

POLITICO

New STEM push from ALEC — Education Department calls for ratings expertise — \$9 million investment in school Internet

By: Libby A. Nelson – December 4, 2013

With help from Caitlin Emma, Maggie Severns and Stephanie Simon

ALEC'S STEM PUSH: ALEC will unveil a new subcommittee focusing on STEM education this week at its annual States & Nation Policy Summit in Washington. The group has found tremendous interest in science, technology, engineering and math education from ALEC members, potential for public-private partnerships, and bipartisan lawmaking on STEM issues, ALEC Education Director Lindsay Russell told Morning Education. There are currently three education subcommittees: digital learning, higher education, and K-12 reform.

—**Also on the agenda:** Education legislation [<http://bit.ly/1ber7xt>] slated to be discussed by members of the American Legislative Exchange Council over the course of the week include a bill that would create cloud-based achievement data “backpacks” for students, a bill expanding online learning and two early intervention bills. Two model school choice bills, including one that creates education savings accounts similar to those available in Arizona and another that targets foster children, may be amended as well. Members will discuss the bills in ALEC subcommittees but vote on them later in the week, after which the passed bills become model ALEC legislation. Model legislation ALEC is currently promoting: <http://bit.ly/18kBXhb>

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT: LEND US YOUR EXPERTISE: The Education Department is submitting its request for information to the Federal Register this week, looking for experts and researchers to help develop its new college rating system. And it's looking for advice on how to use its experimental sites authority — giving colleges some flexibility on financial aid regulations if they participate in controlled experiments — to spread innovation from campus to campus. The department has also created a new website to help navigate the financial aid process, aimed at counselors and others who work with students. The site: <http://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov>.

—**Duncan's day in Nevada:** Education Secretary Arne Duncan will speak to the annual Federal Student Aid conference today about the proposed rating system. He'll also visit two schools and speak to the Association for Career and Technical Education's annual conference.

GOOD WEDNESDAY MORNING, DEC. 4. Welcome to Morning Education. If you have a spare minute today, we highly recommend flipping through this LIFE magazine on education from 1950 for some historical perspective — as the table of contents says, “Some Issues Are

Debated"! <http://bit.ly/1hwUP4R> Keep in touch: Inelson@politico.com and [@libbyanelson](https://twitter.com/libbyanelson). Send your events to educalendar@politicopro.com. And follow us at [@morning_edu](https://twitter.com/morning_edu) and [@POLITICOPro](https://twitter.com/POLITICOPro).

INVESTING IN INTERNET ACCESS: Silicon Valley non-profit EducationSuperHighway announced this morning that it's getting \$9 million in backing from Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's Startup:Education, the Gates Foundation and others to continue its work connecting K-12 public schools to high-speed broadband. The investment is emblematic of a larger movement. Tech executives and foundations are also putting their minds and their millions behind computer science and STEM initiatives, hoping to help schools make the transition to digital learning and build a more skilled, globally competitive workforce. "I really believe we're at a historic moment right now," EducationSuperHighway CEO Evan Marwell said. Caitlin Emma has more for Pros: <http://politico.pro/1k9Qd1l>

STUDENT LOAN LOOPHOLE FOR CARIBBEAN MED SCHOOLS: Students at for-profit medical schools excluded from federal student loan programs are encouraged to pursue an online master's degree from a U.S. university to get access to student aid, according to Bloomberg. That way, they can use the student loan money to support themselves while attending medical school in the Caribbean. More: <http://bloom.bg/1cTSVG9>

FIRST LOOK: NEW DATABASE ON ACADEMIC, ATHLETIC SPENDING: The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics has created a website to compare how much each college and NCAA Division I conference spends on athletics vs. academics. One finding: In every Division I subdivision, since 2005, spending on athletics grew faster than spending on academics. Coaching salaries were a big driver of growth. Academic spending per student grew 5 percent, athletic spending per athlete grew 31 percent, and football spending per football player grew 51 percent. That's without taking scholarship costs into account. The database will be live at 9 a.m. here: <http://bit.ly/1cTLdMc>

—**The policy impact:** "We are hopeful this online database will help university leaders and policymakers develop practices and policies that bring better balance to athletic expenditures within the broader institutional missions," said Brit Kirwan, chancellor of the University System of Maryland and the commission's co-chairman.

TWO HIGHER ED REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS LATER TODAY: The Lumina Foundation will announce at 9 a.m. an effort in 20 communities nationwide to increase the proportion of residents with a college degree. And the Institute for College Access and Success will release a report on rising student loan debt levels, including state and federal data, at noon.

PISA DAY REACTION ROUNDUP: Reactions to the U.S.'s poor showing on the global PISA rankings, especially in math and science, poured in from across the policy spectrum (along with more than a few pictures of the Leaning Tower of Pisa). They were mostly predictable: Charter advocates called for more charter schools to shake up the stagnant status quo; unions pressed for more resources for poor students, and so on.

— Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute took the opportunity to push back against the argument that the Common Core will boost U.S. performance. He cited a Cato report arguing that "there is good evidence

that national culture — not standards or tests — might be the most important determinant of outcomes on international exams.” <http://bit.ly/1eN07oP>

— Teach for America made the case that it’s doing its part to fix things by recruiting more elite college grads and mid-career professionals to teach science and math to low-income students. “This year, more than 30 percent of our 11,100 corps members are secondary STEM teachers — compared to 12 percent in the teaching field nationwide,” the organization noted. <http://bit.ly/19fDwgG>

—Michael Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute boiled his analysis down to this hard-to-refute conclusion: “Maybe we’re just not very good at teaching math, especially in high school.” <http://bit.ly/1gCL566>

—With the counterintuitive argument, we have The Atlantic’s Jordan Weissmann, who asks, “who cares?” <http://bit.ly/1cTP6AN>

NEW SAT DELAYED A YEAR: The College Board’s new version of the exam will debut in 2016, not 2015. One widely anticipated change: the end, or at least a remodel, of the writing exam. More from Inside Higher Ed: <http://bit.ly/1cTPEXc>

TEACHERS WATCH DETROIT BANKRUPTCY: Tuesday’s ruling that Detroit is eligible to declare bankruptcy doesn’t directly affect the city’s schools or teachers. But Keith Johnson, president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, is anxious nonetheless. Judge Steven Rhodes ruled that the city can reduce retiree pensions to save money, despite a provision in the state Constitution that appears to protect public pensions from cuts. Teacher pensions in Michigan are guaranteed under a state system, not by the city, so they’re not at risk in the bankruptcy.

—**A possible precedent?** Yet Johnson, who represents 4,000 Detroit teachers, fears the case could set a precedent. “It could impact us and others down the road — not just in Detroit, not just in Michigan, but nationally,” he told Morning Education. Unions representing police and firefighters plan to appeal, so the issue isn’t settled yet. Johnson will be watching the legal twists and turns closely. “The fundamental question here,” he said, “is does federal bankruptcy law trump state constitutional protections?”

NEWTOWN 911 TAPES OUT TODAY: Recordings of the 911 calls from the school shooting almost a year ago will be made public at 2 p.m. The seven calls total about 25 minutes, and all calls were made to the Newtown police. More from the Los Angeles Times: <http://lat.ms/1cTS7kq>

—**In other Newtown news:** The town’s football team is in the running for a state championship, but don’t expect coverage in the national media. The Washington Post: <http://wapo.st/1cTSdsh>

MOVERS, SHAKERS AND WINNERS: Amy McIntosh of the New York Department of Education’s Regents Research Fund to the Education Department as a principal deputy assistant secretary. (h/t Politics K-12)

—The Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School in Washington, D.C. — one of the few charter schools in the country that focuses on adult students — will be honored tonight for its work helping immigrants integrate into U.S. society.

SYLLABUS

—A health insurance company will pay almost \$3.75 million in penalties for overcharging students at New York colleges. Capital New York: <http://bit.ly/1hwTafP>

—Virginia might get statewide results in the 2015 PISA. The Washington Post: <http://wapo.st/1hwTcUR>

—The SEIU works to unionize adjuncts. The New York Times: <http://nyti.ms/1gDaAEu>

—Texas higher ed leaders say they're concerned about sequestration. The Texas Tribune: <http://bit.ly/1gDc15K>

—The college counseling system is overburdened and many students fall through the cracks, according to new research. The Hechinger Report: <http://bit.ly/1hwTdlk>

—The new Atlanta school board will include four former Teach for America members. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution: <http://bit.ly/1bfevFk>

Always dragging that horse around? Bury that horse in the ground. [<http://bit.ly/1cUUMuh>] Start anew with the whole Pro Education team: @CaitlinZEmma or cemma@politico.com, @LibbyANelson or lnelson@politico.com, @MaggieSeverns or mseverns@politico.com, @NirviShah or nshah@politico.com and @StephanieSimon_ or ssimon@politico.com.

HAPPENING TODAY: WOMEN RULE — This morning, POLITICO, Google and the Tory Burch Foundation present 'Women Rule: Marks of Leadership,' an event featuring several female leaders, including a keynote address from OMB Director Sylvia Mathews Burwell; a conversation with Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and her daughter, filmmaker Alexandra Pelosi; Linda Hudson, President & CEO of BAE Systems; Elizabeth Robinson, Chief Financial Officer, NASA, and many more. Join the conversation with hashtag #WomenRule and tune in from 8 a.m. — 2 p.m. at www.POLITICO.com/Live.