners in September. These states will split the remaining \$3.4 billion. President Obama has asked for an additional \$1.3 billion for the Race to the Top competition to be extended into next year.

More information, including state applications, scores, reviewers notes and comments can be found on the U.S. Department of Education website at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>

Federal funding helps states makeover high-stakes testing

Funding News

U.S. Department of Education officials are now offering states more than \$360 million to help redesign their assessments into summative, end-of-year exams that are delivered and scored by a computer. These tests will also focus on a deeper understanding of the curriculum and higher-order thinking skills, limiting the use of multiple-choice questions. And, they will be in charge of measuring students' readiness for college or a career.

A majority of the money, \$350 million, has been set aside from the "Race to the Top" competitive grant to help states develop new assessments for English and mathematics Common Core Standards. An additional \$10.7 million will be awarded to states who create innovative test formats that use multiple measures of student achievement.

States have until May 27 to apply for the \$10.7 million found in the program "Enhanced Assessment Instruments." States that apply must unite with a higher-education institution or other research facility to develop their new testing system that chart student progress over time and are based on multiple measures from multiple sources. Preference will be given to states that increase the accessibility and validity of assessments for students with disabilities. The Department of Education plans to hand out seven grants through this program, ranging from \$750,000 to \$2 million.

To learn more about "Enhancing Assessment Instruments" grant program from the U.S. Department of Education, go to:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/eag/index.html>

Large pool applies for 'i3' funding

Almost 2,500 schools, districts, and non-profit organizations from every state have indicated their plans to compete for one of many "Investing in Innovation" grants (i3) for which \$650 million is available. This number is about twice the amount of applicants the Education Department had expected to compete.

Eighty-seven prospective applicants said they would apply for what's likely to be just five or fewer awards of "scale-up" grants, which provide up to \$50 million, the largest awards of "i3" funding. Competition also will be fierce for the smallest \$5 million "development" grants with more than 1,600 prospective applicants saying they plan to apply for 100 or less awarded grants. There will likely be fewer applications in the other two areas: improvement of data systems and teacher and principal effectiveness.

The i3 grant program is meant to spur school improvement by asking districts, groups of schools and their nonprofit partners to pursue and scale up innovative reform strategies. Three tiers of grants, with the biggest awards going to the proposals with the strongest research evidence of past success, will be awarded. Applications are due May 11. Awards will be made by September.

Senator proposes \$23 billion to save teacher jobs

Funding News



Senator Tom Harkin, Iowa-Democrat, has recommended that the Education Department create a \$23 billion jobs fund to prevent teacher layoffs due to budget shortfalls, which he calls the Keep Our Educators Working Act.

Job losses at public schools and colleges may top 100,000 in the next school year. The money in the proposed legislation would be used to retain teachers, librarians, and other school staff; to hire

new employees; and to provide new employee training at schools, districts, colleges, and universities.

Harkin urges the legislation be passed immediately as schools make budget decisions for the next school year and stimulus money that, according to the Education Department, preserved more than 300,000 teaching and school administration jobs last year, expires on Sept. 30.



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Governor announces plan to apply for second round of Race to the Top

Colorado News

In April, Governor Bill Ritter announced that Colorado would apply for the second round of federal Race to the Top grants after finishing 14th out of the 16 finalists in the first round. Colorado was the only western state among the finalists.

State leaders discussed for a week whether to apply for round two of Race to the Top. One concern was whether the state would be able to improve its score from round one. Another concern was cutting the initial \$377 million application for round one down by more than half. Colorado can only receive a maximum of \$175 million in the second round.

A total of 40 states and the District of Columbia applied during the first round of Race to the Top. Each was given a suggested budget range based on the number of school-age children in that state. Most states plans exceeded those estimates, but U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said they must adhere to the estimates in round two.

For Race to the Top funding, each state application had to address four broad areas. Colorado achieved 90 percent of the possible points in two areas: developing and implementing high-quality standards

and assessments and turning around low-achieving schools. However, it received only 80 percent of the points for its plan to fully implement a statewide data system to improve instruction and 76 percent of the points for its plan to improve Colorado teacher and principal workforce.

State leaders have been reading the reviewers' comments and talking to education stakeholders across the state, as well as studying the applications of the winning states in round one, Tennessee and

Delaware, and other finalists to try to construct a stronger plan for the state's round two application. Colorado must apply for round two of Race to the Top by June 1. Winners will be announced in September.



Teacher Evaluation Bill spurs statewide support and opposition

Senate Bill 191 has become a hot-button issue for Colorado teachers, administrators, unions, education associations, and legislators alike. If passed, the bill would implement drastic statewide reforms to teacher and principal evaluations, among other education reforms.

Proponents of S.B. 191 say focusing on effective teaching is the best way to cut the achievement gap, reduce the dropout rate, and increase the number of students who graduate ready for college coursework. They also believe it will help the state's chance to win \$175 million in the second round of Race to the Top competitive education grants.

The bill obligates teachers and principals to annual evaluations. New requirements will make 50 percent of teacher evaluations based on their performance during supervisors' reviews, and another 50 percent based on student growth as measured by standardized tests and other measures. In principal evaluations, 65 percent of the evaluation would be determined by student growth and the demonstrated effectiveness of a principal's teachers.

Teachers unions view the student growth portion of the proposed evaluations as placing too much emphasis on tests, especially the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). But because the CSAP is only tested in grades 3-10 and only in certain subjects, half of Colorado teachers will need new assessments created to test students on subjects or grade levels not covered by CSAP testing.

Senator Michael Johnston, the mind behind S.B. 191, offered an amendment so that interim tests, student work, and statewide assessments can be considered to track student growth. However, some teachers worry that linking teacher and principal

evaluations to student growth would provide a disadvantage to those who work in the most challenging schools, work with English Learners or special needs students, and work with students who may be absent from school for weeks.

Johnston said neither the bill nor the governor's council is asking teachers to bring every student to proficiency. The measurement would be based on academic student growth during his or her time in that classroom. Also, an amendment to the legislation allows districts to rate student growth differently for certain classrooms, such as ones with highly mobile students, those with special education students, or ones in which 95 percent of students are considered "high-risk."

The bill also features requirements that "non-probationary status" (also known as tenure) be given to teachers after three consecutive years of demonstrated effectiveness, and this status may be revoked if a teacher has two years of poor evaluations. Additionally, the bill offers new procedures designed to reduce the number of teachers who are assigned, or receive "forced-placement," to school positions rather than being hired by the schools' staff. Johnston's bill would require "mutual consent" between the teacher and the principal before the teacher could receive a job at that principal's school.

Governor Bill Ritter's Council on Educator Effectiveness is now working on creating a more detailed definition of "educator effectiveness" to be used during teachers' and principals' annual evaluations.

So far, S.B. 191 has passed in the Senate Education Committee. It now awaits review by the Senate and then, if it survives, the House.

State Board of Education Approves Rules for Education Accountability Act

In April, the Colorado State Board of Education approved rules for the Education Accountability Act of 2009 (S.B. 09-163), which unifies the state's approach to school accountability.

The rules give the state a role in intervening in districts when accreditation scores are poor for five consecutive years. The rules also give districts with high performance more autonomy while giving districts with higher needs more intervention and support.

The rules require the state board to annually review each school district's performance using four key performance indicators. Built around the Colorado Growth Model and 'college and career readiness' expectations, the performance indicators include student longitudinal growth, student achievement levels, extent of student growth and achievement gaps, and postsecondary and workforce readiness.

APA estimates cost to implement CAP4K

Education policy consulting and analysis firm Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) presented to the Colorado State Board of Education the potentially large costs of implementing the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K).

The APA study found that CAP4K costs could range from \$131.5 million to \$142.4 million or more with a majority of the costs being paid by local school districts. The study estimated costs to the State Department of Education at \$1.5 million and \$1.7 million for the



State Department of Higher Education for the first phase of work alone.

The CAP4K legislation (S.B. 08-212) created new definitions of postsecondary and workforce readiness, new content standards, the development of a new testing system, and building a seamless transition for students from high school to college.

The complete APA analysis report is available at:
www.cde.state.co.us/communications/download/PDF/CAP4KInterimReport3-1.pdf

Governor Crist vetoes education bill, gains national attention

On April 15, Governor Charlie Crist made national headlines when he vetoed Senate Bill 6, a highly controversial legislation that would have tied teacher pay to student performance and eliminate tenure for new teachers.

The bill was a top priority for Florida's Republican Party, and shortly after the veto, Governor Crist retired his Republican bid for the U.S. Senate to run instead as an independent.

Crist said his decision to veto S.B. 6 was due to an outcry of opposition from teachers, parents, students, and local school officials who flooded the Florida Legislature with thousands of emails and phone calls and held rallies, sit-ins, and sick-outs to show their disagreement with the bill. Opponents even created a Facebook page called "Stop Senate Bill 6," which now has more than 50,000 supporters.

S.B. 6 would have been one of the most aggressive and far-reaching merit-pay laws in the country.

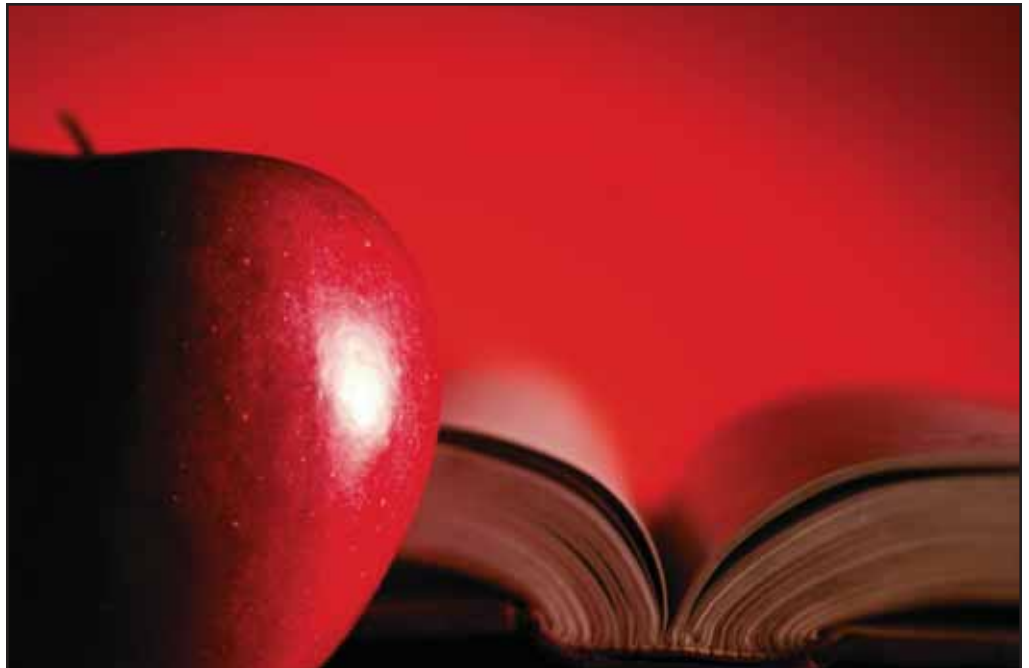
While other states have similar performance-pay plans for educators, they were designed with the cooperation from teachers and teacher unions.

In November, Hillsborough County School District began to craft its own teacher-effectiveness and evaluation plan after winning a \$100 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The district's program will include an opt-out provision. For those teachers who participate, 40 percent of a teacher's salary will be based on student achievement as measured by the

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and end-of-course exams develop by Hillsborough educators. The other 60 percent of a salary will be based on "360-degree" observational evaluations done by principals and other teachers, a system used by some major corporations to evaluate employee performance. Hillsborough hopes that the new system will be able to reward excellent teachers with higher pay much earlier in their careers.

The legislation was unable to revisit S.B. 6 in the last two weeks of the Legislative session, but it is very likely a bill like S.B. 6 will be introduced in the next session.

Crist, as quoted by the *Miami Herald*, said, "We must start over. This bill has deeply and negatively affected the morale of our teachers, our parents, and our students. They are not confident in our system because they do not believe their voices were heard."



Ohio plans to involve more students in Round Two of Race to the Top

In hopes of winning part of \$3.4 billion available in round two of the Race to the Top competitive grant program, Ohio plans to expand its proposed initiatives from the round one application to show how more students will benefit from the state's efforts with Race to the Top funding.

"While our round one application was strong and the initiatives proposed were bold, we must be able to demonstrate that more children will benefit from these initiatives in our round two application in order to gain serious consideration from the review panel," Superintendent of Public Instruction Deborah Delisle said.

Several reviewers noted the number of participating schools and districts and were concerned the state's plan would not ensure that all of Ohio's students would be a part of its Race to the Top initiatives.

In Ohio's round two application, a funding floor has also been established for school districts and community schools who participate in Race to the Top initiatives. School districts would receive a minimum of \$100,000 and community schools would receive a minimum of \$25,000 during a four-year grant.

The funding floor will provide extra resources for 105 community schools and 293 school districts. If all funding floor-eligible schools participated, Race to the Top funding would reach more than 42,000 students, according to Delisle. She added that more than 90,000 of the students who would benefit from Race to the Top funding are considered economically disadvantaged.

Applications for round two of the Race to the Top competitive grant program are due June 1, 2010.

2011 OAA testing may interfere with schools' spring break plans

The Ohio Department of Education announced that OAA testing in spring 2011 will begin on April 25.

Due to Easter being celebrated on April 24, many districts have scheduled or are considering scheduling spring break the week of April 25.

The ODE has asked districts to schedule spring break for the week before Easter (April 24).

Districts that have spring break on the week of April 25 will have to administer OAA tests the week of May 2 (for the initial administration) and the week of May 9 for make-up testing only.

Drafts of Science and Social Studies revisions to content standards posted

New drafts of science and social studies academic content standards were posted to the Ohio Department of Education website on April 1 for public review after more than 2,000 comments from discussion groups and individuals were incorporated into the working drafts. The drafts are expected to be adopted by the State Board of Education by June 30.

University educators seek delay of school curriculum vote

Texas' much debated history and social studies curriculum revisions have prompted a group of Texas university educators to call on the State Board of Education to delay its final vote on the standards until experts from higher education can review them.

In their letter, the educators requested that the board delay its scheduled May vote until curriculum teams and a panel of credentialed content experts from Texas' colleges and universities could review the changes the board made and "prepare a new draft of the standards that is fair, accurate, and balanced."

In March, the State Board of Education gave preliminary approval to new standards for grades K-12 after three days of public hearings and much debate.

Some of the more controversial revisions to the standards include requiring teachers to cover the Christian influences of the nation's Founding Fathers, downplaying Thomas Jefferson's role among the Founding Fathers, minimizing the contributions of minorities, and revising curriculum vocabulary so that the U.S. government is described as a "constitutional republic" rather than "democratic."

Additionally, the letter called for a public review and comment period before the final adoption of the standards.

According to Debbie Ratcliffe, a Texas Education Agency spokesperson, the State Board of Education has already received abundant input from the public on the revised standards, hearing 163 people testify in person and receiving approximately 20,000 e-mails. She also said that the board had an expert review panel, which included reviewers from Texas A&M University, Texas Woman's University, Texas State University, and American University, among other colleges and universities.

The educators from the University of Texas at Austin are not the first group to offer their help in revising Texas' history curriculum. The National Council for History Education (NCHE) offered its services in a letter to the board in March.

In the letter, NCHE said it believed standards revision and improvement needed to be professional and should avoid being politicized. "We need to remove the study of the past from the political concerns and conflicts of the present, instead working with students to understand the 'complexities of causation' and the complex 'interplay of change and continuity,'" the letter said. The group also warned of "overburdening students with a blizzard of required details" instead of focusing on the most significant individuals from the past.

Another public comment period, that began on April 16, will last 30 days. The board is scheduled to meet May 19 to adopt new standards for Texas' social studies and history curriculum.

New Report Format for TAKS Item Analysis Data

The Texas Education Agency announced that item analysis data for the spring 2010 primary administration of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) will now indicate by individual student "yes" (correct) or "no" (incorrect) for each item on a given TAKS test. A separate file will be posted that shows the objective and student expectation associated with each item on the test so that districts can analyze this information immediately by individual student and gain extra time to prepare students for retest administrations for grades 3, 5, 8, and exit level.

Governor Gregoire signs Education Reform bill into law

On Monday, March 29, Governor Chris Gregoire signed into law sweeping changes to the evaluation systems of districts, schools, principals, and teachers.

Phase I of the law will implement a new accountability system, which will recognize schools that have raised student achievement and closed achievement gaps as measured by the state board of education's accountability index.

Phase I will also target the lowest five percent of persistently low-achieving schools as defined under federal guidelines. Schools identified as low-achieving will be required to implement one of four federally approved intervention plans with the assistance of federal funds. Conducting a federal intervention model will be voluntary in 2010; however, if schools do not improve student achievement, it will be required in 2011.

An external review team will do academic performance audits of a designated "required action" district and each of its persistently low-achieving schools to identify potential reasons for the schools' lack of progress. A "required action" district must submit a Required Action Plan to the state board of education for approval. This plan must include implementation of one of the four federal intervention models: turnaround, restart, school closure, and transformation.

After a "required action" district makes three years of progress in reading and mathematics on the state's assessments and no longer has a low-performing school in the district, it will no longer be identified as "required action."

The law also calls for new teacher and principal evaluation systems. Teachers will be rated on a four-level system based on criteria that includes centering instruction on high expectations for student achievement; demonstrating effective teaching practices; recognizing individual student learning needs and developing strategies to address those needs; providing clear and intentional focus on subject matter content and curriculum; using multiple student data elements to modify instruction and improve student learning; communicating and collaborating with parents and school community; and exhibiting collaborative and collegial practices focused on improving instructional practice and student learning.

A new four-level rating system for principals will be based on criteria that includes creating a school culture that promotes ongoing improvement of learning and teaching for students and staff; demonstrating commitment to closing the achievement gap; providing for school safety; leading the development, implementation, and evaluation of a data-driven plan for increasing student achievement; assisting instructional staff with alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessments with state and local district learning goals; monitoring, assisting, and evaluating effective instruction and assessment practices; and partnering with the school community to promote student learning.

The new teacher and principal evaluation systems will be phased in beginning in the 2010-2011 school year when the superintendent of public instruction will select school districts to participate in the development and piloting of the new evaluation systems. The new evaluations will begin statewide during the 2013-2014 school year.

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