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Public access to school computers raises questions

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New standard makes whiteboard content more accessible.



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Do school leaders bear responsibility for a Mass. teen's suicide?

Schools brace for more budget cuts

57 percent of school leaders say they'll have to delay ed-tech purchases in 2010-11, up from 29 percent this year

From staff and wire reports

Although the economy has begun to rebound, K-12 schools still are facing serious budget shortfalls for the coming school year, a new survey reveals—a predicament that threatens their ability to implement new tech-

nologies, raise the quality of instruction in their classrooms, and close achievement gaps among students.

Released April 8, "Cliff Hanger: How America's Public Schools Continue to Feel the Impact of the Economic Downturn," the latest in a series of national surveys from the

American Association of School Administrators (AASA), identifies a number of key challenges that are compounding an already grave situation.

Continued budget strains at the state and local levels will be exacerbated next year when the federal stimulus funding ends, the survey suggests—a phenomenon referred to as the "funding cliff."

Budget cuts, page 20

A textbook example of school politics in action



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University of Texas students rallied before a Texas State Board of Education meeting in March, asking "the far-right, conservative faction of the state board to not inject their political agenda into the social studies and history curriculum." **Story, page 8.**

Will \$99 tablet swim or sink?

New low-cost device aims to challenge iPad in education

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

In a development that it claims will be a game-changer in education, technology company Marvell has announced the prototype of a \$99 tablet computer, called the Moby, that students can use to surf the web, interact with electronic textbooks and other digital media, and collaborate with each other around the globe.

Marvell's announcement came a few weeks before Apple released its much-anticipated iPad tablet computer April 3. Like the Moby, Apple has positioned its iPad as a device for students to read

eTextbooks and use educational applications—though the iPad starts at \$499.

Educators familiar with Marvell's announcement said they were intrigued by the possibilities of such a device for teaching and learning but would wait to pass judg-

\$99 tablet, page 26

Some see conflict in ed-tech plan

Is call for innovation compatible with testing, accountability?

From staff reports

While many school stakeholders say there's a lot to like in the new National Education Technology Plan (NETP), such as its emphasis on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and using open educational resources to improve instruction, others are concerned about what they see as a fundamental conflict between the plan's call for innovation on the one hand and the Obama administration's continued focus on testing and accountability on the other.

In their blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan have called for higher standards, particularly in the core acade-

Plan, page 20

Feds to shape the future of assessment

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

Federal officials are leading the charge to develop a new generation of summative, end-of-year exams that are delivered and scored by computer; focus on a deeper understanding of the curriculum, instead of just multiple choice; and can measure students' readiness for college or a career more accurately.

"There is widespread concern that the most prominent assessments currently being used in the U.S. are inadequate and may have a significantly negative impact on stu-

Assessment, page 24

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eSCHOOL MEDIA INC.

eSchool News is dedicated to providing news and information to help K-20 decision makers use technology and the internet to transform their schools and achieve educational goals.

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eSchool News ISSN: 1098-0814 is published monthly except bi-monthly Nov/Dec by eSchool Media 7920 Norfolk Ave., Suite 900 • Bethesda, MD 20814 • Phone: (301) 913-0115 • Fax: (301) 913-0119
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The cost for a subscription in the U.S. is \$120/year, Mexico or Canada \$158/year, all other countries \$196/year. Please enclose a bank draft or international money order in U.S. dollars. Back issues of eSchool News are available for \$15 each.

For reprint permission contact: NDavid@eSchoolNews.com

Periodical Postage paid at Bethesda, Md., and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO

eSchool News, Circulation Department, 7920 Norfolk Ave., Suite 900 Bethesda, MD 20814





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Threats to innovation

Dennis Pierce, Editor
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In his speech to school superintendents during the American Association of School Administrators' annual conference in February, Education Secretary Arne Duncan argued that schools should have more flexibility in how they get all students to achieve.

"We should be tight on standards ... but loose about how to get there," he told the nation's school leaders in outlining what he called the administration's "guiding principles" for rewriting No Child Left Behind.

Unfortunately, that rhetoric doesn't match reality.

Education Department (ED) officials might not be as prescriptive in telling the top-performing 95 percent of schools how they must meet tougher standards for student achievement under the Obama administration's blueprint for school reform—but they're very exacting when it comes to opening the federal purse strings.

So exacting, in fact, that in the first round of the much-anticipated "Race to the Top" competition for \$4 billion in special stimulus funds, only two states—Delaware and Tennessee—met the administration's stringent requirements.

In that first round, ED awarded only \$600 million of its \$4 billion carrot to entice broad school reforms. And though federal officials will collect a second round of applications for the highly selective program by June 1, many states are rethinking their desire to participate.

Colorado, which had hoped to win \$377 million, finished in 14th place—and Gov. Bill Ritter Jr., who said the scoring by anonymous judges seemed inscrutable, reportedly had not decided whether to reapply for the second round as of press time.

"It was like the Olympic Games, and we were an

American skater with a Soviet judge from the 1980s," Ritter told the *New York Times*.

To help states as they prepare their Phase 2 proposals, ED has posted all Phase 1 applications, peer reviewers' comments, and scores on its web site, as well as videos of states' Phase 1 presentations. But in setting such a high bar to earn federal dollars for reform, the administration is excluding a number of states that could desperately use more money.

Our lead story on Page One shows why this is so disturbing: A new AASA survey reveals that school budget

The stimulus funding merely delayed the inevitable—and now the dam is about to burst.

cuts will be noticeably more significant in 2010-11 than they were in the previous two years.

It appears the unprecedented \$100 billion in stimulus funding for education was only a stopgap measure that merely delayed the inevitable—and now the dam is about to burst wide open.

Although President Obama's FY 2011 budget requests \$4 billion more for education than the previous year, the administration is proposing to shift a greater percentage of federal dollars from formula-based grants to competitive grants, like Race to the Top—a move that most school leaders vehemently oppose.

Because schools can't count on receiving competitive grant dollars, this funding model causes uncertainty and is unlikely to lead to the kind of long-term reforms that ED is hoping for, AASA says. Applying for competitive grants also requires resources that many schools don't have.

Lack of funding was one of the key concerns that educators cited in their responses to the new National Education Technology Plan (NETP), which the administration released in March.

In comments left on the NETP web site (story, page 1), some stakeholders wondered how they would be able to realize ED's comprehensive vision for using technology to transform teaching and learning amid such a harsh budget climate. Others questioned what they saw as a fundamental conflict between the plan's call for innovation on one hand and the administration's continued focus on testing and accountability on the other.

More budget cuts will make it much harder for school leaders to innovate next year—and yet, there is a growing body of research to suggest that's exactly what is needed to reach today's students.

Assistant Editor Maya T. Prabhu's story about the needs of the "iGeneration" (page 10), and Managing Editor Laura Devaney's story about what students say they want from their schools (page 16), make it abundantly clear that our teaching methods must change if we are to engage what Project Tomorrow calls the "free-agent learners" who are accustomed to using technology to communicate, collaborate, and learn outside of classrooms.

Here's hoping Congress will recognize the impending crisis that threatens innovation in the nation's schools, and either provide more money to implement the technology-based reforms outlined in the NETP or push back against the administration's shift toward a more competitive and highly selective funding model.

If not, I fear that yet another well-crafted public policy document won't be worth the bits and bytes that federal officials used to construct it. 



Your Turn

Many of the stories appearing in the pages of *eSchool News* first ran on our web site in some form or another, prompting various responses by our readers. Here, we've published the best of these responses in print, so you can see what your colleagues have to say about these issues. To keep the conversation going, go to www.eschoolnews.com, search for the story in question, and add your own thoughts in the comments section. —The Editors

iPads in education

When our story "Developers seek to link iPad with education" (page 26) appeared online April 5, readers responded with a broad range of opinions about the iPad's potential for education.

"Yes, iPad is the ideal educational tool!" wrote one reader, identified as anilkm3944. "eLearning is the favored choice for many students, and online tutoring is becoming increasingly popular with parents, too. The iPad can prove to be the perfect device for this. ... We may see a new race to deliver the best lessons through this gizmo."

Another reader, djainslie, agreed with *New York Times* technology columnist David Pogue, who noted that the iPad is "not nearly as good for creating stuff. On the other hand, it's infinitely more convenient for consuming it."

"Agreed," djainslie wrote. "If we truly want our students to be creating as well as collaborating, sharing, and communicating, then the iPad will do little to 'change the game'—we need to rise above having students consume in education."

Don't mess with Texas

Our readers were sharply divided over the new social studies standards that the Texas Board of Education will vote on later this month, which—if ratified in their current form—would downplay the separation of church and state in the nation's founding ("Social studies curriculum spurs Texas-size controversy," page 8).

"Abandoning or deemphasizing textbooks would be one way to get around the textbook problem, but the bigger problem is the use of biased texts in schools period," wrote twinkie1cat when the story appeared online March 22. "The thrust of the standards must be to teach the students to evaluate the information and think. The texts should have no editorial viewpoint. One problem is, however, that not all schools are technologically advanced, [and] computers are still more supplemental than integral to the curriculum."

Texas still has a huge influence on the textbook market, twinkie1cat wrote, and "conservative states [could] also be influenced by its efforts to change America into a theocracy."

That prompted a reader identified as "sr" to respond: "The problem with your argument ... is that you are making an editorial statement [yourself]. ... So why should your editorial statements be the ones to which others adhere?"

Reader mby555 wrote: "Some of the comments seem to be saying, 'My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts.' Perhaps if we concentrated our efforts on teaching the children how to learn, rather than what to learn, as a part of the basic knowledge package, they would be better able to make informed choices."

For supremebuddy, the problem is not that Texas would be teaching students what to think. Instead, the problem is that the standards support an idea that is historically inaccurate.

"Separation of church and state is vital to the success of a democratic republic," supremebuddy wrote. "This is a myth that our Founding Fathers wanted a

country based on Judeo-Christian values—just the opposite. They remembered how repressive the government of the Dutch [was] at the time, forcing everyone into a state religion. ... Why don't we teach the true history of this country, not one that is 'whitewashed' and full of ... errors?"

Women in the STEM fields

Our story "Survey: Women, minorities need STEM encouragement" (page 12) also touched a nerve when it appeared online March 22.

"[In] 1978, I worked for Nebraska Public Television and in conjunction with the University of Nebraska produced a television series on women in science," wrote nhoke. "This series was designed to encourage young women in high school to continue to study science and math and pursue the subjects in college. All of the issues discussed in the study were discussed in [these] programs, now over 30 years old. It is so disheartening to reflect on the limited ground that has been gained in this critical field of study."

Reader thomas.edgar noted it's not just schools that are to blame for women not pursuing careers in science.

"It is disheartening to see that interest wane as girls are distracted by messages sent through advertising and media portrayals of the 'ideal' woman," he wrote. "Schools, social organizations, and corporations can certainly go a long way to promote interest in science, but it is an uphill battle as long as the glitz is going to sex appeal and appearance rather than socially redeeming talents." 

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Ed-tech leaders reveal keen insights in eSN-TV interviews

From staff reports

What do U.S. students want most when it comes to technology? How is one school system saving thousands of dollars per year in software licensing fees? How is a European nation about to embark on revolutionary experiment in computer-based testing?

These were some of the many insights captured by eSchool News TV in video interviews with ed-tech leaders during the Consortium for School Networking's annual conference in March. All told, eSN-TV (in conjunction with JDL Horizons, maker of the EduVision platform for streaming and archiving Flash-based video) conducted nearly three dozen video interviews with CoSN conference participants. You can watch all of these short video clips at www.eSchoolNews.tv; here are some of the highlights.



What students want most from ed tech

Julie Evans, CEO of the nonprofit group Project Tomorrow, discussed the latest findings from her organization's annual Speak Up survey of students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. The newest findings from the student data (story, page 16) reveal two significant trends, Evans said.

No. 1, "it's all about mobile, mobile, mobile" with today's students, she said: They're interested in using "the computers they're carrying around in their pockets—the smart phones" for learning. Nearly a third of high school students who took part in the survey said they now carry smart phones, Evans said, and a quarter of middle school students now own smart phones. That opens up "all kinds of opportunities to ... leverage that kind of technology" in education, she said.

No. 2, students are interested in replacing their traditional textbooks "with a truly interactive learning experience," Evans said. Not an eReader device, like the Kindle—but an online environment that includes educational games and simulations, as well as links to outside experts—and the ability to download this environment to their smart phone.

Evans said her organization would release the findings from the teacher and administrator surveys later this year.

Saving money by using open technologies

Jim Klein, director of information technology for the Saugus Union School District in California, discussed how CoSN's K-12 Open Technologies Initiative helps inform school IT leaders about open technologies and how to implement them.

Using open technologies can enable school districts to get more technology into the hands of students, he said, while freeing up money to invest in other areas.

On the server side, Saugus Union has replaced its proprietary server software from companies such as Microsoft and Novell with Linux-based servers—and this has saved the district \$50,000 to \$60,000 per year in licensing fees.

On the desktop side, the district uses OpenOffice instead of Microsoft Office software, which saves about \$150,000 per year in software licensing fees. The district also uses the Linux operating system to extend the life of older computers. So rather than a three or four-year refresh cycle, "we're able to extend the life of those machines out to seven, eight, nine years and still have effective technology in the classroom," Klein said.

A creative approach to testing

Steen Lassen, senior advisor for the Ministry of Education in Denmark, discussed how that nation uses technology in support of student testing.

Denmark has allowed its secondary students to use computers during written exams for more than 15 years, Lassen said. The initiative began by allowing students to use computers only as a word processor—"but after a few years, we could see that more and more students were using computers," Lassen said. That prompted Denmark's education leaders to ask: "If we knew beforehand that the student has a computer, can we then make a new type of assignment that uses the facilities of the computer?"

Inspired by this line of thinking, Denmark began using a CD-ROM to deliver exams. That allowed educators to incorporate multimedia into the assessment process. The exams tested whether students were able to find relevant information, think critically about what they have found, and present their findings, Lassen explained; in other words, Danish students were asked to demonstrate the kind of 21st-century skills that many U.S. companies say they are looking for when hiring candidates.

This month, Denmark is embarking on a new pilot program that will allow internet access during testing for some subjects. In the United States, that might be considered cheating—but in Denmark, officials are testing for "competencies," Lassen said, and not simply a regurgitation of facts.

(Editor's note: Watch these and other interviews from the CoSN conference at www.eSchoolNews.tv.)

Congress boosts college aid on party-line vote

From staff and wire reports

Riding on the coattails of historic health-insurance legislation, a broad reorganization of college aid that will affect millions of students was signed into law March 30.

The measure rewrites a four-decades-old student loan program, eliminating its reliance on private lenders and using the savings to direct \$36 billion in new spending to Pell Grants for students in financial need.

In the biggest piece of education legislation since No Child Left Behind nine years ago, the law also provides more than \$4 billion to historically black colleges and community colleges.

In eleventh-hour maneuvering designed to get the measure to pass, however, lawmakers eliminated \$20 billion in additional funding from the bill. Of that \$20 billion, \$12 billion was slated to help community colleges boost graduation rates, partly through the development of open online courses, and \$8 billion was pegged for an early-childhood education program.

The legislation was paired with the expedited health-care bill, a marriage of convenience that helped the prospects of each measure.

"We are pairing this historic health reform with another opportunity that cannot be missed—the chance to make the single largest investment in college affordability ever at no cost to the taxpayers," said Rep. George Miller, D-Calif.

House lawmakers passed a loan bill last year, but in the Senate, it did not have 60 votes to overcome a near certain filibuster. By riding shotgun on the fast-track health-care bill, the legislation could avoid that obstacle.

A centerpiece of President Obama's education agenda, the new law strips banks of their role as middlemen in the federal student-loan process. It also ensures that students will have an easier time repaying their loans.

Still, Obama won't get the Pell Grant expansion he initially sought. Congressional Democrats had to trim their original spending plans when the 10-year projected savings realized by switching to direct government loans dropped from \$87 billion to \$61 billion.

Private lenders had conducted an all-out lobbying effort against the bill, arguing it would cost thousands of jobs and unnecessarily put student lending in the hands of the government.

Under the college lending program, financial institutions provide college loans at low interest rates, while the government guarantees the loans in the event of default and subsidizes private lenders when necessary to keep rates low.

"By moving to the federal government's direct loan program, we will put the best interests of students first and make college loans more reliable and affordable," said Rep. Ruben Hinojosa, D-Texas, the chairman of a House higher-education subcommittee.

In addition to using the projected savings from that change for Pell Grants and higher-education institutions, the legislation will direct about \$19 billion for

deficit reduction and to offset expenses in the health-care legislation.

Besides increasing Pell Grants, the law will provide \$1.5 billion to make it easier for student borrowers to repay their loans. Beginning in 2014, borrowers won't be required to devote more than 10 percent of their monthly income to repay student loans. The current cap is 15 percent.

Still, the legislation is not as generous as the bill the House passed last year. The bill had anticipated far more spending on community colleges and had called for increasing the Pell Grants each year by the consumer price index plus 1 percent. Democrats had to scrap the additional 1-percent increase.

Now, the law contains no increases in Pell Grants over the next two years and a modest increase over the five years that follow. The maximum Pell Grant, which a House-passed bill last year would have raised to \$6,900 over 10 years, now will increase only to \$5,900.

The current maximum grant for the coming school year is \$5,500.

"The increases in the Pell Grant are better than nothing, but they are still quite anemic," said analyst Mark Kantrowitz, publisher of the student assistance web site FinAid.org.

When Pell Grants were created in 1972, the maximum grant covered nearly three-quarters of the average cost of attending a public four-year college. In 2008, the latest year for which figures are available, the maximum grant covered about a third of the cost. And debt affects the careers graduates choose.

"We're seeing students being squeezed out of socially valuable jobs like teaching and social work" because of their debts, said Rich Williams, who had worked on the bill for the Public Interest Research Group, a consumer advocacy organization.

Community-college advocates were disappointed the final law omitted \$12 billion in proposed funding for a program called the American Graduation Initiative. Designed to help community colleges produce 5 million more graduates over the next decade, the program would have included \$500 million for an online skills laboratory modeled after Carnegie Mellon University's Open Learning Initiative (OLI).

The money would have supported the creation free, open internet classes that would allow students to "learn more in less time than they would with traditional classroom instruction alone," according to a White House statement.

Community colleges still will get \$2 billion for developing or improving career training programs over the next four years.

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Social studies curriculum spurs Texas-size conflict

From staff and wire reports

Some historians are decrying the proposed changes to Texas's social studies curriculum for next year, saying many of the changes do not accurately reflect United States history. But the potential injection of conservative ideals into the social studies, history, and economics lessons that will be taught to millions of Texas students for the next decade might not have as much of an effect on the rest of the country's curriculum as some opponents fear.

"It's a bit of an urban myth that the Texas curriculum automatically hops state borders. I think the media accounts have been

exaggerated," said Jay Diskey, executive director of the school division for the Association of American Publishers. "Nearly all states expect or require publishers to align to their state standards."

If the curriculum passes as is when the final vote is cast this month, teachers in Texas will be required to cover the Judeo-Christian influences of the nation's Founding Fathers, but not highlight the philosophical rationale for the separation of church and state.

The new curriculum standards also herald "American exceptionalism" and the U.S. free enterprise system, suggesting it thrives best without excessive

government intervention.

"We have been about conservatism versus liberalism," said Democrat Mavis Knight of Dallas, explaining her vote against the standards. "We have manipulated strands to insert what we want it to be in the document, regardless as to whether or not it's appropriate."

Following three days of impassioned debate, the board gave preliminary approval to the new standards with a 10-5 vote that followed party lines. But it's unclear what effect the standards might have on textbook content nationwide.

Diskey said that since the early 1990s, publishers have released state-specific ver-

sions of textbooks, which was around the same time that standards-based reform became a national movement.

"Prior to standards-based reform, there were national-based editions," he said. "At that time, it was true that larger states—New York, Texas, California—had an influence on books, but it was more about including more state history."

Patte Barth, director of the Center for Public Education at the National School Boards Association, said Texas traditionally has had a significant influence on national textbooks.

"Both Texas and California have a lot of influence on content," she said. "But there's a movement to put more textbook-type content online, because it's easier to keep it up to date—and obviously it's much cheaper. It's also easier to meet state guidelines and even to integrate local content."

While Barth believes there is still a large demand for traditional textbooks, as more states and districts begin to use online texts, the influence of large states like Texas and California will be increasingly limited, she said.

Diskey said he thinks the surge of digital publishing has erased the common national baseline that once was included in textbooks. At the end of the day, he said, states and districts look at the material and make the decision to use a textbook.

Texas State Representative Scott Hochberg, D-Houston, who sponsored a bill that provides for the adoption and use of open-source textbooks in the state, said digitally published textbooks could be a way for other states and districts to avoid the Texas curriculum.

"I think it works two ways. States that use open-source materials instead of just relying on a small group of textbook publishers will have more options if they want to avoid the Texas curriculum," he said. "And, if the major publishers try to sell the Texas materials in other states, that may hasten states that haven't yet gone electronic to look for alternatives in open-source materials and content from smaller electronic publishers."

Diskey noted that there have been debates around school curriculum for years.

"It's not a new thing. Textbooks have always been a place where our national culture and social wars are played out," he said. "There were debates after the Civil War to determine how the Confederacy would be portrayed. ... There were issues about how Vietnam was to be portrayed."

But he said state boards of education are now more involved in handling the way issues such as evolution and global warming are covered in school.

Barth said history is always a tricky area when it comes to developing curriculum.

"Social studies is a hard subject area to write specific standards for. You have to make choices, and a lot of people feel very strongly about it," she said. 

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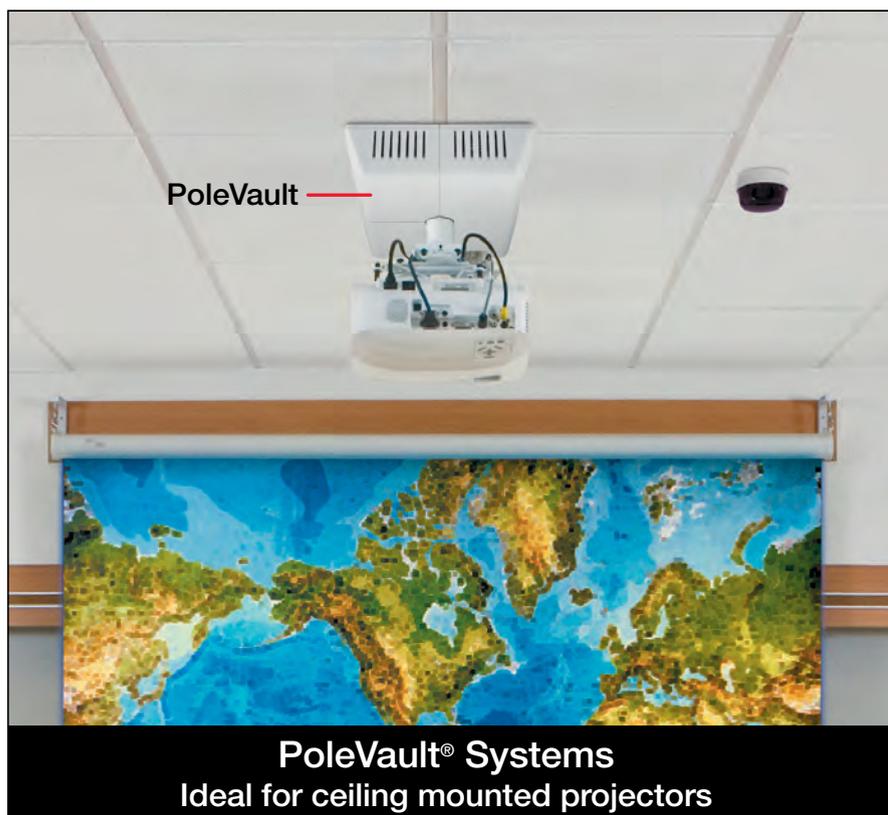
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'iGeneration' requires a new approach to instruction

Maya T. Prabhu
Assistant Editor

Today's middle and high school students learn much differently from students just a few years older—and that's mainly because they've never known a world without the internet or cell phones, says psychology professor and author Larry D. Rosen, whose research could give educators valuable insights into the needs of today's learners.

Children born in the 1990s, dubbed the "iGeneration" by Rosen, live in a time of rapidly changing technology, in which they are constantly connected to a number of mobile technologies.

"iGeners are growing up with portable

technology. Literally from birth, these children are able to grow up using mobile technology," he said. "But I also look at the little 'i' as reflecting the individualized culture."

Rosen said teenagers' desire for individualized experiences is something they expect will carry over into their education. Jody Steinglass, president of Empire Edge, responded to that need when his company designed Adaptster, an SAT math study tool that differentiates and individualizes learning for its users.

Students take a diagnostics test to determine the areas in which they need to study, and the program creates a customized study guide based on those results.

"A study plan is developed with their strengths and weaknesses in mind," he said.

Steinglass recognized teens' connection to their mobile devices and created Adaptster specifically for iPhones and iPods, though he is currently working to create an online version as well.

"People don't want to carry SAT books around with them, but kids already have their iPods with them. So when they have five minutes to kill, they can pull up the [application] and do some problems right then," he said.

Rosen agreed that iGeners are constantly connected to their mobile devices. He noted that iGeneration students don't look at

the technology as a tool, the way it's viewed by older generations—even the so-called Millennial generation that preceded today's teens—but as an expectation. And this affects the way these students learn.

"If we look at kids who spend their entire day online multitasking, in many ways teachers are still asking them to learn one task at a time and in an old-fashioned way," he said.

Not everyone would agree that multitasking is a healthy attribute of today's students. A Stanford University study released last year found that high-tech jugglers have problems paying attention, controlling their memory, or switching from one job to another as well as those who prefer to complete one task at a time.

The study, "Cognitive control in media multitaskers," published last August in the academic journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, found that heavy media multitaskers performed worse on a test of task-switching ability.

Rosen said there are a few things about that study that bothered him. First, it was a laboratory study that asked participants to perform tasks no one would do outside a laboratory setting. Second, it used a relatively small sample size (41 students).

"This is quite a small sample to be drawing general conclusions about multitaskers," Rosen said, adding: "What is needed is *in vivo* studies." He said other research has suggested multitaskers take slightly longer to learn information but do not necessarily perform worse on exams.

In his book, *Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn*, Rosen suggests, among many other things, that teachers should begin to use cell phones as tools for mobile learning.

"If I were going to do a lecture on [President] Chester Arthur in a room full of kids where ... many of them have some type of smart phone, I would split them into groups and ask the students to find information about him," he said. "I would let the kids get engaged with the information. Then I would ask them to do something like create a Facebook or MySpace page based on that information."

Other recommendations that Rosen makes in his book include allowing students to generate original content online as part of lessons; teaching students which media sources to trust and which to avoid; and using the internet to help provide a global perspective.

One problem with today's multitasking iGeners "is that they spend more time gathering information in breadth rather than depth," Rosen acknowledged, "and I think this is an issue for educators." Teachers must teach media literacy and the difference between superficial gathering of information and deeper understanding, he said.

"But after all," he added, "isn't that the challenge for all educators?" 



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PEARSON

Survey: Women, minorities need STEM encouragement

Maya T. Prabhu
Assistant Editor

The science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) industry should make every effort to work from the top down to encourage women and minorities to pursue careers in those fields, according to a study by the Bayer Corp., a health-care and nutrition company.

The Bayer Facts of Science Education XIV survey polled more than 1,200 female, black, Hispanic, and American Indian chemists and chemical engineers, who also are members of the American Chemical Society, about childhood, academic, and workplace experiences that play a role in

attracting and retaining women and underrepresented minorities in STEM fields.

“Almost eight in 10 of our survey respondents say women and underrepresented minorities are missing because they were not encouraged to study STEM fields early on,” said Bayer Corp. President and Chief Executive Officer Greg Babe.

Mae C. Jemison, a chemical engineer and America’s first black female astronaut, noted that she was lucky when she was growing up to have access to scientists and science programs that allowed her to explore her interest in the field.

“When I was in grade school in Chicago, we thought an engineer was the person who

drove the train,” she said, pointing out that it was her access to teachers who were passionate about science that let her know becoming an engineer was an option.

Regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, interest in science begins in early childhood.

Nearly 60 percent of respondents said they first became interested in science by age 11. This parallels the findings of a 1998 Bayer Facts survey of American Ph.D. scientists, which included white men. In that survey, six in 10 also reported interest in science by age 11.

“All children have an innate interest in science and the world around them. But for many children, that interest hits roadblocks

along an academic system that is still not blind to gender or color. These roadblocks have nothing to do with intellect, innate ability, or talent,” Jemison said.

“On the contrary, they are the kinds of larger, external socio-cultural and economic forces that students have no control over. As students, they cannot change the fact that they do not have access to [high-] quality science and math education in their schools. But adults can. And we must.”

Jemison pointed out that her childhood and early academic experience were exceptions and not the rule.

The survey results identified the three top causes or contributors that respondents thought lead to underrepresentation in STEM fields.

Those causes include a lack of high-quality science and math education programs in poorer school districts (cited by 75 percent of respondents); persistent stereotypes that STEM isn’t for girls or minorities (66 percent); and financial issues related to the cost of education (53 percent).

Discouragement also is something that those surveyed said they have to face and overcome if they want to be successful in STEM fields.

“Sixty percent say college is the leading place they are discouraged,” Jemison said. “I had professors who were not entirely pleased to see me in their classrooms.”

In the survey, U.S. colleges were cited as the leading place in the American education system where discouragement happens, with 44 percent saying college professors were the individuals most likely to discourage. The survey found that the K-12 education system fell short as well, with respondents giving it a “D” for the job it does to encourage minorities to study STEM subjects and a “D+” for girls.

“If we want to achieve true diversity in America’s STEM workforce, we must first understand the root causes of underrepresentation and the going challenges these groups face,” Babe said. “We want to knock down barriers. If we can do that, we’ll be able to develop the attitudes, behaviors, opportunities, and resources that lead to success.”

Across the board, respondents gave their company, organization, or institution a “C” for placing women and underrepresented minorities in senior positions to serve as role models and mentors for the younger employees—something Babe said is extremely important in encouraging young scientists and engineers.

“We’re trying to identify mentors early in their careers for females or underrepresented minorities to help guide them through their career path,” he said.

Respondents also said science teachers play a larger role than parents in stimulating and sustaining interest in science: 70 percent of respondents said teachers have the most influence during the elementary years, and 88 percent said teachers have the most influence during the high school years. **ESN**



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Public access to school computers raises questions

Schools can use e-Rate funds to help citizens get online—but web filters could pose a challenge

Laura Devaney
Managing Editor

A move that will let schools use federal e-Rate funds to help their stakeholders get online by opening up their computer labs to the community after school hours has left some educators wondering how schools might let adults view age-appropriate web sites while still protecting children from inappropriate content.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on Feb. 18 approved a motion allowing school systems to let members of their community use e-Rate funded infrastructure after school hours. The FCC's order waives the rule requiring schools to use e-Rate funded equipment and services only for "educational purposes," and it's part of the agency's larger strategy to deliver broadband access to more Americans.

How to implement the new ruling was left to each school's discretion, and schools will have to do so without the benefit of additional e-Rate funds, the FCC said.

Schools don't have to take advantage of the rule change, an FCC spokeswoman said—but those that do must continue to adhere to the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which requires e-Rate recipients to use "technology protection measures" to keep minors from accessing inappropriate content.

"This action will leverage Universal Service funding to serve a larger population at no increased cost to the e-Rate program," the agency said in a statement. "If a school chooses to allow community access, the general public will be able to use



New rules could help spur broadband access, but many questions remain.

the internet access already present in schools for purposes such as job searches and applications, digital literacy programs, and online access to governmental services and resources. Increasing community access to the internet is particularly critical in communities where residential adoption of broadband internet access has historically lagged, including many rural, minority, and tribal communities."

But the ruling has raised several questions for school leaders.

"My biggest question is, how are we going to pay someone to supervise these computer labs after hours?" wrote Linda Hinton, the technology director for Colorado's Monte Vista School District, in an eMail message to eSchool News. "We are letting district staff go because of state cuts in funding. We don't have any funds for this. I guess if the salary was e-Rate dis-

countable, we could handle it."

As for balancing the needs of adults and children, Hinton said she would leave her district's internet filter operative during after-hours use of computer labs.

"Any sites that adults need for job searches and educational purposes shouldn't be affected by the filter," she wrote. "I am not sure about the feasibility of providing a [specific] network access account to someone who is only going to use it infrequently."

Nancy Willard, executive director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, said the FCC's expansion of the e-Rate program is encouraging, although a few important details must be resolved.

CIPA allows for the disabling of a filtering program if it's blocking access to a legitimate web site, and most public libraries will disable the filter if an adult requests this, Willard said.

One challenge stemming from the FCC's ruling, Willard said, is the way computers are arranged in school libraries or computer labs as compared to how they are arranged in public libraries. Public libraries often separate computers intended for use by children from general adult computers, and children must be supervised and not left to wander into an area where an adult might be using a filter-disabled computer.

"Further, in public libraries, there is a strong focus on ensuring patron privacy [through the] placement of computers and privacy screens," she said. "This approach serves many purposes, such as [when] an adult might be searching for sensitive medical information. But in schools, the place-

ment of the computers is designed to ensure the most effective supervision; all screens are to be easily visible."

School leaders also must consider how they would provide the additional staffing, security, and technical support that would be needed to open their facilities for public use after school hours, Willard said.

"I am not saying these issues cannot be handled—but they will need to be discussed and resolved," she said.

Willard said rural communities in particular stand to benefit from the ruling, and she proposed that school stakeholders consider community technology centers as another step toward greater broadband access.

"Why should the adults in these communities only have access after school hours or during school holidays?" she asked. "Would it not be possible to establish community technology centers that are open [during] all daytime and evening hours, that use the same bandwidth as the schools but are a separate program with separate rules, funding, et cetera?" **eSN**

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National Broadband Plan focuses on e-Rate, online learning

More students should have access to online learning, and the federal e-Rate program should be improved to encourage innovation, according to the National Broadband Plan unveiled March 16 by the FCC.

The plan has direct implications for education that are addressed in a 22-page section. It states that broadband can enable improvements in public education by facilitating the delivery of online content—and a key strategy for reaching this goal is to modernize the e-Rate.

Citing "inadequate connectivity speeds" and "bandwidth demands [that] are projected to rise dramatically over the next few years," the plan recommends establishing minimum broadband connectivity goals for schools and libraries and prioritizing e-Rate funds accordingly, while giving schools and libraries more flexibility to purchase the cheapest broadband solutions.

"A potential short-term change is to raise the e-Rate funding cap to adjust it for inflation. This is something that the FCC may act upon without Congressional intervention," said Scott Weston, communications director for e-Rate consulting firm Funds for Learning. "As the plan states, the e-Rate cap of \$2.25 billion per year hasn't been adjusted since the inception of the e-Rate program. This means that schools have less buying power today, in terms of e-Rate dollars, than they did in 1998."

The plan proposes to let the e-Rate fund wireless connectivity to portable learning devices. Students and educators should be allowed to take these devices off campus so they can continue learning outside school hours, it explains.

It also recommends that the government support online learning.

One barrier to realizing the full potential of online learning is that there is a limited pool of high-quality digital content that can be easily found, bought, accessed, and combined with other content, allowing teachers to customize classroom materials to their students' needs.

To help eliminate this barrier, it suggests that the U.S. Department of Education (ED), with support from the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the FCC, establish standards for locating, sharing, and licensing digital educational content by March 2011.

The federal government also should increase the supply of digital content available for learning, and Congress should consider taking legislative action to encourage copyright holders to grant educational digital rights of use, the plan says.

Another major barrier to online learning is that students often have trouble obtaining course credit for online classes, and teachers licensed in one state might not be able to teach online courses in another.

To address this concern, the plan calls

on state accreditation organizations to change their course accreditation and teacher certification requirements to allow students to take more courses for credit online and permit more online instruction across state lines.

To unlock the value of data and improve transparency, the plan recommends that ED encourage the adoption of standards for electronic educational records and develop digital financial data transparency standards for education.

Some FCC commissioners voiced concern over parts of the plan.

Commissioner Robert McDowell, one of two Republicans on the five-member panel, said the plan's recommendation to modernize the Universal Service Fund so that it supports broadband instead of regular telephone service would not do much good.

"Broadband deployment and adoption have flourished in the absence of such regulations. Not only do I doubt that such a reclassification would survive appeal, I don't see how foisting a regulatory framework first devised in the 19th century would help a competitive 21st-century marketplace continue to thrive," he said.

About two-thirds of U.S. households have high-speed internet access now. Many people in the remaining one-third could get broadband service but choose not to, because they think it's too expensive or they don't see a need for it. The

FCC plan calls for increasing adoption rates to more than 90 percent of the population, in part by creating a Digital Literacy Corps to teach people how to use the web.

When rural areas lack broadband access, it's often because phone and cable companies haven't found it worthwhile to invest in dragging high-speed lines to remote places that would have few subscribers. One way the FCC hopes to expand broadband use is with wireless technology.

The wireless industry currently licenses about 500 megahertz of the wireless spectrum. In a move similar to adding more lanes to a freeway, the FCC hopes to free up another 500 MHz over the next decade.

The agency hopes to get roughly 120 MHz of that spectrum from broadcasters of free, over-the-air TV. It would allow broadcasters to unload frequencies they don't need and share in the proceeds raised by auctioning those airwaves to wireless companies.

That proposal has run into fierce resistance from the National Association of Broadcasters, however. TV broadcasters already gave up more than 100 MHz of spectrum when they shut off analog signals last year. Many say they plan to use their remaining frequencies to transmit high-definition signals and to "multicast" multiple channels. **eSN**

First statewide Digital Learning Library launches

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

In a groundbreaking effort to give educators and students free access to standards-aligned digital media content, Pennsylvania has announced the launch of its Digital Learning Library (DLL), which aims to bring learning into the 21st century through interactive and customizable digital content.

Recently, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) began a project to create digital learning resource centers aligned with state standards and connected with student data systems. The goal was to help teachers find free,

high-quality educational materials to help them address their students' learning needs.

Now, thanks to a partnership with the Public Broadcasting Service and Penn State Public Broadcasting (WPSU, an affiliate of PBS), Pennsylvania has created and launched the first of these state DLLs, providing thousands of digital assets to classrooms statewide.

"Digital media is transforming children's lives, from the way they play to the way they learn," said Paula Kerger, president and CEO of PBS.

"Digital media allows for collaboration and interaction—it's not just information that's being fed to you. We must embrace

technology in order to teach to today's children. It is with this in mind that PBS is proud to partner with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and WPSU to provide the commonwealth of Pennsylvania [with] a standards-aligned DLL."

The DLL harnesses the most relevant curriculum materials produced by public TV stations to help boost achievement.

"A lot of focus today is placed on assessments," said Gerald Zahorchak, Pennsylvania's secretary of education. "But what really needs to be in place as well is a strong curricular framework."

Zahorchak described the components that make up the Pennsylvania standards-

aligned-system (SAS): clear standards, fair assessments, a curricular framework, instructional materials and resources, and interventions and safety nets.

"In order to have a great curricular framework, you have to have the best materials and resources, and that's why we decided on this partnership," he said.

All assets in the DLL are aligned with state and local standards, and the collection hosts both nationally and locally created content. The content is offered solely through local public TV stations, and assets include video, audio, images, games, and interactive content.

"We want to maximize the ... power of broadband," said Rob Lippincott, senior vice president of education for PBS. "We think this is coming at a great time, [owing] to the recent announcement of the National Broadband Plan. We also wanted to help individualize instruction by providing multiple modalities of learning."

According to Ted Krichels, general manager of WPSU, Penn State University is helping to create the content to be included in the DLL, thanks to the work of its Nobel Prize-winning faculty and its strength in research and education practice.

"Not only do we have expertise in the creation of digital media, but we also help to underscore the educational mission of local public broadcasting," explained Krichels.

Krichels demonstrated two specific examples of the kinds of media teachers can expect to find in the DLL.

One was a video of a 3-D representation of a city's underground water infrastructure. The other demonstration showed students, through expert interviews and satellite imagery, how geospatial technology can influence a person's life.

The DLL lets educators search for digital assets by subject and by grade level.

After completing either a basic or advanced search, educators can find relevant digital content, as well as any posted lesson plans, instructional content, resources, or assessments.

Each asset includes a description, grade level, the length of the asset, the size of the media file, and the rights and credit information.

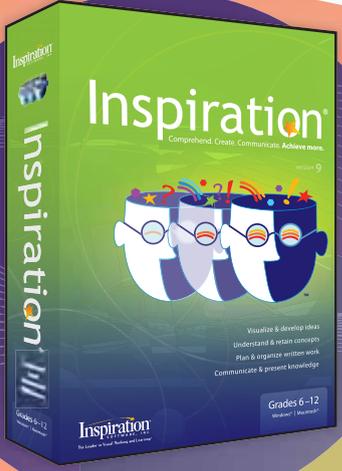
"Most of the content available is an open education resource, meaning that it can be downloaded, embedded, and remixed however you or your student desire. However, each individual asset is protected by the rights of the producer; it is up to the producer how the asset can be used, and it will say as much with each asset," Zahorchak said.

Zahorchak also said there is a gate-keeping process to the materials that are loaded to the DLL, meaning that every asset will be targeted to state and local standards.

Content is currently being created and uploaded daily.

"It's not about quantity or how long each asset is," said Krichels. "It's about the quality." 

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Survey: Digital access, collaboration a must for students

Laura Devaney
Managing Editor

In a national survey that reveals K-12 students' use of technology at home and at school, students overwhelmingly agreed that access to digital media tools and the ability to collaborate with peers both inside and outside of school can greatly enhance education.

"Speak Up 2009: Creating Our Future: Students Speak Up about their Vision for 21st Century Schools," the latest ed-tech survey from the nonprofit group Project Tomorrow, identifies the emergence of "free agent learners"—students who increasingly take learning into their own hands and use technology to create personalized learning experiences.

"For these students, the schoolhouse, the teacher, and the textbook no longer have an exclusive monopoly on knowledge, content, or even the education process, and therefore it should not be surprising that students are leveraging a wide range of learning resources, tools, applications, outside experts, and each other to create a personalized learning experience that may or may not include what is happening in the classroom," the report says.

The survey indicates that students increasingly are seeking out and obtaining technology-based learning experiences outside of school—experiences that are not directed by a teacher or associated with class assignments or homework.

"Students, regardless of community demographics, socio-economic backgrounds, gender, and grade, tell us year after year that the lack of sophisticated use of emerging technology tools in school is, in fact, holding back their education—and in many ways disengages them from learning," the report says.

Those activities include using Facebook to collaborate with, share information with, and tutor other students; taking online assessments and tests; using cell phones and applications for self-organization and productivity; using podcasts and videos to improve in challenging subject areas; taking online courses to learn more about interesting subjects, and not necessarily for a grade; and finding experts to connect with online and share new ideas and content.

The report identifies three essential elements of a new emerging student vision for American education:

- **Social-based learning:** Students want to leverage emerging communications and collaboration tools to create and personalize networks of experts to inform their education experience.
- **Untethered learning:** Students envision technology-enabled learning experiences that transcend the classroom walls and are not limited by resource constraints, traditional funding streams, geography, community assets, or even teacher knowledge or skills.
- **Digitally-rich learning:** Students see the use of relevancy-based digital tools, content, and resources as a key to driving learning productivity, and not just about engaging students in learning.

Social-based learning

Fifty-one percent of responding students in grades 6-8 said they use communication and collaboration tools to communicate with other students for completing schoolwork, and 28 percent use those tools to communicate with teachers. More than 60 percent of high school students use these tools to com-

municate with other students on schoolwork, and more than 40 percent communicate with teachers in the same way.

Forty-three percent of students in grades 9-12 said their primary method of communicating with friends online is through a social-networking web site.

When it comes to communication and collaboration outside of school, 72 percent of ninth through 12th graders, roughly 65 percent of students in grades 6-8, and almost 30 percent of students in grades 3-5 use instant messaging, eMail, and text messaging to communicate with others.

Of "free agent" learners who use technology on their own for learning, 26 percent of high school students and approximately 17 percent of middle school students have sought help from other students via a social network.

About a third of middle and high school students reported they are unable to access personal communications accounts or send messages to classmates during the school day—something the report notes is a "major obstacle to using technology more at school."

Students also indicated they would like to use those same communication tools to correspond with teachers electronically.

Ninety-one percent of parents communicate via text message, instant message, or eMail, and 51 percent use a social networking web site.

But when asked which technology tools would best drive student achievement, only 20 percent of parents identified collaboration tools such as blogs, social networking sites, or wikis. One-third cited communication tools such as eMail or text messaging.

Almost half (47 percent) of middle school students and 40 percent of high school students said discussing how to solve a problem with classmates and helping other students with their problems would be the most helpful instructional techniques or learning methodologies in mathematics.

The same social-based learning approach also appeared in middle and high school students' responses to how they would like to learn more about science, technology, engineering, and math career fields. More than half of students in both groups said that meeting successful role models and talking to professionals about their jobs would be helpful.

Untethered learning

More than half of middle and high school students have access to iPods, desktop computers, laptops/tablets/netbooks, and a cell phone without internet capabilities. Nearly 60 percent of students in grades 3-5 and almost 40 percent of K-2 students had access to an iPod.

But although students have access to a wide range of personal technologies, when asked to identify the major obstacles preventing technology use in their schools, the top response from students in grades 6-12 was, "I cannot use my own cell phone, smart phone, or mp3 player."

That marked the first time school filters and firewalls have not been reported as the No. 1 obstacle for student technology use in school.

If allowed at school, 70 percent of high school students and almost 65 percent of

middle school students would use mobile devices to look up information on the internet. More than half of both groups would work on projects with classmates, and nearly half (48 percent of high school students and roughly 45 percent of middle school students) would access online textbooks.

When asked to recommend how schools could make technology use for schoolwork easier, the top five student responses indicated that access is key. Students (1) want to use their own cell phones, smart phones, or mp3 players; (2) would like to use their own laptops or netbooks; (3) said unlimited internet access throughout schools is important; (4)



Students want more social-based learning experiences.

reported that social networking access is desirable; and (5) said they would like tools to help them communicate with classmates.

Teachers' biggest concerns about using mobile devices in the classroom include student distractions (67 percent); access issues, with not all students having mobile devices (55 percent); and concerns over students cheating with the devices (30 percent). Roughly one-fifth said they do not know how to use the devices within instruction effectively (21 percent) or would need curriculum resources to support the use of mobile devices in class (20 percent).

While students say internet access is essential at school, many parents said they are concerned about their children meeting strangers online (75 percent), sharing too much personal information (73 percent), encountering child predators (72 percent), and encountering inappropriate web sites (67 percent).

Fewer than half of parents (41 percent) said they believe their child's school has effective processes in place for internet safety and protecting personal information. Forty-one percent of high school students and 38 percent of middle school students said they know how to be safe and protect themselves online.

Student interest in online learning is increasing, but students reported that a lack of information about available classes and logistical steps for taking an online class are their primary barriers.

High school students' top reasons for taking an online class are working at their own pace (51 percent), earning college credit (49 percent), and taking classes not offered at their own schools (44 percent). Middle school students reported the same reasons, as well as a desire to obtain extra help on schoolwork.

Digitally-rich learning experiences

Students' use of digital media tools and mobile devices in their personal lives also

applies to their school lives. More than 30 percent of both middle and high school students use digital resources to take tests online. Seventy-nine percent of high school students and more than 60 percent of middle school students use these resources to complete writing assignments.

More than half of third through fifth graders use digital tools to play educational games, and nearly 30 percent use the tools to create slide shows, videos, or web pages for school.

Outside of school, nearly 60 percent of high school students and 65 percent of sixth through eighth graders use digital resources to upload or download videos, podcasts, or photos to the internet.

Roughly 65 percent of third through fifth graders play online games, and slightly more than 40 percent participate in 3D virtual reality.

Almost 45 percent of high school students and 40 percent of middle school students create or modify digital media.

Top student answers for the value of using video or online games as part of regular schoolwork or classroom activities included making it easier for students to understand difficult concepts, learning more about a subject, becoming more engaged

in a subject, and making practice problems more interesting.

Seventy-six percent of parents said that gaming appeals to different learning styles and increases student engagement. Fifty-seven percent said gaming develops problem solving and critical thinking skills.

Online textbooks are a hot topic with students as well.

"When asked to design the ultimate online textbook, the students focused on ... interactivity and relevancy of content, fostering collaborative learning, and personalizing the learning process," the report says.

Students said games, online tutors, links to real-time data and web sites, and animations and simulations should be included in an ideal online textbook. They would use those online texts to personalize learning through electronic highlights and notes, search terms, quizzes, brain teasers, cell phone downloads, and organizational tools.

Ninety-three percent of parents said they like the idea of online textbooks, and 47 percent believe online texts would be good investments for schools to make to improve student achievement.

Project Tomorrow surveyed 299,677 K-12 students, 26,312 parents, 38,642 teachers, 1,987 pre-service teachers, and 3,947 administrators representing 5,757 schools and 1,215 districts nationwide, including public (97 percent) and private (3 percent) schools. The student report is the first in a series of soon-to-be-released reports on technology and education. 

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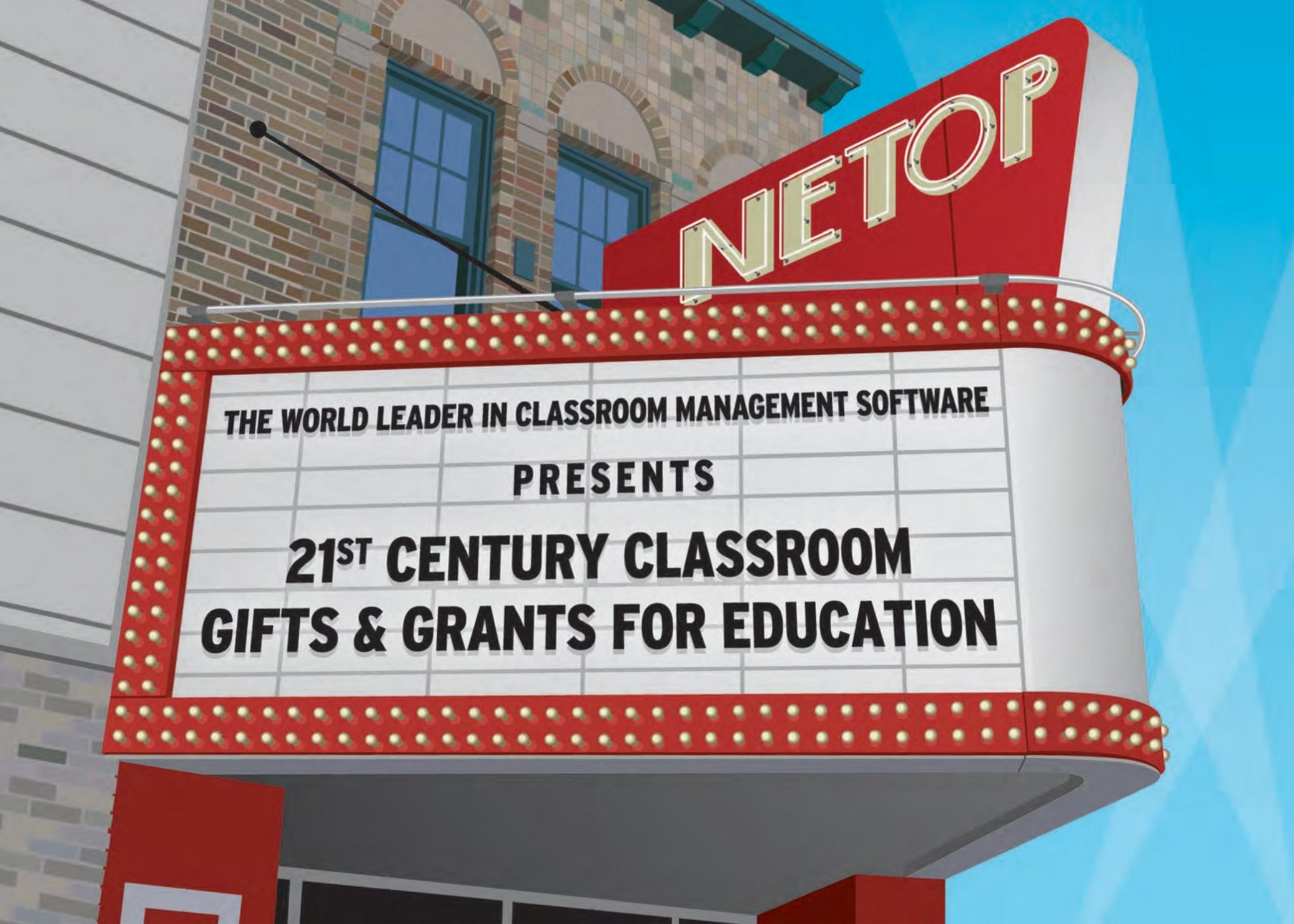
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Could net-neutrality ruling hinder online education?

From staff and wire reports

A federal court threw the future of internet regulations and U.S. broadband expansion plans into doubt April 6 with a far-reaching decision that went against the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The ruling poses a major hurdle for federal policy that school and college administrators hoped would ensure the growth of online education and make high-speed internet affordable for even the smallest schools.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that the FCC lacks the authority to require broadband providers to give equal treatment to all internet traffic flowing over their networks. That was a big victory for Comcast Corp., the nation's largest cable company, which had challenged the FCC's authority to impose such "net neutrality" obligations on broadband providers.

The ruling marks a serious setback for the FCC, which is trying to adopt official net-neutrality regulations. FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, a Democrat, argues that such rules are needed to prevent phone and cable companies from using their control over internet access to favor some online content and services over others.

Some observers fear that without net-neutrality rules, the price of online learning eventually could prove untenable for students. If broadband providers are left unchallenged, net-neutrality advocates say, the country's largest universities could pay telecommunications companies for preferential treatment, while small schools with smaller budgets would be at a distinct disadvantage in the online-learning market.

A group of more than 20 open internet and consumer advocacy organizations sent a letter to Genachowski Oct. 21 that said more than 1.6 million Americans have declared their support for net-neutrality laws.

"They do not want the internet to become just another closed network where large media entities pick winners and losers, like broadcasting and cable," the letter said.

The decision also has serious implications for the massive national broadband plan released by the FCC in March. The FCC needs clear authority to regulate broadband in order to push ahead with some of its key recommendations, including a proposal to expand broadband by tapping the federal fund that subsidizes telephone service in poor and rural communities.

In a statement, the FCC said it remains "firmly committed to promoting an open internet and to policies that will bring the enormous benefits of broadband to all Americans" and "will rest these policies ... on a solid legal foundation."

Markham Erickson, executive director of the Open Internet Coalition—which includes web giants like Google, YouTube, Facebook, and the ed-tech organization EDUCAUSE—said in an April 6 statement that the court decision means the FCC is "now unable to police the internet against anti-competitive and anti-consumer behavior by broadband providers" and could endanger the agency's national broadband plan, which has broad support among educators.

"Today's D.C. Circuit decision ... creates a dangerous situation, one where the health and openness of the internet is being held hostage by the behavior of the major telco and cable providers," Erickson said.

Comcast had no immediate comment.

The court case centered on Comcast's challenge of a 2008 FCC order banning the company from blocking its broadband subscribers from using an online file-sharing technology known as BitTorrent. The commission, at the time headed by Republican Kevin Martin, based its order on a set of net-neutrality principles it adopted in 2005 to prevent broadband providers from becoming online gatekeepers of content flowing over their lines. Those principles have guided the FCC's enforcement of communications laws on a case-by-case basis.

But Comcast argued that the FCC order was illegal because the agency was seeking to enforce mere policy principles, which don't have the force of regulations or law. That is one reason Genachowski is now trying to formalize those rules.

The FCC now defines broadband as a lightly regulated information service. That means it is not subject to the obligations that traditional telecommunications services have to share their networks with competitors and treat all traffic equally. But the agency argues that existing law gives it the authority to set rules for information services, including net-neutrality rules.

This most recent court decision rejected that reasoning, concluding that Congress has not given the FCC "untrammeled freedom" to regulate services without explicit legal authority.

With so much at stake, the FCC now has several options. It could ask Congress to give it explicit authority to regulate broadband. Or, it could appeal the decision to the Supreme Court.

But both of those steps could take too long, because the agency "has too many important things they have to do right away," said Ben Scott, policy director for the public interest group Free Press. The more likely scenario, Scott believes, is that the agency will simply reclassify broadband as a more heavily regulated telecommunications service. And that, ironically, could be the worst-case outcome from the perspective of the phone and cable companies, he noted.

"Comcast swung an ax at the FCC to protest the BitTorrent order," Scott said. "And they sliced right through the FCC's arm and plunged the ax into their own back."

For its part, the FCC offered no details on its next step other than to stress that it remains committed to the principle of net neutrality.

"Today's court decision invalidated the prior commission's approach to preserving an open internet," the agency's statement said. "But the court in no way disagreed with the importance of preserving a free and open internet; nor did it close the door to other methods for achieving this important end." **eSN**

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School webcam spying prompts call for new laws

From staff and wire reports

Sen. Arlen Specter, D-Pa., is pushing for new federal laws on electronic privacy as a school district in his home state struggles with a lawsuit over attempts to locate missing laptops by turning on webcams remotely—something that could have enabled it to record students at home.

Specter said at a field hearing of a Senate subcommittee March 29 that he believes existing wiretap and video-voyeurism statutes do not adequately address concerns in an era marked by the widespread use of cell-phone, laptop, and surveillance cameras.

"My family and I recognize that in today's society, almost every place we go outside of our home we are photographed and recorded by traffic cameras, ATM cameras, and store surveillance cameras," Blake Robbins, a student at Harriton High School who sued the Lower Merion School District in February, wrote in a statement read into the record at the hearing of the crime and justice subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"This makes it all the more important that we vigilantly safeguard our homes, the only refuge we have from this eyes-everywhere onslaught," he wrote.

Robbins accuses the Lower Merion School District of spying by secretly activating webcams on school-issued laptops. District officials admit they did so but said they were trying only to locate 42 lost or stolen computers.

Neither Robbins nor his parents attended the session, which did not specifically focus on the Lower Merion case—the subject of ongoing county and FBI investigations. Instead, five experts debated how best to strike a balance between privacy and



Sen. Arlen Specter, D-Pa.

security concerns.

Lawyer Kevin Bankston of the Electronic Frontier Foundation argued that wiretap laws, which now cover audio recordings, should be broadened to include videotaped surveillance. But others disagreed, arguing that wiretap charges should not apply, lest they entangle innocent people using software tracking programs to try to find their own stolen phones or laptops.

"If it does fall under [the Wiretap Act] in the new legislation, we hope there will be an exception for stolen devices," said John Livingston, chairman of Absolute

Software Corp., the Vancouver, British Columbia-based company that acquired the LANrev TheftTrack software program deployed by Lower Merion. (Absolute Software says it no longer promotes the use of LANrev for anti-theft purposes.)

The panel debated whether any new law should focus on the intent of the person using the camera; whether the subject's location affords them an expectation of privacy, such as a home or locker room; or the full context of the situation.

Only one person from the Lower Merion district testified: a parent opposed to the Robbins family's lawsuit, who urged a middle ground between security and privacy concerns.

Bob Wegbreit said a warning might suffice to let families know the district might activate webcams without a student's knowledge. Students then could choose to keep the computers in other parts of the house, instead of their bedrooms, said Wegbreit, whose group fears the lawsuit will damage the upscale district's finances and reputation.

Nearly 500 district parents have signed a petition opposing the class-action suit.

"We see no benefit to the school district or to the students if a large damage award is gained by the plaintiffs," said Larry Silver, one of several attorneys for the anti-lawsuit group, which has filed documents in federal court asking for permission to intervene in the case. Silver also has a child in the wealthy school district on

Philadelphia's Main Line.

"We want a positive resolution to this matter," Silver said. "We want them to get back to their educational mission."

Federal legislation might help clarify what school districts, employers, or others can and cannot do, Wegbreit said during the March 29 field hearing.

"There's no question that I believe the federal government should be legislating in this area," said Fred H. Cate, an Indiana University law school professor who specializes in cyber security issues. "We've seen a proliferation of video cameras in every aspect of our lives."

Specter, the only senator in attendance at the March 29 field hearing, agreed to lead the effort, noting that at least one federal judge voiced concerns a quarter century ago that privacy laws were not keeping up with emerging technology.

"My sense is my colleagues will be responsive," Specter said. "If there is a gap, it ought to be closed ... after 25 years." **eSN**

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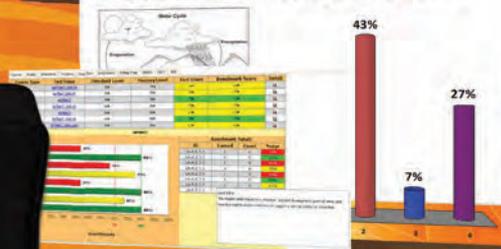
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Program Specialist
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Budget cuts...

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And though President Obama's federal budget plan for fiscal year 2011 requests \$4 billion more for education than the previous year, the administration is proposing to shift a greater percentage of federal dollars from formula-based grants to competitive grants—a move that school leaders fear will further squeeze their limited resources.

The results are likely to include more budget cuts, more job cuts, and fewer resources for programs and personnel. AASA warns—a scenario that doesn't bode well for education technology or other school-reform initiatives.

"The economic downturn persists at the state and local levels, a reality that needs to be considered as Congress and the Obama administration move forward with both the federal budget process and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," said Dan Domenech, AASA's executive director. "Our members were clear in articulating their concern about the cessation of [stimulus] dollars, the proposed level funding for IDEA and Title I, and the significant shift to competitive grants within the federal education funding process."

The survey, which polled 453 school ad-



Budget cuts will be worse this fall.

ministrators in March, found that the economic climate of school systems doesn't reflect the recovery beginning to take hold in other sectors. In fact, school budget cuts will be noticeably more significant for 2010-11 than they were in the previous two years, the survey suggests.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents said they plan to delay technology purchases in 2010-11, up from 29 percent in 2009-10.

Half of respondents said they plan to delay or eliminate instructional improvement strategies next year, up from 22 percent in 2009-10.

Despite an influx of stimulus money, two-thirds of school leaders (68 percent) said they were forced to cut personnel in 2009-10—and 90 percent anticipate having to do so in 2010-11. Class sizes also are expected to balloon this fall: While only 9 percent of respondents said they increased class sizes in the 2008-09 school year, that number grew to 26 percent in 2009-10 and is expected to reach 62 percent for 2010-11.

After holding steady at two percent for both 2008-09 and 2009-10, the percentage of respondents who are considering reducing operations to a four-day school week rose to 13 percent for the coming year. And more than a third of respondents (34 percent) are considering eliminating summer school this year, up from 8 percent in 2008-09 and 14 percent in 2009-10.

A significantly larger percentage of school leaders plan to reduce the number of elective courses they offer this fall. While only 16 percent reported this action in 2009-10, 51 percent said they will do this in 2010-11.

While school leaders said they understand the role of competitive grants in spurring education reform, they raised a

number of concerns about the administration's approach in their responses to the survey.

Because schools can't count on receiving competitive grant dollars, respondents said, this funding mechanism leads to budget uncertainty and therefore is unlikely to lead to the kind of long-term innovation and reform that federal officials are hoping for. Also, applying for competitive grants requires schools to commit resources to pursue a revenue stream that might not come to fruition—and many school systems, especially small or rural ones, just don't have the resources to do so.

"Financially strapped school districts across the nation were clear in reporting that they do not have the capacity to complete a competitive grant [application]," said AASA President Mark Bielang, superintendent in Paw Paw, Mich. **eSN**

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Plan...

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mic subjects of reading and math, and better use of data to make sure students are meeting these more rigorous standards.

The new NETP, released in March, refers to these broader administration goals—but it also calls on school leaders to reinvent teaching and learning, with a focus on personalizing instruction and infusing 21st-century skills into the curriculum.

Now, some educators are wondering whether it's possible to achieve the goals outlined in the NETP while simultaneously meeting the tougher ESEA requirements the administration is proposing—and all at a time when school budgets continue to decline.

"In many places, the report discusses critical thinking, complex problem solving, collaboration, and multimedia communication (a.k.a. 21st-century competencies)," wrote Bill MacKenty, an instructional designer at the Hunter College Campus Schools in New York City. "We read about goals of creating inquisitive, creative, resourceful thinkers, informed citizens, effective problem [solvers], groundbreaking pioneers, and visionary leaders. But the report also clearly articulates the importance of data-based instruction and data-based decisions. How does this report imagine education in the context of quantitative data and qualitative experience?"

He continued: "The report says data, data, data. I get it. But the report also says schools can't be 'information factories.' Where do those ends meet?"

MacKenty is one of dozens of educators who've left comments for the U.S. Department of Education (ED) on the NETP web site. He's not alone in seeing a potential conflict between the plan's call for innovation and the administration's overall school-reform blueprint.

A commenter identified as "Shane" noted that "using technology and integrating it into instructional practices will not prepare students for the 21st century without other major changes to the system of education."

He added: "The focus of the federal and state governments on high-stakes testing is in direct contradiction to creating an environment where humans learn best. Furthermore, it perpetuates the idea that all students should be the same. Students are not the same. People are not the same. ... Stop attaching funding to only standardized test scores. Then, perhaps schools could begin moving towards creating an environment where 21st-century skills can develop."

ED is seeking feedback on the plan as officials look to implement its recommendations. But the comments of MacKenty and others illustrate the many challenges the department will face in bringing its ed-tech plan to fruition. Another is funding.

"The initiatives and ideas proposed in this draft are valid, timely, and logical for the world we live in," wrote a commenter who identified himself as "Russ." "However, ... I fear that broadband/wireless and 1-1 programs are an impossibly high mark to attain in the near term. Has anyone from the federal government looked at the flawed and inefficient way that our K-12 schools spend money on technology? We're locked into the same nonsensical FY cycle as everyone else. Technology, at the K-12 level, is still viewed as a luxury, not a utility, and as such is subject to discretionary spending cuts like any other thing. As long as our public schools do not see technology expenses as the 'cost of doing business,' then we'll continue to be a day late and a dollar short."

Wrote another commenter, "Tom": "Where is the money coming from? Many more dollars are needed to enact this plan, even if we are careful how we spend it."

A commenter named Vic thinks the plan focuses too much on technology's role as an educational tool, and not enough on its role as a subject that students should be learning about.

"I am concerned that the plan will not help raise the bar," Vic wrote. "In 112 pages, there is but one mention of computer science. ... We have a crisis in America, with students not having the opportunity to learn [in] any depth about technology. There is no call for [collaboration] between K-12 and higher ed to develop programs that help provide our children with the best technology education in the world. ... We force students to learn foreign languages when everyone in the world is learning English, but ignore the most important language for their future—the language of computers."

Much of the online discussion about the plan focuses on research and development, and how federal officials can spur the kind of innovation the plan calls for.

A commenter named David suggested replicating the X Prize for public education. The X Prize Foundation is a non-profit organization that seeks to create radical breakthroughs for the benefit of society by fostering innovation through financial competition.

"The success of the X Prize is rather fascinating—both in the drive and enthusiasm it creates in all types of developers, ... the concept has been shown to be such a powerful motivator for jump-starting progress in a variety of areas," David wrote. "Why not find ways to create certain 'outcome-based prizes,' much like the X Prize for education. The government has not typically been involved in such fashion, but why not—if it can be a better way to spend tax dollars and produce an effective outcome for education?"

Despite a number of concerns about the plan, many stakeholders expressed strong support for some of its components.

"As a physician who takes care of chil-

dren with Down syndrome and other disabilities, I am pleased to see that the draft National Educational Technology Plan recognizes UDL as an important educational framework for ensuring that *all* students receive high quality instruction and accurate assessments," wrote a commenter named Brian. He was one of many stakeholders who said they were pleased to see the plan include this strategy for teaching and learning.

Jim Fruchterman, president of Benetech, wrote that he "strongly support[s] the NETP's recommendations on open educational resources (OERs)."

"I think that wider use of OERs has the opportunity to address many of the NETP's goals," Fruchterman wrote: "Make textbooks more affordable; make it easier to make the textbook content accessible; make it easier to adapt textbooks to students with special needs..."

He continued: "We invest a great deal in educational materials. A robust OER offering will create a baseline to ensure that nobody gets left out of the educational opportunities we believe are the birthright of Americans. Economically depressed school systems will have access to the latest materials, even if they don't have the budget. Home-schoolers will [have] a complete set of textbooks for whatever subjects they need. Parents will be able to independently access the learning content that meets the relevant standards, and be better able to assist their children." **eSN**

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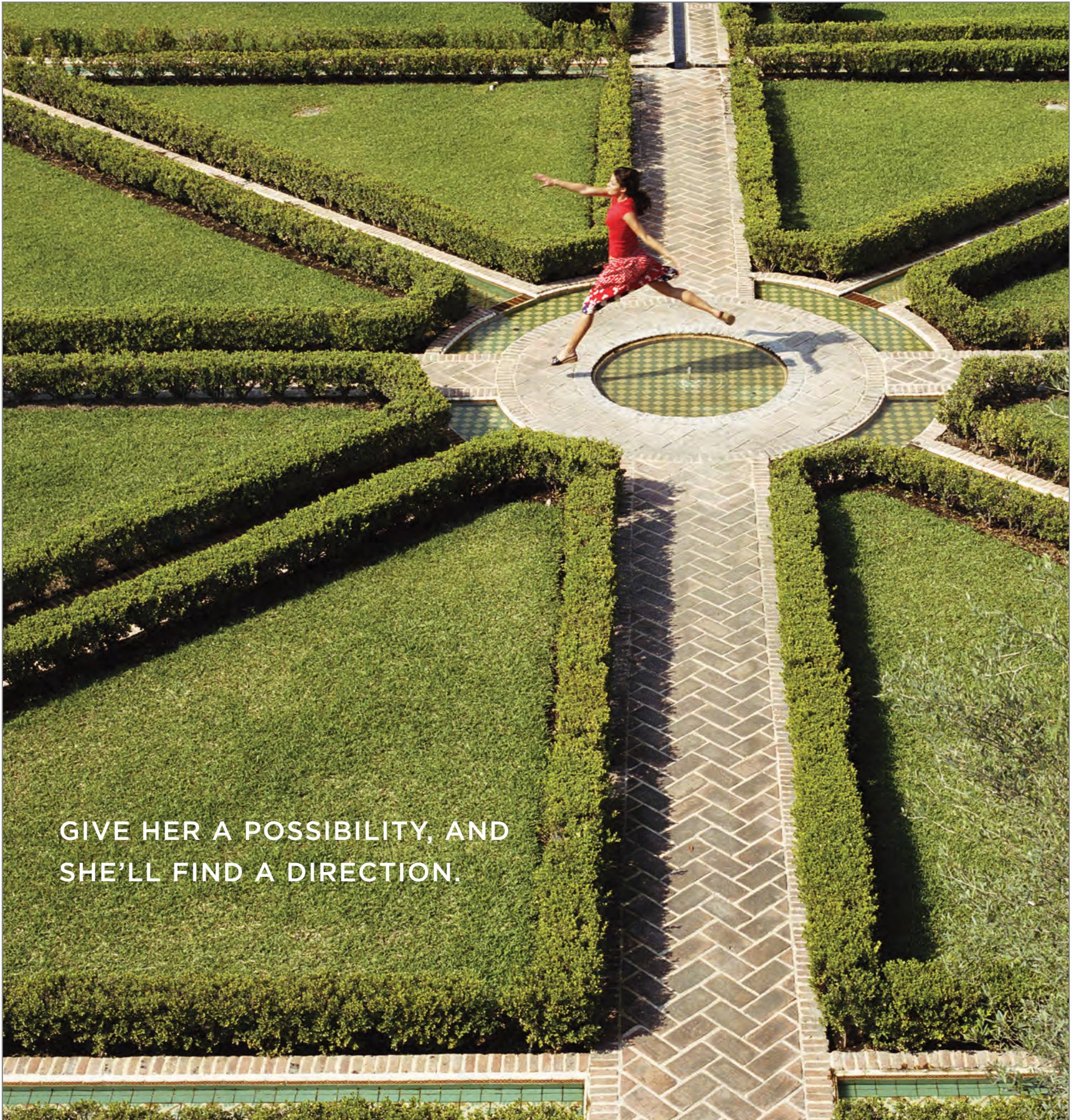
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Security checkpoint

Schools beef up security for internet applications

Dennis Carter
Assistant Editor

K-12 schools and colleges are adding extra layers of security to web applications that are being used for everything from eMail service to group assignments. The extra security is particularly desired as administrators use the applications to store sensitive information that could compromise student and faculty privacy.

Google Apps has risen to prominence in education's move toward web-based tools that store massive amounts of data and allow for collaboration. Google announced in February that 7 million students—about half of all college students in the U.S.—now use the company's applications, such as Google Sites, Google Docs, and Gmail.

With invaluable information stored online and vulnerable to any hacker who can figure out a single password, administrators are looking for ways to ensure that student and educator data are kept safe with more complex security methods.

The widespread use of web-based programs, a trend known as cloud computing, also has required students to remember a host of user names and passwords.

This prompts students to jot down user names and passwords on stray pieces of paper in a dorm room or office, which makes their online information vulnerable to classmates and passersby alike, said Jon Brody, a spokesman for TriCipher, a

California-based company that makes myOneLogin, a program that uses a single sign-in for more than 2,000 internet applications.

myOneLogin can ensure that a student's term paper can't be accessed with one password. Instead, the program will not allow hackers to access an account from a computer that it doesn't recognize. If a student forgets his or her password, myOneLogin will send a temporary password to the person's cell phone. The password will expire after 30 seconds, Brody said.

"Universities already do a good job of taking care of information behind their firewall in their infrastructure," Brody said, referring to traditional campus network security before web applications became commonplace. "But now with web applications, the problem has changed a little bit. Now they're dependent on the [security of the] applications."

St. Michael's Roman Catholic School in the United Kingdom began using myOneLogin last year, and the school's technology official said there hasn't been a reported security breach since.

Damien Kelly, head of eLearning at St. Michael's, said he was "very nervous" when staff and faculty decided to store sensitive student information on Google Apps, but the added layer of online security has kept student records safe from internal and external attacks.

"Security has become an issue for everybody now" that web applications are used by students and teachers, he said. "It's something new ... and we realized it would take a new approach."

Web applications that are accessible at any time to students and their teachers, Kelly said, have gained popularity in education, in part because the technology creates a new level of transparency.

"You can tell if a particular student isn't pulling [his or her] weight in a group project," he said. "And all the excuses you can have [for missing homework assignments] are all gone."

Microsoft also has attracted schools and colleges with its application offerings. The company announced in February that academics and researchers could apply for grants that would give them three-year access to Microsoft Azure, a program that offers enormous data storage and computing capabilities using the corporation's data centers.

Microsoft offers Live@edu, a web-based program that enables student collaboration and allows teachers to distribute homework and PowerPoint presentations online.

Despite the trend toward secure login add-ons, Google Apps provides a secure environment for schools, said Jeff Keltner, business development manager for Google Apps for Education.

Keltner said school employees and students must contact their domain administrator before they make any password changes to their Google Apps accounts, helping to mitigate unauthorized password switches that can lead to stolen information.

"We take security extremely seriously and work hard to make sure that all of our systems are maximally secure," Keltner said. "In that vein, passwords are one of the critical aspects of security for all our systems, including Google Apps."

Google Apps for Education, he said, offers extra web security for schools and organizations who want more than the standard features. The extras include smart cards, certificates, and biometrics that make hackers' jobs far more difficult.

"This is critical for schools, who often have open networks on campus connected to the internet," Keltner said. 

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Assessment ...

continued from page 1

dent learning,” says Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE) Senior Fellow Robert Rothman, author of a recent issue brief called “Principles for a Comprehensive Assessment System.”

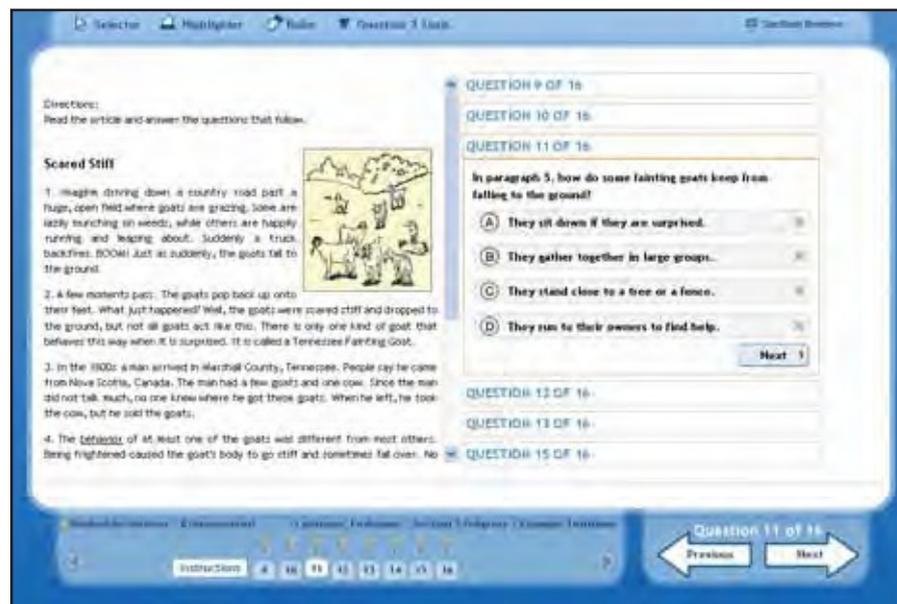
The Obama administration aims to change that. U.S. Department of Education (ED) officials are now offering more than \$360 million in the first wave of federal grants to help states redesign their assessments—and technology is expected to play a significant role in the process.

The vast majority of this money—\$350 million—has been set aside from the “Race to the Top” competition to help states develop new tests based on the Common Core Standards in English and math. Another \$10.7 million is available to encourage innovate test formats that are more accessible for students with disabilities and that use multiple measures of student achievement.

“Unless we take action—unless we step up—there are countless children who will never realize their full talent and potential,” President Obama said during a video address as he announced his administration’s blueprint for overhauling the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in February. “I don’t accept that future for them. And I don’t accept that future for the United States of America.”

Efforts to rethink assessment began with a series of public meetings from November to January, during which federal officials heard from 42 experts and nearly 80 members of the public. From these meetings emerged a framework for the administration’s grant competitions, which aim to support the development of better state assessments that measure higher-order thinking skills and not just multiple-choice responses.

States will have until May 27 to apply for \$10.7 million in grants through a program called “Enhanced Assessment Instruments.” To apply, states must team up with a higher-education institution or other



Pearson's TestNav can be customized to state requirements.

research facility to develop a system for evaluating student achievement based on “multiple measures ... from multiple sources,” and one that can chart students’ progress over time. Preference will be given to projects that increase the accessibility and validity of tests for students with disabilities.

ED will hand out roughly seven grants through this program, ranging in value from \$750,000 to \$2 million.

In addition, states had until April 29 to declare their intention to apply for the \$350 million in Race to the Top funds for creating new assessments, and final applications are due June 23. Funding will be given to one or two consortia of states to build new assessments around the Common Core Standards in reading and math, and eligible consortia must include at least 15 states. The new tests must be implemented within each participating state no later than the 2014-15 school year, ED said.

Applicants seeking these Race to the Top funds must “use technology to the maximum extent appropriate to develop, administer, and score assessments and report [on] results,” according to the agency’s re-

quest for proposals.

In developing their exams, participating states also must use “an industry-recognized, open-licensed interoperability standard” approved by federal officials, to ensure that states will be able to switch seamlessly from one technology platform to another if they need to.

Of the \$350 million, \$30 million will be set aside for a separate competition to support the development of common high school course exams by a consortium of five or more states.

The goal of all of these competitions is to spur the development of new tests that can provide a more accurate and comprehensive picture of each student’s progress and college or career readiness. But the grants also could hasten the delivery of exams via computer in states across the nation.

One company that has extensive experience in developing computer-based summative exams is Pearson, whose TestNav high-stakes testing platform is customizable to state requirements.

TestNav launched in 2000 and last year was used to administer 4.5 million tests in

13 states, Pearson says. The latest upgrade to the system, TestNav 7, is completely web-based—meaning students can use any standard web browser to take a high-stakes exam.

TestNav’s features illustrate the kinds of capabilities that computer-based testing could bring to summative exams. For one thing, the platform allows states to build accommodations into the testing process for special-needs students, such as the ability to enlarge the text, allow for more time, and embed audio files that would read passages aloud to students.

TestNav also can make the test-taking experience more dynamic and interactive for students, allowing them to demonstrate the kinds of higher-order thinking skills that would be hard to show in a pencil-and-paper test.

For instance, Minnesota is using the system to have students answer science questions in which they perform various tasks by manipulating virtual science equipment on the screen. They can figure out the mass of a rock by dragging and dropping it onto a virtual scale, and they can calculate its volume by dropping it into a virtual beaker of water.

And, because the exams are computer-scorable, students and educators can get near-immediate feedback on results.

“The biggest challenges we face with implementation today is school infrastructure, meaning there’s just not enough computers for all the students. We’re hoping these problems might change soon,” said Tracy Freeman, director of program technology management for Pearson. 

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New test measures students' digital literacy skills

Maya T. Prabhu
Assistant Editor

Employers are looking for candidates who can navigate, critically evaluate, and make sense of the wealth of information available through digital media—and now educators have a new way to determine a student’s baseline digital literacy with a certification exam that measures the test-taker’s ability to assess information, think critically, and perform a range of real-world tasks.

The test, *iCritical Thinking* Certification, created by the Educational Testing Service and Certiport, reveals whether or not a person is able to combine technical skills with experiences and knowledge.

Today’s students need to be able to think critically and effectively solve problems while using technology, Certiport explains—going beyond simply searching for information. They also must evaluate the legitimacy of the information, put it in context, and then apply problem-solving and decision-making skills.

“The test and certification program is designed to help employers [and educators] know that a student is ready for the workforce or for academia,” said Quinn Sutton, Certiport’s senior vice president.

Designed for students with at least a 10th grade reading level, *iCritical Thinking* allows students to demonstrate the ability to think critically within technology-enabled academic and workplace environments. About an hour in length, the test features 14 tasks based on real-world scenarios such as extracting information from a database, drawing conclusions from a spreadsheet, or composing an eMail based on findings—tasks students would be expected to do in the 21st-century workplace.

The test simulates the use of common, vendor-neutral applications to measure students’ information and communications technology (ICT) literacy skills. Each task takes about four minutes to complete. The test produces individual score and group report summaries for instructors.

Monica Brooks, Marshall University’s assistant vice president for Information Technology: Online Learning and Libraries, said her school plans to use *iCritical Thinking* beginning in the fall.

Marshall University will use the certification in two different ways. A sampling of freshman will take *iCritical Thinking* as a part of their first-year seminar as a way to benchmark skills and inform instructors about the topics that need to be covered.

Marshall is also part of a state-run program that helps working adults receive a Regents Bachelor of Arts degree.

Brooks plans to use the certification at the end of her Instructional Technology of Libraries class to measure how well students learned the advanced digital literacy skills taught during the class.

“It’s perfect timing [for the certification to be released], because people need these skills. People can Google, but a lot of times they don’t know what to do with that information,” she said. “It’s impor-

tant for students to be proficient so they know how to use the data.”

Sutton said the certification, which was launched last November, is unique in that it isn’t a traditional multiple-choice test, but presents test-takers with real-life scenarios.

“It’s not product training,” Sutton said. “It’s seeing if you can use and apply the skills you possess. It reflects what we do every day.”

Sutton said the certification is geared toward the business environment, adding that as the test becomes more broadly available and understood, he believes more companies will begin to look for applicants with the *iCritical Thinking* Certification.

“Based on the current economy, it’s so relevant for students to become more competitive. They need to be able to hit the ground running,” he said. 





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Developers seek to link iPad with education

Applications for Apple's new tablet include programs to help with science, math, languages, and research

Dennis Carter
Assistant Editor

Technology experts say Apple's latest gizmo, the iPad, won't replace students' laptops, but a menu of applications could help teach the periodic table, a range of languages, and a host of other academic subjects.

More than 300,000 iPads were sold on April 3, the day the product was released, Apple announced—and education technology enthusiasts finally got to experiment with the device that Apple CEO Steve Jobs describes as a “game changer.” Apple also said new iPad owners downloaded more than a million applications and more than 250,000 electronic books on the day of the product's release.

The iPad App Store is stocked with more than 150,000 downloadable programs, including some that might catch educators' attention.

“The Elements: A Visual Exploration” guides students through every part of the periodic table with stunning graphics of each element, presenting an old lesson plan in a captivating platform.

Hello-Hello.com, a language learning web site that launched last year, released its iPad app April 1, offering access to the site's entire Spanish course and allowing access to social networking sites where students can chat with native speakers of the language they are studying.

Hello-Hello.com plans to release iPad apps covering more languages in the coming weeks, according to a company announcement.

WolframAlpha, an online search engine that caters to researchers, released an iPad app that connects directly to the WolframAlpha supercomputing cloud, a potential boon for campus research teams who could continue their work with a device that is more portable than even a laptop, experts said.

Educational iPad applications can cost \$2, \$15, or more, but some programs are available for free, like the “USA Factbook,” which features descriptions of all 50 states. There's

also “States & Capitals” for no charge in the iPad apps store, designed for students preparing for a geography quiz or exam.

Ronald Yaros, an assistant journalism professor at the University of Maryland, was among the iPad early adopters—Yaros ordered the eReader device shortly after Apple unveiled it in February—and said the product could be useful for students interested in the evolution of news consumption.

“To those professors who don't use technology, it'll be revolutionary,” said Yaros, whose curriculum is centered around new media and technology. “I would say it's another tool in the toolbox. . . . It depends on how [tech-savvy] the professor is.”

Yaros, an avid Apple consumer with an iPhone and several Apple laptops, said the iPad takes some “getting used to” because its keys are flat on the screen, rather than raised like a traditional keyboard.

“You have to have it positioned just right to type,” he said.

News site applications, such as those from the *New York Times* and the Associated Press (AP), could serve as worthy journalism class lessons, Yaros said, especially for students studying electronic presentation of the news.

The AP iPad app, for instance, has headlines with corresponding photos near the bottom of the iPad screen. Yaros said the subtle placement of stories that might pique readers' interest—even when an iPad user is perusing another AP story—should be a lesson in itself for his students.

“The stories just kind of float across the bottom of the screen, and they come with what I would call explanatory headlines,” he said. “They don't tease the reader so much, and that's something I tell my students to avoid.”

Learning-management system giant Blackboard Inc. is joining the iPad store with its own application that lets students check their assignments, upcoming exams, and class grades on the Apple tablet. In an April 5 announcement, Blackboard said its app would be free for iPad users in “an ef-

fort to help institutions get started quickly in mobile [technologies] and to encourage use of the iPad as a learning tool.”

The program, called Blackboard Mobile Learn, will be available in June on platforms for students who use the iPhone operating system, BlackBerry, and Google Android.

Officials at Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Pa., were perhaps the earliest iPad adopters in education, announcing March 30 that all full-time students would receive an iPad beginning in the fall 2010 semester.

Providing the latest eReader for students is part of the university's Griffin Technology Advantage Program launch, which “provides students with the best in technology and collaborative learning tools, ensuring that Seton Hill students will be uniquely suited to whatever careers they choose—even those that have not yet been created.”

Seton Hill also will provide 13-inch MacBook for full-time students. The students will own each Apple device, meaning they can take the iPad and laptop off campus and keep the products after graduation, according to the university's announcement.

The University of Maryland partnered with the International Children's Digital Library (ICDL) to create a free iPad app for online children's books in more than 50 languages. The application gives access to a children's search engine designed by Maryland's Human-Computer Interaction Laboratory to sift through ICDL's 4,000 book titles.

“In today's digital and global age, children should be encouraged to read anytime and anywhere,” said Michael Levine, executive director of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, which supports investment and research in digital technologies. “ICDL for iPad does just that.”



Apple's iPad went on sale April 3.

The iPad has gotten mostly favorable reviews from technology writers, although some—such as *New York Times* technology columnist David Pogue—caution that the device isn't meant to replace a laptop.

“The iPad is . . . not nearly as good for creating stuff,” Pogue concludes. “On the other hand, it's infinitely more convenient for consuming it.” **eSN**

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\$99 tablet...

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ment until the product comes to market.

If the device works as advertised, they said, its price point could make it a very attractive option for putting technology into the hands of every student. But one potential hurdle could be the kind of applications it runs and whether these match with users' expectations.

Marvell described its Moby Tablet as a “bold new education initiative” that delivers “always-on, high performance multimedia” and features “live, real-time content, 1080 full HD and 3-D media, and full Flash internet.”

The Moby Tablet could “eliminate the need for students to buy and carry bound textbooks and an array of other tools,” said the company in a statement.

The Moby is powered by the Marvell ARMADA 600 series of processors. It features gigahertz-class processor speed, Wi-Fi/Bluetooth/FM/GPS connectivity, high performance 3-D graphics capability, and support for multiple software stan-

dards, according to the company—including Adobe and Windows Mobile.

Marvell hasn't said when the Moby would ship, and it has not yet released a full spec sheet.

In announcing the Moby during a keynote speech to publishers at the Future of Publishing conference in New York City, Marvell Co-Founder Weili Dai said that “Marvell can help propel education into the 21st century with an all-in-one device that gives students access to the best live content, information, and resources the world has to offer—from books and online resources, [to] text, video, news, music, data expression, or any medium.”

She continued: “With Moby Tablet, students can conduct primary research, reach out directly to the world's leading subject experts, and even collaborate with one another around the globe. Best of all, the device is highly affordable.”

Even with its low price point, the device is not guaranteed to succeed, some ed-tech experts warned.

“Unfortunately this device, like so many others, will be expected to provide

more application use than it was designed for,” said Jim Hirsch, associate superintendent for technology at the Plano Independent School District in Texas.

Hirsch explained that this kind of expectation is what happened in the netbook market, resulting in increased costs and slower operating experiences than users were expecting.

“The negative comments follow quickly when the software applications operate slowly, or not at all, on a device that was never designed to run those applications. That will happen to this device, as well as the iPad, unless user expectations are properly set by technology leaders whose job it is to provide that level of understanding,” he said.

As an electronic reader, the Moby might be hard pressed to compete with the much-hyped iPad, which has the additional benefit of an electronic bookstore and online app store with several thousand applications. But one area (besides cost) where the Moby could hold an advantage over the iPad is in its support for Flash-based video, which could make watching online video much easier than with the iPad.

Though observers were wary about yet another portable reading device with computing capabilities, all agree the Moby's \$99 price tag would be too cheap to ignore.

“The plans are a possible setback to tablet makers like Apple and HP,” said Electronista, a technology news and product review web site. “Their platforms have potentially stronger software but will cost multiple times more, possibly excluding them out of those schools where cost is a key worry. Distribution and format support are Marvell's key problems, as the company is relatively new to making complete products and doesn't have the sales experience that should help both the iPad and the future HP slate.” **eSN**

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Health education gets a federal boost

First Lady's 'Let's Move' initiative takes on child obesity; schools are key partners in the effort

Maya T. Prabhu
Assistant Editor

Roughly a third of American children are overweight, researchers say, and 17 percent are obese—a condition that increases their risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and other illnesses.

Many health experts point to the amount of “screen time” that today’s students are logging as a key contributing factor in the child obesity epidemic. Now, backed by a campaign launched by First Lady Michelle Obama earlier this year, some schools are using the same technologies that have many kids glued to their cell phones and iPods for hours at a time as useful instructional tools in their health-education programs.

To encourage students to adopt a healthier lifestyle, one recent lesson at Aaron Academy, a private special-education school in New York, had students research the nutritional content of popular food items online, then download this information to their mobile computers.

Barbara McKeon, director of Aaron Academy, said part of the school’s mission is to provide a 21st-century learning environment, and teachers embrace technology in all curriculum areas. Each student receives a MacBook and an iPod Touch, both of which are used for every-day instruction.

“Students did research on food labels, so they went to [the food companies’] web sites ... and looked at the information, [then] recorded that information on their MacBook,” said McKeon, explaining the lesson on nutrition.

Other teachers are showing health-related videos from companies such as BrainPOP, Discovery Education, Library Video Co., New Dimension Media, and others, to underscore lessons in a way that is much more powerful than reading about the content in a traditional textbook.

Noting that students tend to be more engaged when watching video, Allison Arunski, marketing manager for Cerebellum Corp., said her company has been creating educational videos since the early 1990s.

The company produces DVD-based video vignettes that generally last seven to 12 minutes, with the aim of presenting real-life scenarios and posing questions about topics that include health, nutrition, and body image. The DVDs come with teachers’ guides to facilitate conversations sparked by watching the videos.

“Instead of a teacher or expert talking to the students, we like to re-enact a classroom, playground, or home scenario. And we usually end the scenario with a discussion question,” Arunski said.

Mark Kittleson, professor of public health education at Southern Illinois University, said using technology in school health programs might still be the exception, not the norm—but that is quickly changing.

“Technology is certainly a critical part that we should be incorporating, but I’ve seen a lot of reluctance among education,” he said. Today’s kids are using technology outside of class, he added, “and to ignore it would be pretty ridiculous.”

Kittleson noted that many schools ban students from using cell phones in class, but he argued that teachers should embrace smart-phone applications in their lessons.

“Teachers should be prepped to show kids that when they go to McDonald’s and they want to find out how many calories are in a Big Mac, if they have a smart phone, they can find out in a matter of seconds,” he said.

Apple’s Apps Store contains dozens of health-related applications for the iPhone or iPod Touch, he explained, such as tools that can help users count calories, monitor their fitness, and even access nutritional information on a variety of foods.

Teachers also can use Facebook or other social-networking tools as a way to include parents in the health-education process, Kittleson said.

“I can see where a teacher could have a Facebook page, and students and parents can go there to find out information about what students are learning and what assignments are,” he said, adding: “Parents play a critical role in the health of students.”

That’s part of the reasoning behind a Toronto company’s decision to put its health-education curriculum online.

In response to the growing demand for supplemental materials that students can access outside of school, Core Learning President and Chief Executive Officer Doug Hatch has begun creating an online component to the curriculum software his company has offered for years.

“Health really starts in the home,” Hatch explained. “If we want kids’ health and hygiene to be better, it helps if moms and dads really know what their children are learning about health.”

By offering its curriculum online, Core Learning hopes to help parents get involved in their children’s health education as well.

“There’s much [that parents] can learn from the curriculum, too,” Hatch said.

The online courses allow students to have access to the curriculum 24-7. Students don’t need to be on a computer at school, and they can work on the lessons at their own pace. Hatch said Core Learning’s software is being revamped to work with interactive whiteboards as well.

‘Let’s Move’

Health education is getting a significant boost from First Lady Michelle Obama, who kicked off a major initiative on the topic in February. The program, called “Let’s Move,” has set an ambitious goal—to put America on track to solving the childhood obesity problem in a generation.

“Thank God it’s not going to be solely up to me,” Mrs. Obama said recently, stressing that the solution will require stepped-up effort from parents, schools, businesses, nonprofit groups, health professionals, and government agencies.

The campaign has four parts: helping parents make better food choices, serving healthier food in school vending machines and lunch lines, making healthy food more available and affordable for everyone, and encouraging children to exercise more.

Health-education advocates couldn’t be happier to have a popular first lady adopting childhood obesity as her cause. They’re also keenly aware of how difficult the problem will be to solve.

“You don’t just go from epidemic obesity to epidemic leanness,” said obesity expert Dr. David Katz, director of Yale University’s Prevention Research Center.



First Lady Michelle Obama joins kids at a free fitness clinic.

Still, Katz said, Mrs. Obama can provide the inspiration to help “shift the massive momentum of our society in the right direction.”

A decade ago, the government’s “Healthy People” program set a 2010 target that just 5 percent of children would be overweight or obese. The most updated government figures, released in January, weighed in at 32 percent for 2007-08.

The first lady said she spent the past year figuring out how to talk about the issue “in a way that doesn’t make already overstressed, anxious parents feel even more guilty about a very hard thing.”

Ideas for addressing the problem include increasing federal money to make healthier school lunches for poor kids; improving the nutrition standards for school lunches; expanding the time available for school recess and physical education; prodding food makers to stop targeting children with ads for high-calorie treats on TV and in online video games; getting more restaurants to print nutrition information on menus; and providing more behavior counseling to overweight kids.

The school lunch program, which is up for an overhaul by Congress this year, is one sure area of focus, and the administration is working with legislators on how to revise it. There should be some extra money available: President Obama’s proposed budget calls for an additional \$1 billion a year for child nutrition programs, and last year’s economic stimulus package included \$500 million for one-time grants to help states and communities tackle smoking, obesity, and various preventable health problems.

Dora Rivas, president of the School Nutrition Association and director of food services for the Dallas public schools, said Mrs. Obama can be a “great motivator” for parents and kids. But, she said, schools need more federal dollars to work more fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains into lunches, and to keep up with the growing numbers of children who qualify for free or reduced-cost meals.

The first lady appealed to the nation’s governors on Feb. 20 for help in reducing child obesity, saying they have a moral and financial imperative to act.

“Let’s stop wringing our hands and talking about it and citing statistics,” she told governors at their winter meeting. “Let’s act. Let’s move. Let’s give our kids the future they deserve.”

Mrs. Obama sought support from leaders of both parties, saying: “The way I see this, there is nothing Democratic or Republican, there is nothing liberal or conservative about wanting our kids to lead active, healthy lives. There’s no place for politics when it comes to fighting childhood obesity. And I know all of you agree.”

In talking to the governors, she noted the importance of empowering parents who feel helpless because they don’t have the time, money, or information to provide healthy meals or safe places to exercise.

Mindful that the governors face economic crises in their states, she said the obesity solutions don’t have to be expensive. She encouraged them to take steps such as providing access to school ball fields at night, or requiring the construction of sidewalks when new roads are being built.

“Comprehensive and coordinated doesn’t mean centralized,” she added. “I’ve spoken to so many experts on this issue, and not a single one of them has said that the solution is for the federal government to tell people what to do. That doesn’t work.”

Material from the Associated Press was used in this report.

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Best Practices

Texas district streams video wirelessly on demand

Maya T. Prabhu
Assistant Editor

A Texas school system has set up a wireless network infrastructure that is capable of streaming high-quality video to students' mobile devices—enabling true anytime, anywhere learning to occur with the help of visual media.

The Keller Independent School District recently began using a wireless video streaming solution that supports its effort to put mobile devices in the hands of every student. Using the Video-on-Demand (VOD) and Digital Media Management solution from SAFARI Montage, Keller ISD can stream rich digital content to students throughout the school district wirelessly, which enhances their overall learning experience, said Chief Technology Officer Joe Griffin.

“Our existing wired infrastructure limited where and how users could access the content,” he said. “We needed a cost-effective solution that could provide high-speed, district-wide coverage and ensure seamless delivery of multimedia content to students and teachers, while supporting our efforts to expand these capabilities to all classrooms.”

High-quality multimedia content requires high bandwidth to deliver the content to students through the web, generally causing VOD providers to recommend the content only be delivered over a wired network.

But Motorola's Wireless LAN (WLAN) solution offers high-performance multi-

media streaming through four key capabilities, according to the company: adaptive networking, superior video handling capabilities, high-power access points, and remote network troubleshooting.

To support the high-bandwidth requirements needed to distribute large, high-quality digital video files from the SAFARI Montage system, Keller ISD turned to Motorola's 802.11n WLAN infrastructure and AirDefense's wireless security and network assurance solutions.

Motorola's 802.11n solution supports the SAFARI Montage Selective Video Streaming software and helps manage and ensure seamless delivery of live video streams to the classroom from cable TV, video cameras, and the internet.

“With our plan to move to a digital curriculum, it was crucial to have a reliable and easy-to-use wireless infrastructure in place that would support our one-to-one instructional objectives and enable visual teaching district-wide,” said James Veitenheimer, Keller ISD's superintendent.

“We also needed a network that could work at a very high level and make it easy for students and teachers to use.”

One reason Keller ISD officials can rest assured that their wireless network will work as promised is the combination of security and advanced troubleshooting they get from AirDefense, which Motorola acquired in 2008.

The company's Wireless Intrusion Prevention System (WIPS) provides Keller

ISD with 24-7 wireless security and network monitoring, ensuring that hackers can't access the sensitive personal information of students and faculty. An “Advanced Troubleshooting” module allows district IT staff to take a proactive approach to monitoring network performance; the technology reportedly can run a diagnostic test every morning before school starts to make sure each classroom has the capability to stream video reliably, without delays, so there are no surprises for the teachers or their students.

Because the AirDefense system remotely monitors and collects data from the wireless access points and allows for remote servicing as well, district IT staff can spend less time troubleshooting network problems in each building; instead, they can get issues resolved from a central location. Motorola says feedback from its customers suggests this capability can cut down on school site visits by IT staff up to 70 percent.

As Keller ISD looks to expand its visual teaching capabilities across the district, its new WLAN infrastructure supports future multimedia resources that will let teachers augment lesson plans with visual and audio learning tools to increase student focus and retention, officials say.

The Motorola solution also supports other technologies used inside and outside of the classroom, including personal devices such as mobile computers or Wi-Fi-enabled smart phones, as well as laptops—which can further enhance learning



Video is going mobile at Keller ISD.

experiences, improve overall productivity for faculty and staff, and prepare students for the future.

“Video is a powerful tool for today's educators that can significantly enhance the student learning experience,” said Tim Beekman, president and co-founder of SAFARI Montage. “But to truly benefit, schools need to have the right infrastructure in place to support the high bandwidth and quality of service required to deliver rich multimedia content, not just to the teacher's classroom computer, but to all wireless devices—from netbooks to mobile phones.” **eSN**

Schools turn to unified communications to save money, streamline operations

From staff and wire reports

More K-12 schools, colleges, and universities are turning to unified communications as a way to streamline campus communication and save much-needed money in unpredictable economic times, a new survey suggests.

Unified communications is the convergence of enterprise voice, video, and data services with software applications designed to achieve greater collaboration among individuals or groups and improve business processes. Component technologies include video, audio, and web conferencing; unified messaging; and more.

The benefits that education technology stakeholders see in implementing unified communications are the same that executives in the government and business sectors see, according to the second annual Unified Communications Tracking Poll from CDW Government Inc. (CDW-G), which provides products and services to education and other sectors.

Fifty-four percent of school IT executives said reducing operating costs is the top benefit of unified communications, followed by increased productivity (50 percent) and more reliable communication (44 percent).

“IT executives report that economic pressures were a greater concern in 2009 than in 2008, but for many, the return on investment from UC deployments is so compelling that they ask, ‘Why wouldn't we do this?’”

said Pat Scheckel, vice president of converged infrastructure solutions at CDW-G. “The result is reduced costs, increased productivity, and improved decision making—benefits that resonate across every industry, especially in a recessionary economy.”

K-12 institutions, new to the tracking poll in 2010, see emergency notification as a key benefit of unified communications technology.

Of K-12 survey respondents, 39 percent said they were assessing their district's unified communications needs, 30 percent were planning an implementation, 18 percent had started implementing, and 13 percent had fully deployed unified communications.

School leaders in Indiana's Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation began to develop a strategic district plan and held more than 200 public meetings for community members, and installing top-notch communications technology emerged as one of five core focus areas.

“We realized that the first thing we needed was a solid infrastructure,” said Mike Russ, the district's chief technology officer. “A key part of that was a good communications system.”

Russ said the district had been installing a voice-over-IP (VoIP) system piecemeal as it could afford to do so, but decided to move forward with full implementation in the strategic plan.

Before, “teachers never had phones in

[their] classrooms, and it's also important for safety and security that teachers be able to communicate in case of a crisis,” Russ said.

Teachers received wireless VoIP telephones that move easily as they change classrooms or attend to different bus or cafeteria duties. The phones also display messages on their screens. Voice mail messages also appear as eMails—so if a teacher's phone is not in reach but the teacher is at a computer, the voice mail message is instantly accessible.

Using Singlewire Software's Informa Cast, school administrators are able to broadcast a message directly to one or more teachers' telephone screens without making an announcement over a public address system—something that comes in handy in case of surprise early dismissals, Russ said.

The district also uses Blackboard Connect for external messaging and blasts reminders and announcements to parents and other stakeholders.

Russ said the district installed wireless infrastructure and access points, and then gave teachers their telephones and the proper training to go along with the new equipment.

The district has seen immense cost savings since it has implemented its unified communications system.

For example, the district has been able to eliminate most of its regular analog telephone lines, Russ said. The district left some phone lines intact for security purposes, such as alarm systems and elevator

operations, but is no longer paying per line, per month, year-round.

“I think we'll continue to see more benefits as we go along,” Russ said.

The district's own IT staff now handles may issues that used to route to an outside tech company, such as its previous analog telephone company.

“Usually you have to have that company come in and make adjustments, because it's their equipment in your building, and you don't mess with that,” Russ said. “Now, the nice thing is that... our own staff is handling all those issues that used to go to an outside company.”

Russ said partnering with CDW-G on the district's unified communications installation also saved the district much-needed dollars.

“Most of us in K-12 don't have the luxury of having a huge staff of engineers. Partnering with CDW-G is a cost savings in a lot of ways, versus retaining someone on staff of that caliber,” he said. “If we'd had to add staff because of this implementation, the cost savings would have been gone quickly.”

Russ recommended that districts looking to implement a unified communications system plan ahead for as many years as they can. Most likely, new technologies will become available sooner than school leaders think, and the infrastructure being put into place now should be able to support those technologies whenever possible. **eSN**

Education in Focus

New standard makes IWB content more accessible

Common File Format developed for U.K. interactive whiteboard content, and U.S. could be next

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

In what educators and vendors are calling a giant step forward in education technology, the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) recently announced that all major interactive whiteboard vendors have agreed to make their educational content available in the U.K. in a common file format (CFF).

By making these educational resources more shareable and accessible, many say, BECTA is setting a powerful example for change that could go global. Now, some in the United States and Canada—where such software still is mostly proprietary and incompatible—want to know when these same vendors will adopt a CFF in North America.

In 2007, BECTA teamed up with the RM Group, one of Europe's largest suppliers of technology-based curriculum products for education, to address the issue of multiple interactive whiteboard (IWB) solutions each having their own proprietary software.

At the time, most content files developed for any one type of IWB could not be opened with the software on other IWBs, which limited the ability of teachers to share resources across different IWB platforms.

BECTA appointed RM to develop a common industry-wide standard that would benefit educators by allowing the exchange of resources within and between schools.

Now, three years later, BECTA and RM have created not only a file specification for software (.iwb), but also a Viewer application, accompanying supporting documentation, and a code library that software publishers can use to integrate support for the CFF into their own applications.

So far, eInstruction, Hitachi, Luidia, Mimio, PolyVision, Promethean, RM, Sahara Presentation Systems, SMART Technologies, and TeamBoard have committed to adopt the CFF in the U.K.

"We know that this technology is capable of bringing lessons to life, motivating learners to participate with enthusiasm, and helping them to achieve better results," said Steve Lucey, BECTA's executive director for strategic technologies, in a statement. "BECTA is working to help the education sector get better value from investment in technology, which is more important than ever in the current economic climate. Sharing resources and ideas is one of the ways to stimulate more effective use of technology and make the most of that investment."

Lucey said BECTA was spurred to develop the CFF as a result of the advocacy efforts of IWB users in England and internationally. Interest in the CFF also has come from European education ministries hoping to procure IWB solutions on a national scale.

"Our goal was to make all files interchangeable through a generic file format," explained Hedrick Ellis, senior project manager for RM Education. "We wanted something any word processor could open."

Although IWB vendors who sell to schools in the U.K. are committed to including the CFF standard in their software, it will not be available immediately because developers go through a "software cycle,"

Ellis said. The CFF should be included in vendors' next software cycle.

However, some developers are already including the new common format in their software.

According to Kate Wallace, vice president of strategic partnerships for RM Education's United States division, RM has made steps to include the CFF in the next generation of RM Easiteach.

Another IWB vendor, PolyVision,



With the Common File Format, educators can use IWB content on any board.

which uses RM Easiteach and Qwizdom as its content providers, is software agnostic, meaning customers can choose what software they run on the IWB.

"The power of information is the ability to share that information," said Peter Hildebrandt, director of global product management, research, and development for PolyVision. "We encourage our partner companies to adopt a CFF, since we believe it's a natural step in technological progress."

TeamBoard's Draw 5.5 software currently supports the BECTA CFF as well—and TeamBoard says it is the first commercially available IWB software to do so.

Making the case for CFF

BECTA and RM cited pressure from the government and IWB users, as well as their mission to ensure that education technology is as useful as possible for educators and students, as the reasons for the project's success in the U.K.

However, with no government equivalent to BECTA in the United States, vendors and educators are wondering if adoption of the CFF in the U.S. might take longer.

The delay, some say, is because two of the largest IWB providers in the U.S.—SMART and Promethean—sell their boards with proprietary content.

"The key to getting the likes of Promethean and SMART on board [in the U.K.] was to get the standard ratified internationally, and hence ensure that a requirement for the standard became a feature of [the school bidding process]," explained Wallace.

"Here in the U.S., I have not come across the equivalent of a BECTA-type organization, and I think this will be one of the challenges to getting it rolled out. SMART and Promethean, of course, signed up in Europe, but what governing body can we rely on here to rally the providers and get them to adhere?"

According to Wallace, the next generation of CFF-enabled RM Easiteach will be released in the U.S. this spring and will be

materials, and we encourage open standards that are non-proprietary," Marks said.

In theory, he said, U.S. adoption of the CFF could occur in one of three ways:

(1) It could be government-mandated, in the same way the National Television System Committee (NTSC) developed the broadcast standard.

(2) It could be industry-initiated: IWB vendors could agree to partner on a CFF for the U.S. schools market.

(3) A dominant entity or vendor could commit to supporting CFF in the U.S., forcing other IWB vendors and entities to follow along as a result of market pressure.

"I'd say probably the easiest way to go would be through a government mandate," said Marks, "just because different companies have diverse needs, and this could lead to very complex standards."

Another way, however, could simply be pressure from educators on IWB vendors to adhere to a CFF.

After all, "the greatest benefit will be to educators," said Eileen Shihadeh-Shald, vice president of marketing for eInstruction. "The creation of a CFF for all interactive whiteboard content will enable educators to develop and share interactive content with their colleagues, across their institutions, and even across borders without having to worry about which brand of hardware they chose."

Shihadeh-Shald said eInstruction would be in favor of such an opportunity in the U.S. and would seek to help drive it.

"As an industry, it makes no sense to limit educators' choices; rather, we should provide them [with] the utmost flexibility," she said. "Though the principal difference is that decisions like this in the U.K. tend to come from the top, and in the U.S. decision making is much more distributed, this type of change can be initiated by the vendors themselves and by educators."

According to IWB manufacturer TeamBoard, a CFF helps teachers in two significant ways.

"First, a world of content is opened up to them, regardless of the hardware platform they enjoy," said TeamBoard in a statement. "This can only increase the utility of the interactive technology itself. Secondly, teachers can feel free to invest in the development of their own resources in the CFF without fear that a future hardware brand change (such as changing classrooms or switching schools) will render their investment unavailable."

"CFF, and open source in general, is where the entire world is going," said RM's Ellis. "In the future, people will not be tied or shackled to their software or hardware purchases. With enough pressure and determination, we can spur this change."

the first platform to embrace CFF in the U.S.

However, Wallace said, "we need all whiteboard software providers to comply in order for school districts to benefit from sharing resources in the truest sense, as well as reduce training overheads. The biggest advantage of CFF is that it aims to retain as much interactive functionality of each resource that is exported/imported."

Wallace said RM Easiteach has always been platform agnostic and designed for any interactive whiteboard or slate, but the CFF will "open the floodgates to free the flowing of information between interactive software platforms."

Promethean was noncommittal when asked whether it would support CFF in the U.S., and SMART Technologies declined to comment for this story.

Although the U.S. does not have a direct equivalent of BECTA, Joshua Marks, chief technology officer for Curriki—an online educational community whose web site offers free, open K-12 instructional materials—said there are some organizations in place to help make a push for CFF in America.

The Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF), which aids in data sharing among K-12 institutions, could help push for adoption of CFF in the U.S., he said. So could the IMS Global Learning Consortium, which has developed a common set of standards that will allow any kind of digital learning content to be used with any type of learning management system, student information system, or web portal.

"Standards are helpful in enabling multiple types of collections of diverse mate-

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Best new instructional resources on the internet

C-SPAN Video Library puts democratic process online

<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/videoLibrary/>

Discovering how the hotly debated health-care reform bill became law, or learning about other legislative actions, is now as simple as watching a viral YouTube video: The contents of the C-SPAN Archives at Purdue Research Park are now online—and so far, 160,000 hours that span 23 years of history are available for free viewing. Robert X. Browning, C-SPAN Archives director and an associate professor of political science at Purdue University, said the site is a political candy store that promotes the democratic process—while holding politicians accountable for what they say. C-SPAN broadcasts 24 hours a day, carrying live feeds and rebroadcasts of the Senate and House of Representatives, plus original programming on three channels. Moving to a web-based archive has been in the works for more than two years, Browning said. The new web site lets anyone access video by searching by speaker names, titles, sponsors, committees, categories, and other keywords. Sessions also contain transcripts from the Congressional Record. The full use for high school students, teachers, and citizens has yet to be realized, said R. Douglas Hurt, head of Purdue's Department of History, who added: "This archive will be remarkably flexible, and it is only restricted by the researchers and the scholar."



Common Sense Media launches digital media and citizenship program

<http://www.common sense media.org/educators>

Common Sense Media has announced a comprehensive digital literacy and citizenship initiative that aims to provide educators, parents, and kids with the tools necessary to raise a generation of responsible, smart, and safe digital citizens. The initiative has three key components: a school-based curriculum for grades 5-8; a public awareness and education campaign, which includes PSAs and other outreach with partners; and an aggressive public policy strategy designed to bring funding and distribution to schools nationwide. "Technology is already at the center of our kids' lives—whether it's for education, play, or socializing," said James P. Steyer, CEO and founder of Common Sense Media. "We have a responsibility to educate kids to become smart digital citizens." The curriculum component, which launched as part of a pilot program in San Francisco and Omaha, Neb., schools and will roll out fully this fall, teaches kids to think critically and make informed choices about how they live and treat others in today's digital media world. It covers everything from privacy and sexting to cyber bullying and self-expression, using interactive lessons and real-life stories to engage kids in the digital ethics discussion. Common Sense Media's Parent Media Education Program already provides educators and parents with hands-on guidance about the media and technology issues in their kids' lives; this free program is currently used in more than 5,000 K-12 schools.



Read.gov encourages students to discover the world of books

<http://www.read.gov>

Read.gov, from the Library of Congress, is an online portal of free reading resources for children, teens, and even adults. It features online versions of out-of-copyright books for children, including *Mother Goose*, *The Arabian Nights*, *The Secret Garden*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Raven*, and other classics. It also provides webcasts of authors, such as *Twilight* author Stephenie Meyer, as well as writing contests, suggested booklists, teaching resources, and more. Teaching resources include lesson plans from the American Memory Project, such as "*The Great Gatsby*: Facts Behind the Fiction," which has students create their own newspapers using primary-source materials from several American Memory digital collections.



This month's very best web sites—exceptional instructional resources, special events, and state-of-the-art research and management tools—for the K-20 decision maker

Leadership

Research and management resources for the K-20 decision maker

What Bill Gates is learning right now

<http://www.gatesnotes.com>

It's no surprise, really, but it turns out Microsoft founder and chairman Bill Gates is a strong supporter of the open-courseware movement that has swept through education in the last few years. On a new web site that Gates launched earlier this year, he discusses some of his favorite sources for online lectures and other learning materials. He also offers his thoughts on education reform and a host of other topics.



"There are some great examples of how technology can enable almost anyone to learn from the world's greatest minds," he posted to GatesNotes.com. "A lot of people ask me what I'm reading, and how I learn about new topics that interest me. I am fortunate to have time to read a lot, and I also like to view courses online from MIT's OpenCourseware, Academic Earth, and others." GatesNotes is designed to share the technology icon's thoughts and start discussions about a range of topics, from education and philanthropy to world health, energy, and the environment. In an interview with technology news source CNET, Gates said he plans to post content to the web site about three times a week, with some posts being brief and others being more in-depth. Gates says he'll be writing soon about some of his favorite courses from MIT's OpenCourseware project, as well as other good sources for online educational material. In another post dated Jan. 18, Gates indicates his support for the KIPP ("Knowledge Is Power Program") model of K-12 education, which is now reflected in more than 60 U.S. middle schools. There's also a video with Gates discussing what he sees as the strengths and weaknesses of American public education on CNN, although you need Microsoft Silverlight to watch it.

New online social network aims to encourage effective teaching

<http://www.effectiveteachers.org>

Taking advantage of current social media technology, Teachers Network—with funding from the Ford Foundation—has introduced a new online forum for collaboration on issues affecting educators. The web site aims to bring together educators and policy makers within a national online community to share ideas, suggestions, and best practices for improving teacher effectiveness and retention. The site includes findings from a recent survey conducted by Teachers Network, called "What Keeps Effective Teachers in the Classroom," suggesting that effective teaching is largely the result of continued professional development, support for teacher collaboration, and opportunities for leadership.



'SEN Teacher' promotes free resources for special-needs students

<http://www.senteacher.org/>

"SEN Teacher" is a web site that provides free educational resources for teachers of students with special needs and learning disabilities. Resources for K-12 and college-level students are available, including at-home activities and free downloads, and the site's Printables Page offers customizable handouts and teaching aids. SEN Teacher also links to other carefully chosen web sites that provide more free resources and helpful links. The Files Page lists free educational software for special-needs students, and a custom Google search engine can help users locate additional resources.





Grants & Funding

How to serve as the 'lead applicant' in a collaborative grant project

By Deborah Ward

If you plan to apply for grants that involve other partners, you should be familiar with the term “lead applicant” and the responsibilities that go along with being one.

Being the lead applicant for a grant project means you're the entity or organization—a school district, a state education department, a library, or a museum, for example—that receives the grant funding and enters into the grant agreement with the funder. However, this does not exclude others from participating as partners in the project. So, a museum could apply as the lead applicant for a museum-specific grant, for instance, while partnering with a school district that plays an important role in the project. This role might include creating a curriculum that builds on a specific exhibit that the museum is planning to show. This is just one

example of how a museum might partner with a school, and there are many others.

The lead applicant, of course, must meet all eligibility requirements for the grant program. These requirements will always identify the specific types of eligible applicants, but they also might specify the kinds of populations that the entity must serve (such as special-education students, for example), and/or the geographic region where the lead applicant must be located. I have also seen requests for proposals (RFPs) for networks of partners that define the length of time the network must have existed in order to be eligible to apply.

Although this is not a written requirement, it is often assumed that the lead applicant will provide the “lead grant writer” to facilitate the proposal process. If you want to be the lead applicant for a project, but you cannot provide the lead grant writer, I would recommend that you

discuss this with your partners early in the proposal process to determine who will take this role, so there are no misunderstandings.

Someone representing the lead applicant must submit the proposal. This means that if you're planning to apply for a federal grant, you must be registered in the specific system that is used to submit applications, which—in most cases, regardless of the federal agency—will be Grants.gov. The person representing the lead applicant is called the Authorized Official. In the case of private foundations using an online application system, there might be a registration system that is required before you can apply. If you are the lead applicant, read the “how to apply” section carefully in an RFP or funding guidelines, and make sure you have followed the steps to be registered to submit the application.

A lead applicant is responsible for sub-

mitting the programmatic and fiscal reports that are due when managing a funded project, and the lead applicant is held liable for any late or inaccurate reports. This is important to keep in mind when working with partners. They, too, must carry their fair share of responsibility in getting information to the lead applicant. However, if they make an error or mispend grant funds, it will be the lead applicant who will pay the consequences if there are any. It's important for lead applicants to review the grants management responsibilities at the outset of a project and to make sure that all partners understand the data they'll need to collect and how they must track any expenditures that involve grant funds. **eSN**

Deborah Ward, CFRE, is an independent grant writing consultant. She welcomes questions at Debor21727@aol.com.

Grant Deadlines

May

More than \$150,000 in technology equipment from CDW-G and Discovery

Through their “Win a Wireless Lab Sweepstakes,” CDW-G and Discovery Education will give K-12 schools across the United States the chance to win one of three 21st-century classroom labs worth an estimated \$45,000, complete with tablet or notebook computers and a wireless cart, interactive whiteboard, student response system, projector, printer, and document camera. The two companies also will provide on-site training to all three grand-prize winners. In addition to the hardware, Discovery Education will award a \$5,000 digital media grant to the winning schools to help them more fully use the technology and engage students in learning. Schools can enter the sweepstakes every day until the deadline—and entrants who post about the program on their Twitter accounts can receive an additional two entries per day.

Deadline: May 3

<http://www.discoveryeducation.com/cdwg>

\$7,000 in student scholarships for essays about school technology

Samsung Techwin America is asking high school students across America to write a 300-word essay on why technology is a good investment for schools. Applicants must be U.S. high school students with a teacher sponsor, and they must give Samsung permission to use their photo and essay for publicity purposes. Seven awards of \$1,000 each will be made.

Deadline: May 28

<http://www.samsungscholarship.com/>

June

50 document cameras awarded to teachers based on need

The 2010 “Active Learning” Grant Program, from Samsung Techwin America's Electronic Imaging Division, offers 50 SAMCAM 860 document cameras to worthy applicants based on need. Any teacher in the United States is eligible to apply. An independent evaluation team will review the applications and notify the winners no later than September.

Deadline: June 1

<http://www.samsunggrants.com>

Up to 90 percent of the cost of educational video content

Because educational video content is not eligible for support under the federal e-Rate program, New Dimension Media is offering a discount program called the CCC!-Rate. The program provides the CCC! Core Curriculum Content package at a discount that is equal to a school's or district's e-Rate discount. That means schools can purchase CCC!'s library of educational video programming as if it were eligible under the e-Rate program—for between 20 percent and 90 percent off the regular cost.

Deadline: June 30

<http://www.cccvod.com/rate-information.php>

Michigan schools eligible for free screen capture and recording software from TechSmith

TechSmith Corp. is donating up to \$2 million worth of its screen capture and recording software to K-12 schools in Michigan, where the company is based. The grant program ends June 30 or when the \$2 million grant pool is exhausted, whichever comes first. Any K-12 school, district, teacher, or department in Michigan is eligible to apply.

Deadline: June 30

<http://www.techsmith.com/michigangrant>

Ongoing

Free access to SAS online curriculum resources

SAS Curriculum Pathways, which is used by thousands of teachers in more than 30 states, is now available for free to every educator in America. SAS Curriculum Pathways provides content in the core disciplines of English, mathematics, social studies, science, and Spanish. Aligned with state standards, it offers more than 200 InterActivities and 855 ready-to-use lessons that enable technology-rich instruction and engage students' higher-order thinking skills. It is primarily for use in grades 8-12, though middle school content is in development.

<http://www.sas.com/govedu/edu/curriculum/index.html>

Grants to help schools implement Netop Vision software

Netop has launched the Netop Get A Grant for Education (NGAGE) program to help educators struggling with shrinking budgets. Available until funds run out, the program provides financial support for schools to purchase an individual or site license for the Netop Vision6 Class Kit, classroom-management software that has been proven to improve student achievement. Netop has \$500,000 in funding for its NGAGE grants, which are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Grants of \$200 to \$450 are available for classroom labs, and grants of \$1,500 to \$1,600 are available for a site or district license. The Vision6 Class Kit is priced at \$999, but with an NGAGE grant of \$450, an educator would pay only \$549 per classroom or lab.

<http://www.netop.com/ngage.htm>



Stakeholder & Community Relations

Bullied teen's suicide sparks debate

South Hadley, Mass., school leaders under fire for their response to the ongoing abuse

By Nora Carr, APR, Fellow PRSA

A teen's suicide in bucolic Western Massachusetts has resulted in several of her former classmates being charged with crimes ranging from disturbing a school assembly to civil-rights violations, harassment, and statutory rape. And now the school system finds itself at the center of a heated controversy over its response to the ongoing abuse.

Tormented daily at school and online by a group of "mean" girls and boys, 15-year-old Phoebe Prince hanged herself in January, just two days before the school's winter cotillion.

"It appears that Phoebe's death on Jan. 14 followed a tortuous day for her, in which she was subjected to verbal harassment and threatened physical abuse," said Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth Scheibel. "The events were not isolated, but the culmination of a nearly three-month campaign of verbally assaultive behavior and threats of physical harm."

Sadly, the bullying didn't stop with the pretty Irish immigrant's death. Even after Prince committed suicide, students reportedly continued to mock Prince and make hateful comments about her on social media sites—even to the point of disrupting an online memorial set up in her honor.

Prince's crime? Apparently, per news reports, the teen queens ruling the school's social scene didn't think a newcomer like Prince should date a popular football player. As a result, she was repeatedly referred to as an "Irish slut," among other nasty names.

While school officials weren't charged with any crimes, Scheibel said that Prince's abuse was "common knowledge" and criticized teachers and administrators for not doing more to intervene.

"The actions or inactions of some adults at the school are troublesome," said Scheibel, noting that the police investigation "revealed that certain faculty, staff, and administrators also were alerted to the harassment of Phoebe Prince before her death."

The issue of who knew what, and when, has spawned outrage in South Hadley, Mass. Security at the school has been increased. Some are calling for the principal, superintendent, and school board chairman to resign.

School officials maintain they found out about the bullying shortly before Prince's death. The district attorney seemed to refute these claims during the press conference announcing the criminal charges against the four girls and two boys involved in harassing Prince.

Statements issued by Christine Sweklo, South Hadley Public Schools assistant superintendent, indicated district officials had not been given the opportunity to review new information gleaned from the criminal investigation prior to the district attorney's press conference.

With the superintendent away on vacation and pressure mounting, the district seemed to struggle to tell its side of the story.

Statements were issued to the news media but weren't posted online, even though

the district's web site was touted as new and improved.

After days of silence, the superintendent, school board chairman, and principal stumbled badly during interviews, particularly on television.

Sounding dismissive, defensive, and insecure, these individuals reinforced rather than refuted the stereotypical view of aloof, out-of-touch bureaucrats.

Yet a closer read of written materials released by the school and district reveal a more caring, competent, and compassionate response.

"It's very clear that we need a district and community-wide focus on developing civility in our young people," wrote South Hadley Principal Dan Smith in his February newsletter. "A number of people spoke about the need for parents, students, and school personnel at all grade levels to work together to proactively address this issue."

I suspect that South Hadley's poor showing in the media and underutilized web site are owing as much to a lack of high-pressure television news experience and a dearth of professional communications staff as they are to a lack of caring.

School and district officials maintain that all personnel intervened swiftly and appropriately to any and all reports they received about Prince's torment.

Although it's a typical crisis response, the rush to blame someone—anyone—for Prince's suicide won't bring her back or make the last few days of her life any less painful. It's also not fair to anyone involved, including Prince.

Teen suicide is always disturbing and heartbreaking. However, most psychiatrists will tell you that it's very difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint exactly why an individual chooses to end his or her life. Typically, there's a complexity of mental health issues involved—issues that might or might not be explained fully by bullying.

In a classic case of perception becoming reality—and not just shaping it—the worldwide view of South Hadley High and its surrounding community is overwhelmingly negative. It will take years, if not a decade or more, for the school to rebuild its reputation.

The district has a number of proactive plans in place to address bullying concerns district-wide and in the community.

These include the formation of a citizen task force, reviewing policies and procedures, offering more training, and communicating more openly with all key publics, starting with students.

While these efforts are commendable and underreported in the news media, the district might want to consider making a clean break with the past by apologizing (verbally as well as in writing and on the web site) for not intervening sooner or more effectively.

Although overdue and likely to cause the district's legal counsel heartburn, research has shown that apologizing when mistakes are made (including sins of omission as well as commission) tends to reduce litigation.

If the district's review of the facts shows



South Hadley students hold a candlelight vigil in memory of Phoebe Prince.

that school personnel did everything humanly possible to prevent such a tragedy from occurring, or that additional intervention likely wouldn't have changed the outcome, and if district officials are confident that all policies and procedures were followed to the letter and need no improvement, and if they believe that South Hadley High School has no systematic climate or cultural concerns that need to be addressed, then they might get by with simply expressing care and concern for the victim.

All of those "ifs" create a pretty high bar to leap over, however. Assuming for a moment that South Hadley High School and South Hadley Public Schools are like most public schools and districts nationally, they probably have some additional work to do. And even if everything was done perfectly every single time in response to Prince's bullying, the fact remains that a young girl decided that dying was better than living.

With about one-third to one-half of all children experiencing bullying as some point during their school years, it's time for all of us who care about children to take more proactive and assertive action in responding to reports of bullying. This includes other students, parents, mental health professionals, business leaders, elected officials, and other community members, along with educators. Schools can't bear the sole responsibility for eradicating bullying and other social ills.

Bullying often is seen as the first step on a continuum of escalating mental health concerns, including violence to self or others, according to child and adolescent psychiatrists. Depression, anxiety, insomnia, digestive problems, low self-esteem, and other symptoms consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are common after-effects of bullying in children, teens, and adults.

Girls are more likely to engage in verbal or relational bullying, in which the victim is denigrated and ostracized by a social group or clique. Boys are more likely to engage in verbal and physical bullying. In some cases, bullying and harassment turn into physical or sexual assault.

While many bullying victims don't

commit suicide, thoughts of suicide are common, according to researchers and child psychiatrists. Victims often carry permanent scars from the emotional, relational, verbal, physical, and online abuse they endure from bullies, experts say.

Although Prince's abuse occurred primarily at school, the young teen did experience electronic harassment as well. Cyber bullying and cyber stalking can be particularly painful for teens.

The 24-7, constantly connected nature of their lives makes it difficult to escape or find a safe haven. Hateful text messages, humiliating Facebook comments, and online threats don't stop just because the bullies and victims aren't in close proximity to each other anymore.

The anonymity afforded by many social media sites and other digital communications only makes matters worse, as bullies feel free to say and do things online they'd never do in person or at school.

A 2007 Pew Research Center study shows that 32 percent of online teens have experienced some form of electronic bullying. Tactics range from posting embarrassing photos without permission (6 percent) to having private material forwarded without permission (15 percent).

About 13 percent of online teens also report receiving threats or have been the victims of digital rumor-mongering, the same study showed. Similar to bullying that occurs at school or in the community, perpetrators of online bullying tend to be the same age as their victims.

For Phoebe Prince and other victims of abuse by bullies, where and how the bullying occurs matters little. They just want it to stop.

As educators charged with helping keep students safe from emotional and physical harm, we can and should do more.

As community leaders charged with creating a more just society by forming future citizens, we can't dismiss cruelty as "normal" teenage behavior. It's not. **eSN**

Award-winning eSchool News columnist Nora Carr is the chief of staff for North Carolina's Guilford County Schools.

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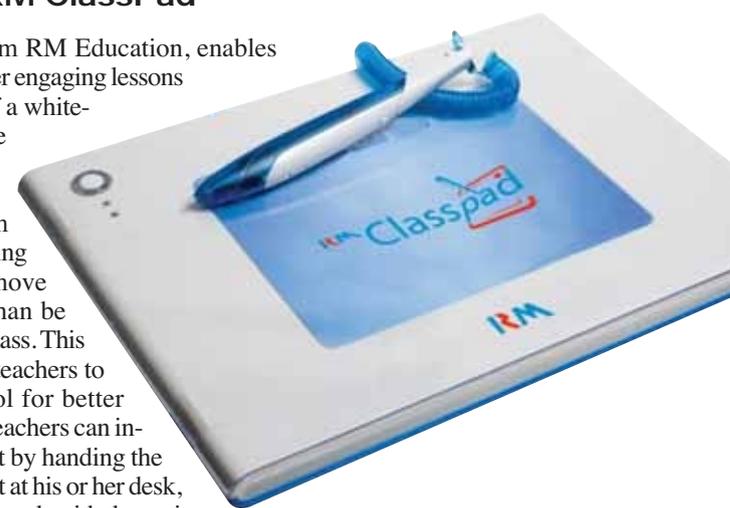
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From the Student Video Network to interviews with leading experts in education, and from important vendor information to conference keynotes, we've collected a large variety for you to choose from. Simply go to our **Video Viewers' Guide** page on our web site www.eschoolnews.com/eSN-TV/ViewersGuide to check out our top videos.

Highlights



The Financial Conditions of School Districts

AASA Executive Director, Dan Domenech, and AASA Policy Analyst, Noelle Ellerson, talk about the release of AASA's survey on the financial conditions of school districts across the United States.



JASON Live Event with Space Energy Researchers

Space weather physicist Dr. Janet Green and space architect Constance Adams joined The JASON Project in this 40-minute live online chat. The JASON Project—www.jason.org

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CoSN 2010

Francesc Pedro Interview

Pedro, sr. policy analyst for OECD, discusses his organization and its international peer learning opportunities.

Garry Putland Interview

Putland, general manager of Education Services Australia, discusses his organization, its curriculum, and the delivery of this content.

Steen Lassen Interview

Lassen, senior advisor for the Ministry of Education in Denmark, explains how they are using ICT in schools to allow students to take exams via computers, and much more.

Gavin Dykes Interview

Dykes, associate dir. of consulting for Futurelab, talks about the most recent Learning and Technology World Forum.

Ed Gragert Interview

Gragert, exec. dir. of iEARN-USA, discusses how his organization helps children and students by providing an international education and resource network.

Sue Beueridge Interview

Beueridge, an Educational Outcomes business change manager, discusses Australia's latest ICT education initiatives.

Vendor News.

EduPlatform and 1:1 learning

Watch how Nash Rocky Mountain Early College High School uses EduPlatform in their 1:1 initiative, which integrates today's latest technologies into the classroom for 21st cen. learning.

Computer Lab on Wheels

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Don Lifo & Brad Senden Interview

Don Lifo, sr. vp of Springsted Inc. & Brad Senden, managing partner for the Center for Community Opinion, advise schools and districts on draft proposals.

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