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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Fursenko Goes Back to School

By Jonathan Earle

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Andrei Fursenko **Denis Grishkin**

Former education minister Andrei Fursenko has been tapped to head a new science and education advisory body in charge of long-term planning, signaling that the Kremlin will press ahead with controversial education reforms.

The Kremlin's education and science department will advise the president on pertinent issues and help develop policy, according to an executive order posted online Tuesday.

Fursenko's appointment has not been officially announced, but he confirmed it in an interview with Moskovskiye Novosti published Wednesday.

Fursenko said he would work on long-term strategic planning and that the new office would not duplicate the work of the Education and Science Ministry.

The appointment is a reminder of the prominence of former ministers in President Vladimir Putin's administration.

Five former ministers have become presidential aides under Putin, including former Health and Social Development Minister Tatyana Golikova, former Economic Development Minister Elvira Nabiullina, former Natural Resources and Environment Minister Yury Trutnev and former Communications and Press Minister Igor Shchyogolev.

The education and science department, whose precise structure and staffing are still unclear, is the third presidential office created since Putin's return to the Kremlin last month and raises the number of such offices to 18.

Fursenko, who headed the Education and Science Ministry from 2004 until May, is a controversial figure in education circles as a result of his most discussed reform, the introduction of a national graduation exam known as the Unified State Exam.

Critics say the standardized test forces teachers to "teach to the test" without raising achievement, while supporters, including Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, say its many benefits include additional transparency in the university application process.

Earlier this week, Fursenko's brother Sergei resigned as head of the Russian Football Union after Russia's disappointing showing at the Euro 2012 championship, in which the team failed to reach the second round of competition.

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