

POLITICO

Texas testing contract up for grabs — CCSSO, CGCS committed to more constructive tests — Harvard professors balk at sexual harassment policy

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TEXAS TESTING CONTRACT UP FOR GRABS: Pearson made quite a splash in 2010 when it landed a five-year, \$468 million contract to develop, administer and score assessments in the Lone Star state. The contract runs through next spring and Texas had an option to renew it for another two years — but officials recently decided to seek other bids and write a fresh four-year contract. The request for proposals is an enormous document, split into eight parts. Bids are due by 2 p.m. on Dec. 17. <http://bit.ly/1n1sfg>

— **Pearson can bid on the contract again.** Because of its size and the breadth of services it offers, it might have the inside track. But its current contract has drawn some unwelcome scrutiny. The state auditor last year issued a scathing report, calling the document too vague to allow for effective oversight by the Texas Education Agency. The contract had so few details about the costs of each element that when the legislature eliminated 10 of the 15 tests required for high school graduation, state officials had to rely on Pearson to tell them how much they'd save. In the end, Pearson reduced its fees by \$6 million. <http://bit.ly/1z8oknq>

— **Texas, of course, is one of a handful of states** that never adopted the Common Core. In fact, state law forbids teachers from using a Common Core curriculum. So the new tests are not intended to resemble the PARCC or Smarter Balanced consortium tests, which emphasize close reading and open-response questions. But the RFP does ask test developers to suggest improvements on the standard fill-in-the-bubble model. “We are inviting responders to the RFP to provide suggestions for ‘innovative approaches to large-scale assessments’ for future development,” said Debbie Ratcliffe, a spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency.

COMMITTED TO MORE CONSTRUCTIVE TESTS: The Council of Chief State School Officers and the Council of Great City Schools will announce new steps today to make sure that every test taken by students is worthwhile. The groups want to improve the quality and amount of testing in public schools while addressing public concerns. Joining the groups for an

announcement at 1 p.m. ET are New York State Commissioner John King, Louisiana State Superintendent John White, D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson and Oakland Unified School District's School Board Member Jumoke Hinton Hodge.

— **Each official has dealt with testing struggles.** King and White have both seen significant pushback to the Common Core-aligned PARCC exams in their states, for example. And Henderson announced in June that the District would delay the use of student test scores in formulas to evaluate teachers while schools get used to new PARCC exams.

GOOD WEDNESDAY MORNING, OCT. 15. I'm upping my game in the kitchen with a new purchase: A cast-iron skillet! [<http://bit.ly/1wcIV4F>] So far, I've managed to avoid dropping it on my foot. What should I make? Send your cast-iron recipes, tips and amusing GIFs to cemma@politico.com or [@caitlinzemma](https://twitter.com/caitlinzemma). Events: educalendar@politico.com. And follow us on Twitter: [@Morning_Edu](https://twitter.com/Morning_Edu) and [@POLITICOPro](https://twitter.com/POLITICOPro).

WHO'S SPENDING THE MOST? An interactive map released today by the Fordham Institute shows that, when it comes to per-pupil spending, D.C. Public Charter Schools is outpacing D.C. Public Schools, Alexandria City Public Schools, Arlington County Public Schools and Prince George's County. DCPC spends more than \$18,000 per student, while PGC lags far behind at \$10,400 per student. When it comes to low-income students, Arlington County is spending the most per pupil and "poverty-stricken Prince George's County appears to be doing practically nothing to spend what little money it has on its toughest schools," Fordham President Michael Petrilli and research analyst Matt Richmond write in a blog post [<http://politico.pro/Zr7j7m>]. The map: <http://bit.ly/1w5I4SV>

HARVARD PROFS BALK AT SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY: Twenty-eight members of the Harvard Law School Faculty want the university to reconsider the school's sexual harassment policy. In an op-ed for the Boston Globe, the current and retired professors write that the policy is "overwhelmingly stacked against the accused" and lacks fairness and due process. Its definition of sexual harassment goes beyond Title IX and Title VII law, they write. They also argue that Harvard failed to convene with a broad group of faculty when developing the new policy, and seem to take a jab at the White House, which has made campus sexual assault a marquee issue this year. "Harvard apparently decided simply to defer to the demands of certain federal administrative officials, rather than exercise independent judgment about the kind of sexual harassment policy that would be consistent with law and with the needs of our students and the larger university community," they write. The op-ed: <http://bit.ly/1Cj80MP>

INSIDERS SEE ALEXANDER'S INFLUENCE: Nearly seven out of 10 education insiders think Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander will be the most influential senator on education in the next two years. That's according to a monthly survey released by Whiteboard Advisors. If Republicans take control of the Senate, almost three quarters of those surveyed think that implementation of a new college ratings plan will be less of a priority. But if the Senate turns, insiders think Republicans will focus on data privacy initiatives and a gainful employment regulation. They also think the education research bill is the only piece of legislation with a chance of passing during the lame duck session. The survey results: <http://politico.pro/1sGXFJy>

THE EVIDENCE ON PRE-K: The Cato Institute is out today with its take on the state of pre-K research, and it isn't sold on many of the oft-cited examples showcasing preschool effectiveness. Three high-profile programs that researchers have long held up as exemplary — the Abecedarian project, the Perry Preschool program and the Chicago Child-Parent preschool program — should not be the basis on which policy decisions are made today, the author argues, in part because they “differ markedly from contemporary preschools in ways that make them incomparable.” Cato concludes that more research is needed. The report: <http://bit.ly/ZYleTu>.

— **The Center for American Progress** is also weighing in on early childhood today, making the case that infants and toddlers — an increasingly diverse population — are underserved by government programs. Early Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block grant and other programs focused on infants and toddlers show potential but “fall short in their scope and quality,” the report says. The full report: <http://ampr.gs/1xPIxtS> CAP is also hosting an event at 10 a.m. ET today: <http://ampr.gs/1CizrX8>

— **And a reminder:** Applications for the Obama administration’s new \$250 million Preschool Development Program are due today. Last month, the Education Department said 31 states intended to apply.

IN CALIFORNIA, VERGARA PLAINTIFFS BACK TUCK: Several of the student plaintiffs from the landmark Vergara lawsuit gathered Tuesday with former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to endorse Marshall Tuck in his race for state superintendent. Tuck has embraced the Vergara ruling, which overturned California’s laws on tenure, seniority-based layoffs and other job protections for teachers. By contrast, incumbent Superintendent Tom Torlakson has joined the teachers union in denouncing the decision. So the endorsement wasn’t a big surprise. But Tuck hopes to use it to underscore his framing of the race, in which he stands on the side of kids while Torlakson protects union interests.

— **Torlakson, for his part,** has said the ruling must not stand because it unfairly blames teachers for all the problems in public schools. “The people who dedicate their lives to the teaching profession deserve our admiration and support,” he said when he announced the appeal.

— **Joe Macias, the father of plaintiff Julia Macias,** spoke on behalf of the families who endorsed Tuck. “We need leaders that will start working toward solutions today, instead of just denying that there are even problems,” he said. Villaraigosa, for his part, called Tuck a man “with the courage of his convictions.”

REPORT: CORE CLASSES GET SHORT SHRIFT: Nearly all of the almost 2,000 colleges and universities included in the American Council of Trustees and Alumni’s annual “What Will They Learn?” report describe general education as a central part of their missions. But you might not gather that based on their curricular requirements. Less than half the colleges require students to take literature, foreign language, economics, U.S. government or history courses, for example. Just 60 percent say students must take a college-level math class. The report: <http://politico.pro/1o9uBdW>

FOR-PROFITS MAKE FINAL GAINFUL APPEALS: For-profit college lobbyists are descending on the Obama administration to present final arguments against the “gainful employment” rule before the Education Department releases a final version this month. Many of their concerns aren’t new. But in a meeting with OMB Tuesday afternoon, officials with the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities raised new concerns about the regulations based on an adjustment to cohort default rates made last month by the Education Department. Allie Grasgreen reports: <http://politico.pro/1sNHBGd>

NORTH CAROLINA SENATE RACE CENTERS ON EDUCATION: If you’re avidly following education this election cycle, look to North Carolina for your fix. Democratic Sen. Kay Hagan and Republican Thom Tillis are locked in a tight battle. Tillis, who has served as speaker of the House since 2011, helped pass a budget that included teacher layoffs, sparking a years-long back-and-forth between teachers and the statehouse. Hagan has seized on it, running a bevy of ads with backing from the National Education Association. Maggie Severns has the story: <http://politico.pro/1vsPVNN>

FROM SCIENCE-STRUCK TO NSF HEAD: National Science Foundation Director France Córdova, one of 12 children born in France to American parents, didn’t grow up knowing many scientists or receiving much encouragement in science classes. But in 1969, after U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the moon, her longtime fascination with science finally started to take hold. Maggie Severns talks to Córdova for POLITICO’s Women Rule series: <http://politico.pro/1yAMFky>

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

— Former Head Start Director Yvette Sanchez Fuentes will join the Center for American Progress as a senior fellow, where she’ll work on issues including Head Start.

SYLLABUS

— Court gives go-ahead to New York University expansion. The New York Times: <http://nyti.ms/1rtFeTe>

— Sen. Richard Blumenthal to schools: Drop “deadly deal” with big tobacco. The Hill: <http://bit.ly/Zr6cEM>

— Republican state lawmakers in Montana are questioning Gov. Steve Bullock’s \$37 million plan for an early childhood education program. The Associated Press: <http://gftrib.com/1sdsDaT>

— Hillary Clinton urges private businesses to partner with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to help more young people earn college degrees. Las Vegas Review-Journal: <http://bit.ly/1wEZ6aF>

— College in Texas told Nigerians they were rejected for coming from country with Ebola. Inside Higher Ed: <http://bit.ly/1vujChm>

And we were bound [<http://bit.ly/1rGB8eb>] to the Pro Education team: @[CaitlinZEmma](#) or cemma@politico.com, @[alliegrasgreen](#) or agrasgreen@politico.com, @[mbmarklein](#) or mbmarklein@politico.com, @[MaggieSeverns](#) or mseverns@politico.com, @[StephanieSimon](#) or ssimon@politico.com.

LAST CALL FOR “WOMEN WHO RULE” AWARDS — Know a woman with entrepreneurial spirit in media, technology or business? Nominate her today for the “Women Who Rule” awards from POLITICO, Google and the Tory Burch Foundation. Entries due Friday: <http://politi.co/1oEXwD2>.