



Pearlie Harris, the director of the Royal Castle Child Development Center, watches over children at the school in New Orleans. In order to stay in business, the center must find ways to retain families who might be drawn to Louisiana's publicly funded preschool program.

INDUSTRY & INNOVATION

Grad Rates Seen as Fuel For Startups

Education Proves Stronger Influence Than Money

By Michele Molnar

Startup and entrepreneurial growth in small to large cities is fueled more by high school diplomas and college degrees than by venture capital, government funding, or the presence of research universities, a study concludes.

The study, conducted by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, examined business activity in 356 U.S. metropolitan areas. Researchers found that investment levels of financial organizations, primarily venture capitalists, did not correlate with high startup activity, and that billions of dollars in federal government research expenditures and the presence of research universities were not associated with higher rates of entrepreneurship.

Instead, the authors say, education is the most significant factor correlated with entrepreneurial growth. "A substantial high school completion rate will further increase the area's

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Public Pre-K Can Put Squeeze on Private Providers

Competition From Free Preschool Can Siphon Off Coveted Clients

By Christina A. Samuels

Every year, Pearlie Harris hustles to keep 4-year-olds enrolled in the child-care center she runs in the Hollygrove neighborhood of New Orleans.

Louisiana regulations require one caregiver for every five children under 12 months old in center-based care, such as Ms. Harris' Royal Castle Child Development Center. For 4-year-olds, regulations allow one teacher for every 16 children. Ms. Harris' center uses a more labor-intensive formula: one caregiver for four infants and one teacher for 10 4-year-olds. The tuition for the 4-year-olds

subsidizes the more expensive care for the younger children.

But Royal Castle, which charges \$165 a week for infants through 4-year-olds, is in competition with Louisiana's publicly funded preschool program for at-risk children, which is free to qualified families. And the center, which is certified by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and highly ranked under the state's rating system for child-care programs, sometimes finds itself on the losing end of such competition.

The pressure on private child-care providers can be an unintended consequence of the expansion of publicly funded preschool programs

for 4-year-olds. Centers rarely earn much money on infant care, because the caregiver-to-child ratios have to be kept low. But when 4-year-olds, with their more favorable ratios, leave for a publicly funded program, some private programs falter.

Research into this situation is nuanced. A study of universal-preschool programs in Georgia and Oklahoma has found that so-called preschool "crowdout" isn't always a given.

But some early-education advocates have seen evidence of the strain, and they say it puts them in a quandary. None of them wants to discourage public funding for early-childhood programs, but when private providers disappear, fewer high-quality slots are available for

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Minnesota Pushes To Ratchet Down Achievement Gap

By Michele McNeil

As some states use their No Child Left Behind Act waivers to try to move far away from certain aspects of the law, Minnesota is doing the opposite when it comes to accountability—and with early, promising results.

The state is eschewing popular education policy trends such as A-F grading systems, state-takeover districts, and "supersubgroups" of at-risk students in favor of policies that embrace the spirit of the 12-year-old accountability law. Minnesota is elevating the importance of small subgroups of at-risk students, issuing progress reports to districts on achievement gaps, and relying on regional centers to help struggling schools.

The payoff for such unflashy work? Early data show that about three-quarters of districts are on track to cut their achievement gaps in half by 2017 for nearly all of their subgroups—a key goal of the NCLB waivers offered by the U.S. Department of Education. Gradua-

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Computer Science Education: Not Just an Elective Anymore

By Liana Heitin

Computer science education is getting something of a fresh look from state and local policymakers, with many starting to push new measures to broaden K-12 students' access to the subject.

Seventeen states and the District of Columbia now have policies in place that allow computer science to count as a mathematics or science credit, rather than as an elective, in high schools—and that number is on the rise. Wisconsin, Alabama, and Maryland have adopted such policies since December, and Idaho has a legisla-

tive measure awaiting final action.

At least eight more states are in the process of reviewing proposals for similar legislative or regulatory changes.

"The amazing thing is not only the level to which policy changes are increasing, but the diversity, both regional and political," of where it's happening, said Cameron Wilson, the chief operating officer for the computer science advocacy group Code.org. "These are red states and blue states, and they're all embracing this."

In January, Texas lawmakers approved legislation that would allow students to take a computer science course to satisfy a foreign-language

requirement—a move that alarmed some computing advocates, who say it denies computer science's deep roots in math and science. Several other states, including Kentucky and New Mexico, are considering a similar approach.

In addition, some large urban districts are getting in on the action. The Chicago and Broward County, Fla., systems are finding ways to bring computer science courses to more students and schools in the next academic year.

There's widespread agreement that the recent surge in public interest around computer science education was partly triggered by a hip, well-fi-

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Jake May/The Flint Journal-MLive.com

Third graders Jojuane White, left, and Eddie Turner, learn computer-coding techniques by playing an “Angry Birds” game during an “Hour of Code” event at Brownell/Holmes Elementary School in Flint, Mich. The initiative is intended to expose more students to computer programming. [PAGE 1](#)



Quim/Stockphoto

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Common Arts Standards Open for Final Review

The public has until the end of this month to contribute to a final review of the pre-K-12 arts education standards—covering dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts—proposed by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards.

Drafts of the voluntary national standards were developed by a handful of arts-focused groups and educators and are, according to a press release, “intended to affirm the place of arts education in a balanced core curriculum ... and help ensure that all students are college- and career-ready.”

The new draft standards emphasize four artistic processes in each arts discipline: creating, performing, responding, and connecting. The final standards are expected to be issued in June.

—LIANA HEITIN

NEA Calls for Correction On Course of Common Core

In a letter to members of the National Education Association last week, President Dennis Van Roekel argues that in too many places, states and districts have “completely botched” implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Among the standards’ greatest champions, the union is now faced with rank-and-file members’ gripes as they are implemented.

The NEA won’t oppose the standards, Mr. Van Roekel writes, but he says teachers must be given more time to grapple with them and more supports to introduce them into teaching and learning. He also says tests not aligned with the standards should no longer be given, and stakes should not be attached to new, common-core-aligned tests until 2015-16 at the earliest.

—STEPHEN SAWCHUK

Character-Building Beats Out Economy-Building as Goal

Americans rank “building character” above bolstering the economy when asked to name the most important long-term goals of K-12 educa-



Becky Bohrer/AP

UNION PROTEST

Willie Anderson, front, the UniServ director of NEA-Alaska, welcomes other demonstrators to a rally on the Capitol steps in Juneau, Alaska, last week. The union opposes a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would allow public money to be used for private schools.

tion, according to a new poll.

A survey of 6,400 voters, conducted by the advocacy group 50CAN, found that twice as many respondents chose character-building as those who chose “a healthy economy.” Respondents also ranked building character above building independence and leadership, creating a lifelong love of learning, providing equal opportunities, helping people become good citizens, and providing “self-fulfillment.”

50CAN is funded by such groups as Google, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation. (The Gates and Walton foundations have also provided support for news coverage in *Education Week*.)

—CATHERINE GEWERTZ

Federal Court Questions Uniforms With Mottos

A federal appeals court has cast legal doubt on a Nevada district’s uniform policy, holding that requiring students to wear shirts with the

motto “Tomorrow’s Leaders” is a form of compelled speech that implicates the First Amendment.

The three-judge panel stopped short of striking down the uniforms of Roy Gomm Elementary School in the Washoe County district. It said the district did not have the chance to present justifications for the infringement on speech because a family’s

lawsuit had been dismissed.

The panel also held that an exception allowing students to wear Scout uniforms on meeting days was a content-based restriction that also implicated the free-speech clause. The court said the school district should be given the chance to justify its policy under a strict-scrutiny standard.

—MARK WALSH

Groups Issue Guidelines To Prepare for Online Tests

A group of ed-tech organizations has issued an “assessment ready” checklist, case studies, and responses to frequently asked questions to help districts with the successful administration of new online exams aligned with the Common Core State Standards.

Recommendations by the nonprofit Consortium for School Networking, the nonprofit eLearn Institute, and the for-profit Education Networks of America, include systemwide planning, investments in Internet infrastructure, and a focus on details.

Field-testing of the new online common-core exams will take place later this year, with final versions of the tests administered next school year.

—BENJAMIN HEROLD

Ala. House OKs Bill Offering Dual-Enrollment Tax Credits

Lawmakers in the Alabama House unanimously approved a bill last week that would provide

REPORT ROUNDUP

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LEARNING LANGUAGE

“Multilingual Children: Beyond Myths and Toward Best Practices”

A research synthesis based on decades of evidence from the fields of medicine, psychology, education, and linguistics highlights common myths about children who grow up speaking more than one language.

Drawing upon more than 100 studies, the review concludes that multilingualism is an advantage to be nurtured and maintained, rather than a risk factor in a child’s life. Published in the current issue of *Social Policy Report*, a peer-reviewed journal published by the Society for Research in Child Development, the report was endorsed in November by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

A key finding is that the research it cites has failed to trickle down to practitioners who work with multilingual children, including educators and pediatricians.

The report identifies as one myth the perception that learning or speaking more than one language will confuse a child. Rather, it says, fluency in more than one language is associated with higher academic achievement and enhanced mental health. This is even the case when one language is not necessarily supported at home. By age 10, children in dual-immersion schools can perform on par with monolingual speakers of either language.

—R. HOLLY YETTICK

ASSESSMENT COSTS

“Pricing Study: Machine-Scoring of Student Essays”

A new analysis seeks to pinpoint how much can be saved by “machine scoring” test essay questions, and concludes that the costs can be as low as 20 percent of the price of human grading, depending on the volume of students being tested and other factors.

For years, simpler multiple-choice items have had an obvious allure: They’re typically easier and cheaper to score than essays.

But the new study, published by the Danville, Calif.-based Assessment Solutions Group, concludes that the costs of machine scoring of long-form essays could be as low as 20 percent to 50 per-

N.J., Disability-Rights Advocates Settle Long-Term Lawsuit

New Jersey has agreed to take several steps to raise the number of students with disabilities served in inclusive classroom settings, as part of a settlement of a lawsuit disability-rights advocates filed.

The agreement says the state will conduct a “needs assessment” for 75 districts with the lowest levels of inclusion; provide training and support to district personnel on inclusive practices; monitor those districts for compliance yearly; and allow oversight by a committee made up of disability advocates.

“The advocates are hopeful that this carefully crafted settlement will result in a vast improvement in New Jersey’s placement of children in the least-restrictive environment—an area where New Jersey, for decades, has trailed the rest of the nation,” said Ruth Lowenkron, a senior lawyer at the

Education Law Center in Newark, one of four plaintiffs, said in a statement.

The settlement comes seven years after advocates filed a suit claiming the state was violating provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act by denying students accommodations that would let them remain in a general classroom setting.

Michael Yapple, a spokesman for the New Jersey school board, said the state has made substantial movement in recent years to address inclusion. He noted that in the 2007-08 school year, about 10 percent of students with an individualized education program were attending school in separate facilities outside their home district. As of the 2012-13 school year, that figure had dropped to 7.8 percent.

—CHRISTINA A. SAMUELS

| TRANSITION |

Gregory Thornton has been named the chief executive officer of the 80,000-student Baltimore city school district.

He is currently the superintendent in Milwaukee and previously served as the second in command in Philadelphia and as a deputy superintendent in the Montgomery County, Md., school system.



Mr. Thornton replaces Andrés Alonso, who stepped down last year. A start date has not been announced.

donated. The hope is to generate as much as \$10 million to support dual-enrollment efforts.

The proposal now heads to the Alabama Senate. —CARALEE J. ADAMS

Albuquerque District Audit Finds Apparent Violations

Internal audits at a third of Albuquerque, N.M., public schools have turned up numerous problems, including instances involving thousands of dollars in questionable expenditures and improperly recorded receipts. Fifty-eight schools were found wanting.

For example, at Albuquerque High School, an audit found that nearly \$20,000, raised by the entire student body, was used to pay for seven students and four adults to attend President Barack Obama's second inauguration in Washington last year. The audit could not identify two of the adults who went on the trip.

Kathy Korte, the chairwoman of the school board's audit committee, said the district needs to re-examine certain policy areas and take a close look at procedures and forms. —MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE

Extra School Funds Eaten Up By State Retirement System

When lawmakers in Utah decided to boost per-pupil spending last year by 2 percent, many state residents cheered, envisioning that cash rain-

ing on teachers and classrooms.

In reality, much of the money was spoken for—by the state retirement system—before it ever hit schools, a *Salt Lake Tribune* investigation found. In the Salt Lake City and Alpine districts, not one cent of the increased student funding made it into classrooms. All went to the retirement system or health-care costs.

Lawmakers last year put about \$166 million in new money toward education for this school year. Despite the increase, Utah still has the nation's lowest per-pupil funding. —ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mass. Becomes Last State To Fingerprint Employees

School districts in Massachusetts have started fingerprinting teachers, administrators, bus drivers, and other employees for national background checks.

Massachusetts is the last state to fingerprint school employees to more fully search for past criminal activities, education officials said. If districts find any questionable information from the FBI reports, they could move to fire the employees.

The program was approved by the legislature and Democratic Gov. Deval Patrick more than a year ago, but the FBI noted the law failed to reference the appropriate federal statutes necessary for the agency to run the background checks, prompting revisions. —AP

\$5 million in tax credits for individuals or businesses that contribute to dual-enrollment programs.

The measure, according to local news reports, would grant a tax credit of up to \$500,000 to anyone who donates to a new scholarship program for students who take college courses while in high school. Contributors would get a tax credit equal to half the money

cent of the costs of human scoring for tests involving large numbers of student responses. The savings tend to be lower, but still significant, where smaller groups of students are being tested.

To put that in dollar terms, in a state that is testing between 1.5 million and 3 million students, the costs of human scoring would range from \$1.51 to \$2.08 per student, or \$3.4 million to \$4.7 million in total. With machine scoring, costs range from 41 cents to 86 cents per student, or \$922,000 to \$1.9 million.

The study was supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which also underwrites news coverage in *Education Week*. —SEAN CAVANAGH

COLLEGE-ENTRANCE TESTING

“Defining Promise: Optional Standardized Testing Policies in American College and University Admissions”

A new study finds “no significant differences” between the college grades and completion rates of students who submit ACT or SAT scores with their college applications and those who do not. A more reliable predictor of academic success, the research concludes, is students' high school grades.

The report analyzed data for 123,000 students who enrolled in 33 colleges that do not require applicants to submit test scores from college-entrance exams. It includes a diverse swath of public and private four-year schools representing 5 percent of the postsecondary institutions with such policies.

The report, published last week on the National Association for College Admission Counseling website, was coauthored by William Hiss, a professor and former dean of admissions at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, and Valerie Franks, a former assistant dean of admissions at Bates. Bates is among

the schools with a test-optional admissions policy.

The study also notes that students who choose not to submit test scores are more likely to be the first in their families to go to college, women, minorities, recipients of need-based financial aid, and students with learning disabilities. —CARALEE J. ADAMS

SCHOLARSHIP INCENTIVES

“The Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship”

The Kalamazoo Promise Scholarship, a program designed to expand college access in Kalamazoo, Mich., is having a positive impact on student behavior and completion of high school courses, new research finds.

The data also show that eligible African-American students saw their high school grades improve.

Since 2006, anonymous donors have promised to help pay college tuition and fees for graduates of Kalamazoo public schools, with the award's size depending on how long the student has been enrolled. For those who attend district schools from kindergarten until 12th grade, 100 percent of tuition is covered.

The program has helped 85 percent of graduates pay for college, according to the study, published last week in the journal *Education Next*. The study examined data for students in grades 9-12 from 2003-04 to 2007-08.

It notes that, with the advent of the program, the number of students earning high school credits increased by 9 percentage points. The number of days a student was suspended dropped by 1.3 days in the second year after the announcement and 1.8 days the next; and GPAs increased slightly, but not in a statistically significant way. For African-American students, GPAs increased by 0.2 points the first year, 0.3 points the next, and 0.7 points in year three. —C.J.A.

School Improvement Grant Reanalysis Shows Smaller Gains Than First Reported

A revamped analysis of the Obama administration's controversial and costly School Improvement Grant program continues to show that billions of federal dollars produced mixed results when it comes to one of the toughest challenges in education policy: turning around perennially foundering schools.

About two-thirds of schools that took part in the program showed gains in the first year, while another third slid backward, the analysis, done under contract for the U.S. Department of Education, found.

The conclusions closely mirror those in an analysis put out by the Education Department in November—and then promptly pulled back after department officials realized its contractor, the American Institutes for Research, had erroneously excluded too many

schools. In the revised analysis, results didn't change substantially.

Like the original analysis, the revamped review shows that the first cohort of schools—those that started in the 2010-11 school year—made greater progress overall than the second cohort, which started in the 2011-12 school year. The revamped data, like the original, show that schools in small towns and rural areas are generally outpacing their urban and suburban counterparts, especially in math.

One noticeable shift came in overall averages. In both math and reading, the first cohort's scores improved, as they did in the first analysis, but not by as much. The same held true for math scores for the second cohort, but reading gains rose in the reanalysis. —ALYSON KLEIN

PERCENTAGE-POINT GAINS

| | Original Analysis | | Revised Analysis | |
|------------|-------------------|---------|------------------|---------|
| | MATH | READING | MATH | READING |
| 1st cohort | 8 | 5 | 7 | 3 |
| 2nd cohort | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education

NCLB Policies Live On Despite Waivers

“The Waive of the Future? School Accountability in the Waiver Era”

The No Child Left Behind Act waivers granted by the U.S. Department of Education were intended in part to give states flexibility from some of the policies that were viewed as problematic in the federal law.

But a new analysis finds that, when it comes to the accountability systems states use to identify low-performing schools, many states with waivers are continuing some of the same policies. According to the report, these problems include an over-reliance on one-time snapshots of student performance in reading and mathematics and a reluctance to consider non-test-based indicators such as attendance rates or longer-term postsecondary outcomes.

The study, in the January/February issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Educational Researcher*, evaluates the validity, reliability, fairness, and transparency of the waivers, which have been granted to 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. (Puerto Rico is not included in the analysis, though.) More than half of the waiver states—24—allow for the continuation of the NCLB practice of using proficiency rates as one way to identify low-performing schools.

Even in the 20 states that use student-growth measures, change over time is just one piece of a composite measure used to identify low-performing schools, according to the study, which was led by Morgan S. Polikoff, an assistant professor of education at the University of Southern California. And five states—Arkansas, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and West Virginia—rely entirely on proficiency rates to identify low-performing schools.

The authors conclude, however, that waivers are still an improvement over the original law, pointing to accountability system innovations created under the waivers in Massachusetts and Michigan. —R. HOLLY YETTICK

ETS Wades Into Market for Teacher-Performance Exams

Test seeks to double as a learning tool

By Stephen Sawchuk

As interest in licensing exams that measure prospective teachers' classroom skills grows, the venerable test-maker ETS is entering the market with a new option for states.

Field-testing began last month for the Princeton, N.J.-based Educational Testing Service's new exam, which purports to measure many of the same competencies as the edTPA,

a licensing test seven states have recently adopted and many others are considering. (See *Education Week*, Dec. 4, 2013.)

"We're two years behind the edTPA, so I don't expect to leap into the market with a 50 percent share off the bat, but there is a lot of interest," said Seth Weiner, the ETS' executive director of teacher licensure and certification.

The exam, known as the Praxis Performance Assessment for Teachers, or PPAT, was developed at the same time as a version tailored for Missouri, which plans to begin administering it in the 2014-15 school

year. It gauges, broadly speaking, candidates' ability to plan lessons, gather information on students' grasp of material, and adapt instruction accordingly.

In one of the major differences with the edTPA, candidates carry out four separately completed tasks over the course of their student teaching.

The first exercise will not be formally scored; mentors will review it and use the results to support prospective teachers' problem areas. The subsequent three tasks will each make up part of the overall grade, and the final task includes a 15-minute video recording and an

analysis of each candidate's classroom instruction.

ETS officials say the format will help assessment double as a learning tool for candidates, who receive a "professional growth plan" as part of the test.

The edTPA contains several different prompts, too, but they are submitted at once.

The field-testing for the ETS product includes some 250 candidates located in programs in seven states. It's scheduled for full release in the fall, and at least one other state, Hawaii, has approved it alongside the edTPA as an option.

So far, Missouri offers the most insight into what the test will mean for teacher-preparation programs.

The Show-Me State's version of the exam, to be used by all 39 institutions preparing teachers, uses Missouri's teacher-evaluation framework as its basis, so that teachers in training become familiar with the same expectations they'll face once in the classroom, said Paul Katnik, an assistant commissioner for the office of educator quality at the Missouri education department.

"What we were finding was that there was kind of a gap," he said. "We're trying to close that distance between expectations and reality."

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Missouri Model

Missouri also plans to use results from the exam as one of several measures of the quality of its teacher-preparation programs. The state recently took steps to begin auditing its programs every year, rather than every seven years, as is common elsewhere.

The exam's rollout there begins next fall, but it won't be complete until 2017. And teacher-educators harbor many of the same concerns that their colleagues have about the edTPA: Will the scoring—to be performed centrally by educators trained by the ETS—truly be valid and reliable? Will its cost, \$275 per person, burden candidates? Will districts wary of privacy issues permit teachers to record video in classrooms?

Faculty attitudes will be critical, said Kathryn B. Chval, the associate dean for academic affairs in the education school at the University of Missouri-Columbia, where 30 candidates have taken a pilot version of the test so far.

"An assessment where you can see what [candidates] are saying about how to use technology or differentiate needs, or about diversity, can help you address problems. If it's used for that kind of purpose, I think it can be very helpful," Ms. Chval said.

But it will be less helpful, she said, "if faculty approach this as one more thing to check off they're doing, another hurdle."

She added: "They see this as high-stakes, and they're worried about it. It's an unknown quantity."

Also unknown is whether the current vogue for performance-based exams will hold up.

"Will the market say this information is so much more valuable that we want to pay three to four times the cost of the typical test, or will they say, 'We like this, but it's not worth it?'" said George Powell, the ETS' vice president of teacher licensure and certification.

The ETS, a nonprofit, and the for-profit company Pearson are the two major providers of teacher-licensing exams in the United States. (Pearson administers the scoring of the edTPA by teacher-educators, but the test is owned by Stanford University.)

Prior to the PPAT, the ETS developed performance exams for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. It also created the Praxis III, an assessment of first-year teachers, but that exam no longer exists.

Charter Network Finds New Teachers Among Its Graduates

Project draws alumni into profession

By Katie Ash

Amid plans to expand its charter operations in the Chicago school district, a charter-management group is taking a novel approach to building a pipeline of highly qualified, and racially diverse, teacher-candidates. The Noble Network of Charter Schools, which currently operates 14 schools in the 404,000-student district, is recruiting its alumni to start on the path to the classroom.

The charter network has teamed up with the Relay Graduate School of Education—an accredited teacher education program that operates campuses in New York City, Newark, N.J., and New Orleans—to help Noble graduates with a college degree get a master's degree and prepare for teacher certification.

The move comes as the wider charter sector struggles to amass a pool of highly qualified teachers, experts say.

The Noble network has already had success hiring a handful of alumni as staff members, said Michael Milkie, the co-founder, chief executive officer, and superintendent of Noble charter schools, which opened in 1999 and serve about 9,000 students. With many of the network's 3,500 alumni still in college, Mr. Milkie believes that those who commit to teaching at Noble schools will relate well to their students and become effective role models.

Some researchers question a recruitment strategy that relies on new and inexperienced teachers, and charter schools in particular have been criticized for their tendency to employ novice teachers who leave the profession within a few years. But Nina Rees, the president and chief executive officer of the Washington-based National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, said charters should embrace innovative approaches to hiring and recruiting teachers.

"This is one of the things we've always wanted charters to do—grooming our students to come back and work in our space and become advocates in our charter schools," she said. The Noble charter school network serves a student population that is

98 percent minority and 89 percent low-income. About a third of its current teachers represent minority groups, a proportion Noble officials hope will grow with the help of the program.

The network of schools, which is known for its high expectations and strict discipline policies, has consistently outperformed district-run schools in Chicago in terms of ACT scores and academic growth on state tests.

The Chicago board of education recently voted to approve two more Noble campuses, as well as five other charter schools—a controversial move in light of the board's decision to close 49 regular public schools this school year, citing budget and enrollment issues.

Getting in Gear

Through its partnership with the Relay Graduate School of Education, which was co-founded by members of three different charter-management organizations as an alternate education-certification program, 40 students will be chosen for the first cohort.

Classes are expected to start in July, pending approval from the Illinois board of higher education for Relay to operate as an out-of-state institution and grant master's degrees to teachers in the state. (Relay is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education to operate in its other three locations.) Although any student with a

bachelor's degree can apply to the program, Noble alumni will be given preference in the application process, said the network's Mr. Milkie.

Students will then spend a year as a student-teacher while taking classes and earning a stipend. During the second year, students will

she said, has helped her relate well to the students now in her charge.

The new program "will be an opportunity that my principal paved for me that will now be there for everyone," said Ms. Silva, who has been teaching for three years.

Turnover Concerns

But Marisa Cannata, an associate director of the National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., says that relying on a hiring strategy that continually employs new, inexperienced teachers is potentially problematic.

There is a steep learning curve for teachers within their first three years, she said, and new teachers experience higher turnover rates than their veteran counterparts.

That's particularly true in charter schools, which typically pay less than regular public schools, and employ younger, less-experienced teachers, said Ms. Cannata.

While many charter networks pull teachers from programs like Teach For America or TNTP (formerly the New Teacher Project) other charter school networks are also exploring ways to beef up the teacher pipeline.

"The pipeline of talent that enters charter schools is not diverse, so we really need to focus on these types of activities," said Ms. Rees, from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. "No one is going to be more committed [to teaching these students] than people from the same community who are also the same color as the students they're serving."

“The pipeline of talent that enters charter schools is not diverse, so we really need to focus on these types of activities.”

NINA REES

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

transition into a full-time position, getting paid a salary and continuing to take courses through the Relay program. Classes cover core instructional practices such as lesson planning, pedagogy, and assessment of student progress, as well as how to teach a specific subject area.

Lamanda Silva, an alumna who is teaching in the network, always knew she wanted to teach. After she graduated from college, Noble offered her an internship that soon became a full-time teaching position.

Her experience as a Noble student,

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LIVE OR ON-DEMAND

New E-Rate Funding to Address K-12 Technology Needs

But money will not reach schools until 2015

By Sean Cavanagh

Schools are under increasing strain to provide fast, reliable Internet access for teachers and students, and federal officials insist that help is coming. But will it arrive quickly enough?

Those familiar with the E-rate program predict that proposed changes to its funding—expected to pump an extra \$2 billion into high-speed broadband over the next two years—are likely to produce significant benefits for the nation's schools over time, thanks in part to a new focus on supporting the use of new technologies.

Yet they also say it will take time for the bulk of the new money to reach districts—probably not until calendar year 2015—where it can help cover the costs of new Wi-Fi connections and other needs.

The pressure on school districts to upgrade their technology is growing, as the financial support to make those changes is limited. States are scheduled to begin giving online tests aligned to the Common Core State Standards in a year—exams that many district officials say will greatly tax their bandwidth and their ability to give tests with their current stock of laptops, desktops, and other devices.

Demand Rising

Meanwhile, schools' demand for bandwidth is also rising because of the growth of technology-enhanced lessons in classrooms, as well as students' increasing reliance on mobile devices and other new technologies.

The Federal Communications Commission, the agency that oversees the E-rate, announced a series of steps last month that officials said would

BOOST FOR BROADBAND?

FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler recently announced plans to bring changes to the federal E-rate program, which supports K-12 schools and libraries and has an annual budget of \$2.4 billion. Among the newly proposed policies:

A \$2 billion increase for broadband funding over the next two years;

Applications in the current 2014 funding cycle that “get the most students the most broadband,” without favoring urban school systems, will be prioritized;

Opportunities for greater productivity in use of funding in the program will be prioritized after an ongoing, internal review;

The release of a public notice soon that emphasizes phasing out outdated “legacy services” and focuses on broadband; and

Prioritizing, rather than penalizing, applications from groups of schools.

SOURCE: Federal Communications Commission

not only put more broadband funding into the program over the next two years, but also redirect the funding to pay for the most in-demand technologies, such as broadband.

Yet most of the tangible benefits of the new money for broadband will not be felt in districts for a while, a number of observers predict. They cite a variety of reasons, including the fact that the E-rate application process for 2014 is already far along, as well as the limits on how quickly districts can arrange to make technology upgrades.

In the long term, the picture “is very optimistic” for E-rate funding to help meet schools' growing technology needs, said John Harrington, the CEO of Funds for Learning, a company in Edmond,

Okla., that consults with school districts on how to apply for money through the program.

From the FCC and many policymakers, “there's a good vision for the program,” he said. “There's a real commitment, up and down the line.”

Prioritizing the Money

Yet the FCC's blueprint is less likely to help schools with more-immediate needs, particularly in areas such as strengthening connections between buildings and classrooms, he said.

“For many schools, the bottleneck is inside the schools themselves,” Mr. Harrington said, adding that “for the internal connections, the short term is pretty bleak.”

E-rate applications to secure

money to pay for improvements to internal connections are typically deemed “Priority 2” requests within the federal program. Historically, little money has been left for those E-rate projects after “Priority 1” requests, which usually bring basic Internet connectivity to a school campus, have been met.

“Only in Washington, D.C., do those priorities matter,” Mr. Harrington said. “If you're a superintendent, your priority is connecting students.”

In a statement to *Education Week*, FCC officials confirmed that they expect that the bulk of the new \$2 billion in broadband money will flow during 2015.

During 2014, the agency “will be taking a range of steps to free up the additional funds, as well as modern-

ize the program,” the FCC said. Also in 2014, the agency will focus on Priority 1, and wait to see how much demand there is for Priority 2 services before acting on those requests, it said. Decisions about Priority 2 requests typically aren't made until later in the calendar year, and FCC officials said they expect to stick to that schedule this year, too.

School and technology advocates have for years been calling for foundational changes to the E-rate program, which provides discounted telecommunications services to schools and libraries and has a \$2.4 billion annual budget. President Barack Obama was one of those making that argument. Last year, the White House called for more money to go to the program and to

BLOGS

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Lawmaker Hasn't Read Standards, But Wants to Revoke Them

| **CURRICULUM MATTERS** | A Republican state legislator who is the main proponent of a House bill that would nullify common-core reading and math standards in Kansas hasn't actually read them.

Therein lies one of the most interesting—and potentially disturbing, at least to some—aspects of the debate around the common standards: To what extent is opposition based on the content of the standards themselves—what they actually expect students to know and do—and to what extent is it based on things that have nothing to do with content, such as the federal government's role in getting states to adopt them?

As Willie Dove told the *Lawrence Journal-World*: “I do not believe it is within the scope of our federal government to put something together when it comes to education.”

There has been a lot of publicity given to those who feel that the federal government's offering of incentives constitutes a violation of laws that bar federal officials from mandating local education decisions.

The standards' creators repeatedly point out that while the U.S. Department of Education has encouraged their adoption, that's a far cry from writing or mandating them.

To be sure, there have been critics who have dived into

the content of the standards and come up with judgments about their quality and appropriateness. But those kinds of debates are not the ones getting top billing in the aisles of state legislatures.

—CATHERINE GEWERTZ

Top-Paid ‘Government’ Workers Include Former CEO of K12 Inc.

| **MARKETPLACE K-12** | A new report places Ronald J. Packard, the former CEO of the for-profit education provider K12 Inc., among the country's “highest-paid government workers.”*

Why the asterisk?

“They're not who you think they are,” asserts the report, released last week by the Center for Media and Democracy.

Based in Madison, Wis., the advocacy group probes the sway that corporations and “front groups” exert on public policy. Its report plays on the criticism directed at public agencies and employees from those who accuse them of taking advantage of taxpayers. The authors redirect that criticism at heads of private organizations that contract with government agencies, including K12, and reap great financial rewards.

The center says Packard earned more than \$19 million in compensation between 2009 and 2013, and notes that it

rolled in as K12 achieved lackluster academic showings in some states. He is sarcastically labeled America's highest-paid “teacher,” alongside other corporate officials, such as George Zoley, the chief executive of the private prison company GEO Group (“America's highest-paid corrections officer”).

—SEAN CAVANAGH

As Snow Days Pile Up, Options Explored to Make Up Time, or Not

| **TIME AND LEARNING** | With the latest round of wintry weather, countless schools again are losing precious instructional time. Many districts have already maxed out on their snow days, and educators and policymakers are grappling with how—or whether—to make up the time

In Michigan, legislation has been introduced that would allow schools to make up missed days by adding minutes to school days already scheduled. Meanwhile, South Carolina is considering a bill that would allow school boards to forgive up to five days of canceled classes for bad weather. Action on the bill has been delayed, though, because of—you guessed it—more bad weather.

And, in line with a recent trend, a district in New Jersey is seeking an alternative solution for this latest round of snow days, opting for a virtual school day instead.

—ALYSSA MORONES

refocus it on relevant technologies.

Earlier this month, the FCC announced plans to act. In a Feb. 5 speech, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, an Obama administration appointee, promised that the agency would spend \$1 billion more a year over the next two years on broadband. Mr. Wheeler also said the agency would prioritize requests for broadband support in the current E-rate funding cycle, for which applications from schools are coming in now; and phase out support for outdated services, a change that would be spelled out in a public notice to be released by the agency.

Some backers of the E-rate program say the overall money devoted to the program needs to increase dramatically—perhaps doubling in size—to meet demand.

But Mr. Wheeler said in his speech that the FCC needs to scour the existing program for savings, and for money that can be redirected, before it considers taking that broader step.

“[T]he biggest immediate opportunities are unlocked by first looking carefully at how to do better with what you already have,” Mr. Wheeler said. He called for “an assessment of the use of current funds, along with a fact-based analysis of the needs of the program.”

Evan Marwell, the CEO of EducationSuperHighway, a nonprofit group in San Francisco that seeks to improve school Internet access, said it made sense that the bulk of the new broadband money would not reach districts until 2015, partly because the 2014 funding cycle is too far along for the agency to make major shifts in the kinds of projects that receive money.

In some respects, that’s not a bad thing: The FCC will be able to ensure that new broadband funding is awarded as part of a restructured, improved E-rate program, rather than sending it to schools under the existing model, Mr. Marwell argued.

The process of using E-rate money for tech upgrades gets slowed down for other reasons, he noted. It takes time for districts to put out bids for technology to companies, including Internet service providers, and to select them, he said.

Other scheduling barriers persist. For instance, districts often try to limit ambitious tech upgrades so they occur during summer months, rather than during the school year, when they fear the work will derail instruction, Mr. Marwell added.

Crafting Future Plans

But even if the money doesn’t course through the pipeline as quickly as schools want, Mr. Marwell said the delay should give districts the opportunity to assess their needs for bandwidth and devices, so that when a substantial pool of money for broadband does become available, they’ll be ready.

“Start getting your ducks in a row,” Mr. Marwell said he would advise K-12 systems. “Take a hard look at what [you] have for wired and Wi-Fi. Every school in the country should have a plan.”

Schools wondering about their digital readiness will soon be asked to take their technology systems for an important, and potentially arduous, test lap around the track.

Later this year, the two main state consortia designing online common-core exams, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, will begin administering field tests in districts across the country.

The field tests “will reveal a lot,” said Lillian Kellogg, the vice president for client services at Education Networks of America, a Nashville, Tenn.-based company that is a managed-network-service provider.

“What schools find out this year is that they’re going to need a lot more bandwidth,” she said. “I believe we will see a huge surge in demand in next year’s cycle because schools will better understand the limit of their existing infrastructure.”

Ms. Kellogg’s company, which serves 550 school districts, recently joined two other organizations—the

“**I believe we will see a huge surge in demand in next year’s [E-rate request] cycle because schools will better understand the limit of their existing infrastructure.”**

LILLIAN KELLOGG

Vice President for Client Services
Education Networks of America

nonprofit Consortium for School Networking, a Washington-based professional association, and the eLearn Institute, a Wyomissing, Pa.-based nonprofit—in releasing a series of resources to help schools prepare to administer online common-core exams.

In the meantime, it’s possible that the FCC could use its authority to redirect some funding for pressing school district needs in 2014, rather than waiting until next year, said her colleague Bob Collie, a senior vice president at the company. The agency could redirect money that was approved to go to various school systems but has not been spent, he said.

Regardless of when funding arrives, schools’ needs are broad, Ms. Kellogg said. And while it is an oversimplification to say that districts’ technology needs are being driven by online testing, the relationship between digital needs for testing and for classroom instruction is becoming clearer, she said.

“If you’re going to be testing digitally, you have to be instructing digitally,” she said. “And you have to have the infrastructure in place all year long.”

Coverage of entrepreneurship and innovation in education and school design is supported in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.



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Diplomas, Degrees Spur Startup Growth in Cities

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

startup rate,” they write.

It was a finding that surprised Yasuyuki Motoyama, a senior scholar in research and policy at the Kauffman Foundation, a Kansas City, Mo.-based philanthropy that works to foster economic independence by advancing education and entrepreneurship. He is a co-author of the new study, “Beyond Metropolitan Startup Rates: Regional Factors Associated With Startup Growth.”

Contrary to conventional understanding in the research literature, the study found that there are few significant factors that the public sector can affect to influence startup rates and growth in metropolitan areas. For the new report, released last month, a team of researchers examined the subject from three angles: the startup rate for all industries, for high-tech sectors, and for high-growth firms.

Among other findings, the research showed that metropolitan areas with more college graduates will produce more startups, and that greater high school completion rates will further fuel startup activity.

But just because a city has a high

college-completion rate does not necessarily mean that it has a high rate of high school completion, according to the study.

“Until I looked at the data, I assumed that if a city has a high level of college-completed adults, that city would also have a high level of high school-completed adults. But that is not true,” said Mr. Motoyama, an expert in city and regional planning.

Expanding Skill Sets

Promoting high school completion would seem a logical outgrowth of the study. But states are “already all over high school completion,” said Kathy Christie, the vice president of knowledge/information management and dissemination for the Denver-based Education Commission of the States. “That train’s been out on the tracks for a long time.”

Rather, she said, the biggest “aha” from the study is the fact that college graduation is not the only significant educational factor generating startups.

In fact, the study cites older data from 2008 showing that 53 percent of entrepreneurs had actually not attained four-year college degrees.

“We’re starting to hear from communities, ‘Quit simply talking about four-year college completion, and recognize that there are lots of skills and credentials out there that make a difference for the earning power and long-term future for young people,’” Ms. Christie said.

Katherine Lucas McKay, a senior policy analyst for the Corporation for Enterprise Development, a Washington-based nonprofit that is dedicated to expanding economic opportunity for low-income families and communities in the United States, said the Kauffman study did not focus sufficiently on “micro-businesses,” which are essentially self-employed individuals who have up to five employees. Inclusion of those businesses might have affected the results of the study, she said, by showing that a four-year college degree could be even less vital to entrepreneurial success.

“These are striving, successful ‘Main Street’ businesses that may not ever become Google, or even a firm that grows to 100 employees,” she said, “but they add more than \$1 trillion in economic activity every year.”

Ms. McKay, who co-authored a January 2014 report called “Enhancing Support for Lower-Income Entrepreneurs Through Major Public Systems,” said it’s important for education policymakers to look at the skills that entrepreneurs want help with—such as how to forecast

earnings—as part of the financial education taught in secondary schools. Learning those skills, she said, should be in addition to personal financial literacy, such as “how to create a budget” or “how to handle a bank account.”

David T. Conley, the chief executive officer of the nonprofit Educational Policy Improvement Center in Eugene, Ore., and an education professor at the University of Oregon, based in the same city, added: “Why not have all students do a business plan? That would be kind of cool.”

Pathways to Success

Mr. Conley also said the finding that students with a high school education contribute significantly to the startup economy doesn’t surprise him.

“What does it take to be an entrepreneur? It takes perseverance, a willingness to take risks, some social skills to work with people,” he said. “But does it take Algebra 2? Not necessarily.”

The fact that roughly half of entrepreneurs do not hold four-year college degrees didn’t faze Brian K. Fitzgerald, the CEO of the Business-Higher Education Forum, a membership organization of Fortune 500 chief executives and research university presidents that seeks to advance innovation in education and the workforce and bolster U.S. competitiveness.

“Look at Bill Gates. They had to give him an honorary degree. Steve Jobs dropped out of college, too,” Mr. Fitzgerald said.

What’s important, Mr. Fitzgerald said, is building talent pathways between colleges and employers in areas such as cybersecurity, risk analysis and management, and sustainability.

“We’re working on seeding new high-school-to-college pathways that don’t exist now,” he said.

Not every student needs a college degree, he added. “We’re saying every student should have a pathway to go as far as he or she sees fit,” Mr. Fitzgerald said. “If they have the technical skills and knowhow with an associate’s degree, then God love ’em. Go and be an entrepreneur.”

But that may not be as easy as it sounds, because the vast majority of startups fail, according to experts.

Plus, the study points out that more research needs to be done to assess the correlation between educational attainment and entrepreneurial success.

Coverage of entrepreneurship and innovation in education and school design is supported in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.



Scan this tag with your smartphone for a link to “Beyond Metropolitan Startup Rates: Regional Factors Associated with Startup Growth.” www.edweek.org/links

WHAT CORRELATES TO MORE ENTREPRENEURS IN AN AREA

EDUCATION

A high ratio of college graduates, coupled with a substantial rate of high school completion

SIZE OF METRO AREA

Large areas tend to have higher entrepreneurial rates than smaller ones

WHAT DOESN'T PROMOTE BUSINESS STARTUPS AND GROWTH

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Billions of dollars in government research expenditures don’t translate into more startups

VENTURE CAPITAL

Investment levels of financial organizations, primarily from venture capitalists, do not correlate to high startup rates.

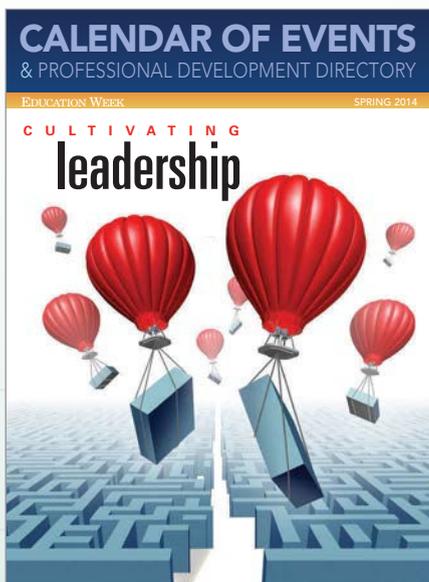
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Public Pre-K Puts Competitive Heat on Private Providers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

parents of babies and younger toddlers.

“Seventy percent of children in Louisiana ages 0 to 5 have all parents in the workforce. So we know they’re somewhere when their parents are working,” said Melanie Bronfin, the policy director for the Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families. “Our fear is they’re in unregulated, unlicensed settings.”

Louise Stoney, the co-founder of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, an information and advocacy group, said that she “fully supports expansion of preschool. I am 100 percent supportive. I will take any money you give me, in any way it comes.”

But, she said, “it’s really easy for well-meaning initiatives to have unintended consequences.”

Ms. Stoney described what she calls the “iron triangle” of finance for early-care providers: full enrollment, full collection of fees from parents, and revenues that cover the cost of caring for children.

The triangle is often quite shaky for the small businesses that comprise most day-care centers, Ms. Stoney said: They may be underenrolled, have a hard time collecting fees from parents, or charge fees that barely cover their costs for fear of losing customers.

Once an outside player enters the market—such as a publicly funded program—the whole system for a private provider can collapse.

That’s what happened to some providers in St. Louis, where the school system used money from the settlement of a long-running desegregation case to add 700 tuition-free preschool slots three years ago, bringing the district-run program to about 2,000 seats in all. The program offers free before and after care, and has waiting lists at almost every school where it is offered.

Financial Strain

But in the wake of the expansion, the Nursery Foundation, founded in 1946 as a rare racially-integrated child-care program in the city, shut down last year. Cuts to federal Head Start funding through budget sequestration, along with state cuts and dwindling enrollment, doomed the center, executive director Terri Olack told the *St. Louis Beacon* newspaper.

“We’ve had a lot of competition from the free program,” she told the paper in March, before the center closed. The program charged parents from \$5 to \$70 a week, per child. “When you’re a single parent trying to put food on the table, a free program outweighs a quality program.”

Paula Knight, who as associate superintendent of the 27,000-student district manages the early-childhood program, said that she was aware of the discontent among some private providers when she assumed oversight of the program last July.

She said she has visited day-care providers around the city to get a better idea of their offerings. If parents find that they are wait-listed at



Ted Jackson for Education Week

a school, they can be steered to one of the prescreened providers.

“I knew this was something worth mending,” Ms. Knight said, as did the superintendent, Kelvin Adams. “We don’t want people to think we’re just grabbing at kids.”

For Ms. Harris, at Royal Castle, the competition is not just for students, but for teachers. To meet state rules and Head Start regulations, teachers of 4-year-olds at Royal Castle have to have college degrees. But she is not able to pay her staff more than \$13 an hour,



We don’t want people to think we’re just grabbing kids.”

PAULA KNIGHT

St. Louis Public Schools

and employees—including Ms. Harris—receive no benefits.

“Degreed teachers want to get paid for their education. That is always the issue for me,” Ms. Harris said. “I can’t pay them what they’re worth.” After employees gain experience working at Royal Castle, they are often snapped up by local charter schools and placed in positions where they can earn nearly twice as much, and receive health-care and retirement benefits, she said.

The feared impacts of publicly funded programs aren’t always a given, however. Researchers Daphna Bassok, Maria Fitzpatrick, and Susanna Loeb explored the phenomenon of private preschool crowding

in a paper published in 2012 for the National Bureau of Economic Research. They studied Oklahoma and Georgia—two states with universal preschool programs for 4-year-olds.

In Oklahoma, preschool is provided through the public school system, and about 40,000 students were enrolled in the 2012-13 school year. In Georgia, the program is a more voucher-like subsidy, which parents can use at public and private providers. About 82,000 children were enrolled in the 2012-13 school year.

The researchers found a complex series of effects.

In Georgia, the number of private programs expanded with the advent of the publicly-funded program, which might be expected, the researchers said, because parents were able to use the subsidy at either a public or a private preschool. In Oklahoma, the public program did not lead to a significant contraction in the private child-care market, the study found. The researchers hypothesized that existing private programs got smaller but were able to stay in business, or they were able to provide services to children enrolled in half-day public preschool programs.

The best situation for private providers, said Ms. Stoney, of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, would be a situation where they could also have access to the public dollars. “States need to get much more sophisticated about enabling diverse delivery,” she said.

Creating Partnerships

Allowing a multitude of high-quality providers undergirded West Virginia’s universal preschool program, said Clayton Burch, the executive director of the state’s office

of early learning. The lawmakers who voted for universal preschool back in 2002 also required that jurisdictions provide at least half of their slots for 4-year-olds through collaboration with private providers, Head Start programs, or child-care centers. Currently, about 74 percent of 4-year-old preschool slots are operated in collaboration with community partners, Mr. Burch said.

Burch said such work is best done when a state or city is in the earliest stages of expanding preschool programs. “It’s really difficult if you’ve already got a system, and you’ve already put these places out of business,” he said.

Such a partnership is something Ms. Harris dreams of in New Orleans. She has already reached out to a local charter school to see if she can forge a connection where children from her center matriculate to that school. Her employees might be able to share in the benefits package offered by the charter.

Until then, she works to keep her program afloat.

“I really try to push our program,” she said. “I tell parents, we do have a degreed teacher working in the classroom, we are the same program that they have at the Catholic schools. We are required to make sure the kids are prepared for kindergarten.” She also provides a Head Start program, which brings in federal dollars.

Some parents, however, are drawn to the state-funded program for their 4-year-olds, or to a program based at a school that feels more academically oriented than her center, she said.

“We need to think about how to still provide care for the zero to threes,” she said. “We have to get these kids ready. They’re important too.”

Pearlie Harris, the director of the Royal Castle Child Development Center, works with children at the school in New Orleans. The private early-childhood center, which serves children up to age 4, finds itself in competition with Louisiana’s free preschool program, especially for older enrollees.

States Move Computing Beyond Elective Status

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

nanced marketing campaign by Code.org. The year-old nonprofit sponsored December's Hour of Code, an initiative to get 10 million students to spend at least one hour learning computer-programming skills. According to Code.org, more than 20 million students participated.

A data point frequently cited by Code.org is that by 2020, there will be 1.4 million jobs in the computing field, but just 400,000 college computer science majors to fill them. The group also says that only 10 percent of high schools in the United States currently offer computer science—though other computer science advocates indicate that's just a best guess.

"We know for sure it's really low, but we don't have an exact number," said Chris Stephenson, the executive director of the New York City-based Computer Science Teachers Association, a group that advocates increased access to computer science in K-12 education.

According to recent state data from the College Board, which administers the Advanced Placement program, not a single student took the AP computer science test in Wyoming in 2013. Just one student took the exam last year in Mississippi, and 11 students took the test in Montana.

Barbara J. Ericson, the director of computing outreach and a senior research scientist at the Georgia Institute of Technology, in Atlanta, examined the same data and found stark inequities in the racial and gender profiles of test-takers.

For instance, in 2013, no African-American students took the exam in a total of 11 states, and no Hispanic students took it in eight states. Fewer than 20 percent of test-takers overall were female, and three states had no female test-takers.

Alison Derbenwick Miller, a vice president of the Oracle Academy, a

philanthropic arm of the information technology giant Oracle that provides computer science curricula to schools and teachers, called access to computer science "a social-justice issue."

"In the future, students who don't have an understanding of computing and computer science won't be able to get good-paying jobs because those jobs just won't exist," she said.

Code.org estimates that 60 percent of STEM-related jobs are currently in computing.

Laying the Groundwork

Proponents of teaching computer science—which the CSTA defines as the study of computers and algorithmic processes, including hardware, software, and programming—say they've been working behind the scenes to broaden access at the high school level for more than two decades.

"The interest we're seeing now is a culmination of a lot of people working really hard for a lot of years," said Ms. Derbenwick Miller.

Groups, such as the Association for Computer Machinery and Computing in the Core, have been laying the foundational policy work and raising awareness about computer science education.

The NSF began investing in computer science curricula a few years ago as part of an effort to get 10,000 computer science teachers in 10,000 high schools by 2016. Then a year ago, Code.org, funded by a list of corporate donors including Google and Microsoft and co-founders Hadi and Ali Partovi, kicked off its campaign with a video featuring basketball star Chris Bosch, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, and musician will.i.am, among other celebrities, explaining the importance of learning to code. The Code.org video went viral, and it has been viewed more than 11 million times on YouTube.



Teacher Maureen Kildee works alongside Janiah McKnuckle as the 3rd grader learns computer-coding skills during an "Hour of Code" event last December at Brownell/Holmes Elementary School in Flint, Mich. The initiative aims to expose more students to computer programming, and to raise public awareness about the importance of computer science education.

The recent economic recession also turned the public's attention to preparing students for future employability.

Those factors created "a perfect storm," said Ms. Stephenson of the CSTA. "All of a sudden, [computer science] reached the level of public consciousness, and legislators started to pay attention."

Washington state appeared to kick off a new round of policy activity in May 2013, when Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, signed a measure allowing students to earn a math or science credit toward graduation by taking a computer science course. Several other states quickly followed suit, including Wisconsin, Alabama, and Maryland, according to Computing in the Core.

David L. Evans, the executive director of the National Science Teachers Association, declined to comment on whether his group supports or opposes particular policies that allow computer science to count as a math or science credit. He said only, "Schools and districts should be encouraged to offer their students the best courses that will prepare them for college and the workforce, and that includes computer science courses."

However, he said, "it shouldn't be an either-or proposition to take computer science or another core course."

The 404,000-student Chicago district announced in January that it would add computer science as a core subject rather than an elective. The 263,000-student Broward County district in Florida is adding curriculum and courses on computer programming at 38 schools.

Texas took a different tack—as part of a larger piece of legislation, lawmakers included a provision that would allow existing computer science courses to fulfill a foreign-language requirement.

Ms. Stephenson, who has devoted her career to improving computer science education, said the Texas brand of legislation is "very worrisome," mainly because it perpetuates the misconception that coding is the same as computer science.

"A coding language is just a tool in computer science; it's not the course itself," she said. "It's like saying that because multiplication is part of the tool set of math, all you learn in math is multiplication."

Mr. Wilson of Code.org is adamantly against such legislation, too.

It "can hurt both computer science and languages," he said.

A similar bill has passed the Kentucky Senate, but still needs to clear the House. New Mexico is also considering comparable legislation. And U.S. Rep. Tony Cárdenas, D-Calif., introduced federal legislation in December that would designate programming languages as "critical foreign languages."

"This is wildfire," Ms. Stephenson said of the coding-as-foreign-language proposals. "We understand why they're trying to do this, but go the other route. Make it count as a math or science credit."

In Kentucky, foreign-language advocates have pushed back on the proposed legislation, in part out of concern that it would reduce students' options in learning languages.

David P. Givens, the Republican state senator who sponsored the bill, said that he, too, would prefer to have computer science fulfill a math or science requirement, but that the state already has stringent course requirements. "It's as much a time-constraint challenge as anything," he said.

Hurdles Ahead

Even with legislation to broaden access to computer science moving forward, hurdles in school implementation remain. First, there's the issue of finding qualified teachers.

"Most states don't allow teachers to be certified just as computer science teachers," said Ms. Stephenson. "So either they force teachers to get a secondary endorsement, or they let anybody teach the course."

States end up dealing with what Ms. Ericson of Georgia Tech calls a "chicken-and-egg problem": Teacher-certification programs won't train teachers because there's no state computer science certification, and the state won't create a certification program because there's no teacher training for it.

Among teachers who are proficient in computer science, turnover can be a problem, said Ms. Ericson. They often leave the classroom for more-lucrative jobs in industry.

And student interest can't be taken for granted either.

"Surprisingly, we train teachers and they get excited to go back and teach, and they can't get enough students," said Ms. Derbenwick Miller. "On the ground, there's a lot of work to be done."



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Some in Congress Adding Fuel to Common-Core Debate

By Alyson Klein

A spate of Republican-sponsored legislation on Capitol Hill makes clear that the partisan edge to criticism of the common-core academic standards isn't restricted to state legislatures.

Some GOP lawmakers—including members who are up for re-election or seeking higher office—have introduced bills that would admonish the Obama administration for its role in bolstering the Common Core State Standards and, in some cases, bar federal use of competitive grants or regulatory flexibility to encourage their adoption. The standards, which were developed through a partnership of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, have been adopted by 46 states and the District of Columbia.

Coming at the kickoff of the 2014 congressional midterm elections, the bills may help conservative lawmakers shore up their base and fend off potential primary challenges. But it's unlikely President Barack Obama would sign such legislation, so a debate on the legislation in either chamber of Congress would be largely symbolic.

Political Stakes

Even a symbolic debate could be politically perilous for the common core, said Phillip Lovell, the vice president for federal advocacy at the Alliance for Excellent Education, a nonprofit policy group that has been a longtime cheerleader for higher standards.

"I think the debate in itself is harmful because it sends the wrong message," he said. "It says Washington has something to do with [common core] when Washington had nothing to do with it. Those who have introduced the legislation are essentially demeaning decisions that the majority of states have made."

But Jim Stergios, the executive director of the Boston-based Pioneer Institute, which opposes the new stan-

dards and has been helping state-level political groups advocate against them, said there's definitely a role for Congress in challenging the administration's championing of common core. In fact, he's surprised that it took lawmakers this long to assert themselves.

"Frankly, it should have bubbled up long ago," Mr. Stergios said. And he doesn't expect opposition to die down anytime soon. "I think this is one of the big issues going forward; it's cresting as an issue around this election cycle," he said. He expects the debate to continue well into the 2016 presidential race.

Senate Criticism

The Obama administration gave common-core states an edge in the high-profile Race to the Top grant competition, and directed \$360 million in federal stimulus funds to two consortia of states to develop tests that align with the standards. And the department made adoption of college- and career-ready standards a requirement for states that wanted a waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act. Common core fit the bill, but some states—including Virginia and Texas—were able to get a waiver without adopting the standards.

The most prominent recent legislation criticizing the Obama administration's role in pushing the common core is a nonbinding resolution, introduced earlier this month by Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C., who is working to fend off several primary challengers.

The resolution, which was also introduced in the House by Rep. Jeff Duncan, R-S.C., has garnered nine Senate co-sponsors, including some Republicans locked in tight races, such as Sen. Mike Enzi of Wyoming, the former chairman of his chamber's education committee. It also has the support of tea party favorites, such as Sen. Mike Lee, a Utah Republican.

The resolution would make clear that education is a state issue, and that the U.S. Secretary of Educa-

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Jeremy Walther/AP

Jayden Jacobsen raises his hand during a lesson at Freeman Elementary School in Freeman, S.D. The state is implementing the Common Core State Standards this year in English/language arts and mathematics. The common core has prompted fierce debate in state legislatures and is the topic of legislation in Congress.

State Lawmakers Aim to Rejigger Local School Board Elections

Place on calendar, partisan status eyed

By Andrew Ujifusa

In the latest attempt by state legislators to change how local school board elections work, two Kansas bills under consideration would alter the elections' place on the calendar, and, in one case, their nonpartisan status.

Proponents of such legislation, which would group more local elections together, and in some cases put them on the same ballot as both statewide and federal elections, say that it is a relatively straightforward way to boost the often-anemic turnout for these board elections at little or no extra cost.

That argument could have special force in an election year like 2014, which includes 36 gubernatorial races, legislative races in all but four states, and congressional elections. It would also coincide with greater interest in school-related electoral politics by advocacy groups and others.

Such legislation, which has been considered in the past two years in Arkansas and Delaware, would also bring some uniformity to a hodgepodge of state and local laws on the

timing of school board elections.

Right now, 17 states don't set clear requirements in terms of when local school board elections must be held, according to recent information compiled by the National School Boards Association. Many states allow local boards at least some flexibility in setting election dates, and four states—Connecticut, Georgia, Maine, and South Carolina—allow local boards complete discretion in setting election dates. Even where states control the dates of local elections, there is significant variation between states in terms of their place on the calendar.

Tricky Mechanics

However, some school boards question whether reshuffling the timing of their elections would truly boost turnout, since those races would generally—if not exclusively—appear at the bottom of new, longer ballots. In addition, school boards have concerns about the mechanics of merging school board elections, which often cross city and county lines, with other elections, as well as the timing with respect to school budgets and other responsibilities.

The two bills in Kansas were introduced last year, but they are receiving

additional consideration from lawmakers this month. Senate Bill 211 would shift the local school board elections to match state and federal contests in even-numbered years, as well as make the board elections partisan—right now they are nonpartisan. House Bill 2227 would group a variety of local elections, including for city offices and boards of public utilities, as well as school boards—together in the November of odd-numbered years, and keep them nonpartisan. (Kansas has 286 school districts, and all but one hold elections to select their members.)

Supporters of the measures say grouping the school board elections together in some way would get more people to vote in them. Although the House bill in its present form would not make the elections partisan, state party officials support both bills.

In testimony submitted this month for the House bill, Kansas Republican Party Chairman Kelly Arnold told lawmakers, "Partisan designations by candidates give clear signals to voters on the candidate's general political philosophy and view on issues."

But there's no clear reason why school board members need or should want a partisan dimension added to their elections, said Mark Tallman,

the associate executive director of the Kansas Association of School Boards, which opposes both bills.

The timing of elections also is a point of conflict. Right now, Kansas school board elections take place in April, with members taking office July 1. This works well with both the timing of school budgets and boards' annual evaluations of their superintendents, Mr. Tallman said. Changing the timing of elections would disrupt both, in the view of his members.

"This is sort of a solution looking for a problem," he said. "There's really no guarantee that the turnout would be better if you did move it."

'Suppressing the Vote'

In Arkansas, a bill to shift school board elections was introduced last year by GOP Sen. Eddie Joe Williams. Senate Bill 587 passed the state Senate but failed in the House. That failure triggered Arkansas Learns, a K-12 advocacy group in the state, to initiate a get-out-the-vote campaign for school board elections, which took place on Sept. 17 last year.

The president and chief executive officer of the Little Rock-based Arkansas Learns, Gary Newton, said that in the 2012 school board elections for roughly

240 districts, only 36,000 voters voted, according to data collected by his organization. Not aligning school board elections to general elections amounts to "suppressing the vote," he argued.

"Less than 1 percent of the electorate was voting in school elections. And, unfortunately, they had turned into more insider elections with more employees dominating," Mr. Newton said.

However, some elections hold significantly more consequences than others. In one Arkansas school election held last year in Bauxite School District Number 14, for example, only one position was up for election, and only one candidate stood for the post. The only other item on the school board ballot was whether voters were "for" or "against" the district's tax rate. But if an Arkansas district is not proposing a change in the tax rate (the Bauxite district sought no tax increase or decrease), that vote has no impact on the district's tax rate, even if voters reject it.

Mr. Newton acknowledged that his group's voting campaign last year didn't appear to have significantly increased turnout. But he said his group would make the issue a priority in the state's 2015 legislative session, when a new bill similar to Sen. Williams' can be considered.

States Found to Lag In Their Data-Linking On Youngest Children

Key information often siloed, report finds

By Julie Blair

Only one state—Pennsylvania—collects and then cross-references data from five major early-childhood-education programs and makes the information available to authorized users through its own K-12 data system, a new survey finds. But many other states are working to put similar plans in place or are aiming to connect early-childhood education, health, or social-service records to K-12 school databases.

Moreover, states should make coordinating all education, health, and social service program data a top priority, according to the report issued by the Bethesda, Md.-based Early Childhood Data Collaborative, an umbrella group advocating for the better use of information for individual children to improve the quality of and access to early-childhood education. Doing so, the group asserts, would make it easier to track student progress, pinpoint problems, identify underserved groups, and inform instruction.

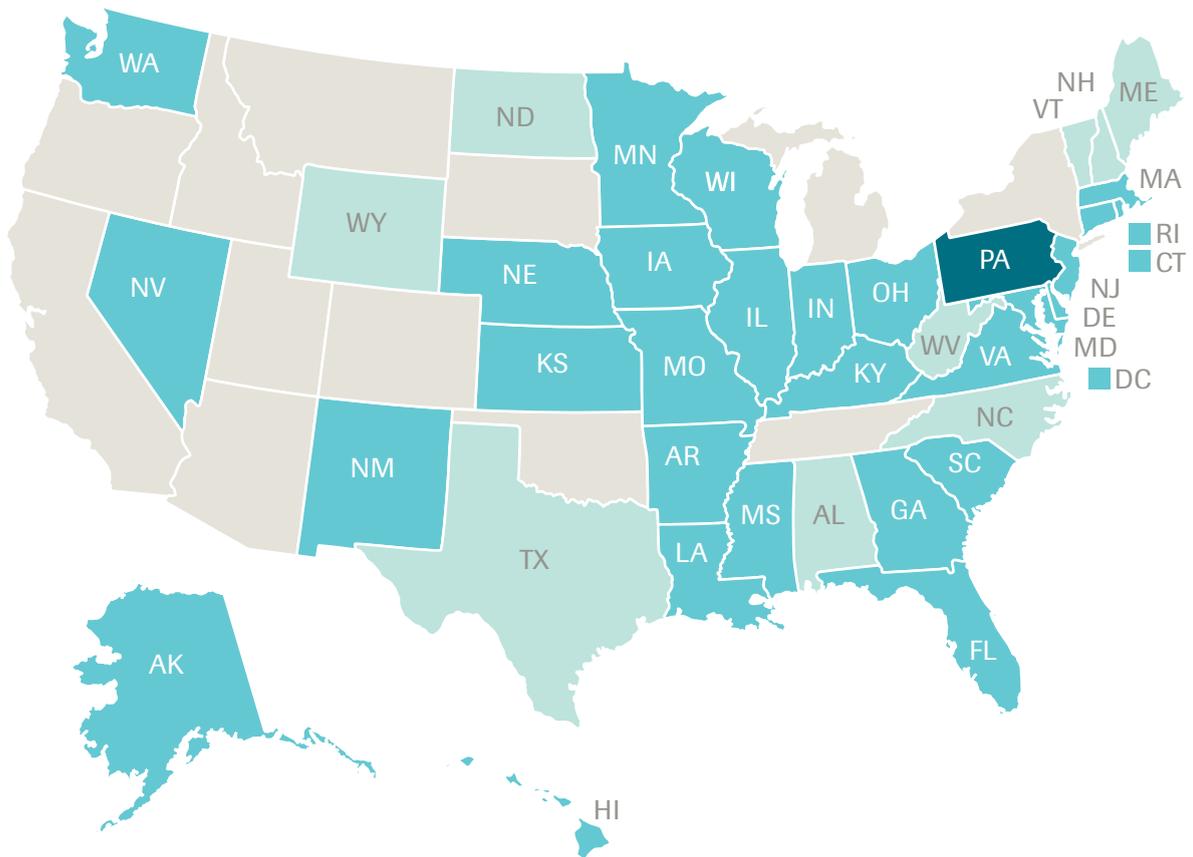
Without such linkages, “you’re not

getting a snapshot of how programs work and are progressing over time,” said Carlise King, the executive director of the data collaborative, which last week issued its “2013 State of States’ Early Childhood Data Systems.” In most cases, children’s information is stored in multiple, uncoordinated systems managed by different state and federal agencies, the survey found.

Privacy Concerns

But that’s exactly where it should stay, some privacy advocates say.

“There’s a huge push for this to happen based on what we think is very uncertain evidence that this data collection will create better schools,” said Leonie Haimson, the executive director of Class Size Matters, a New York City-based nonprofit that advocates for student privacy, among other issues. “I can see there are reasons why you might want to share information, ... but keeping it in one place under one organization, whether private or gov-



ernmental, is very worrisome.”

The data collaborative, formed in 2009, is a partnership made up of the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, the Data Quality Campaign, Child Trends, a nonprofit research group, and the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of

California, Berkeley.

In July 2013, the collaborative surveyed all states and the District of Columbia on how well they linked data between their K-12 systems and what the group identified as five major state or federally funded early-childhood programs, including state pre-K, Head Start, special education, and federally funded child care.

Among the findings:

- There are 26 states that link

early-childhood-education data across two or more publicly funded early-care and -education programs;

- Thirty-six states collect state-level child-development data from early-childhood-education programs, and 29 states capture kindergarten-entry-assessment data.

- States’ coordinated early-childhood-education data systems are more likely to link information among programs for children partici-

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The goal is not to collect a lot of data about kids, then ... provide it for everyone. The goal is to answer the question, ‘Are our kids ready to start kindergarten?’”

PAIGE KOWALSKI
Data Quality Campaign

MAKING CONNECTIONS

States vary widely when it comes to linking child-level data from five key early-childhood programs and their own K-12 data systems. Those programs range from state-funded pre-K to federally funded programs such as Head Start.

Key

 Links all Early Care and Education programs to K-12

 Links some ECE programs to K-12

 Planning to link

SOURCE: Early Childhood Data Collaborative

pating in state pre-K and preschool special education than for children in Head Start or subsidized child-care programs.

- Thirty-two states already have governance systems to guide the development and use of such linked information.

The data are intended to be of practical use to education policy-makers, said Paige Kowalski, the director of state policy and advocacy for the Washington-based Data Quality Campaign, which aims to harness data and use them to make informed decisions.

“The goal is not to collect a lot of data about kids, then ... provide it for everyone,” Ms. Kowalski said. “The goal is to answer the questions: ‘Are our kids ready to start kindergarten? What kind of environment is best?’ And for legislators, ‘Which kinds of programs should we scale up and scale back?’”

States’ Responsibility

But more data means more chances for manipulation or misuse, Ms. Haimson said. Aggregate data might be a useful way to nail down trends, but much of the information kept will be looked at by teachers, for example, and will be of a very personal nature, she added.

“There are reasons to keep medical records separate from education records separate from criminal-justice and child-service records,” she said. “Parents have a fear of what states will do with data and who the data will be shared with.”

Ms. Kowalski, however, said that such personal information could prove necessary to families who, for example, are building an evidence-based case for the need for special education services.

And states ultimately will have the responsibility to protect such information, Ms. King said, which is why so many are developing criteria for data development and management.

Douglas A. Levin, the executive director of the Washington-based State Educational Technology Directors Association, said that federal and state privacy laws create a framework for protection already.

“I am not aware of any rules or issues that would affect the handling of data about minors by public institutions that change because they are very young,” Mr. Levin said.



Scan this tag with your smartphone for a link to “2013 State of States’ Early Childhood Data Systems.”

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Partisan Differences on Common Core Evident in Congress

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

tion should not coerce states into adopting the common-core standards. Similar resolutions have been introduced by Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., who is also up for re-election this year, and Rep. Phil Gingrey, R-Ga., who is running for a Senate seat.

Chris Minnich, the executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, said he's not opposed to bills or resolutions clarifying that the U.S. Secretary of Education doesn't have a role in encouraging a particular state to adopt standards—that would just affirm current law, he said.

But he's concerned about legislation that specifically cites the common core, as the Graham, Duncan, Roberts, and Gingrey bills do.

"It's okay if they want to confirm that states have a right to set their own standards," Mr. Minnich said. "But if they're going to call out common core, they should also call out [other sets of standards, such as in] Texas and Massachusetts."

Possibly widening the partisan divide, there's at least one piece of legislation, introduced by a Democrat, Rep. Chaka Fattah of Pennsylvania, which seeks to support the common-core standards.

LAWMAKERS WEIGH IN

The Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted by 46 states and the District of Columbia, have been a hot topic in statehouses over the past year. Now, the U.S. Congress is getting in on the action, releasing bills that take a stand on the appropriate role for the federal government in bolstering the common core or any other set of standards:

RENEWAL OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

Student Success Act, H.R. 5

Would bar the U.S. secretary of education from, directly or indirectly, attempting to "influence, incentivize, or coerce" a state to adopt common core or any other set of standards.

Sponsor: Rep. John Kline, R-Minn.

Status: Passed the House July 19, 2013, by a vote of 221 to 207, with only Republican support.

Strengthening America's Schools Act, S. 1094

States would have to adopt standards that prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce, but those standards would not necessarily have to be the same as the Common Core State Standards.

Sponsor: Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa

Status: Passed June 12, 2013, by the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee with only Democratic support.

Every Child Ready for College or Career Act, S. 1101

Would require states to adopt "challenging" academic standards, but would prohibit the secretary of education from directing or controlling state standards.

Sponsor: Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

Status: Introduced June 6, 2013.

FEDERAL ROLE ON HOT SEAT

Resolution, Common Core, H.Res. 476, S.Res. 345

A nonbinding "sense of Congress" resolution introduced in each chamber proclaims education as a state and local issue, and admonishes U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and President Barack Obama by name for giving states that adopt Common Core a leg-up in the Race to the Top grant competition, financing assessments linked to the standards, and encouraging the adoption of the standards through the waivers from parts of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Sponsors: Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C., and Rep. Jeff Duncan, R-S.C. Has 46 co-sponsors in the House and 9 in the Senate.

Status: Introduced Feb. 6, 2014, in the U.S. Senate, and Feb. 11 in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Learning Opportunities Created at Local Level Act, S. 1974

Would prohibit the federal government from intervening in a state's education standards, curricula, and assessments through grants, waivers, or other incentives.

Sponsor: Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan.

Status: Introduced Jan 30, 2014.

Educational Freedom Act, H.R. 4008

Would prohibit any federal official from using—directly or indirectly—grants, contracts, and other methods to "mandate, direct, incentivize or control" state and local standards and curricula, including the common core.

Sponsor: Rep. Phil Gingrey, R-Ga., with 4 co-sponsors

Status: Introduced Feb. 6, 2014.

DEFENDING COMMON CORE

Resolution Supporting the Common Core, H.Res. 43

A non-binding "sense of the House of Representatives" resolution that would commend the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers for their efforts to "increase the rigor, utility, and comparability of state academic standards" through the development of the common core.

Sponsor: Rep. Chaka Fattah, D-Pa.,

Status: Introduced Jan. 23, 2013.

ESEA Implications

It may be telling that lawmakers continue to release the bills even though Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have already spoken loud and clear when it comes to the standards. Bills to renew the Elementary and Secondary Education Act introduced by House and Senate GOP education leaders would also prohibit the secretary from tying grant money or regulatory flexibility to a state's adoption of academic standards.

The House version specifically mentions the common core. It passed that chamber last summer with only Republican support.

Still, the common core wasn't discussed much during floor consideration of the bill. There was speculation that House leaders discouraged conservative lawmakers from arguing against the standards, since they continue to have support among GOP state chiefs, governors, the business community, and other prominent Republicans. For in-

stance, former Gov. Jeb Bush, widely mentioned as a possible GOP presidential candidate, is a big booster.

The bills are just the latest instance of the standards as a federal flashpoint. Last year, Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, urged his fellow Iowan, Sen. Tom Harkin, a Democrat who chairs the panel that oversees education funding, to include language in a spending bill barring the Education Department from directing any money to state imple-

mentation of the standards or the tests that go along with them. (Sen. Harkin's response was that the common core is a state-led effort.) And last year, the Republican National Committee passed a resolution lambasting the standards.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party included language in its 2012 presidential platform that hailed the common core—and gave President Obama credit for his role in bolstering the standards.

SOURCE: U.S. Congress

BLOGS

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Arkansas, Utah Rebuffed for Now On Teacher-Evaluation Waivers

| POLITICS K-12 | The U.S. Department of Education has rejected, at least for now, Arkansas' and Utah's requests for one-year delays in implementing the final phase of their teacher-evaluation systems. The reason: Both states asked federal officials for more than just a delay.

In June, the Education Department set up a fast-track, streamlined process to consider requests from No Child Left Behind Act waiver states to delay by one year, until 2016-17, the requirement that teacher evaluations be tied to personnel decisions.

According to letters sent to Arkansas and Utah in December, both states' requests went outside the parameters of that streamlined process. So now, the department will consider the requests as part of its more rigorous, lengthier amendment process. (And neither state has had its request approved via the amendment process either, according to the department's waiver website.)

Utah wants to delay its pilot for its student-growth percentiles and student learning objectives, along with full implementation of its student-growth measure, to the 2016-17 school year. And Arkansas wants to delay the use of its student-growth measure until the 2015-16 school year.

The department has yet to announce its decision on four other states that want a teacher-evaluation delay: Maryland, Kansas, Washington, and South Dakota.

—MICHELE McNEIL

Indiana Unveils Draft Standards Intended to Replace Common Core

| STATE EDWATCH | The Indiana Department of Education has released a draft version of new content standards for English/language arts and math that would replace the Common Core State Standards that were adopted by the state in 2010. The drafting of the new standards was required under a law approved last year.

According to what the state school board has said, the new Indiana College and Career Ready Standards "represent Indiana sovereignty, demonstrate high levels of quality, and are aligned with nationally and internationally benchmarked definitions of college and career readiness and postsecondary expectations."

The state's Academic Standards Evaluation Panels, which oversaw the creation of the draft content standards, had 27 members, including English and math teachers, as well as English and math professors and professors at schools of education in the state. They compared the current common-core standards

with prior Indiana standards and held them up against aforementioned criteria for state standards.

It's still unclear how much and exactly where the draft standards deviate from the common core—at some level, the difference between the two sets of standards may become very minute or nonexistent. And whatever set of standards the state board ultimately adopts, it will still have to select a state assessment aligned with their standards.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, the U.S. Department of Education requires states to have assessments that align with their standards. Even states with NCLB law waivers still have to meet this requirement, but the federal Education Department's peer review guidance process to aid that alignment was recently suspended. That review by outside experts doesn't look at the assessments themselves, but rather at states' plans for reviewing and implementing high-quality assessments as they relate to their standards.

The proposed Indiana standards will be up for review for several weeks, including at three meetings where the public can comment. The Indiana Education Roundtable—which is led by Gov. Mike Pence, a Republican, and Superintendent of Public Instruction Glenda Ritz, a Democrat, and also includes business leaders and members of the education community—is set to vote on the draft standards March 31. The state school board is scheduled to vote on the new standards April 9.

—ANDREW UJIFUSA

ECHOES and REFLECTIONS Leaders in Holocaust Education

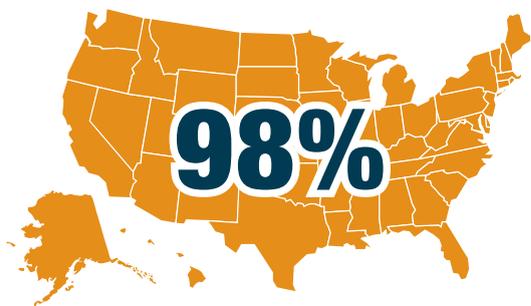
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OVERVIEW

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OF STATES

HAVE TRAINED EDUCATORS TO
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2.2

MILLION

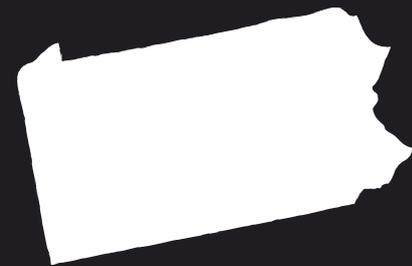
STUDENTS IMPACTED



20,000+

EDUCATORS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TRAINED

PENNSYLVANIA



87 TRAINING PROGRAMS SINCE 2005



1,565 EDUCATORS HAVE BEEN TRAINED



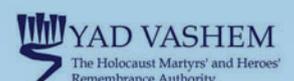
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Waiver Promises Place Minnesota On Rigorous

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tion rates for black students in 2012-13 increased at six times the rate of white students from the previous school year. More than 70 percent of Minnesota's lowest-performing "priority" and "focus" schools have shown improvement on test scores.

What's more, unlike most other states, Minnesota has passed federal waiver monitoring by the Education Department with flying colors.

"We do really well with overall achievement, but we have struggled with achievement disparities among subgroups," said Brenda Cassellius, Minnesota's education commissioner. "We hadn't seen our at-risk kids gain any traction. Now, we have created a clear goal around these disparities."

'Lack of Urgency'

Overall, Minnesota is a high-performing state academically, but it has some of the highest achievement gaps in the country between white minority students, and between low-income students and their more affluent peers. Those gaps have caught the attention of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who in a January 2011 speech to the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce criticized the state for its "lack of urgency" and its stalled progress in raising the achievement of disadvantaged students.

So when the department offered waivers under NCLB later that year, Minnesota jumped at the chance—and selected as its overarching goal that achievement gaps be cut in half by 2017.

The state's school improvement strategy is more than just a goal, however.

The new accountability system is heavy on multiple data points, giving schools and districts information on proficiency rates, student growth, achievement gaps, and graduation rates for high schools.

"We didn't want to mash it up into an A-F grade. There was power in giving every single school an achievement-gap score," said Ms. Cassellius, who was appointed commissioner in January 2011 by Gov. Mark Dayton, a Democrat.

The state is boosting literacy training and focusing on state and local data teams that can help teachers make sense of the new information.

And perhaps most importantly, the state has elevated the role of its regional support centers in helping the lowest-performing schools. The state legislature recently gave the department an additional \$2 million to double the number of these "centers of excellence" to six.

"We are not taking over schools. They should find the solutions," Ms. Cassellius said.

Bay View Elementary School is one of the state's lowest-performing "priority schools"—meaning it ranks in the bottom 5 percent for achievement—and also a recipient of aid through the federal School Improve-

ment Grant program. The 550-student school, in which 43 percent of pupils are low-income, has struggled with overall proficiency rates and student growth, said Principal Diane Morin, who was brought in as a new principal two years ago when the school got its SIG designation.

Although her school's label has come with a host of interventions and resources—from an additional 10 minutes a day of instructional time to a parent liaison—Ms. Morin said new instructional coaches and teacher-led "professional learning communities" have been the most important. And all have been coordinated by her school's designated center for excellence.

"Before, there wasn't a lot of accountability," said Ms. Morin, referring to the pre-waiver NCLB era. "You'd go write a plan and it would sit. I called it

ent-trigger" laws. Nor has the state asked for additional flexibility from federal officials around teacher evaluations or testing.

Yet the state's waiver, and its new accountability path, are not without their critics.

The Minnesota Business Partnership gives the state credit for highlighting successful "reward" and "celebration" schools, and for extra supports for the lowest-performing schools. But it doesn't like that the state's student-growth model compares students' growth against other students versus an absolute proficiency standard, said Jim Bartholomew, the group's education policy director. And, the business group feels there's not a lot of attention paid to schools that are not among the lowest performing.

school and district rating system, three (or four) factors are weighted equally: student proficiency, growth, reduction in achievement gaps, and graduation rates for high schools.

Minnesota earned a nod of praise from the Education Trust, which has been highly critical of how federal officials structured the waivers and how states have redesigned their accountability systems in response. The Washington-based advocacy group doesn't think most states are putting enough emphasis on closing gaps in their new ratings systems. But Minnesota is one exception, the group said in a Feb. 2013 report, because it incorporates achievement gaps into its new ratings system.

And in defense of the traditional subgroup categories, Ms. Cassellius, the Minnesota commissioner, said

white students. You still want them to grow—every school and every subgroup," she said.

Focus on Achievement Gaps

The federal waiver's requirements forced all states, including Minnesota, to zero in not just on the lowest-performing schools, but on "focus" schools that have the largest achievement gaps. But these focus schools have been a particular weak spot for states as they implement their waiver plans, as federal officials find that interventions are not often linked to the reason achievement gaps exist in the first place.

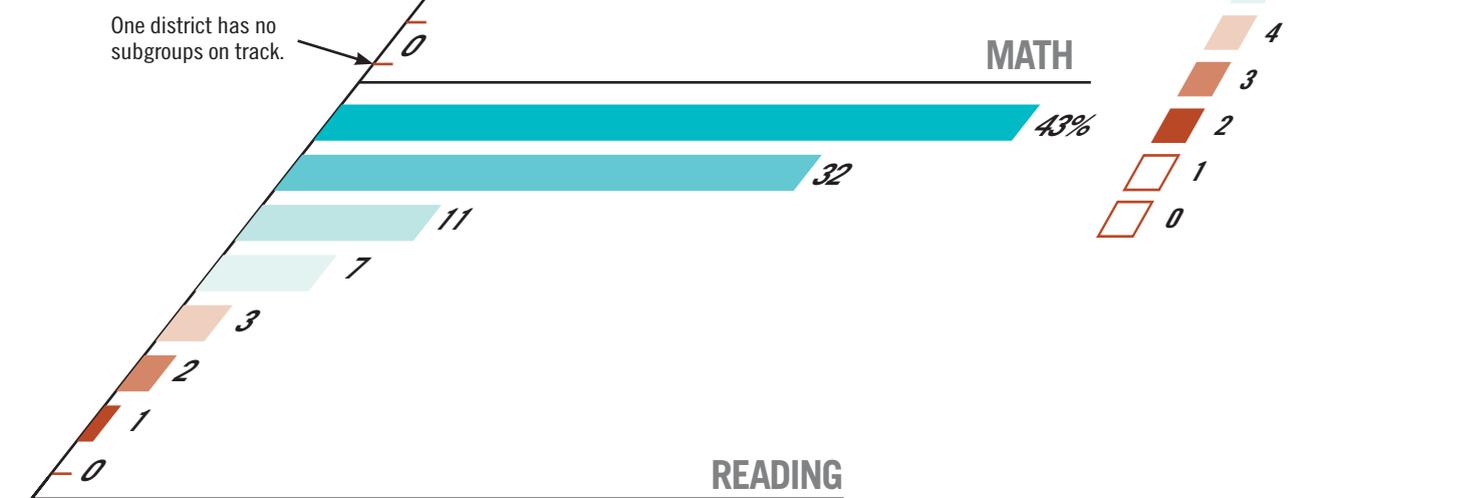
This is not a problem in Minnesota, according to its federal monitoring report.

Case in point is Garlough Elemen-

TOWARD THE GOAL

Under its No Child Left Behind Act waiver, Minnesota aims to cut achievement gaps in half for all eight subgroups of students, including low-income students, minorities, and students with disabilities by 2017. About 40 percent of districts are on track to meet that goal in math and reading for all eight subgroups.

SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Education



shelf art. Now, every couple of months we update our school improvement plan and submit it to the state. It's really upped the accountability. And people are really buying in."

Local buy-in—and stability within the state's education policy landscape—may be key to Minnesota's early success in closing gaps.

Anne Hyslop, a policy analyst for the Washington-based New America Foundation who has closely studied the waivers, said that one other thing sets Minnesota apart: The state has adopted the Common Core State Standards only in English/language arts, and has stuck with its own tests versus joining the new federally supported consortia developing new assessments.

"They haven't had to deal with the distraction. There's been a lot of stability," she said. "It does help when teachers and principals and district officials know what's coming."

Separately, state officials point out that the state hasn't been mired in legislative battles over teacher hiring practices, vouchers, or so-called "par-

"We have a huge achievement gap, and there is a sense of urgency," Mr. Bartholomew said. "There is not a lot of directed action for schools in the middle."

Emphasis on Subgroups

One of the most significant deviations that states made from the original NCLB Act was in backing away from the law's emphasis on disaggregating data for small subgroups of at-risk students. More than a dozen states, in their approved waivers, instead decided to group students together into one low-performing supersubgroup. They argued that this new tactic would get around issues with subgroups that don't have enough students to warrant statistically reliable achievement data.

But Minnesota stuck with its eight subgroups, gave them more prominence, and is now reporting and holding districts accountable for how subgroups of students fare in graduation rates as well. In its new

students are not lost in Minnesota's accountability system given its student-growth measure.

"Every kid has a predicted growth score now," said Ms. Cassellius, noting that schools earn points for each student's progress toward the predicted growth rate. "Every kid matters. Even if they're proficient."

And as state officials like to say, all means all. In Minnesota, the achievement gap is measured by comparing the growth of a disadvantaged subgroup against the statewide average growth of higher-performing peers. So the growth of students of color at one school is measured against the statewide growth average for white students. Low-income students at an individual school are compared against their wealthier peers statewide.

And, white students in a school are compared against white students statewide. Now, Ms. Cassellius said, 220 school districts are not meeting goals for their white students and are getting flagged—something they likely avoided under the original NCLB.

"We have really high-performing

tary, a K-4 environmental magnet school just south of the Twin Cities that has seen large achievement gaps among its Hispanic students. Reading has been a particularly tough subject for the school.

Working with its regional support center, the school has revamped its reading programs—creating assessments to identify children's reading levels, focusing on guided reading in the classroom, and using a literacy coach. And as a result, the achievement gaps—particularly among Hispanic students—closed significantly in 2013, state data show.

"Under NCLB we were never labeled a bad school. We had never gone through a school improvement process. So when we got this 'focus' designation it felt really horrible," said Sue Powell, who is in her ninth year as the principal at the 350-student school. "But the support we've got has been phenomenal."

California The Great Exception

By Charles Taylor Kerchner

Conventional political wisdom suggests that California's education policies should be firmly in harness with those of President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. After all, the state has an iconic Democratic governor, no Republican statewide officeholders, and both houses of the state legislature are under Democratic control.

Instead, there is vigorous disagreement. Rather than leading with accountability, California starts with changing instruction and building capacity. Rather than constructing educational politics around a war between "reformers" and educators, it acknowledges multiple, diverse interests and the need for compromise and collaboration.

California's divergence is no red-state aversion to the federal government; nor is it sticker shock at the price of new K-12 assessments. It's an aversion to the Race to the Top mentality, and the embrace of a deeply held alternative view of what drives improvement in public education. "No high-performing country or state has limited their reform efforts to this narrowly conceived approach," wrote former California state Superintendent Bill Honig a few years ago.

The pointy edge of dispute is teacher assessment. "We can't fire our way to Finland," says Michael Kirst, who chairs the California board of education. The state has refused to sign on to the test-score-accountability provisions of the federal agenda. In response, Secretary Duncan has twice, or thrice (depending on who's counting), rejected California's Race to the Top

applications and has refused a statewide waiver of No Child Left Behind Act requirements.

In its most glaring departure from Duncanism, the state legislature has terminated its old statewide testing system altogether and suspended its single indicator system, formerly the Academic Performance Index, for at least two years. The intent is to allow California's schools and teachers to implement the new Common Core State Standards without tests tied to defunct standards. Secretary Duncan has said he can't "in good conscience" approve such a deviation, and his department is threatening to withhold federal funds. Negotiations are ongoing, but a determination is due any day from the department.

So, where is all of this coming from? One view is that the state has been, again, captured by its interest groups, particularly the California Teachers Association, which has fought every effort to link teacher evaluations to student test scores. The CTA heavily endorsed Gov. Jerry Brown and state schools chief Tom Torlakson, and, in this version of the story, is reaping its rewards.

Another is that grouchy old men are temporarily holding the state captive. Gov. Brown and Mr. Kirst are both in their mid-70s, as are many of their advisers. (Full disclosure: I fall into the same age range.) Only the refusal of these septuagenarians to retire gracefully prevents the state from applying student-test data to teacher evaluations, firing the bottom 10 percent, starting a statewide student data-tracking system, and letting the market rule.

But without discounting either the power of interest groups or the truculence of age, it may be possible that California is creating a different way forward. From a practical policy standpoint, it has chosen to lay down



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heavy bets in two areas, while subordinating policies on the Race to the Top checklist.

First, it has bet big on decentralization and rebuilding the capacity of its 1,000 recession-battered school districts, which have suffered nearly a 14 percent inflation-adjusted per-student funding loss since 2008. And they weren't in great shape to begin with. Over decades, California has slid near the bottom of cost-adjusted state rankings. It was 49th in *Education Week's* latest *Quality Counts* ranking. However, in the wake of the state's economic recovery, schools face almost-unprecedented opportunity. There is a promise of a lot more money.

The state has coupled the revival of its financial fortunes with a revolutionary change in how it spends its education dollars. For the first time in four decades, substantial fiscal control is being returned to school districts through what is called the local-control fund-

Making 'Individualized' Plans for a Postsecondary Future

By V. Scott Solberg
& Curtis Richards

Every so often in education, new ideas are introduced and spread across states and districts as if they had a life of their own.

The rise of individualized learning plans, or ILPs, may represent just such an idea. These personalized learning strategies strive to strengthen the transition between school and college or work while bolstering student engagement and family involvement in learning.

In 2005, 21 states encouraged the use of ILPs. Our research with the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) indicates that today at least 37 states and the District of Columbia view ILPs as an anchor for their college- and career-readiness efforts. These plans, known by different names in each state, are typically required of all students, including students with disabilities and other special populations.

ILPs are different from, but closely related and complementary to, the transition plans that students receiving special education services are federally required to incorporate into their individualized education programs (IEPs) once they reach age 16.

“ District officials have reported that ILPs show promise in increasing enrollments in Advanced Placement courses and applications to college.”

When implemented as a whole-school program, ILPs are designed to engage all students in becoming career-ready by helping them define the secondary and postsecondary plans that will help them achieve their self-defined career goals.

In NCWD/Youth's research, families reported that the process results in students' taking ownership and becoming more engaged in their courses.

For students with disabilities, ILPs enable them to become more assertive in guiding their IEP meetings and ensuring that their transition activities help them develop the college-readiness and employability skills that are aligned to their career and life goals.

Based upon our several years of research in numerous states and schools, we define a high-quality ILP as:

- A document consisting of (a) coursetaking and postsecondary plans aligned to career goals, and (b) documentation of the range of college- and career-readiness skills that the student has developed.

- A process that enhances the relevance of school and out-of-school learning opportunities, and provides students access to career-development opportunities that incorporate self-exploration, career exploration, and career-planning and -management skill-building activities.

Students typically develop the plans begin-

ning in 8th grade and regularly revise them with adult mentors (teachers, counselors, parents, and other family members) throughout high school to reflect their shifting interests, needs, and learning experiences inside and outside of school.

In interviews with NCWD/Youth, district officials have reported that ILPs show promise in increasing enrollments in Advanced Placement courses and applications to college, and in encouraging students with disabilities to obtain a standard high school diploma and consider college as an option.

ILPs work effectively, in part, because students, not adults, take charge of the process. One promising activity we found involved using ILPs to generate annual student-led parent-teacher conferences.

During the conference, students discuss their career and life goals in relation to the evidence they have generated from self-study and career-exploration activities. They also talk about the in- and out-of-school experiences that will keep them on pace to achieve those goals.

The process also inspires students to seek out relevant community service and work-based learning experiences; helps them learn about job qualifications, industry standards, and postsecondary pathways; and enables them to describe how to gain access to resources to help



“
The state has
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with a
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education dollars.”

ing formula. This new finance formula weights state allocations according to student need.

Districts with low-income students, English-language learners, and foster youths receive 20 percent more in the current version of the formula. Those where 55 percent of students fall into one or more high-needs categories will get an additional grant. Special education students will continue to receive additional funding, as before.

Politically, local-control funding is an investment in rebuilding trust, and that effort turns the education policy of the last four decades on its head. As the economist Joseph Stiglitz

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CHARLES TAYLOR KERCHNER is a professor at the Claremont Graduate University in California and co-author of *Learning from L.A.: Institutional Change in American Public Education* (Harvard Education Press, 2008). He will be writing the opinion blog On California on edweek.org beginning next month.

with college planning, tuition assistance, and applications.

In focus-group interviews, families reported that the ILPs, especially when presented in the context of student-led parent-teacher conferences, increased positive regard for their schools and teachers. One family member said the schools “seem focused on launching adults” rather than only on increasing test scores.

While we have not yet released our final report, which was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor, we can share our findings on a number of exemplary ILP implementation strategies. These include:

• **Providing support and professional development for teachers, school counselors, and administrators on the implementation and long-term use of the plans.** This is critical to ensure that plans are implemented with fidelity and that everyone involved understands the process.

Additionally, implementation should provide teachers with advisory time during the school day to meet with students, and with curricula that includes grade-level expectations with career-planning elements. This promotes schoolwide buy-in that allows for a more effective and sustainable rollout of ILPs. Wisconsin, for example, is developing and implementing

an intensive professional-development system that includes training modules and allows staff members in each school to build the competencies they need to implement ILPs effectively.

• **Establishing a cross-sector task force to guide ILP implementation.** In addition to state departments of education and labor, the state agencies involved can include those working in vocational rehabilitation, health and human services, and higher education. Education department representation should include school counseling, special education, and career and technical education. This allows groups to share expertise and leverage resources to support ILP implementation. It also increases access to work-based learning opportunities and preparation for postsecond-

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V. SCOTT SOLBERG is the associate dean for research and a professor at the Boston University School of Education. CURTIS RICHARDS is the director of the Center for Workforce Development at the Institute for Educational Leadership, in Washington. The writers lead the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, a technical-assistance center aimed at improving transition-age youth outcomes, supported by the U.S. Department of Labor’s office of disability employment policy.

More Play, Better Focus

By Debbie Rhea

It seems counterintuitive to think that less classroom time and more outdoor play would lead to a better education for kids. After all, what many in our country, including most recently New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, have prescribed are longer days in the classroom. But longer days on task don’t equate to better results. Instead, they translate into more burnout, lower test scores, and more of the same. All work and no play really does make dull boys and girls.

For years, educators have tried different strategies of more testing and of more time on task to reverse these trends, but they have proved to be unsuccessful. The answer is not additional in-class sitting time. What kids need is time to move and have unstructured play.

On a recent sabbatical, I spent six weeks in Finland studying how that country practices education. Reading, science, and math are important in the Finnish education system, but so are social studies, physical education, arts, music, foreign languages, and a number of practical skills. The school day in Finland looks much different from the school day in the United States.

In the United States, for example, a 1st grader attends school 35 hours a week, seven hours a day. In Finland, a 1st grader spends 22.5 hours a week in school, or 4.5 hours a day. Three hours each day are spent on content in the classroom, and another 1.5 hours are spent on recess or “unstructured outdoor play.” Some elementary schools in the United States do not have recess time built into their schedules, let alone outdoor recess.

Kids are built to move. Having more time for unstructured outdoor play is like handing them a reset button. It not only helps to break up their day, but it also allows them to blow off steam, while giving them an opportunity to move and redirect their energy to something more meaningful once they return to the classroom.

When a human sits for longer than about 20 minutes, the physiology of the brain and body changes. Gravity begins to pool blood into the hamstrings, robbing the brain of needed oxygen and glucose, or brain fuel. The brain essentially just falls asleep when we sit for too long. Moving and being active stimulates the neurons that fire in the brain. When

you are sitting, those neurons don’t fire.

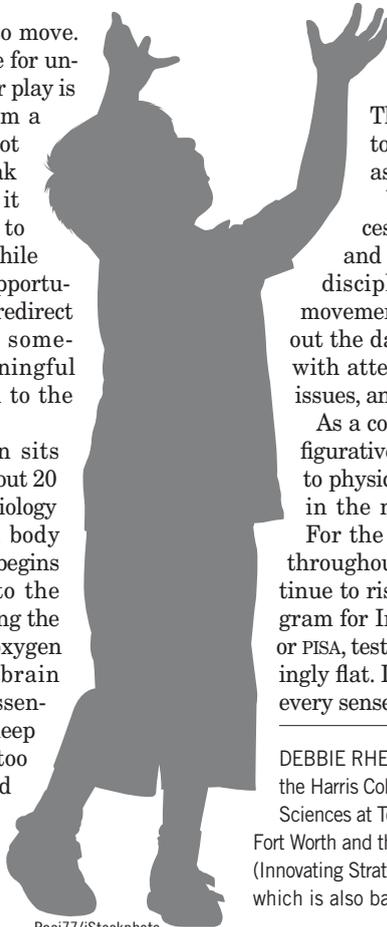
Getting students out of their chairs and moving outdoors is essential. A 2008 study published in *JAMA Ophthalmology* found that 42 percent of people in the United States between the ages of 12 and 54 are nearsighted. But 40 years ago, that number was only 25 percent, a change that can’t be explained by heredity. Time indoors can weaken our vision, especially if we are staring at computer screens and not looking away for long periods of time. Additional studies have also shown that when people have inadequate daylight exposure at work, particularly in areas that have poor indoor lighting, it can disrupt their circadian rhythms—the cycle that allows for healthy sleep. When these rhythms are thrown off, it can have a negative impact on academic performance.

I’m such a believer in more unstructured outdoor play and recess throughout the day that I’ve launched a pilot program called Project ISIS—Innovating

Strategies, Inspiring Students—that is being



We should not
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classroom time, and
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students.”



Paci77/iStockphoto

implemented in

two Texas private schools,

with an additional three

public elementary schools in that state

coming on board by the fall. While the

program doesn’t reduce the number

of hours spent at school, it does build in more outside

recess time. Students get two 15-minute unstructured outdoor-play breaks in the morning

(one is right before lunch, the other is a full lunch with a short recess afterward), and then two

more 15-minute recess breaks in the afternoon. These schools will continue to have physical education as a content area.

We should not sacrifice recess time for classroom time, and neither should be used to discipline students. The more movement children have throughout the day, the better they will be with attentional focus, behavioral issues, and academic performance.

As a country, we aren’t moving—figuratively or literally. Kids’ access to physical education has declined in the name of classroom time. For the most part, obesity rates throughout the United States continue to rise, and our country’s Program for International Assessment, or PISA, test scores remain disappointingly flat. It’s time we got moving, in every sense of the word. ■

DEBBIE RHEA is an associate dean of the Harris College of Nursing and Health Sciences at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth and the director of Project ISIS (Innovating Strategies, Inspiring Students), which is also based at the university.

Commentary Mischaracterized Conn. School Reform Efforts

To the Editor:

Regarding Ann Evans de Bernard's recent essay ("When Is School Reform Not Enough?," Feb. 5, 2014), I couldn't disagree more. Ms. de Bernard ignores many successes of school improvement efforts being led by educators across Connecticut, and the support by a majority of people in Connecticut for these efforts.

Consider the state's school turnaround program (the Commissioner's Network), which has brought tangible changes for the better to struggling inner-city districts like Bridgeport, where right now only two in 10 3rd graders are reading at grade level.

And consider what's taking place in New Haven, where a groundbreaking teacher- and principal-evaluation program is in use. The city also signed a nationally recognized labor contract that links pay increases to educator effectiveness and student achievement.

New Haven's educator evaluation system is not only good for kids, but it's also supported by people across the city: More than two in three New Haven voters believe that supporting and retaining the very best teachers is critical to ensuring students' success, according to a recent citywide survey.

In addition to ignoring these successes, Ms. de Bernard dismisses high-performing public school options like charter schools. But she fails to acknowledge that public charter school options are helping kids get the knowledge and skills they need for future success.

Not only are public charter schools helping kids in Connecticut get a high-quality education, but a majority of people support them: Nearly two in three voters statewide (62 percent) have a very or somewhat favorable opinion of public charter schools, according to a recent statewide survey.

Although performing better than students

in many states, Connecticut's students are still falling behind kids in some states and other countries. We must continue improving public education because nothing less than our kids' futures and the economic viability of our state are at stake.

Jennifer Alexander
Chief Executive Officer
Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now
New Haven, Conn.

Reader Questions Integration Findings in *Quality Counts*

To the Editor:

I was troubled by some of the survey results in your most recent *Quality Counts* report (Jan. 9, 2014)—in particular, by the survey regarding the merger of high- and low-poverty districts, where only about one-third of respondents indicated a belief that such a merger would likely reduce achievement gaps or raise student achievement.

The survey consisted only of school district administrators who are registered users of edweek.org, which indicates *Education Week* needs to do a better job reporting on the beneficial results of socioeconomic and racial integration in schools.

One excellent recent example of the impact of integration on schools comes from Montgomery County, Md. RAND researcher Heather Schwartz studied the progress of children in public housing who attended largely middle-class schools versus children in public housing who attended predominantly low-income schools.

Public-housing residents who attended lower-poverty schools in so-called "green zones" far outperformed their counterparts at higher-poverty schools. This occurred even though the county directs extra resources to its 60 neediest schools (known as "red zones") to introduce full-day kindergarten, reduce class size, devote more time to literacy and math, and provide extra professional-development opportunities to teachers.

This research confirms the findings of the Coleman Report, published in 1966, which found student background and socioeconomic status to be more influential than variations in school resources, such as additional

funding or smaller classes.

If the benefits of integration have been known for nearly 40 years, with modern research continually confirming earlier findings, why is it that district administrators and consumers of *Education Week's* media are unaware of this research?

While school integration may not be a "hot topic" on par with science, technology, engineering, and math education or the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, the benefits emanating from an integrated school setting are numerous and profound, and the topic deserves equal coverage by this newspaper.

Michael Hilton
Law and Policy Fellow
Poverty & Race Research Action Council
Washington, D.C.

The author also provides volunteer support to the National Coalition on School Diversity.

Students With Disabilities Can Meet Diploma Standards

To the Editor:

We are fortunate to finally have reliable and comparable data on high school graduation rates of special populations, such as students with disabilities, thanks to the federal requirement that all states use the four-year adjusted-cohort graduation-rate formula.

Equally important is the new focus on student outcomes, including graduation, being implemented by the U.S. Department of Education as part of its monitoring and compliance activities required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ("Graduation Disparities Loom Large," Jan. 29, 2014).

There is clearly no excuse for graduation gaps as high as 43 percentage points between students with disabilities and all students, with 19 states having gaps of 20 points or greater.

However, as states work to improve the graduation rate for students with disabilities, care must be taken to ensure that those efforts don't result in a serious degradation of a general diploma.

Many states make allowances for students with disabilities to receive a regular diploma, such as credit reductions, alternative courses, and lowered performance criteria. Making excessive allowances for students with disabilities results in lower expectations and less meaningful diplomas.

An Achieve report issued last year, "Graduation Requirements for Students With Disabilities: Ensuring Meaningful Diplomas for All Students," stated that, as we work to have students college- and career-ready, "it is critical that high school graduates, including students with disabilities, receive a diploma that means something—that they are prepared for postsecondary education and careers."

To that end, the report said, it is "critical that state policies and practices encourage students with disabilities to meet the college- and career-ready standards needed to attain the state's standard diploma."

Provided with specially designed instruction and appropriate access, supports, and accommodations, 85 percent to 90 percent of students with disabilities can meet the graduation standards targeted for all other students, the report said.

Let's hope states don't compromise the meaning of a high school diploma as an easy route to improving graduation rates. Students with disabilities both deserve and are capable of much more.

Candace Cortiella
Founder/Director
The Advocacy Institute
Marshall, Va.

The writer is the author of "Diplomas at Risk," a 2012 report from the National Center for Learning Disabilities.

COMMENTARY POLICY

Education Week takes no editorial positions, but publishes opinion essays and letters from outside contributors in its Commentary section.

For information about submitting an essay or letter for review, visit

www.edweek.org/go/guidelines.

California The Great Exception

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed essay in December, "It is trust, more than money, that makes the world go round."

California schools get spending flexibility, but each district is required to devise an accountability system that links resources and educational outcomes on eight indicators. Enforcement depends on local government, teacher activists, and parents to make it work. "We used to rely on the state to have regulations and auditors. Now we're relying on community local action," Mr. Kirst asserts.

Local-control funding discards the fragmented categorical system that characterized California's school funding for the past 40 years. Following equity lawsuits and the Proposition 13 property-tax-limitation initiative passed in 1978, the state became public education's paymaster. And the legislature sliced and diced almost a third of state funds into as many as 124 categorical programs, each with its own accounting rules, regulations, and burdensome paperwork. None of these rules required schools to show how these expenses were linked to student outcomes. The district's major accountability to the state was exercised through program audits called "coordinated compliance reviews," which tested the fidelity of record-



keeping and largely ignored student achievement.

Second, in addition to the state's change in its funding system, California has gone *all in* on the common core. It hasn't hedged its bet. The legislature sent \$1.25 billion to school districts to implement the common standards this school year and next. And the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, which will be piloted this spring, will largely replace the state's old assessments.

There is no state master plan for implementation—a shocking oversight to some—and districts are responding with substantial variation. But there is a strong collaborative effort between districts and state leaders. The state has produced helpful frameworks in both English/language arts and math,

the two common-core subject areas.

The state is also the bulwark of the Smarter Balanced testing consortium, and after its federal financial support concludes, the consortium's efforts will be housed at the University of California, Los Angeles.

In supporting the common core, the state agrees with Secretary Duncan and differs substantively with its detractors. California has had a long and largely positive experience with its own standards, beginning in the 1980s, and the emphasis on teaching for understanding and application. Much of this got lost in the No Child Left Behind testing era, and the teachers in the state whom I've talked to welcome the idea of fewer and deeper standards.

By focusing on the common core and local control and accountability, California is intentionally sidelining aspects of the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top agenda. Mr. Kirst has been a policy scholar for nearly half a century, and he is acutely aware of the problem of "policy overload"—trying to do too many things at once. When that happens, he remarked to me recently, schools flip into compliance mode and don't change in the fundamental ways that matter. "So, it's a laundry list Duncan gives you, not common core," he says. "That is the essence of the problem."

While California is a long way from fully articulating its vision of the future, it follows a tradition of enticing difference. As the journalist Carey McWilliams wrote in *California: The Great Exception* nearly seven decades ago, "California, the giant adolescent, has been outgrowing its governmental clothes, now, for a hundred years." Until its recent malaise, the state has always thought of itself as the inventive edge of the continent. It's beginning to think that way again. ■

EDUCATION WEEK

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The **Charles Stewart Mott Foundation** provides partial support for *Diplomas Count*, *Education Week's* annual report on the state of high school graduation and reform efforts. The foundation's mission is to support efforts that promote a just, equitable, and sustainable society. www.mott.org

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Making 'Individualized' Plans For a Postsecondary Future

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

ary education.

Connecticut, for example, has established a statewide collaboration that oversees professional development and supports in-school ILP implementation teams.

- **Placing the responsibility for implementation not just on school counselors, but also on special education and general education teachers and administrators.** Because all students can use these plans, all teachers, administrators, and members of the school support staff should be trained in how to prepare to implement them. Rhode Island, for example, has established clear roles and responsibilities for students, educators, families, and district administrators in its ILP framework to ensure all departments collaborate throughout the process.

- **Ensuring long-term funding for online career-information systems that offer "ePortfolios."** Many districts struggle to pay for access to online career-information systems. Some states, such as Kentucky and South Carolina, have provided funds for a single state system that allows for electronic portfolios that transfer with students who move between districts, data for the state to use when evaluating outcomes, and the ability to offer streamlined professional development. At a minimum, states need to strongly encourage that any system meet industry standards.

- **Establishing accountability systems to track program effectiveness.** Accountability sys-

tems provide data to verify the effectiveness of ILPs by tracking student outcomes, graduation rates, and postsecondary pursuits. They also provide data on implementation fidelity by showing how many schools are implementing the plans, how many students are participating in them, whether schools have schoolwide buy-in, and how well the plans are being implemented.

Kentucky, for example, uses an accountability system that combines student data, program reviews, and educator data to determine the effectiveness of ILPs in schools, districts, and across the state.

We also have learned that the best implementation comes when states have a comprehensive strategy and a multi-organization and multiyear master implementation plan. States also need to connect their online career-information systems and ePortfolio data into their own longitudinal-data systems, and pay special attention to strategies to communicate to a broad range of stakeholders what ILPs are and how they benefit students, schools, communities, and the workforce.

If we are serious about ensuring college- and career-readiness opportunities for all students, we need to focus more effort on enabling students and their families to become more engaged in transition-readiness efforts well before they graduate. Properly designed and implemented, ILPs help students and their families strive to get the most out of their educational opportunities and successfully launch into a postsecondary training and education program and the world of work. ■

WEB COMMENT

“College for all who desire college should be our aspiration, but we must remember that not everyone desires a college degree. Those students need options, too.”

— James L. Woodworth, responding to the online-only Commentary “Getting Low-Income Students on the College-Degree Path” by Rick Dalton

To read the Commentary and respond, got to www.edweek.org/go/dalton.

ONLINE

www.edweek.org/go/commentary

COMMENTARY

In response to the recent controversy over school lunches being taken away from students with unpaid lunch tabs, **Patricia Montague**, the CEO of the School Nutrition Association, offers an online-only essay discussing how school administrators should handle this situation.

▶ www.edweek.org/go/montague

EDUCATION WEEK TEACHER

In a new Teaching Ahead roundtable discussion, educator panelists respond to the question, “As Schools Adapt to Common Core, What Should Be Taken Off Teachers’ Plates?”

▶ www.edweek.org/go/roundtable-plates

BLOGS



In a recent Top Performers post, **Marc Tucker** interviews **Pasi Sahlberg**, a prominent former education official in Finland, on the significance of that country’s recent drop in PISA rankings.

▶ www.edweek.org/go/sahlberg-interview

Matthew Lynch’s Feb. 17 post



“Teachers—The Greatest Common Core Casualty?” has generated a spirited online discussion. Read the Education Futures blog post and join the ensuing conversation.

▶ www.edweek.org/go/teachers-casualty

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SUPERINTENDENT

BLAINE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

Blaine County School District is home to the world famous Sun Valley resort nestled in Idaho's Rocky Mountains where there are endless free-flowing rivers, and over 200,000 acres of natural splendor, with opportunities for swimming, fishing, mountain biking, skiing, world class golf and more.

Blaine County Schools is seeking an individual with visionary leadership and strong administrative skills to lead a district of approximately 3,300 students. The salary will be in the range of \$165,000 plus an excellent comprehensive benefits package. The final salary for the successful candidate will be negotiated and determined based upon proven experience, qualifications and meeting Board criteria.

Interested candidates may apply online at
www.rayassoc.com

Ray and Associates, Inc.

Ph: 319/393-3115 E-mail: glr@rayassoc.com

Application Deadline:

March 25, 2014

Please do not contact the Board or District directly.

RAY & ASSOCIATES, INC.



IOWA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF & IOWA BRAILLE & SIGHT SAVING SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

The Iowa School for the Deaf and Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School is seeking an individual with visionary leadership and strong administrative skills. The salary will be in the anticipated range of \$175,000-\$200,000 plus an excellent comprehensive benefits package. The final salary for the successful candidate will be negotiated and determined based upon proven experience, qualifications and meeting Board criteria.

The superintendent leads both the Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired as well as the Iowa School for the Deaf and coordinates statewide services for students who are deaf or blind.

Interested candidates may apply online at
www.rayassoc.com

Ray and Associates, Inc.

Ph: 319/393-3115 E-mail: glr@rayassoc.com

Application Deadline: March 24, 2014

Please do not contact the Board or Schools directly.

RAY & ASSOCIATES, INC.



SUPERINTENDENT

BREWSTER CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Located in Putnam County, north of New York City, is seeking a



SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

This 3,300-student school district, situated contiguous to Westchester and Dutchess counties, is committed to educational excellence and the success of every student. A suburban community of 18,000, Brewster values its natural beauty while priding itself on advancing a progressive educational agenda.

The Board of Education has determined that the successful candidate will be:

- An educator with a proven track record of empowering students and teachers to raise expectations and achievement
- An administrator with outstanding communication skills who is transparent in all dealings with staff and community
- A collaborative leader who is open, accessible and approachable for students, staff, parents and the community at large and is visible in the community and at school activities
- An experienced administrator who has helped a district address the economic realities of our time without diminishing programs and services for the students
- A problem solver whose work is characterized by systems and big picture thinking, and who puts the needs of students first

The Board is offering a regionally-competitive compensation. New York State Certification as a School District Leader (SDL) or School District Administrator (SDA) is required.

Online applications will be accepted until Feb 28, 2014.

Please go to the School Leadership web site (www.leadschools.us) and click on the online application link under Current Vacancies.

To learn more about the Brewster schools, please go to www.brewsterschools.org
An Equal Opportunity Employer



Superintendent of Schools Alachua County Public Schools, Florida

The School Board of Alachua County is seeking a talented, experienced and dynamic leader to serve as Superintendent of Schools. The district serves about 27,000 students in 44 schools and centers and is recognized statewide for its many innovative and high quality educational programs and services. It also enjoys outstanding community support.

A candidate must have a minimum of ten years successful administrative experience, including school-based experience. Administrative experience must be in a district of 15,000 students or more. A master's degree is required, with a doctorate strongly preferred. The salary range is \$140,000 to \$170,000 annually with a negotiable benefits package and a three-year minimum contract.

Interested candidates should submit a resume reflecting their personal and professional qualifications, significant professional accomplishments and references by February 28, 2014 to: Brian Moore, Staff Attorney, Alachua County Public Schools, 620 East University Avenue, Gainesville, FL 32601, or electronically to: moorebt@gm.sbac.edu.

Questions regarding this position should be directed to Wayne Blanton, Florida School Boards Association, at (850) 414-2578 or blanton@fsba.org.

All applications for this position are subject to the Florida Public Records Act and 'Government in the Sunshine' provisions of Florida law and therefore cannot be held in confidence. A brochure regarding this position is available under Superintendent Search at www.sbac.edu.

The School Board of Alachua County is an equal opportunity employer.

HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT

Hartford Public Schools, located in Hartford, Connecticut, seeks an individual with visionary leadership and strong administrative skills to lead a Portfolio District of 21,075 students. The salary will be in the range of \$250,000 excluding benefits. The final salary and benefits package for the successful candidate will be subject to negotiation and based upon proven experience, qualifications and meeting Board performance criteria.

Interested candidates may apply online at www.rayassoc.com

Ray and Associates, Inc.

Ph: 319/393-3115 E-mail: glr@rayassoc.com

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RAY & ASSOCIATES, INC.



Positions Available

Asheboro City Schools seeks ESL Teacher to teach in Asheboro, NC. Must have Bachelor's or foreign equivalent in Education, Teaching English as a Second Language, or related field. Must have or be qualified to hold NC teacher license in ESL (K-12). Employment will require background and reference checks. Complete an application at <http://schooljobs.dpi.state.nc.us/> and e-mail Carla Freemyer, Executive Director of Human Resources, at cfreemyer@asheboro.k12.nc.us requesting retrieval of the application.

Asheboro City Schools seeks Mathematics Teacher to teach in Asheboro, NC. Must have Bachelor's or foreign equivalent in Mathematics Education or related field with at least 24 college credit hours in Mathematics. Must have or be qualified to hold NC teacher license in Middle Grades Mathematics. Employment will require background and reference checks. Complete an application at <http://schooljobs.dpi.state.nc.us/> and e-mail Carla Freemyer, Executive Director of Human Resources, at cfreemyer@asheboro.k12.nc.us requesting retrieval of the application.



PRINCIPALS/ HEAD OF SCHOOL

SCARSDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

START DATE: AUGUST 1, 2014

GREENACRES is a K-5 elementary school with a rich and varied educational program, a high-achieving student population of approximately 390, an accomplished faculty of 35, and an active, participatory parent body.

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- Demonstrate intellectual breadth and resilience.
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- Arrive at decisions through fair-minded collaboration.
- Create an environment that fosters mutual respect among students, parents, and teachers.

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Santa Monica-Malibu USD is a diverse community serving 11,300 students, dedicated to generating extraordinary achievement for all while simultaneously closing the achievement gap.

McKinley Elementary is a Title I, CA Distinguished School of 490 students. A model in collaboration, McKinley is looking for a visionary who can lead the school to excellence in Common Core, Equity and Access, Professional Learning Communities and RTI.

Deadline: Wednesday, Mar. 12, 2014, 4:00 p.m.,

Job Info/Application: www.edjoin.org

Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District
1651 Sixteenth Street S.M., CA 90404 310-450-8338 Ext 70220

NEW CANAAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

New Canaan, Connecticut

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

Position available July 1, 2014

The New Canaan Public School system seeks an exceptional principal to serve as the educational leader of an exemplary elementary school serving grades K-4.

The successful candidate must be able to articulate and implement a high quality elementary school program, evaluate & develop staff, implement new curricula and communicate effectively with students, faculty & parents. Highly competitive salary & excellent benefits package. Appropriate CT certification required.



To apply for this opportunity, applicants should complete an online application on the district website: www.newcanaan.k12.ct.us

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Principal

Douglas County School District RE-1

Are you a principal looking for a school district that "provides a stark counterpoint to the conventional reform narrative"? Douglas County School District RE-1 just may be the change you're searching for!

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Principals in DCSD have to understand and be able to adapt and manage change; including the ability to demonstrate leadership in the midst of managing daily activities. DCSD Principals know, understand and advocate for their school, community and the Douglas County School District as a whole. Above all else, DCSD Principals put student needs first. Our Principals use the District's vision, core values and the Board of Education's direction to make decisions and provide instructional leadership for all students.

To apply and read more about our district: <https://www.dcsdk12.org/>

All applicants and District Transfers need to apply online. The online application is located on the District website under "Careers". Please include the following when applying online: a formal letter of interest specific to position, 3 professional letters of recommendation, license and transcript information and a current résumé.

Effective Start Date: July 1, 2014

School Leadership Opportunity

**Farmington Public Schools
Farmington, Connecticut**

West District School Principal

Salary range* \$129,405 - \$140,127

Matching annuity contribution up to \$4,225

*\$2,000 stipend for Ph.D. or Ed.D.

West District School, a nationally recognized Blue Ribbon School with outstanding faculty and strong parental support, has an enrollment of 341 students in K-4 and 19 faculty members. Qualifications include strong curriculum background, broad knowledge of early education programs and the ability to work collaboratively with a variety of stakeholders. Experience as a building principal or supervisor of staff is preferred.

Starting date the position is July 1, 2014. Candidates must hold or be eligible for State of Connecticut Certification as an Intermediate Administrator (092).

Qualified and interested individuals for these positions should send a résumé with cover letter, two current letters of reference and copies of transcripts. Applicants should also include a concise statement of educational vision for elementary education. Applications will be accepted until **March 17, 2014**. For additional information, please see our website at www.fpsct.org

Kimberly Wynne
Assistant Superintendent
1 Monteith Drive
Farmington, CT 06032
860-673-8265

TOP SCHOOL JOBS'S K-12 TALENT MANAGER

What If You're Not As Good As You Think?

I had a fascinating conversation with a group of Ohio educators last week about the evolution of teacher evaluations in this country. One person pointed out that many teachers, who, for years, have received a 5 out of 5 on their evaluation, now feel like their world has come "crashing down" if they get a less than perfect score. In 2009, The New Teacher Project published the **Widget Effect** which concluded that "in districts which use binary evaluation ratings...more than 99 percent of teachers receive the satisfactory rating," while systems that use a broader range of factors gave 94 percent of teachers one of the top two ratings.

We talked about the myriad things that could affect an evaluation score—from evaluator reliability and skill to tool validity to the demographics of kids in a classroom. Then, an interesting question was posed by another teacher: **What if the people who received low evaluation scores deserved them? What if they don't know how to tell if they're good at what they do? What if they're just not that great of a teacher?**

Last month, a friend and former teacher sent me an article from Harvard Business Review online called **"If You Were a Poor Performer, You Wouldn't Be Aware of It"** by Andrew O'Connell. The author explained:

"In a logic test administered to people who had volunteered over the internet, a team of researchers found that the lowest scorers vastly overestimated their performance, believing, on average, that they had gotten **7 out of 10** items right, when the actual figure was **0**, according to Thomas Schläpfer of the University of Cologne in Ger-

many. People who lack the skill to perform well also tend to lack the ability to judge performance (their own or others'); because of this "dual curse," they fail to recognize how incompetent they truly are."

These researchers were testing something called the **Dunning-Kruger Effect**. In their paper, *Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments*, professors Justin Kruger and David Dunning write that "People tend to hold an overly favorable view of their abilities in many social and intellectual domains." They suggest, "overestimation occurs, in part, because people who are unskilled in these domains suffer a dual burden: Not only do these people reach erroneous conclusions and make unfortunate choices, but their incompetence robs them of the metacognitive ability to realize it."

I've read a few more articles on Dunning and Kruger's work. In short, they have concluded that an individual who lacks a certain skill also lack the ability to objectively evaluate their own performance.

What are your perceptions of this research? How might it impact how we think about evaluations in education and other industries?

To read more from TopSchoolJobs's K-12 Talent Manager blog, visit http://blogs.edweek.org/topschooljobs/k-12_talent_manager/.

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American School of Doha QATAR

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Effective in July of 2015

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<http://www.searchassociates.com/Openings/Administrative.aspx?ID=1062>

For more information about the school please see <http://www.asd.edu.qa>



TOP SCHOOL JOBS's

CAREER CORNER BLOG

The Interview Before the Interview

Often we think a job interview consists of the answers given to a series of questions from a committee or building administrator. There is an interview that happens even before you walk into the conference room or office that too often candidates overlook. The impressions you make on the students and office staff can impact the decision as to whether or not a candidate is a good fit for a school. Being personable, approachable and aware of those in the room is an indicator of the presence you will have in the school community. I recall an interviewee at my school that was somewhat standoffish with the office staff, did not speak to the maintenance personnel and barely addressed the principal when he came in dressed casually. Her demeanor completely changed when she was introduced to him as the principal and one who would be interviewing her. Unfortunately, her previous interactions with him and his staff spoke volumes and thus cost her the position. Conversely your willingness to take the time to acknowledge the office staff, remain approachable with students who may be in the office and connect with others are good indicators that you have those "people" skills which will translate into positive interactions with parents, students and other staff members. Think about the best customer service experience you have had and what made it so. What did you learn from that experience that you will take into your classroom, into your interactions with parents and into your interactions with other staff members? Remember, ours is a customer service profession. Let all aspects of the interview experience reflect this...

To read the complete blog post, visit <http://blogs.edweek.org/topschooljobs/careers>
The opinions expressed are strictly those of the author and do not reflect the opinions or endorsement of Editorial Projects in Education.

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CANTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Canton, Connecticut

Canton Public Schools is searching for two dynamic and exceptional leaders to become the next Canton Middle School Principal and Director of Pupil Personnel Services. The Canton Public Schools, recognized as one of the top School Districts in Connecticut, serves approximately 1,700 students, PreK-12. The District features an outstanding faculty and supportive parent community.

CANTON MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Canton Middle School, a Connecticut Association of Schools' Middle School of the Year, serves an enrollment of approximately 265 students.

QUALIFICATIONS

Preparation

Candidates must possess or be qualified for appropriate CT Intermediate Administrative & Supervisor Certification (092)

Experience

Successful teaching and administrative/leadership experience.

Personal Qualities

The successful candidate will possess and be able to demonstrate:

- a persistent focus on student achievements in all areas of the curriculum;
- an appreciation of the strengths of all students;
- the ability to work collaboratively with faculty, staff, and parents to improve student performance;
- strong leadership and management skills;
- strong interpersonal skills;
- knowledge of 21st century curriculum;
- strong technology and scheduling skills;
- a sense of humor and creative spirit.

DIRECTOR OF PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES

The primary focus of this position is PreK-12 special education, including associated services to promote the overall success of students. The Director will provide a vision for the Department and oversee the full continuum of services for students with special learning needs.

QUALIFICATIONS

Preparation

Candidates must possess or be qualified for appropriate CT Intermediate Administrative & Supervisor Certification (092) and Comprehensive Special Education, PreK-12 (065).

Experience

Successful special education teaching and administrative/leadership experience.

Personal Qualities

The successful candidate will possess and be able to demonstrate:

- the ability to work collaboratively with faculty, staff, and parents to improve student performance;
- strong leadership and management skills;
- strong interpersonal skills;
- knowledge of relevant laws and Connecticut State Department of Education regulations regarding special education and pupil personnel services.

COMPENSATION

Salary for 2014-15: \$120,712 - \$134,031, Doctoral stipend: \$1,200

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Interested candidates should visit our website at www.cantonschools.org to complete an on-line application.

Application Deadline: March 14, 2014.

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Reading Public Schools



Instilling joy of learning and inspiring the innovative leaders of tomorrow



Reading Public Schools is currently searching for innovative educational leaders for the following positions:

High School Principal

Anticipated Start Date: July 1, 2014 • Salary Range: \$115,000-\$130,000
Deadline to Apply on School Spring: March 14, 2014

Director of Student Services

Anticipated Start Date: July 1, 2014 • Salary Range: \$115,000-\$130,000
Deadline to Apply on School Spring: March 14, 2014

District Network Manager

Anticipated Start Date: March 1, 2014 • Salary Range: \$80,000-\$90,000
Deadline to Apply on School Spring: February 21, 2014

Interested candidates should apply online by submitting a cover letter, resume, 3 professional letters of recommendation, copy of certification, and official transcripts to www.schoolspring.com by the deadline specified above.

We are an equal opportunity employer. Consult our website for more information at:

www.reading.k12.ma.us



OTHER



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- » Teaching experience in that field (or teaching methods or supervising student teachers in that field)
- » Experience mentoring or supervising beginning teachers

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edTPA

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Why We Need More Black Men in Teaching

By Donald G. Nicolas

Often, particularly in urban schools and districts, someone asks: “Where are the black male teachers?” Statements affirming the need for more black male teachers are commonplace. As an experienced black educator and former assistant principal, I have heard assertions that more must be done to increase the number of black educators in our schools. I have also seen the tremendous impact an effective black male educator can have in the classroom. Notice I use the word *effective*; this is because an ineffective black male educator can have a more detrimental impact on a school than perhaps a teacher from any other demographic.

If I am being candid, I can attest personally to the fact that in many schools, the only abundance of black men comes in the form of custodians, food-service employees, and transportation workers. In addition, in conversations with my colleagues, it is widely understood that if black men are educators, they more often than not are physical education teachers or coach in some capacity. Black men are largely underrepresented in our nation’s classrooms; it has been widely reported that they make up less than 2 percent of our country’s teachers.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is heading up several initiatives to help recruit black men into our classrooms, most notably TEACH.org, a public-private initiative with a mission to “help great candidates find places in today’s rapidly evolving classrooms.” However, could all efforts to increase the number of black men in the classroom be in vain? I think so. Let me explain why, and what we can do to help.

Fit. According to recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly 82 percent of public school teachers in school year 2011-12 were white. When black men first enter the classroom, there is a high likelihood that they may be only one of maybe two or three black males on the staff, even in some predominantly black schools and districts. When hiring decisions are made within a school, they largely depend on “fit”: Will this person fit in at our school, and how well? Needless to say, adding a black man to the staff will automatically change a school’s dynamics.

As a black male teacher who has mentored other black male teachers, I can speak to the fact that parents, students, and fellow teachers may watch the black male employee more closely because of the rarity of the situation. The educator as well as the school community must be prepared for this. It takes a certain amount of character to accept and live up to this reality and the expectations that come with standing out.

Challenge: As a teacher or administrator with a black male teacher on staff, inquire periodically about his comfort level and/or difficulties he is having. Reassure him about his importance to the staff as a whole. Find time to debrief with him generally in an open and honest dialogue independent of any evaluative repercussions.

Lack of mentoring. A deficiency of black males in the classroom obviously leads directly to a lack of them in school leadership roles, such as principal and assistant principal. Educators have long said that mentoring is a key to success for many new teachers. In fact, many districts have mandatory induction programs for first- and second-year teachers.

Part of the mentor experience includes pairing the new teacher with an administrator or teacher who will observe, discuss research, and share experiences in an effort to foster the novice’s growth as an education professional.

The expectation is that new educators will have mentors who have their best interests and professional growth at heart. I honestly think it’s a challenge for black men to find someone in their school willing to level with them and be honest about the great responsibility that comes not only with being an educator, but a black male educator at that.

So many times I’ve personally seen young teachers written off and led astray by “mentors” who didn’t mentor them and allowed them to sink into what can be a professional abyss. If any teacher is not given the proper support, it is easy to be consumed by the overwhelming responsibility of being an educator.

Challenge: When black male teachers are on the staff in urban schools that need their presence, it is imperative that a concerted effort be made to provide these men with caring, spirited mentors who understand their importance and vigorously provide them guidance.

You can’t be what you don’t see. So many times it is said black boys want to be rappers or athletes because when they turn on the television, that’s what they see. If more black male teachers were in our nation’s classrooms, it would dramatically alter children’s aspirations. I wrote this Commentary because I believe every single conversation about education today must begin with the need to increase diversity in the teaching force. A conversation about standards, teacher quality, or graduation rates cannot begin without a vigorous effort and commitment to this cause.

Think about the first time you had a black male teacher, if ever. If you did, chances are you will never forget him. I firmly believe that if we put positive black men in front of these students, more young black boys will aspire to be educators.

Challenge: Ask two people how many African-American male educators they’ve had in their K-12 school careers. It is my hypothesis that most will give you an answer between zero and two. Continue the conversation by affirming the need to increase this number.

Poor achievement among our neediest students is the result, at least in part, of a lack of strong, positive black educators in the classrooms. This nation needs to move swiftly to engage more African-American men in teaching. No longer can we simply be OK with black men representing less than 2 percent of our teacher workforce. It is unacceptable. ■

DONALD G. NICOLAS is a 5th grade teacher at a public school in Broward County, Fla.



When black men first enter the classroom, there is a high likelihood that they may be only one of maybe two or three black males on the staff.”



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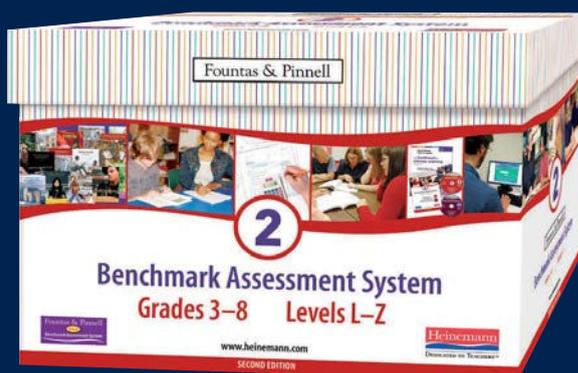
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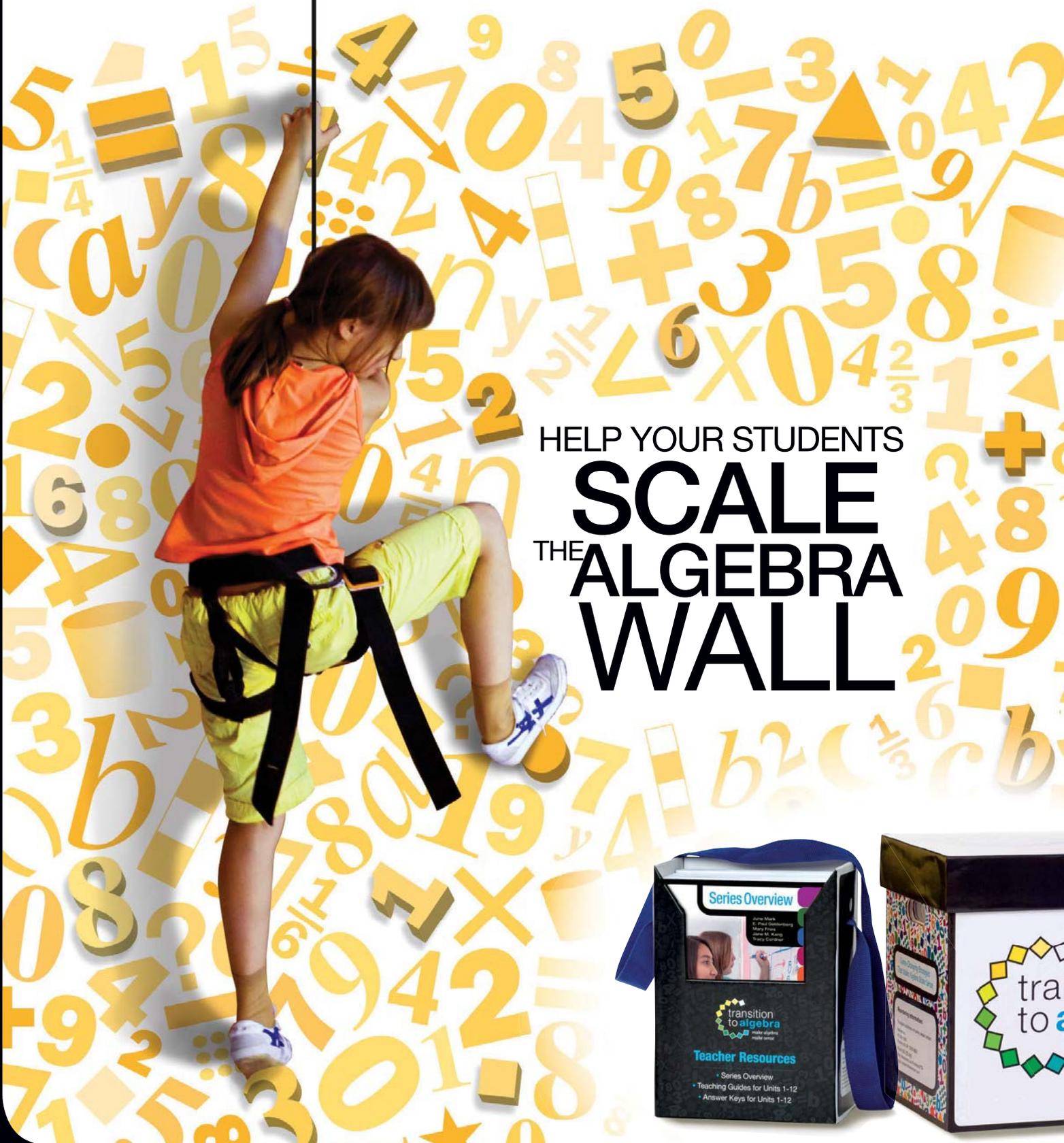
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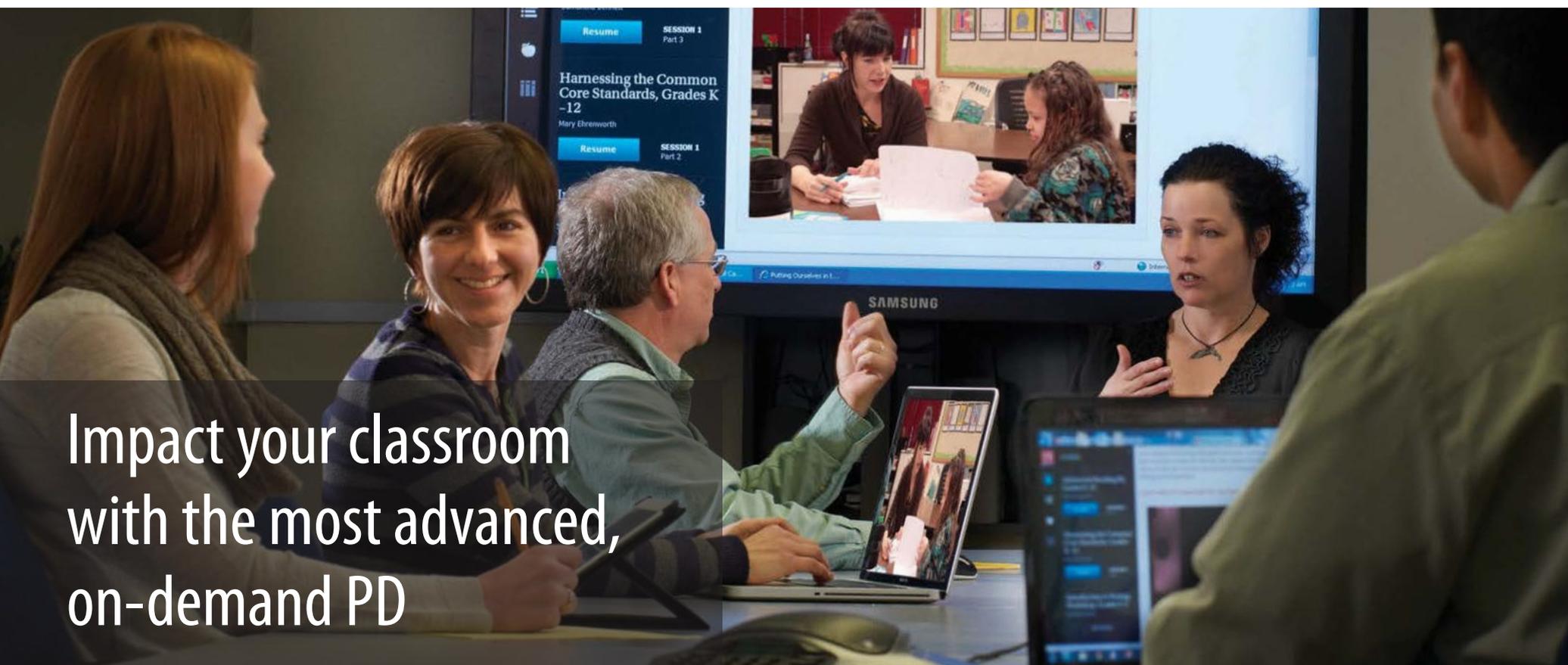
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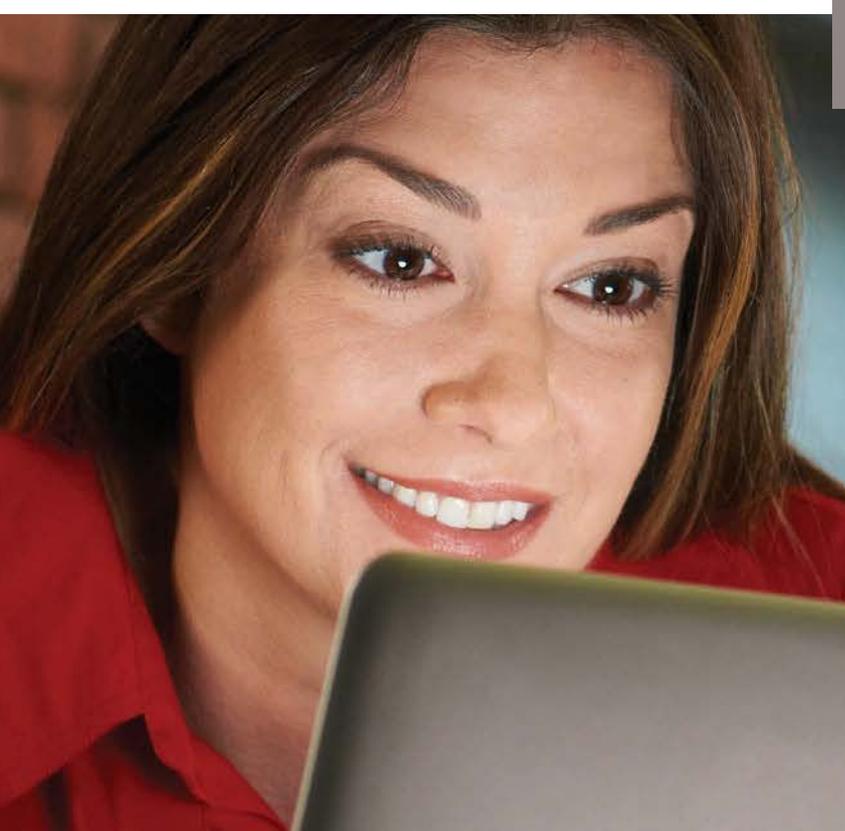
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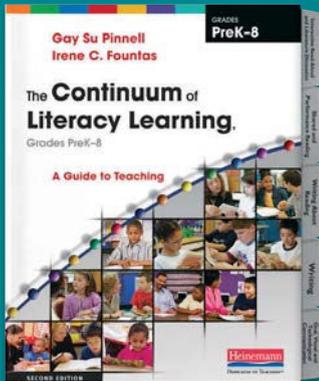
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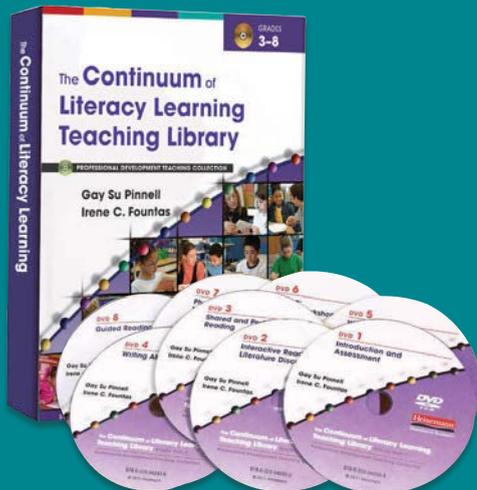
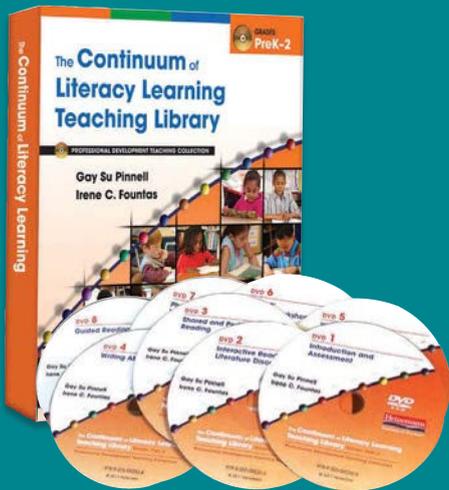


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