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How to avoid committing social media gaffes



# Technology News for Today's K-20 Educator OL NEWS

eSchoolNews.com Vol. 13. No. 10 \$10.00

October 2010

# States get millions to rethink exams

Education Department announces \$330M in grants to spur 21st-century assessment

#### Meris Stansbury Associate Editor

Education Secretary Arne Duncan on Sept. 2 announced the recipients of millions of dollars in federal grants to provide new state assessment systems to test students' 21st-century skills. The announcement comes as part of the recent push from the federal Education Department (ED) for higher-performing schools and common standards.

Two large state coalitions won this "Race to the Top" competition to create a series of new national academic tests to replace the current patchwork system: the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)

from Washington state and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) from Florida.

SBAC, which submitted an application on behalf of a group of 31 states, received \$160 million. It will focus on formative assessments and the use of technology for test-

Exams, page 30

### The 'Taj Mahal' of schools?



The new Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools opened this fall on the site of the former Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, where the Democratic presidential contender was assassinated in 1968. With an eye-popping price tag of \$578 million, it's the nation's most expensive public school ever-prompting a national debate over how best to spend limited educational dollars. See story, page 6.

# Mac schools face SIS dilemma

### Laura Devaney Managing Editor

Education industry giant Pearson says its PowerSchool student information system (SIS) software will no longer support Macintosh database servers by Dec. 31, forcing Mac-using districts to make some tough decisions.

The announcement came as a surprise to many people, especially because PowerSchool was an Apple product before Pearson bought it from Apple in 2006. Apple earlier had acquired PowerSchool, a leading SIS product for Mac-based schools, from its eponymous owner in

PowerSchool runs on an Oracle database. While Oracle issued a Windows update some time ago, Mac users are still waiting on the Oracle 11g update that would let them run PowerSchool.

"To maintain our commitment to providing great software, we need to upgrade to an Oracle version that does not support Mac servers," Pearson said in a letter to

Dilemma, page 32

# **Teacher** ratings spark controversy

LA Times probes effectiveness of 6,000 public school educators

### From staff and wire reports

In a move that has many local educators seething, the Los Angeles Times has published an online database comparing more than 6,000 elementary school teachers in the city based on a controversial statistical method that relies on test-score data to determine their

The database, and its resulting fallout, marks the latest chapter in a national debate over how best to measure teacher qualityone that pits members of the Obama administration against many teachers' unions. It also raises important questions about what kinds of teacher and school district information should be made publicly available.

The Times "has produced an analysis of how effective Los Angeles Unified School

Ratings, page 32

### U.S. ramps up key STEM initiative

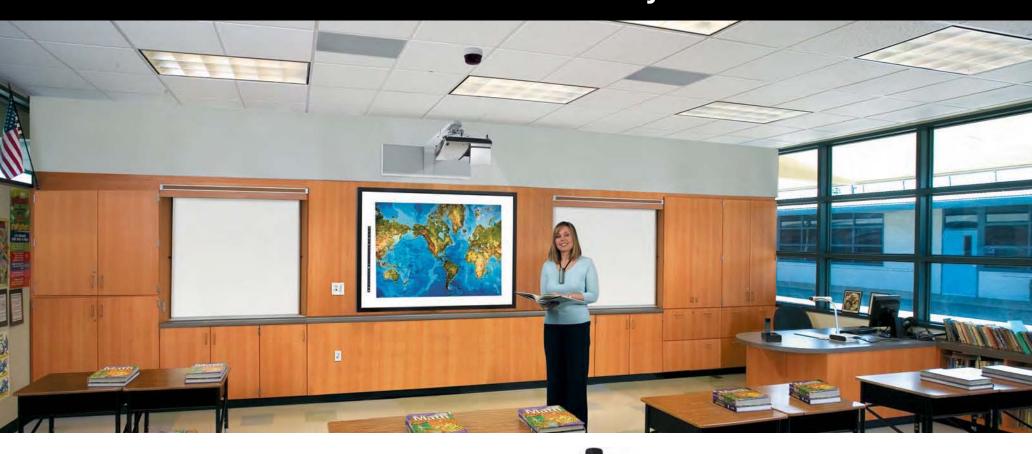
### From staff and wire reports

A grant program that challenges students to design their own video games is one of several new initiatives announced by President Obama Sept. 16 as part of a broad expansion of his "Educate to Innovate" campaign, which aims to spur students' interest in science, tech $nology, engineering, and \, math \, (STEM) \, fields.$ 

The day before, Obama announced the launch of Change the Equation, a CEO-led

STEM, page 31

### **Extron Classroom A/V Systems**





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*e*School News • 3 October 2010

# eSchool News

# OCTOBER 2010

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31 Lessons from the nation's best online teacher FLVS' Teresa Dove wins first-ever national award.

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Algebra is among the hardest subjects to teach but new technology can help.

- Laura Devaney

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20 Doctors eye laser pointers For the latest school safety news, go to www. eschoolnews.com/resources/safe-center



### eSchool Mediana

**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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# default lines Default: Values set by the system until changed by you

# Putting our ideas of assessment to the test

### Dennis Pierce, Editor dpierce@eschoolnews.com

Here's a pop quiz: What are the skills that today's students will need to be successful in tomorrow's workplace?

The answer to this question has enormous implications for the future of education, including what we teach our students—and how we test them.

According to an Associated Press story published on Labor Day, economists fear that many people will be left behind even when this historically bleak job market begins to turn around.

As our economy continues its shift from a manufacturing-driven economy to one fueled by service industries, the number of lower-skill, middle-income jobs will shrink, AP reports. Any job that can be automated or outsourced overseas will continue to decline.

Of the 8 million-plus jobs lost to the recession—in fields such as manufacturing, real estate, and financial services—many aren't coming back, economists warn. In their place will be jobs in professions like health care, information technology, and statistical analysis—and most of these new positions will require complex skills or higher education.

The AP story validates a theme common to many advocates of education reform.

In his best-selling book *A Whole New Mind*, author Dan Pink writes: "Thanks to an array of forces—[including] globalization that is shipping white-collar work overseas, and powerful technologies that are eliminating certain kinds of work altogether—we are entering a new age." Pink argues that right-brain skills such as creativity, innovation, collaboration, and empathy are what will distinguish the workers in this new age and allow them to succeed.

Education consultant Alan November agrees. During an ed-tech conference earlier this year, November said he was talking with a senior executive at a global investment bank recently, and he asked the executive: What is the most important skill for today's students to learn so they are prepared to succeed in the new global economy? To his surprise, the executive replied: "Empathy"—the ability to understand and respect different points of view.

Most of today's companies do business with customers

all over the world, November explained, and several also have branches in multiple countries. Chances are good that when students enter the workforce, they'll be working with—or doing business with—someone from another nation, with its own culture and its own unique perspective.

It's not hard to find people who are smart, the executive told November. What *is* hard to find are employees who have to ability to empathize with, and be sensitive to the needs of, people from other countries.

I don't mean to imply that traditional areas of learning aren't important. But it's becoming increasingly obvious that these don't go far enough in preparing students for the new challenges that await them when they graduate.

So, if it's true that our economy is changing, and the skills that will define success in this new economy are changing as well, shouldn't we be rethinking the skills we're teaching students—and the abilities we're testing them on?

That's what the federal government is encouraging states to do with \$330 million in new Race to the Top grants (see our lead story on page 1). Two large coalitions of states have won grants to design new exams that (1) are better able to assess important 21st-century skills, and (2) are aligned with the Common Core standards that the Obama administration also is pushing.

Because these projects are in their early stages, it's too early to tell how effective they'll be in meeting the need for a new generation of assessments. But educators will be watching closely to see how these experiments fare.

Whatever their outcome might be, it's bound to be controversial, as change often is. Look at Oregon's experience, for instance. In our story on page 30, we report on how a decision to let students use a computer spell-check feature when taking an online version of the state's writing exam has raised concerns among stakeholders, prompting a larger discussion about the skills students should be tested on in the digital age.

State officials say the controversial move comes after consulting with local school systems and ed-tech experts, and they argue that it more accurately reflects how students compose essays today. To some critics, however, the decision spells the end of society as we know it.

Oregon's decision is the latest response to an increasingly important question in education: With such powerful technology now at our fingertips, do we really need a command of all the facts—or do we need to know how to call up those facts when we want them?

This question isn't new; remember all the hand wringing that accompanied the introduction of graphing calculators into math classes in the '80s and '90s? Today, the notion that calculators would make students dumber seems a little quaint, as a growing number of teachers are proving by using the devices to transform math class into an environment where interactive learning and exploration are replacing rote memorization. And that, in turn, is fostering greater curiosity and experimentation among students. (See our Special Report on page 21.)

If you think what Oregon has done is revolutionary, you might be shocked by Denmark's notion of testing. In that country, the government has taken the bold step of giving students internet access during their final school-year exams. Students can access any site they want, but they can't use eMail or instant messaging.

For years, Denmark used a CD-ROM to administer these exams, Steen Lassen, senior advisor for the country's Ministry of Education, told *eSchool News* in March. The exams tested whether students were able to find relevant information, think critically about what they 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're looking for when hiring employees.

This past spring, Denmark started a pilot project that gave students full internet access during testing for some subjects, instead of a limited collection of resources loaded onto a CD. In the United States, that would be considered cheating—but in Denmark, officials are testing for "competencies," Lassen said, and not simply a regurgitation of facts.

Whether you believe something's rotten in Denmark, or you support that country's changes, one thing seems clear: The future of student assessment is no longer as unambiguous as a multiple-choice exam.

## Assessing teachers is a challenge, too

How to redesign assessments so they are better instruments for guiding improvement is a question that is just as applicable to teachers as it is to students.

As our front page story "Teacher ratings spark controversy" indicates, the *Los Angeles Times* caused quite a stir by publishing an online database comparing more than 6,000 teachers based on a controversial statistical method that relies on test-score data to determine their effectiveness.

The *Times*' efforts mark the latest chapter in a national debate over how best to measure teacher quality. The Obama administration wants states and districts to incorporate students' test scores into their teacher evaluation systems, but unions caution that test scores don't paint a complete picture of a teacher's worth.

The *Times* rated the city's third- through fifth-grade teachers using an approach called the value-added model. Each student's past test performance was used to project his or her future performance. The difference between the child's actual and projected results is the estimated "value" that the teacher has added or subtracted during the year.

Supporters of the value-added model describe it as a fairer, more accurate way of using students' test scores to assess teacher quality. But just as investors in a mutual fund are warned that the fund's "past performance is no guarantee of future results," I'm not so sure that a student's prior test results are an accurate way to gauge how that student should score on future exams.

We'll be taking a closer look at the value-added model's pros and cons in a future issue, but here's what the American Federation of Teachers had to say about the *Times*' actions: "Leading researchers ... have concluded that value-added

models, which deal with predictions and assumptions, are inherently undependable and imprecise. All have concluded that value-added models should never be used in isolation ... to judge a teacher's performance."

AFT's warnings aside, more schools are rethinking their teacher evaluation processes with an eye toward including students' test scores.

In late August, ED announced the winners of \$3.4 billion in remaining Race to the Top funds to spur state and local school reforms, and implementing teacher evaluation systems that take into account student achievement data was among the criteria for the awards.

One of the winners was the District of Columbia Public Schools, whose chancellor, Michelle Rhee, has butted heads with the local teachers union over her controversial reform efforts. These include firing principals, closing schools, and negotiating a new contract with teachers earlier this year that gave them the chance to earn bonus pay in exchange for fewer job protections. After the contract was signed, Rhee promptly fired 241 teachers whose students were among the lowest performing in the district.

Rhee's actions have earned applause from many school reformers, as well as criticism from teachers and community activists. Under her leadership, the D.C. schools have improved student achievement, and their graduation rate has inched up. But there are still significant gaps in achievement between high-performing and low-performing schools and between whites and blacks. Her critics also have decried her autocratic leadership style.

Last month, in what was widely viewed as a repudiation of Rhee's methods, D.C. voters chose city council



D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee

chairman Vincent Gray over incumbent Adrian Fenty in the city's mayoral primary election. Rhee had campaigned for Fenty, and his loss puts her tenure as chancellor of the city's schools in jeopardy.

Rhee, who called the election results "devastating for the schoolchildren of Washington, D.C.," encouraged school reformers to learn from the election and "be more aggressive and more adamant."

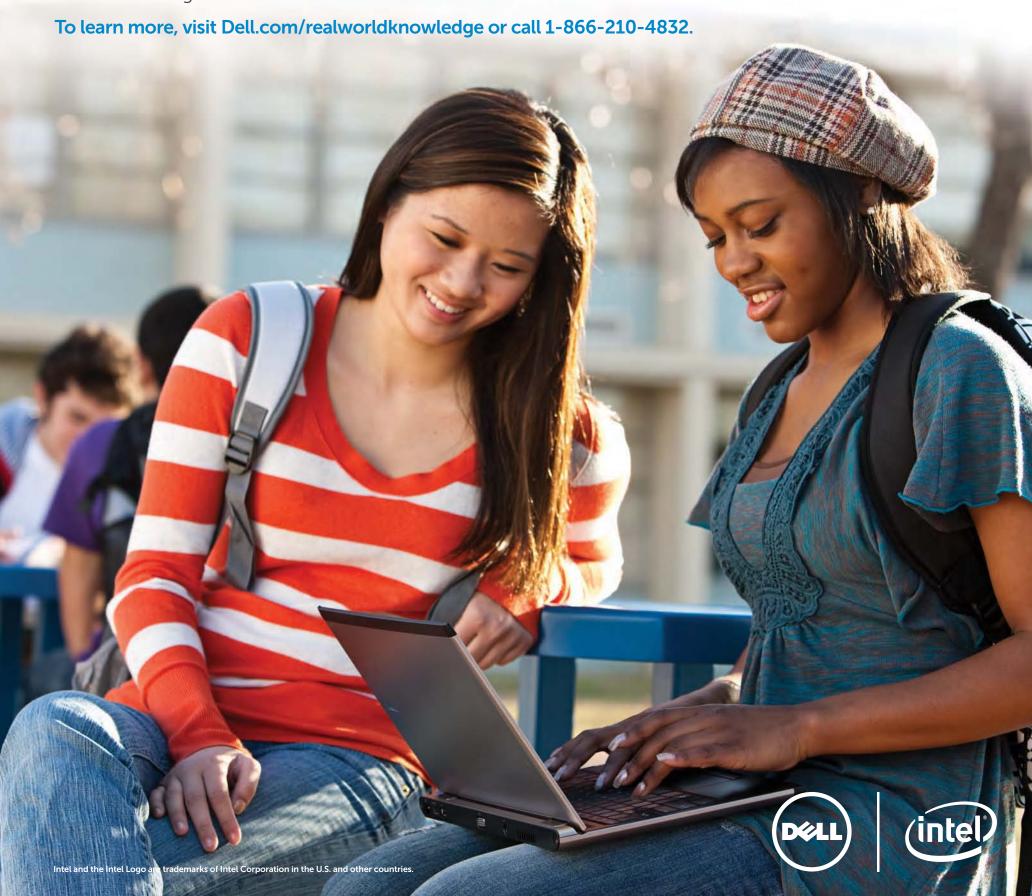
I'd point to a different lesson in Fenty's defeat. City educators are upset that the teacher evaluation system that landed D.C. a Race to the Top grant was created without their input—unlike, say, the systems being developed in states like Florida, New York, and Rhode Island, where teachers have been given a role in discussions.

Creativity, innovation, collaboration, empathy: These aren't just important skills for today's students to learn—they're also key traits for would-be reformers.

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# Online update

# Free webinars explore important ed-tech topics

In exchange for just an hour of your time, you can learn how to add video easily to your school or district web site ... or cut costs by managing your textbook inventory more effectively ... or sensibly incorporate technology into lessons in ways that can boost students' writing skills.

These are among the topics we'll be exploring this month in our series of FREE webinars at **eSchool News Online**. These one-hour events are a great place to learn about new technologies, or how your colleagues are solving ed-tech challenges similar to your own. All of our webinars are available to anyone free of charge; to participate, all you'll need on the day of the event is internet access. Once you register, you'll receive a link to log in at the scheduled time.

Can't make the date, or missed a previous webinar? Don't worry—our webinars are also recorded and archived for "attending" at your convenience. This is also a great way to go back and review a webinar presentation after the event, or share it with your colleagues.

Here's a peek at what's available this month. To register, go to: <a href="http://www.eschoolnews.com/events/webinars">http://www.eschoolnews.com/events/webinars</a>

### Adding Video to Your Web Site Just Got Easier (Oct. 5, 2:00 p.m. ET)

More than a powerful video streaming platform, EduVision is a full-featured communications package that provides any school, district, or association with its own internet TV broadcast station. It's built around Flash-format video streaming and works with a full range of web browsers. Unlike more technically involved video solutions, EduVision requires virtually no up-front investment in technology or technical training. JDL Horizons provides complete portal management, hosting, and distribution, including customization for your standalone video portal or embedding video in your own web site.

Speakers will include:

- Sally Lindgren, coordinator of technology services for the Great Prairie Area Education Agency, will discuss how she shares video content with her 32 school districts and the state of Iowa.
- Paul Saxton, media teacher at Eagan High School, will discuss how he allows students to upload video homework, publishes a weekly student-produced video news program, and supports video streaming of live events.
- Alan November and Brian Mull of November Learning will share how and why student-created products culminating in video productions engage students in their learning and leverage technology at the core of a school's mission.
   Sponsored by JDL Horizons

## Managing Textbook Inventory to Lower Costs and Support Student Success (Oct. 7, 2:00 p.m. ET)

Textbook mismanagement can cost your district a bundle. Between replacement costs, unused textbooks hiding in closets, and the potential penalties of an audit, your textbook inventory can cost you much more than just the price on the cover. But there are ways to efficiently track textbook inventory and bring textbook costs under control.

In this webinar, participants will learn about:

- Putting a textbook management process in place for the first time
- Where to get the manpower to barcode for efficiency
- Tools for proving equitable access and responding to audits
- Finding the hidden textbooks
- Accountability and recouping the costs of lost textbooks Speaker: Terri Cox, Instructional Resources Coordinator, Comal ISD Sponsored by Follett Software Co.

### Sensibly Incorporating Technology in Today's Classroom: It's All About the Writing! (Oct. 12, 2:00 p.m. ET)

Come spend an hour with BookJams author and California's 2007 Teacher of the Year Alan Sitomer as he hosts a webinar on how to sensibly incorporate technology and new literacies into instruction.

Sponsored by the Alan Sitomer Book Jam

...and don't forget, if you miss any of our webinars, you can listen to the archived version online. Some recent webinars you might have missed, but should check out nevertheless, include:

- How to Serve More Students on the Autism Spectrum with Shrinking Budgets
- Head Of The Class: Answers to 10 Common Education IT Systems Management
- Putting the "e" in Learning for the iGeneration

# New school's \$578M price tag raises eyebrows

### From staff and wire reports

A new public school building in Los Angeles that cost more than \$500 million to build—at a time when the city has laid off more than 3,000 teachers and cut several academic programs—has raised eyebrows across the country, adding fuel to a national debate about how important one's environment is to learning and how best to spend limited educational resources.

The opening of the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools was auspicious for a reason other than its both storied and infamous history as the former Ambassador Hotel, where the Democratic presidential contender was assassinated in 1968. With an eye-popping price tag of \$578 million, it is the nation's most expensive public school ever.

The K-12 complex to house 4,200 students has drawn national attention as the creme de la creme of "Taj Mahal" schools, \$100 million-plus campuses boasting both architectural panache and deluxe amenities.

"There's no more of the old, windowless cinderblock schools of the '70s where kids felt, 'Oh, back to jail,'" said Joe Agron, editor-in-chief of *American School & University*, a school construction journal. "Districts want a showpiece for the community, a really impressive environment for learning."

Not everyone is similarly enthusiastic. "New buildings are nice, but when they're run by the same people who've given us a 50-percent dropout rate, they're a big waste of taxpayer money," said Ben Austin, executive director of Parent Revolution who sits on the California Board of Education.

At RFK, the features include fine art murals and a marble memorial depicting the complex's namesake, a manicured public park, a state-of-the-art swimming pool, and preservation of pieces of the original hotel.

Partly by circumstance and partly by design, the Los Angeles Unified School District has emerged as the mogul of Taj Mahals

The RFK complex follows on the heels of two other LA schools among the nation's costliest—the \$377 million Edward R. Roybal Learning Center, which opened in 2008, and the \$232 million Visual and Performing Arts High School that debuted in 2009.

The pricey schools have come during a sensitive period for the nation's second-largest school system: Nearly 3,000 teachers have been laid off over the past two years, and academic programs have been slashed. The district also faces a \$640 million shortfall—and some schools persistently rank among the nation's lowest performing.

Los Angeles is not alone, however, in building big. Some of the most expensive schools are found in low-performing districts: New York City has a \$235 million campus; New Brunswick, N.J., opened a \$185 million high school in January.

Nationwide, dozens of schools have surpassed \$100 million with amenities including atriums, orchestra-pit auditoriums, food courts, even bamboo nooks. The extravagance has led some to wonder where the line should be drawn and whether more money should be spent on teachers.

"Architects and builders love this stuff, but there's a little bit of a lack of discipline here," said Mary Filardo, executive director of 21st Century School Fund in Washington, D.C., which promotes urban school construction.

Some experts say it's not all flourish and that children learn better in more pleasant surroundings.

Many schools incorporate large windows to let in natural light and install energy-saving equipment, spending more upfront for reduced bills later. Cafeterias are getting fancier, seeking to retain students who venture off campus. Wireless internet and other high-tech installations have become standard.

Some pricey projects have had political fallout.

After a firestorm over the \$197.5 million Newton North High School in Massachusetts, Mayor David Cohen chose not to seek re-election and state Treasurer Timothy Cahill reined in school construction spending.

Now, to get state funds for a new school, districts must choose among three designs costing \$49 million to \$64 million. "We had to bring some sense to this process," Cahill said.

In Los Angeles, officials say the new schools were planned long before the economic pinch and are funded by \$20 billion in voter-approved bonds that do not affect the educational budget.

Still, even LA Unified Superintendent Ramon Cortines derided some of the extravagance, noting that donations should have been sought to fund the RFK project's talking benches commemorating the site's history.

Construction costs at LA Unified are the second-highest in the nation—something the district blames on skyrocketing material and land prices, rigorous seismic codes, and unionized labor.

James Sohn, the district's chief facilities executive, said the megaschools were built when global raw material shortages caused costs to skyrocket to an average of \$600 per square foot in 2006 and 2007—triple the price from 2002. Costs have since eased to \$350 per square foot.

On top of that, each project had its own

After buildings were demolished at the site of the 2,400-student Roybal school, contaminated soil, a methane gas field, and an earthquake fault were discovered. A gas mitigation system cost \$17 million. Meanwhile, the RFK site involved 15 years of litigation with historic preservationists and Donald Trump, who wanted to build the world's tallest building there. The wrangling cost \$9 million.

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# FCC seeks input on rules for online services

### From staff and wire reports

In the latest twist in the Federal Communications Commission's pursuit of "net neutrality" rules to prevent broadband providers from discriminating against certain types of traffic flowing over their lines, federal regulators are seeking public input on what rules should apply to wireless internet access and specialized services that aren't part of the internet but are delivered over wired broadband connections.

The agency's move comes a few weeks after Google Inc. and Verizon Communications Inc. announced a proposal of their own that would allow the FCC to enforce net neutrality rules for wireline broadband traffic would but exempt wireless carriers. The companies' plan, which was not popular with public interest groups, also would leave room for broadband providers to charge extra to route traffic from so-called "premium services" over dedicated networks that are separate from the public internet.

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, as well as many internet content providers, public interest groups, and education organizations, say net neutrality rules are needed to prevent phone and cable companies from abusing their control over high-speed internet access to become online gatekeepers for content.

But the commission faces fierce resistance from phone and cable companies, which insist they need flexibility to manage network traffic to prevent high-bandwidth applications from hogging capacity. Phone companies are particularly opposed to applying net neutrality rules to wireless services, which have more capacity constraints than wired systems.

Phone and cable companies also fear that strict net neutrality rules would prevent them from charging a premium for specialized services that travel over dedicated networks, often called "managed services." That category includes video services such as AT&T Inc.'s U-Verse and could expand to include online gaming, remote medical monitoring, and power grid controls. Some education groups are worried these also could include video services used for distance education.

Broadband providers warn that rules prohibiting them from offering premium services could discourage them from continuing to invest in their lines.

In August, Verizon and Google offered their own policy proposal to try to find a middle ground on net neutrality. Their plan would prohibit phone and cable companies from slowing down, blocking, or charging to prioritize internet traffic traveling over their regular broadband lines. But it would allow broadband providers to charge extra for services like U-Verse that are separate from the public internet.

The Verizon-Google plan also would exempt wireless services from net-neutrality rules.

The FCC's decision to seek public comment on both issues is a disappointment to public-interest groups that have been calling on the agency to move ahead quickly with strong net-neutrality regulations. They say these rules are needed to prevent phone and cable companies from favoring their own services or those of business partners and from discriminating against internet phone calls, online video, and other web services that compete with their core businesses.

"While the FCC continues to play the game of kick the can down the road, consumers are left unprotected," said Free Press Research Director Derek Turner.

Free Press and other public-interest groups have been sharply critical of the proposal from Verizon and Google. They say it would create a two-tiered internet with a fast lane for online companies that can pay more and a slow lane for everyone else. They also complain that it includes a giant loophole for the mobile web at a time when more and more consumers are going online using handheld devices.

Net-neutrality rules have been a top priority for Genachowski since he joined the FCC last summer. The agency has been trying to craft some sort of compromise on the issue in recent months, but those efforts recently reached an impasse. In a statement, Genachowski said the FCC "will continue to be vigilant in guarding against threats to internet freedom."

Even before it moves ahead with any network neutrality proposal, the agency first must establish its authority to regulate broadband in the aftermath of a federal appeals court ruling in April that cast doubt on its existing regulatory framework.

Comments on the FCC's inquiry are due 30 days after its public notice is published in the Federal Register, and reply comments

are due 55 days after this date. Comments can be filed online at www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs by referencing GN Docket No. 09-191 and WC Docket No. 07-52.

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# FBI: No charges in school laptop-spying case

### Agency says it can't prove criminal wrongdoing in remote activation of student webcams

### From staff and wire reports

No criminal charges will be filed against a suburban Philadelphia school district that secretly snapped tens of thousands of webcam photographs and screen shots on laptops issued to students.

The FBI and federal prosecutors announced Aug. 17 that they could not prove any criminal wrongdoing by Lower Merion School District employees.

"We have not found evidence that would establish beyond a reasonable doubt that anyone involved had criminal

intent," U.S. Attorney Zane D. Memeger said in a statement.

The FBI investigated the wealthy district for possible wiretap violations after a student's civil lawsuit exposed the issue. Lower Merion High School student Blake Robbins alleged the district photographed him 400 times in a 15-day period last fall, sometimes as he slept in his bedroom or was half-dressed.

District officials said its technology staff only activated the remote tracking system to try to find laptops that had been reported lost or stolen. But the district soon acknowledged that the software system sometimes remained activated for weeks or months, even after a laptop was found causing the district to capture 56,000 webcam photographs and screen shots from student laptops.

'We are very pleased with today's decision by the U.S. Attorney's Office, which supports the findings of our internal investigation," Superintendent Christopher W. McGinley said. "This is all good news for the students and staff of Lower Merion School District as we prepare for the start of a new school year.'

The federal prosecutor's announcement follows a school board decision on Aug. 16 to prohibit the remote use of the tracking software without the written consent of students and their parents or guardians. The policy was recommended by a task force formed in the wake of the February law-

Robbins' lawsuit was still pending as of press time, and a second student has joined him in suing the district over the alleged electronic spying.

None of the images captured appeared to be salacious or inappropriate, school officials have said. The district said it remotely activated the software to find 80 missing laptops in the past two years.

About 38,000 of the images were taken over several months from six computers reported stolen from a locker room.

The tracking program took images every 15 minutes, usually capturing the webcam photo of the user and a screen shot at the same time.

None of the images captured appeared to be salacious or inappropriate; the district said it remotely activated the software to find 80 missing laptops in the past two years

The district also captured video chats and instant messages that Robbins exchanged with friends, according to his lawyer, Mark Haltzman.

Robbins maintains that he never reported his laptop missing or stolen, and he doesn't know why the district deployed the surveillance software on his computer. He was one of about 20 students who had not paid the \$55 insurance fee required to take the laptops home but was the only one tracked, his lawyer has said.

About a dozen school officials could request an activation, but only two people on the technology staff could turn the program on, the district has said. Those technology staffers, coordinator Carol Cafiero and technician Michael Perbix, were placed on paid leave after Robbins filed suit.

Cafiero's lawyer said she did nothing wrong and wants to return to her \$105,000a-year job. District spokesman Doug Young said he could not comment on the person-

"I would hope they take her back soon," lawyer Charles Mandracchia said Aug. 17. "She's one of the few people that said we needed to establish a policy. And it kind of fell on deaf ears.

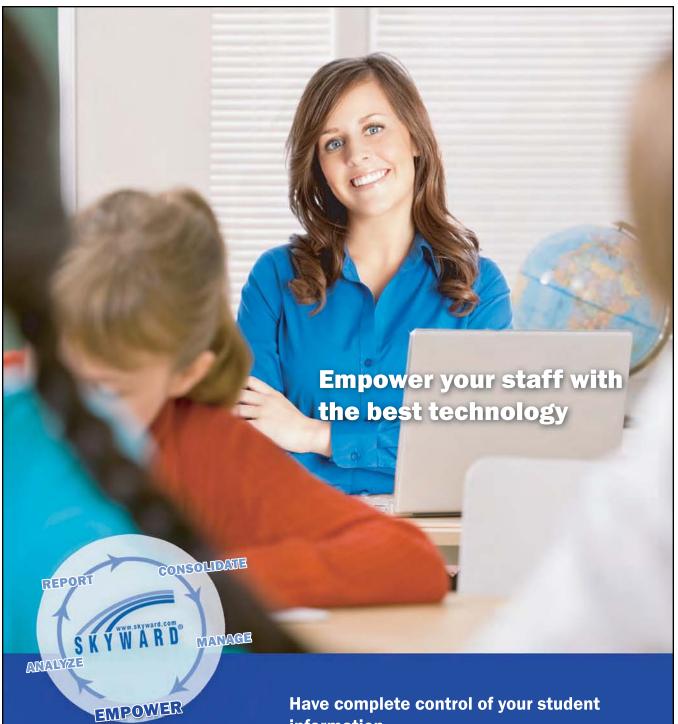
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**10** • *e*SCHOOL NEWS

# Companies turn to social media for grant giving

Maya T. Prabhu Contributing Editor

A growing number of companies are turning to social media to determine grant award winners. Experts say the trend has a number of benefits for grant givers—but the best applicants might not always win.

"In part, this trend is growing as companies see for themselves what 'doing well and doing good' can do for their brand, and social media is often the best means of promoting community outreach, based on its inherent ability to reach communities in new and more personal ways," said Sherrie A. Madia, director of communications for the Wharton School at the University of

Pennsylvania, who is the author of *The Social Media Survival Guide: Everything You Need to Know to Grow Your Business Exponentially with Social Media*.

Steve Loflin, founder and executive director of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS), said his organization uses social media to promote its scholarship opportunities to its members and to showcase scholarship recipients.

"Corporations are using Facebook because it's where their customers, clients, or members are. If you want people to be engaged with your brand and raise the awareness about your grants and organizations, you can't rely on traditional media alone to share that message," he said. "The bottom line is that social media has changed the way in which we acquire and use information. This is true in general and certainly the case with grants and awards."

Both Madia and Loflin cited Pepsi's "Refresh Everything" campaign.

In its campaign, Pepsi invited consumers to become fans of its Facebook page and submit ideas across a variety of categories, from developing neighborhood projects to addressing hunger and homelessness. Fans vote on the entries, and Pepsi will award grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$250,000. The company estimates it will give away \$15.6 million, Madia said.

In the education world, Kohl's uses Facebook to connect with and determine potential grant award winners. In early July, the department store announced a contest that will award \$500,000 to 20 public and private K-12 schools.

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of Kohl's Cares, its philanthropic program, Kohl's will award \$10 million total—20 awards of \$500,000—to schools whose students, staff, faculty, or supporters share what their school would do with the prize. Examples include starting an art program, creating a new computer lab, or saving a music program. The program ran through Sept. 3.

"As kids and parents think about the new school year, we want everyone to dream big about how half a million dollars could impact their favorite school," said Julie Gardner, Kohl's executive vice president and chief marketing officer.

Once a student, teacher, or parent submitted ideas for what his or her school could do with \$500,000, Kohl's Facebook fans could vote up to 20 times for their favorite elementary, middle, or high schools, with a maximum of five votes for any individual school.

The top 20 vote-getting schools that meet contest criteria will win \$500,000 each—as long as the school officials have provided information on how the school will use the money to support education programs or initiatives.

As with all things, using social media to determine grant winners has both pros and cons

"The upside of social media granting is the potential to engage more people, rally communities, and of course, generate positive feelings for the brand in the name of corporate social responsibility," Madia said.

"The downside is that even as these promotions engage, they may isolate as more control is given over to the hands of consumers—the information 'haves'—which may leave organizations who need funding the most even further behind."

Loflin added that the best applicant might not win, because the general public might not be as attentive to all aspects of the application in the same way that a judging panel would.

"You can reduce the likelihood of that by ensuring that you use social media and the public to only vote on finalists. That way, it doesn't matter who wins—you'd feel satisfied that any of the applicants was worthy and met the grant's criteria or standards," he said.

As the use of social media in grant giving evolves, Loflin said there will be a greater need and request for transparency.

"The process of online voting can feel more like a popularity contest than a process for identifying the most qualified and worthy candidate," he said. "Verification and accountability are good measures of fairness and accuracy."

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# Superintendents attending 'tech academies' to boost skills

Growing 21st-century demands have led to tech leadership centers for senior district leaders

### Laura Devaney Managing Editor

As the need for tech-savvy students becomes more pressing, school leaders' technology skills also must keep pace, and superintendents across the nation are enrolling in technology-focused professional development academies to ensure that their school districts don't fall behind on technology integration.

The Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership (TICAL) is a statewide ed-tech service funded by the California Department of Education. All TICAL resources are matched to California state standards, as well as the International Society for Technology in Education's National Education Technology Standards for Administrators. Arkansas also has a TICAL branch, which is funded by the Arkansas Department of Education.

TICAL's online portal offers categorized tools and resources that relate to 21stcentury leadership. Resources address concepts such as data-driven decision making, integrating technology into standards-based curriculum, technology planning, professional development, closing the digital divide, systems operations and maintenance, and financial planning.

TICAL "plays a critical role in helping California narrow the achievement gap by integrating new and relevant ways to increase academic rigor in the classroom through technology," said California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell.

Within the organization is the TICAL Cadre, a network of education leaders chosen for their success. Cadre members contribute content to the online portal and also offer coaching for participants.

The U.S. Department of Education's National Education Technology Plan references TICAL as a leadership success story.

Another resource for superintendents, Technology Information Education Services (TIES), was created in 1967 to provide technology and information resources to school leaders, educators, and students. TIES is a joint-powers cooperative owned by 40 Minnesota school districts, and members represent about 400 schools.

The TIES Superintendents Technology Leadership Academy is available to superintendents throughout Minnesota. Sessions are funded by a federal Enhancing Education Through Technology grant.

TIES follows the Consortium for School Networking's Empowering the 21st Century Superintendent initiative, which focuses on five themes for technology leadership: (1) strengthen district leadership and communications; (2) raise the bar with 21stcentury skills; (3) transform pedagogy with compelling learning environments; (4) support professional development and communities of practice; and (5) create balanced assessments.

Superintendents in the TIES program learn about each of the five themes, with a full day-long session dedicated to each theme. They discuss the day's theme with other superintendents in the morning, and an afternoon session brings the superintendents together with their own administrative team to brainstorm how that given theme applies in their district.

"It helps for them to be with other superintendents in the morning so that they can learn from each other and share practices," said Betty Schweizer, TIES CEO.

During a session about strengthening district communications, superintendents created podcasts about their technology visions. "For some, that was challenging," Schweizer said. But the experience left an impression, and the superintendents "told us that they're using more technology themselves.

CoSN's superintendent framework addresses a "third wave" technology challenge in today's districts. The first-wave challenge is infrastructure, such as networks, hardware, and access. The second wave is the supportive and enabling applications, such as student information systems and distance learning. The third wave, CoSN says, is transformative applications: integrating technology into every aspect of teaching and learning.

While superintendents don't necessarily need to have in-depth involvement with the first two waves, their participation is essential for the third wave.

"It's hard for superintendents to jump in, in the third wave, when they historically haven't been involved in the first or second," Schweizer said-and that's where programs such as TIES can help.



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# Grant program seeks answers to classroom challenges

### From staff and wire reports

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has partnered with the nation's largest teachers union and its charitable foundation to launch a grant program encouraging public school educators to identify and solve K-12 education's most pressing classroom challenges.

The new "Challenge to Innovate" (C2i) program leverages ED's Open Innovation Portal (https://innovation.ed.gov/my-portal) to solicit ideas in a process known as "crowdsourcing," in which officials tap the collective wisdom of a large group of people through the power of the internet.

"Smart innovation will help dramatically accelerate achievement and attainment," said Education Secretary Arne Duncan. "Without it, we will surely fall short of our goals to prepare all of America's students for success in the global economy."

In the new partnership, ED's Open Innovation Portal will host the C2i program, a three-phase challenge from the National Education Association's NEA Foundation.

The first phase of the challenge, from Sept. 7 through Oct. 19, asks educators to share their most pressing classroom challenges that can be solved with \$500 or less. The five ideas with the most online votes, as judged by the Open Innovation Portal

community, each will receive \$1,000 from the NEA Foundation.

In the second phase, from Nov. 16 through Jan. 14, educators will post their best solutions to the winning challenges. Up to 10 of these proposed solutions each will receive a \$2,500 grant from the NEA Foundation for the teachers who suggested these ideas to implement the solutions in their schools.

In the final phase of the program, from Jan. 17 through Feb. 4, the NEA Foundation will select and post up to three top solutions to receive a \$5,000 planning grant and technical support. These winning solutions also will be posted on the Donors

Choose (http://www.donorschoose.org) web site, where teachers nationwide will be invited to submit requests to receive up to \$500 to help implement the ideas. The NEA Foundation, in partnership with citizen philanthropists from the Donors Choose community, will provide funding for teachers to implement and test the innovative solutions.

Educators can take part in the C2i program by joining ED's Open Innovation Portal community. Once they register for the portal (which is free of charge), they can post, review, comment, and vote on the most pressing classroom challenges and their solutions.

C2i "is a powerful tool for educators with three components," said NEA Foundation President Harriet Sanford. "First, it is a social network for educators to trade opinions and information. Second, it is an open invitation for public school educators to share the issues that keep them up at night and the solutions they believe will make a difference. Third, C2i is a challenge to educators to formalize those ideas and be considered for funding and implementation."

ED, the NEA Foundation, and Donors Choose are using the innovation portal to collect ideas from teachers as part of a new government-wide initiative to solicit ideas for solving the nation's challenges from ordinary citizens. Another component of this initiative, Challenge.gov, is a new online site where "entrepreneurs, innovators, and citizen solvers can compete for prestige and prizes by providing novel solutions to tough national problems, large and small," federal officials say.

In February, ED's Office of Innovation and Improvement launched the Open Innovation Portal as a collaborative web community where education stakeholders can highlight areas of need, propose solutions, and fund, implement, and improve these solutions in and outside of the classroom.

Since then, more than 5,000 members have joined the portal, created more than 1,000 connections, and posted more than 250 ideas to improve education, officials say.

Among these many ideas are...

- A collaboration involving the Denver Public Schools and local universities to boost the achievement of English language learners through a process called "collaborative strategic reading";
- An inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, called Enquiring Minds, that takes students' ideas, interests, and experiences as its starting point and gives them more responsibility for the direction and content of their learning; and
- An invitation for local businesses and individuals to sponsor classes and teamteach subjects with highly qualified teachers, in an effort to bring real-world experiences into the classroom, solve the challenge of doing more with fewer resources, and forge stronger relationships with the community.

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**16** • *e*SCHOOL NEWS

# Teens sue Facebook over 'like' button

### Lawsuit says minors' names are used illegally when promoting products on the social network

### From staff and wire reports

Two Los Angeles County teenagers are suing Facebook, claiming the social networking giant effectively sold their names and likenesses to advertisers without parental permission.

The lawsuit, filed Aug. 26 in Los Angeles, challenges a Facebook feature that allows members to note that they like an advertised service or product. Facebook broadcasts those endorsements to the user's friends.

The lawsuit also claims minors un-

wittingly endorse Facebook when people typing their names in a search engine are steered to a Facebook sign-up page.

The plaintiffs say Palo Alto, Califbased Facebook is violating a California law that requires parental consent for children to make commercial endorsements. The teens seek unspecified damages.

Facebook spokesman Andrew Noyes said the lawsuit is meritless. He noted that Facebook doesn't allow users under 18 to let their profiles appear on public search engines.

University of Minnesota law profes-

sor Bill McGeveran, who has much experience in social media and legal issues, told the publication Online Media Daily that "the borderline between conversation and advertising is really blurry in social networking."

McGeveran referenced a 1971 California law that prohibits companies from using people's names or photos in ads without their consent, or if the person is a minor, without parental consent, and pointed out that the law was enacted before the internet or social networking existed.

The class-action lawsuit is filed on be-

half of all California residents who are or were under the age of 18 and members of Facebook from Aug. 26, 2007, to Aug. 26, 2010, and whose likenesses or names were used in a Facebook advertisement or landing page.

"When a teenager sees that their Facebook friends 'like' an ad, it piques their curiosity, making them more likely to click the ad or visit the page," said Los Angeles plaintiff attorney John Torjesen of John C. Torjesen & Associates. "We believe it is a clear case of exploitation of children for the sake of profits."

"The consent of the minor for this commercial use of his or her name and likeness is not obtained by Facebook," said plaintiff attorney and co-counsel Antony Stuart of Stuart Law Firm. "Under California law, the minor's consent cannot be obtained without the consent of the parent or guardian. Facebook makes no effort to obtain parental consent."

Under California law, minors can't give legal consent, and the lawsuit claims that Facebook should seek parental or guardian permission before underage members say they "like" advertised items.

The lawsuit also alleges that Facebook tells advertisers that when a user "likes" a product, the action results in more click-throughs by the user's friends.

# The borderline between conversation and advertising is really blurry in social networking."

### - University of Minnesota law professor Bill McGeveran

"The apparent endorsement of a good or service in an advertisement by one member who is recognizable to other persons will generate higher 'click-throughs' and greater revenues to a paying advertiser, and thereby to Facebook," the lawsuit reads.

"Facebook encourages its members to communicate such 'likes,' characterizing these indications of like as something that contributes to the social nature of communication within the Facebook network. Facebook then uses this information for targeted marketing of endorsement ads to the effect that '[your friend] Billy Smith likes this product.' In the forgoing example, Billy Smith is a Facebook member and a child whose name (and often likeness) is being used to endorse paid advertisements without legal consent."

A Facebook representative said the social networking company will "fight [the lawsuit] vigorously."

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# Publishing giant makes \$400M commitment to ed tech

### Houghton Mifflin Harcourt says it's time to invest in new ideas for K-12 public education

### From staff and wire reports

Educational publishing giant Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) is making a \$400 million investment to back up the company's increasing emphasis on putting more technology into classrooms. The reason, HMH says, is because it no longer accepts the status quo in public education.

We are living in challenging times but the challenge of fixing public education is one challenge we simply have to meet," company CEO Barry O'Callaghan told eSchool News. "We need to bear

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down on what works in the classroom and provide schools and teachers with the tools and resources they need to be effective. Then we need to assess progress, measure results, and do what works best for each child."

The investment, announced Sept. 13, includes \$100 million in incubator money for technology that supports student achievement. Through this new Innovation Fund, HMH will provide capital and product expertise to educational entrepreneurs.

The Boston-based company also plans to invest \$300 million over the next three

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years developing its own education technology, such as a pilot algebra application for the Apple iPad currently being tested by 400 California students.

According to O'Callaghan, though HMH has the knowledge and technology to improve teaching and learning environments, to really effect change, "we need to see all the players with a stake in the school system—administrators, teachers, parents, community organizations, and the private sector-working together to advance the interests of the students."

The HMH Innovation Fund will seek

out, select, fund, and execute ed-tech ideas - submitted by those in the education and technology industries—that can help to engage teachers, administrators, parents, and students in learning.

The fund also will look to support new consumer applications, including gaming platforms and other interactive solutions, to engage students outside the classroom.

While all ideas are appreciated, O'Callaghan said, those focusing on how to personalize learning are particularly appreciated.

"This is a challenge well worth taking on," he said, "because if we can address the particular learning needs and styles of each child, we can support a teacher in helping that child advance where he or she needs extra support and to achieve to his or her full potential. And innovative content, approaches, and technology are what can bring this to life.

In the coming weeks, HMH will formally unveil the process and requirements for submitting concepts, including a dedicated online site for filing ideas.

HMH will invest another \$300 million in-house by creating what the company calls "innovation centers" in the U.S. and Dublin

Within these research centers, O'Callaghan said, HMH is focused on developing new ed-tech products ranging from virtual and online learning tools, to digital supplemental content to help students, teachers, and parents extend existing curriculum, to emerging growth areas such as education gaming and mobile application development.

The company's research teams already have created two pilot programs based on new technologies:

1. A one-year pilot program in four California school districts to test a full-curriculum algebra application on Apple's iPad.

More than 400 California eighth-grade students will receive instruction strictly via an iPad loaded with Holt Algebra 1 course materials, including comprehension tracking tools that give students customized online remediation based on quiz and test scores and simultaneously provide teachers with student-specific performance feedback. A report of the research findings from the pilot project is expected in fall 2011.

2. A new all-digital Language Arts program in Texas for grades 2–12, called Texas Write Source, that helps students of every learning style master writing forms and grammar usage through the use of wholeclass interactive whiteboards, an online workspace that enables students to share personalized essays, and the ability to download video podcasts, audio-enabled interactive mini-lessons, games, and quizzes

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# What schools can learn from charters about teaching ELL students

#### Meris Stansbury Associate Editor

As charter schools become testing grounds for innovative approaches to education, many of these schools with high English language learner (ELL) and Latino enrollments are identifying best practices for how to achieve proficiency with these students. The most important advice: Involve the community and offer afterschool activities.

"Next Generation Charter Schools: Meeting the Needs of Latinos and English Language Learners," a new report released by the Center for American Progress (CAP), details how charter schools can become models for all schools that serve a high number of ELL and Latino students.

The report comes as the Obama administration has encouraged states to support the expansion of high-quality charter schools by giving states that lift caps on new charters a chance to win grants from its Race to the Top competition. But even as the administration pushes for more charter schools, many critics are questioning whether the schools really are any more effective than traditional public schools.

According to Melissa Lazarin, associate director for education policy at CAP and co-author of the report, Latinos already have a large presence in many charter schools, specifically those located in California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida.

"Forty percent of Latino students are ELLs," said Lazarin, "[and] there are also 5 million ELLs in pre-K through [grade] 12, with 10 percent enrolled in public schools. ... These numbers are large and must be addressed."

Peter Groff, president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, said he hopes the report will help other schools to "replicate what works with ELLs in both charters and public schools."

### **Effective strategies**

The report lists a few strategies that topperforming ELL and Latino-based charters—El Sol Science and Arts Academy in Santa Ana, Calif.; the Raul Yzaguirre School for Success in Houston; YES Prep Gulfton in Houston; and International Charter School in Pawtucket, R.I.—are using.

In general, these schools establish high expectations for all students during the hiring process to ensure that teaching staff enter the classroom with these expectations.

The schools also accelerate the pace at which ELLs engage with grade-level content, and all four schools stress the importance of teaching a second language while simultaneously delivering core academic content.

For Monique Daviss, executive director of El Sol Science and Arts Academy, dual-language instruction is considered a unique characteristic that other schools don't offer.

Daviss' school has students that are proficient in both English and Spanish by the fourth grade. Currently, students are 95-percent proficient in both languages.

"While at first it can be intimidating for non-ELL parents to put their child in this school, they also know that this school offers a variety of services and has a high percentage of graduation," she said. Daviss explained that all students must take the standardized test in English in second grade, in accordance with California standards.

The schools also work to expand learning time opportunities, on the premise that more learning time can enable individualized or small-group instruction to target ELL students' learning gaps.

Richard Farias, superintendent of Raul Yzaguirre School for Success and founder, president, and CEO of the Tejano Center for Community Concerns, said that by offering school until 6 p.m., students are not getting into trouble.

"Nine hundred and fifty students are currently enrolled in the school, and we have a waiting list of 400. One of the biggest reasons parents want to enroll their child is because they know we are a safe school," he said.

"Four hundred students stay at school until 6 p.m.," said Daviss of El Sol. "Then 300 adults attend our adult education classes from 6 to 9 p.m. These classes are like those offered at a community college."

Farias' school also offers evening classes for adults, because, he says, "many adults in these communities are illiterate and can't help their kids at home with their homework."

Classes for adults include citizenship, language, and computer skills.

With a large ELL population, most of the schools take an approach that makes ELLs everyone's responsibility. This includes supporting teachers' efforts to obtain certification and additional professional development to instruct ELLs, and training all staff on effective strategies to engage ELL students.

The schools used a variety of formal and informal strategies to create and foster strong lines of communication with students' parents, even in languages other than English. Translating all school materials, conducting regular home visits, and having bilingual staff are examples.

"Our charter is designed specifically for low-income, at-risk students," said Farias. "One of the first things we found was how important it was to implement home visits, because teachers need to see and understand where these kids come from. When these kids come to school, they don't leave their home life and culture behind, which is a mistaken assumption a lot of schools make."

Farias said his school has received tremendous community support, because it recognizes that kids can be successful if the school acts as a guide but that the community must be involved, too.

Farias' school also provides summer activities that include parents, as well as mandatory summer school for students who are not proficient. The school currently has a zero-percent dropout rate, and 90 percent of graduates go to college.

### **Charter laws**

According to the CAP report, changes in state policies can support and enhance some of the strategies used at the four highlighted charter schools. These include:

 Re-examining provisions related to enrollment and recruitment. Most states require an open enrollment policy for all charter schools, as well as a lottery process when demand exceeds



Best practices for encouraging proficiency include strong community support.

the number of available slots. The few that do not should consider following this conventional practice, says the report. States also might want to consider monitoring enrollment numbers for certain populations, including ELLs, to ensure that all students have equitable access to charter schools.

- Considering a school's capacity to effectively serve ELLs in evaluation charter school applications. This requirement is worth considering when the school will be located in a school district or zone that has a significant ELL population, says the report.
- Providing clear guidance in state charter laws that specify equitable access to federal and state categorical stream for charter schools. This includes clear guidance on the state-to-charter allotment for federal Title III dollars and state funding allotted for ELLs, which some charter schools have difficulty accessing.
- Holding schools accountable for progress in closing academic proficiency and college readiness gaps and meeting growth targets. This should be based in disaggregated outcomes across race, ethnicity, and language status, and in instances of multi-campus charter networks, each individual campus should be evaluated for its performance, according to the report.
- Considering the role that charter school autonomy can have on the education of ELLs and Latinos. According to the report, the level of autonomy afforded to charters has made it possible for school leaders and educators to flexibly mold their school models in ways that have demonstrated strong results for ELLs and Latinos, including using native-language instruction programs.

"Autonomy is the key to success," said Groff. "Lots of regulation for charters would hinder innovation."

### **Critics respond**

While the four charter schools profiled in the CAP report have had clear success in teaching ELLs and Latino students, critics of the charter school movement note that charter schools in general have had mixed results—and in many communities, their enrollment doesn't fairly reflect the overall population of ELL students.

"The essence of the charter movement is extreme variability," said Diane Ravitch, an education historian whose latest book is critical of the push for more charters. "There are some excellent charter schools, some terrible charters, and most are in between. On average, charters do not get better academic outcomes than regular [public schools]."

Ravitch noted that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, has compared the performance of students in charter schools to those in regular public schools since 2003.

"In no assessment—2003, 2005, 2007, 2009—have charters outperformed regular publics, whether one looks at Hispanic students, black students, low-income students, or urban students," she said.

In her book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*, Ravitch describes how a *Boston Globe* survey last year found that ELLs account for nearly one-fifth of all Boston public school students, but in the city's charters (with only one exception), the ELL population was fewer than 4 percent.

Similarly, a *New York Times* story from earlier this year reported that New York charter schools lag in enrolling Latinos. Although Latinos are the largest ethnic group in New York City's public schools, there are nearly twice as many black students as Latinos among the city's 30,000 charter school students, the *Times* reported.

Ravitch and other critics argue that one way charter schools have an advantage over traditional public schools, and could do a disservice to the most at-risk students, is that they take students whose parents are the most engaged in their children's success.

"Parents who care about their kids' education enough to make the effort to learn about and request a school are the ones whose kids attend charter schools," wrote Sharon Higgins of Change.org in an article titled "Charters Exclude the Most Challenging Students."

"Parents who don't have it together to pay attention, care, or take action to try to improve their kids' education do not choose charter schools. Thus, their kids—obviously likely to be the most challenged and challenging—are left in the traditional public schools."

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# Doctors eye health hazard in powerful laser pointers

Journal article warns of dangers of some high-powered laser pointers easily available online

### From staff and wire reports

A 15-year-old boy damaged his eyes while playing with a laser pointer he'd bought over the internet, say doctors who warn that dangerously high-powered versions are easily available online. One eye expert called it "a legitimate public health menace."

The boy's case is reported in the Sept. 9 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* by doctors who treated him at the Lucerne Cantonal Hospital in Switzerland.

It follows two reports in June of similar

accidents. British doctors said a teenager damaged his eyes with a high-powered laser pointer, and a British physician said his vision was affected for several months after he was zapped by his 7-year-old son.

Laser pointers are devices that resemble pens and emit a narrow beam of laser light. They're used by lecturers to point out information during presentations, for example.

Laser pointers sold in the United States are subject to a power limit imposed by the Food and Drug Administration—one that won't cause instant eye damage, although harm is still possible with prolonged expo-

sure. Laser pointers that exceed the FDA restriction can be found online, however.

The Swiss boy's laser was 30 times more powerful than the FDA limit. He bought it to pop balloons and burn holes in paper and his sister's sneakers, his doctors said.

One day, he was playing with the pointer in front of a mirror to create a light show, and he accidentally zapped his eyes with its green light several times.

Although he noticed right away that his vision was blurry, he was afraid of telling his parents. So it wasn't until two weeks later, when he couldn't hide the problem



Laser pointers should have a power output no more than 5 milliwatts.

any longer, that he saw a doctor.

The vision in his left eye was so poor that he couldn't count fingers more than three feet away. His other eye also showed severe vision loss, one that would make it difficult to read a newspaper, Dr. Martin Schmid, one of the doctors reporting the case, said in an eMail message to the Associated Press.

Examination showed a hemorrhage in his left eye and several tiny scars in his right eye.

After four months, his vision showed some improvement but remained moderately impaired, Schmid said.

High-power devices like the one the teen bought are advertised as laser pointers and look just like low-powered versions, Schmid and colleagues wrote.

"I'm stunned that a kid can get access to ... this type of power," commented Dr. George A. Williams, chair of ophthalmology at the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine in Royal Oak, Mich.

"This is a legitimate public health menace," said Williams, a spokesman for the American Academy of Opthalmology. "Parents should be aware there are inappropriate lasers available over the internet."

The FDA has warned in the past that it has found laser pointers and toys that exceed the output limit of 5 milliwatts—five-thousandths of a watt. It rarely collects reports of eye-damage incidents like the case in Switzerland, said FDA health promotion officer Dan Hewett, so it's not clear how often they happen.

His agency recommends that consumers make sure laser pointer labels carry a designation of Class IIIa or lower, along with a statement of compliance with Chapter 21 CFR. Hewett suggests consumers should look on the label to make sure the power output is no more than 5 milliwatts, or 5 mW.

But he stressed that even a laser product that meets those conditions can cause eye damage if a person stares into the beam long enough.

"Just because it says 5 mW and Class IIIa, FDA is not saying you can grab this laser and stare at it," he said.

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# The Interactive Math Classroom

Backed by high-quality teaching, technology can breathe life into abstract concepts

In Audrey Cucci's math classes in Frankfort, N.Y., it's not unusual to see students moving around the room, engrossed in conversation, sometimes even laughing—and generally having a good time.

No, her students aren't slacking off; they're actually deeply involved in their learning. Armed with collaborative handheld technology and an approach that incorporates problem solving within real-world scenarios, Cucci has managed to take a subject that students typically think of as dull and make it highly engaging and interactive. And the results speak for

themselves: The number of Cucci's students who are passing has increased by nearly 20 percent.

"What was more important to me were the comments of my students—it's not often that a kid walks into a math classroom and says, 'This is cool,'" she said.

Cucci, who teaches at Frankfort-Schuyler Central High School, isn't alone in her approach. Across the country, a movement is afoot to make math class more interactive, replacing problems on the chalkboard with tools and strategies that will capture students' interest and make math come alive.

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# An essential tool for teaching

The National Council for Teachers of Mathematics holds that technology is "an essential tool for teaching and learning mathematics effectively" and that it extends teaching and learning opportunities.

Tools such as interactive graphing calculators and computer software help students "extend the range and quality of their mathematical investigations and encounter mathematical ideas in more realistic settings," according to the organization.

When properly implemented and supported, technology can help students increase achievement and grasp complex math concepts that might otherwise be too obscure for thorough understanding, NCTM says. But educators must be adequately prepared to know when and how students can most effectively use technology to boost learning.

NCTM's recommendations for technology in the math classroom, posted on the organization's web site, include:

- Every school mathematics program should provide students and teachers with access to instructional technology tools, including appropriate calculators, computers with mathematical software, internet connectivity, handheld data-collection devices, and sensing probes.
- Pre-service and in-service teachers of mathematics at all levels should be provided with appropriate professional development in the use of instructional technology, the development of mathematics lessons that take advantage of technology-rich environments, and the integration of technology into day-to-day instruction.
- Curricula and courses of study at all levels should incorporate appropriate instructional technology in objectives, lessons, and assessment of learning outcomes.
- Programs of pre-service teacher preparation and in-service professional development should strive to instill dispositions of openness to experimentation with ever-evolving technological tools and their pervasive impact on mathematics education.
- Teachers should make informed decisions about the appropriate implementation of technologies in a coherent instructional program.

The Center for Implementing Technology in Education (CITEd) conducted seven focus groups in 2005 to examine the challenges facing schools and districts when it comes to implementing technology. Some common challenges emerged, including funding and professional development needs.

The two are somewhat linked: Many focus group members said that limited funding means limited professional development opportunities. Tight school budgets also mean outdated computers, software programs, and internet connections.

In addition, educators said time constraints often limit the extent to which they integrate technology into their instruction. They said they don't have the time to find technology resources online or in professional learning communities.

Limited time and funding contribute to what many in the focus groups said is an urgent need to help math teachers experience professional development that uses the technology teachers already have access to in their own classrooms.

—L.D.

### Interactive Math Classroom...

continued from page 21

It's no secret that math class often fails to elicit enthusiasm from students. Although hard-to-teach, hardto-learn topics such as algebra can present challenges, technology tools exist that can help make learning a more engaging, and even fun, experience for students.

The kind of interactive classroom environment created by Cucci and others has the potential to transform math instruction nationwide. Incorporating technology products that help students visualize abstract problems in a real-world context can move math from a frustrating class to a potential career choice for students. And tools that enable students to collaborate and share ideas can kindle excitement and enthusiasm among both students and teachers alike.

That could be just the shot in the arm needed for U.S. math instruction. It's been well documented that the

vide access for students from a wide variety of backgrounds," he said. "In mathematics, there are just certain concepts that are sticky, that are tough, and they always have been. There are certain things that technology can really help with."

(For more on NCTM's support of interactive technology that can boost student engagement and achievement, see the sidebar "An essential tool for teaching.")

### No more 'powering down'

Cucci uses the TI-Nspire Navigator system from Texas Instruments, which wirelessly connects students' graphing calculators to each other and to a teacher's computer, making it possible to have shared learning experiences.

Her classroom also contains an interactive whiteboard and wireless slate, a document camera, and a wireless microphone. Each student has his or her own TI-Nspire handheld unit, and students take all notes,



"In mathematics, there are just certain concepts that are sticky, that are tough, and they always have been. There are certain things that technology can really help with." — Mike Shaughnessy, president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)

United States ranked 24th among industrialized nations in the 2003 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the last year the test was given in mathematics. In 2007, a different international exam—the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or TIMSS—found the average math achievement of U.S. fourth graders trailed that of eight other countries, and the average math scores of U.S. eighth graders trailed that of five other nations (all of them in Asia).

Students' varied backgrounds are part of what complicates U.S. math instruction. For example, an increasing number of students are not native English speakers, so math teachers face a challenge before the math curriculum even enters the picture, said Mike Shaughnessy, president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

"Technology can level that playing field; it can pro-

tests, and quizzes and complete all homework assignments using their TI-Nspire device.

"Interactivity in the math classroom means movement and engagement, and students who are actively engaged in conversation, brainstorming, and creating," Cucci said.

"The interactive classroom might look a little different than your typical classroom, with technologies that engage and excite students. On any given day, if you were to walk into my classroom, you would see my students moving about different stations, or up at the [whiteboard], or acting as a live presenter with the TI-Nspire Navigator."

Cucci's students often sit in small groups to discuss math concepts and work through problems together, which reinforces collaboration and problem-solving skills.

"My class is never quiet, and if it is, that tells me

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### Interactive Math Classroom...

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they are not 'getting it,'" she said. "I encourage my kids to interrupt and give their ideas and hypotheses. I encourage them to build their own knowledge."

Cucci said she tries to create a classroom environment that is similar to what her students will experience in a college setting, and group work that involves solving problems they could expect to see outside of the classroom is a big part of that.

For instance, when her students study exponential growth and decay, students split into groups using tools such as a temperature probe, motion detector, or light sensor. One student operates the probe or sensor, another is in charge of the TI-Nspire device, which is connected to the probe, and a third student records the data on temperature changes, differences in motion, and different brightness levels. Students learn important collaboration skills while they're working in groups on different experiments.

Cucci uses her interactive whiteboard and wireless microphone to record every lesson she presents to the class as a whole, which she then posts on SchoolTube and links to her class web site for students to access from school or home as needed.

"I do have high expectations, but my students are willing to rise to them because they enjoy my class and are motivated to do so," she said. "They do not have to 'power down' when they come see me."

# 'Action-consequence activities' help illustrate key concepts

A key feature of the TI-Nspire is its ability to display math exercises in a more dynamic and interactive fashion, allowing students to manipulate the data on their handheld screen and see what effect these changes have in real time.

This functionality has led to the creation of what TI calls "action-consequence activities," which direct students to "take action on a math object in a TI-Nspire document, observe the consequence, and reflect on the math implications," according to the company.

For example, an algebra lesson on inverse variation asks students to explore this concept by manipulating a rectangle with a fixed area. On their TI-Nspire handhelds, students use a virtual "slider" that adjusts the rectangle's length, and the width automatically changes, too, so that the area remains constant. Students then capture the length and width values and store these data in a spreadsheet using the TI-Nspire's manual data capture feature. After gathering 10 sets of values, students use the spreadsheet to compute the product of the lengths and widths to verify that it remains constant, and they create a graph to visually represent the inverse variations.

Action-consequence activities provide a helpful visual explanation of various math concepts, Cucci said, and the outcome is instant when students manipulate one part of a mathematical equation or process on their handhelds.

"The kids like it because it's so visual," she said.

TI offers several of these action-consequence activities as part of its Math Nspired offering, which combines classroom-ready lessons with self-paced online professional development resources to help teachers teach the hardest-to-learn math concepts.

Designed to be used "as is" or modified as desired, all Math Nspired lessons are developed in conjunction with classroom educators, TI says. Algebra Nspired and Geometry Nspired are the first offerings in this series, with Algebra 2 and Calculus content to be available this fall. (For more information, see the sidebar "Teaching the hardest-to-learn math concepts.")

Besides helping students visualize abstract ideas, the TI-Nspire's ability to show the effects of data changes in real time encourages students to experiment in ways

that help them take ownership of their education, said Sean Bird, a math teacher at Covenant Christian High School in Avon, Ind., and a national T3 instructor. T3, or Teachers Teaching with Technology, is Texas Instruments' national professional development and leadership program.

Instead of watching a teacher write an equation on a chalkboard, students can plug that equation into their handhelds and can see what the equation does and how it works, Bird explained. They can explore what happens when they change certain variables—and they get immediate feedback.

The TI-Nspire devices include touchpads that operate like a computer with a mouse, and a "Scratchpad" on the home screen lets students perform calculations and create graphs without saving any work.

"My students enjoy using the touchpad handhelds to manipulate math equations, which gives them a deeper understanding of the concepts and helps them learn faster and retain more," Bird said.

## Formative assessment leads to better teaching

Another aspect of the TI-Nspire Navigator system that Bird really appreciates is a polling feature that allows him to make sure his students understand important concepts and also lets students indicate their confusion anonymously.

"Using that formative assessment tool really helps the teacher to become a better teacher," he said.

Besides quick polls, another way educators can ensure student comprehension is by taking a snapshot of the screen on students' TI-Nspire devices. The Screen Capture feature records students' keystrokes so the teacher can see how they arrived at an answer, and the teacher can share this information step by step with the class if desired. Conversely, the teacher can share his or her own keystrokes with the rest of the class to demonstrate a mathematical process.

This type of interactivity lets students become a part of the lesson and makes them feel as if they're exploring math concepts together with the teacher, instead of merely attending a lecture and copying numbers and symbols into a notebook.

In this vision of a connected math classroom, teachers are able to adjust their instruction to better meet students' needs and make sure they are understanding the lesson—and this ability was found to have a significant effect on student achievement in a recent federal study.

A four-year, \$3 million study funded by the Institute of Education Sciences and the U.S. Department of Education found that Algebra I students whose teachers

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# Evidence suggests that the interactive classroom model works

A four-year, \$3 million study funded by the Institute of Education Sciences and the U.S. Department of Education found that Algebra I students whose teachers used TI-Navigator networked classroom technology achieved higher math test scores and were more confident in their math abilities.

Researchers gathered data on 127 Algebra I teachers and 1,128 students from 28 states. Students whose teachers used the Navigator system scored 14 percentage points higher on a custom Algebra I test on average, compared with students whose teachers did not use the system.

Another research project—the Classroom Connectivity in Mathematics and Science Project, based at Ohio State University (OSU)—focused on the impact of technology, accompanied by strong professional development, on student achievement.

Researchers hypothesized that with the help of technology integration supported by teacher professional development, students in a classroom where the teacher used a TI-Navigator system would perform better on a post-test than students in a control classroom.

The longitudinal study included more than 4,000 students over four years, said Douglas Owens, an OSU professor and principal investigator on the project. Teachers were randomly assigned to either a TI-Navigator classroom or to a control classroom.

A large part of formative assessment is revealing student thinking and making instructional decisions based on that thinking, said Steven Pape, co-principal investigator and a University of Florida professor.

The classroom connectivity afforded by the Navigator system allows teachers to make better, more informed decisions about the instructional strategies they should use, he added.

A connected classroom also has fewer students who drift off and become disengaged in the lesson, said Owens. Students using the handhelds are "engaged with their handheld and the activities going on in the classroom."

"In a normal mathematics classroom, students say, 'This is math, I have to do it," explained Owens. "In a connected classroom, students say, 'This is math, and I understand it. I can do it.' Students are engaged with the activities in the classroom and with the tasks the teacher has set."

"The most exciting thing about connected classroom technology is that teachers get this accurate information about student learning while the class is unfolding, while they still have a chance to make adjustments," said Karen Irving, an OSU professor and co-principal investigator.

Irving said that, although the images of student handhelds projected onto a screen or whiteboard for the entire class to see are anonymous, some educators reported that students voluntarily pointed out their incorrect graphs or mathematical equations in an attempt to fully understand the math concept.

"It gives students more control over revealing [their] knowledge—or lack of knowledge," she said.

Students in the Navigator classrooms learned 20 percent to 36 percent more than they would have in a typical Algebra I classroom, Pape said.

"Algebra is a gatekeeper to many of the advanced mathematics classes, so we need to work in Algebra I to begin to help students break through" to more advanced math courses, he said.

The researchers noted that in focus groups, students in the connected classrooms were much more engaged—and through quantitative analysis, the researchers determined that students in those technology-rich classrooms believed in their ability to learn math much more strongly.

Students are sometimes fearful of math and have anxieties, but in a connected classroom they feel more supported, with more of a sense of community,

"Having information from 30 students makes a teacher's job more complex, but it helps them make the instructional changes they need to make to support learning," Pape said. —L.D.







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# Teaching the hardest-to-learn math concepts

What are the concepts within core math topics that students struggle to understand in particular?

Under the direction of Melendy Lovett, president of education technology for Texas Instruments, that was the question TI recently set out to answer.

The company partnered with Gail Burrill, an instructor in the department of teacher education at Michigan State University, and Thomas Dick, a professor of mathematics and coordinator of collegiate mathematics education at Oregon State University, to find out which math topics students traditionally struggle with more than others.

Burrill and her team of researchers at Michigan State, and Dick and his team of researchers at Oregon State, examined all of the high-stakes assessments they could find in all 50 states and looked at how well students performed on each individual item.

"We tried to categorize items in terms of whether students were succeeding, and we looked to see, across the space, if there were clusters [of difficulty] around the same mathematical topic," Burrill said.

Algebra is one common area of difficulty, and Burrill said it was clear that students struggled with the notion of equivalents, equivalent expressions, and other algebraic concepts.

The researchers weren't able to do a full item analysis for every state, but for those states that made performance data available for each individual test

"We tried to categorize items in terms of whether students were succeeding, and we looked to see, across the space, if there were clusters [of difficulty] around the same mathematical topic."

 Gail Burrill, instructor, Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University

item, Burrill and Dick said they saw a common pattern of math struggles emerge.

"The research we did really was around trying to get a better handle on what were those problem topics that kids were having difficulty with," said Dick. He noted that the research "set the stage for us to think [of] ways that we could use [the TI-Nspire] to target these topics."

Based on what they learned, Burrill and Dick—who both are project researchers and academic advisors for TI's Math Nspired initiative—brainstormed ways of using the TI technology to help students master these hard-to-teach concepts.

The researchers brought their ideas back to Lovett at TI. The company gathered a group of educators to evaluate these prototypes, and the educators, researchers, and TI team members shared their thoughts on addressing tough-to-teach areas using the TI-Nspire system and the prototypes.

"One of the things we've been thinking about is that technology serves two roles. It serves as a mechanism



Tech can make hard topics easier to teach.

for doing the operations, performing the calculations, and freeing up kids to think about what is actually happening mathematically," Burrill said. "Its other role is to develop understanding. We really focused more on developing understanding—not ignoring its ability to do things, but we were really trying to help address the [mental hurdles to understanding] that surfaced in the tough-to-teach, tough-to-learn areas."

Dick said that because the TI-Nspire lets students play with equations and see corresponding changes immediately, it opens up a chance for teachers to ask students not just what happens, but why—and students can explore the math however they please.

"To us, that's what was so exciting," he said. "It really opened up a lot more opportunities. You could still use it as your workhorse, but it also revealed a chance to design some action-consequence environments: Students can take a purposeful action and immediately see the consequence. There are lots more chances to ask 'why' questions."

Burrill added: "The really important thing is that every student is engaged in thinking about those 'why' questions. They're not observing someone else do it, they're not listening to someone tell them what is happening, they're actually engaged in it, in an interactive math classroom having conversations with each other and with the teacher about what might be causing the consequences and how they might think harder about the mathematics."

The researchers' work is reflected in many of the resources contained in TI's Math Nspired (www.mathnspired.com), an online collection of classroom-ready lessons that address these toughto-teach concepts using the TI-Nspire system.

Burrill said interactivity in math classrooms makes children more visible to teachers—they can't hide their written work under their hands and can't avoid eye contact if a teacher has a classroom system that displays every child's screen and work on a master computer or unit. And because teachers have that access, they can help students who might not grasp a specific topic in a more sensitive way.

"I think, with teachers in general, the approach has resonated," said Dick. "Teachers are always looking for an alternative way to get through to kids. One approach might work for the vast majority of the class, but you want to reach everyone in the class—so having some alternatives is what's neat about having these explorations." —L.D.

### Interactive Math Classroom...

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used TI-Navigator technology achieved higher test scores and were more confident in their math abilities.

Researchers gathered data on 127 Algebra I teachers and 1,128 students from 28 states. Students whose teachers used the Navigator system scored 14 percentage points higher on a custom Algebra I test, compared with students whose teachers did not use the system. (See the sidebar "Evidence suggests that the interactive classroom model works.")

Bird uses the TI-Nspire Teacher Software to create classroom materials suited to students' needs. Then, using the system's wireless capability, he sends those activities to students' handhelds during class.

The teacher software also lets him project all student screens onto a central screen, so students can see everyone else's answers. And, he can delete files from students' calculators, which he said is helpful for classroom management and to prevent a student who's in a morning class from sharing test or quiz information with a student from an afternoon class.

The TI-Nspire Student Software lets students use their home computers just like a TI-Nspire handheld, only on a larger screen — allowing them to transfer files easily between a home computer and the handheld device.

Bird said he believes technology has changed the potential for math instruction.

"When you have [students] interacting with it in interesting ways, [the concept] really sticks with them longer," he said.

### Professional development is critical

To make this vision of the interactive math classroom a reality requires teachers who are well versed in appropriate uses of the technology—but many educators struggle to find and prepare digital content for their classes, or have limited time in which to incorporate technology.

That's why a strong professional development program is essential. Technology can boost student engagement, Bird said, "but if teachers don't know how to effectively use it, it won't be used to its potential. ... Professional development provides that vital link in the chain."

Cindy Moss, director of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, helped to compile a STEM education report that revealed educators need 80 hours of high-quality professional development to really change their instructional practices.

"That's two [full] weeks—[but] in the real world of public education, we get a day in August and a day in February," Moss said. She noted that training "needs to be professional and ongoing."

Moss said one of her main concerns is helping teachers improve.

"Thave 140,000 kids. How do I take average teachers and turn them into rock stars?" she said. "I feel like this is a matter of national security; it's not just the morally right thing to do, it's something we have to do for our economy."

Using a comprehensive system of eight research-based strategies for supporting math instruction from TI, called MathForward, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools dramatically increased the number of students performing at grade level on state mathematics tests.

"It has the technology that hooks the kids," Moss said of the system. "The kids are excited to learn, and we're using the way they like to learn. They don't realize ... they're learning math."

(To learn more about Charlotte-Mecklenburg's use of the MathForward system, see the sidebar "A comprehensive approach to math reform pays off.")

One of the eight strategies is continuous, hands-on support and professional development for educators. Teachers attend a week-long training session in the summer, work with classroom coaches four days a month, and attend ad-

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### Interactive Math Classroom...

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ditional training once a month during the first year of the program. "All of this works because it changes the teacher." Moss said.

Although she had some initial concerns about older teachers' reactions to using the technology, Moss said she has seen no teacher hesitation. "Teachers don't have to be technology experts—this is the best thing I've ever seen," she said. "It takes the fear out of math for them."

Though technology has tremendous potential to transform math instruction, NCTM's Shaughnessy said it must be implemented correctly.

Teachers "need to think about getting [students] hooked" with a unique problem or challenge to solve, he said. "Once you've got that hook in there, it's a really powerful way to teach math. But it is a challenge for some teachers who have been out [of teacher education] for a while, because they themselves didn't get a chance to experience technology that way."

TI's Math Nspired, which includes a selection of online and blended training opportunities that can be customized to meet educator, school, and district needs, can help—and NCTM also offers support and resources to help math teachers integrate technology effectively into their classrooms.

Shaughnessy said teachers who attend NCTM conferences or workshops arrive with open minds.

"It does take orchestration; there's lots of initial investment and, later on, a lot of payoff. It takes a good attitude toward risk on the teacher's part, to be comfortable trying new things and to realize that the kids are going to find things [beyond the teacher's skill level]," he said.

Ultimately, fostering an interactive approach to math education will better prepare students for success outside of school, Shaughnessy said.

He added that technology offers "tremendous potential" as a tool for revolutionizing math instruction, concluding: "It's something that we have only really begun to use in good ways. ... The sky is the limit there."



Using networked calculators can help teachers discretely see which students need more attention.

# A comprehensive approach to math reform pays off

Officials in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District knew they needed a change when the annual number of students performing at grade level on state mathematics tests grew by just 3 percent.

After exploring their options, Cindy Moss, the district's STEM director, and her team chose to implement Texas Instruments' MathForward initiative (www.timathforward.com) to increase algebra readiness and math performance in the district's middle schools.

MathForward is a comprehensive approach to math reform, built on eight research-based components: increased instructional time, increased teacher content knowledge, common aligned assessments, common planning times, continuous coaching and professional development, using technology to motivate students, curriculum integration, and administrator and parental support.

Moss noted that when students have problems with algebra, those difficulties often can be traced back to the student's early days of math.

The program was offered to eight Title I middle schools on the condition that each school's principal attend a day of training the summer before implementation.

"I knew that if the principal didn't support it, we wouldn't have a change—and it wouldn't be lasting," she said.

Out of the eight middle schools, six principals agreed to attend training, and 23 teachers incorporat-

ed MathForward strategies into classrooms with nearly 500 eighth grade students in all. Teachers used the TI-Navigator classroom system with TI-84 Plus graphing calculators.

In the program's first year, Moss said the district's eighth grade math scores on the North Carolina state assessment increased by 10 percentage points overall—but MathForward schools increased by 25 percentage points on average. During the second year, MathForward schools' state math scores increased by roughly 35 percentage points.

"Kids in high-poverty schools were having 2.5 years of growth compared to their wealthy peers.... English as a Second Language and special-education students had four, five, even six years of growth in one year," Moss said.

District averages for Title I students, which started at 63 percent proficiency for seventh-graders, increased to nearly 80 percent proficiency when those same students moved on to eighth grade.

And the program's success is not limited to test scores.

"Discipline issues and classroom management issues have disappeared, because now the kids are engaged," Moss said. "Teachers share and collaborate with teaching tips."

The district soon will add another 40 algebra teachers to the program, so 77 of the district's 110 algebra teachers will have access to MathForward strategies

in their classrooms. During the program's first year, Moss said, 65 percent of eighth graders were at grade level in mathematics, and that number has since jumped to 85 percent.

Some school leaders worried about replacing calculators if students mistreated the equipment. The program is in its third year, and Moss said not a single calculator has been broken or stolen.

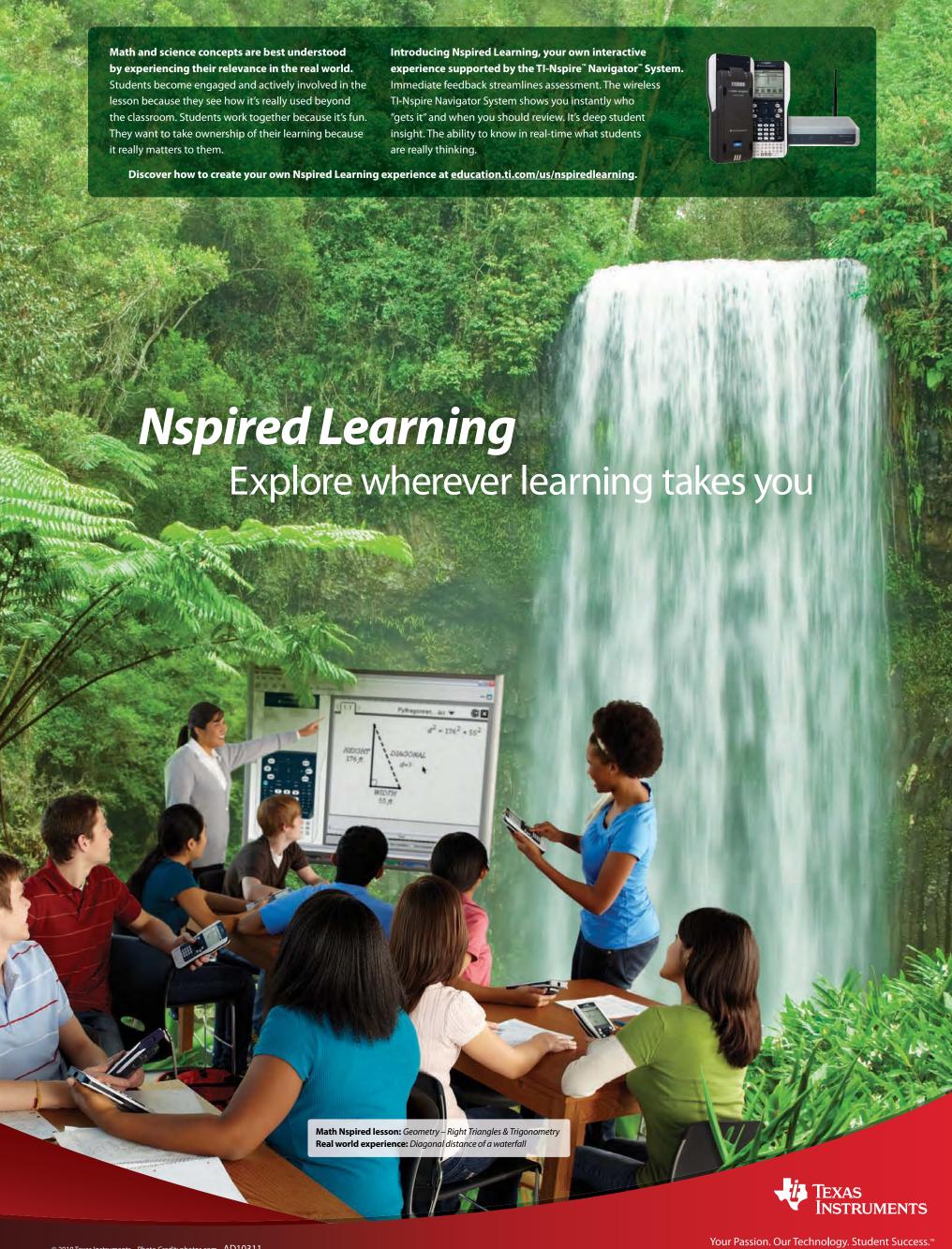
"Some of the teachers were a bit worried about their technology expertise, and we helped them identify a student in each class who is their technology expert," Moss said. She added that the system "empowers the teachers and makes the kids feel that what they're doing matters."

It's also easy for teachers to bring relevant, topical issues into the classroom with MathForward. At the end of the 2009-10 school year, the eighth-grade students applied the math concepts they'd learned to study the Gulf Coast oil spill.

The students used the NASA web site, Google Earth, and the BP web site to gather information as they examined the logistics of bringing in recovery vehicles and how much the devices used to control the oil spill would cost. They also calculated the ripple effect of lost tourism during the summer.

"Eighty percent of high school dropouts [occur] because kids can't pass algebra," Moss said. "Making math engaging and relevant for kids is what keeps me up at night." —L.D.





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# New software turns paper into inexpensive digital tablet

Livescribe's digital 'smart' pens soon will be able to stream written text to a computer in real time

Maya T. Prabhu Contributing Editor

Over the last year, Livescribe has promoted its digital "smart" pen as an educational tool not just for capturing and recording class notes, but also sharing these notes online in a technique known as "pencasting." Now, the latest version of the company's smart pen, called the Echo, adds more digital storage capability, and new software coming this fall will enable the pen to stream all notes taken live, in real time, to a computer—turning special dotted paper into an inexpensive digital tablet.

In a recent demonstration for an eSchool News reporter, company founder and CEO Jim Marggraff showed how the technology could be useful for instruction. As a user jots down notes on the special paper, these notes are recorded in the pen's memory and also streamed live to a computer, where they can be displayed for an entire class to see in real time. (For now, the pen must be connected to the computer via a USB cable.)

"Livescribe's mission is to enhance the capture, access, and sharing of written and spoken information to improve communication, collaboration, productivity, and learning," Marggraff said in a statement.

A number of companies have created digital "smart" pens in recent years: tools that can digitize handwriting and even convert writing into word-processing text. Developers say students who use the pens to capture and upload their notes to computers for review could perform better in



Livescribe's Echo smart pen

school. The pens also are a more convenient option for students who typically carry their laptops to class to take notes.

"The student becomes more efficient," said Keith Renty, business development manager for IOGEAR.

With IOGEAR's Mobile Digital Scribe, the pen emits an electronic signal to a receiver that is attached to the student's paper. The receiver has enough memory to store the notes on 50 standard-size sheets of paper. Unlike Livescribe's solution, the receiver can be attached to any standard notebook the user writes on, Renty said—meaning it doesn't require special paper.

But Livescribe's Pulse smart pen was the first to capture audio as well as handwritten text. By recording the audio from a lesson while a student is writing, Livescribe's pen lets the student focus more on the lecture itself, as opposed to making sure he or she is writing everything down. Simply by tapping the paper with the pen, students can hear what the instructor was saying at that very moment in their notes.

The ability to record sound as well as writing has led to the creation of what Livescribe calls "pencasts," or recordings of class lectures or demonstrations that can be uploaded to a school web site in Flash format, making them available for any student to access.

Livescribe's Pulse has 2 gigabytes of memory and costs \$129.99. The new Echo is available in an introductory bundle to educators for \$199.95, which includes the Echo 8GB smart pen, a small starter notebook, micro USB cable, Livescribe Desktop software, and two ink cartridges. The \$199.95 price applies to the purchase of up to nine pens, with volume discounts also available.

The 8GB Echo smart pen features storage for up to 800 hours of audio or a combination of audio, digital ink, and applications. Applications range from reference tools such as a complete 70,000-word American Heritage Desk Dictionary to simple games and study aides, available from Livescribe's Beta Application Store, which now includes more than 60 applications.

With its introduction of the Echo, Livescribe has added several new features, including Launch Line, a new way to access and launch applications in seconds; password protection to ensure that recorded audio on the smart pen remains private and secure; custom notebooks that can group and organize notes as easily as creating a playlist in iTunes; and a pencast import/export feature that lets users share pencast files locally to a desktop or server. The Echo also can display its owner's name or other contact information on the OLED screen, making identification of the owner easy.

With the launch of Echo, Livescribe also announced the Pencast Player for iPad, iPhone, and iTouch, which lets customers access their pencasts anywhere they go.

Livescribe's new software, coming this fall, not only will enable users to stream recorded text from the smart pen to a computer in real time; it also will let users instantly create a PDF file of the recording and send it via eMail with the click of a button.

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# Spell-check use on writing exam prompts debate

### Oregon will allow use of spell-check feature in the online version of its writing test this year

### From staff and wire reports

A decision by the Oregon Department of Education to let students use a computer spell-check feature when taking an online version of the state's writing exam this year has raised some concerns among stakeholders, prompting a larger discussion about what skills students should be tested on in the digital age.

State officials say the controversial move comes after consulting with local school systems and education technology experts, and they argue that it's a natural evolution that more accurately reflects how students compose essays today—and how they'll continue to write via computer once they move on to college and the workforce. To some critics, however, the decision spells the end of society as we know it.

KTVZ-TV in Bend, Ore., reports that, beginning this school year, state officials will allow students to enable the spell-check feature in the writing assessment software used to test students online.

State education department staff met with school district representatives this summer to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of enabling the feature, which had not been previously allowed.

Issues included the increasing use of computers with spell checkers for communication in the workplace, college, post-secondary training, and the military. Also discussed were the effects of such a change on the "conventions" portion of a student's score and how to provide equity for students using the paper-based test.

Based on this discussion and input from state education department staff, the following changes to Oregon's online writing assessment will be implemented this year for grades seven and high school:

1. The spell-check feature will be activated for use as an allowable resource for the 2010-11 Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment.

2. To make sure the testing process is fair for all students, those taking the paper-based version of the exam will be allowed to use a dictionary or enter lines of text into a word processing application that has an enabled spell-check feature; if students are generating their full essay on a word processor and then copying it into a test booklet, the automatic spell-check feature can remain enabled throughout the writing process.

The test asks students to write an essay in response to a prompt, KTVZ reports. Their writing is judged on six traits, including organization and sentence fluency.

Conventions—which includes spelling, capitalization, and similar features that spell check can detect and fix—is the single most important element in a student's score, with the conventions score reportedly counted for twice as much as any other trait.

The decision to enable spell check prompted quite a response to KTVZ's report, with several readers slamming the decision in online comments.

"So let me get this straight," wrote one reader on the TV station's web site. "They're going to score these tests with a heavy weight on spelling and capitalization, etc., but then give the students a program that corrects these things? Wouldn't the logical thing be to reduce the value of those categories for scoring purposes?"

Another reader wrote: "Our educators keep setting the bar lower and lower, when they should be raising the standards. America's already losing it academically, folks, and unless we set world-class edu-

cational opportunities and expectations for our young people, it's going to be pretty sad for them and the country."

The decision is "more an acknowledgement of modern reality," said a state education department spokeswoman.



To some, the decision spells trouble.

Giving students a spell-check tool during the test helps to replicate the real-world conditions and resources that students will experience in college or in a career, she explained, adding: "We're just taking our students into the 21st century."

Students will have the ability to activate the spell-check mode on the statewide assessment by clicking on a spell-check icon on the response screen. Once in the spell-check mode, the feature will highlight all misspelled words and give the student a list of alternate spellings. This is not an auto-correct feature, state officials noted; students still will be responsible for selecting the correct option and proofreading their essay for errors.

Oregon offers the state writing exam to its high schools in both online and paperbased formats; some middle schools tested the new online format last year. But the tests have come under scrutiny because some schools around the state have reported significant score differences between the online and paper-based versions.

The Oregon Department of Education is analyzing the data to determine what accounts for the discrepancies, but reports from schools around the state show that students were less likely to pass the online version of the test last year.

The tests used the same prompts and were identical, and the test scorers are trained to read both handwritten and typed essays.

One theory is that students taking the online version of the writing test are skipping a crucial proofreading step. Those taking the paper-based exam compose their essays first and then copy the completed version into an official test booklet—an action that helps students review their work. Officials worry that the online test might cause students to focus more on keyboarding than on things such as word choice, sentence structure, and critical-thinking skills.

Students also said they said they struggled with proofreading their work onscreen instead of printing out their work and editing it by hand. Enabling the spell-check feature could alleviate this problem, officials say.

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### Exams...

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ing to measure student growth over time through computer adaptive testing. It will continue to use one test at the end of the year for accountability purposes but will create a series of interim tests to inform students, parents, and teachers about whether students are on track.

PARCC, which submitted an application on behalf of a group of 26 states, received \$170 million. It will focus on testing students' critical thinking skills by examining their speaking skills, reading analysis and essay skills, digital media skills, and project-building skills. It also will replace the one end-of-year, high-stakes accountability test with a series of assessments throughout the year that will be averaged into one score for accountability purposes, reducing the weight given to a single test administered on a single day—and providing valuable information to students and teachers throughout the year.

"By joining forces, our states will be able to learn from one another and develop next-generation assessments that monitor student achievement of the knowledge and skills necessary for success after high school," said Massachusetts Education Commissioner Mitchell D. Chester, who will chair the PARCC governing board.

Both groups will assess students' knowledge of mathematics and English/language

arts from third grade through high school and could replace existing tests, such as interim assessments that are commonly used in classrooms today.

Both consortia designed their assessment systems with expert input and help from teachers of English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities to ensure that these students are appropriately assessed, officials said.

Higher-education institutions within the consortia's states also have "bought in" to the new assessments, said Duncan—many by accepting these assessment scores and forgoing remediation if student scores are high.

The proposals submitted by the two consortia had many similarities, but they are not identical in approach or philosophy—characteristics Duncan said are needed for progressive thinking and effective change in the U.S.

"This is the beginning of assessments 2.0," said Duncan during a live webcast from Achieve's Annual American Diploma Project Network Leadership Team Meeting at the Westin Hotel in Alexandria, Va. "And what makes this creation even more admirable is that it's 100-percent the vision of state and local leaders."

Achieve is a nonprofit education reform organization that helps states raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability.

Duncan made clear that these new assessments are not pilot programs, but will

be implemented in participating states by the 2014-15 school year.

"This is the first time we'll ever really know if students are college and career ready. Also, parents, students, and the community will finally have an assessment system that lets them be proactive in their learning by giving them up-to-the-minute results and testing critical skills," he said.

"Our nation is in active competition for jobs with students from around the world," said Florida Education Commissioner Eric J. Smith. "This federal award ... signals high-quality instruction in every classroom and [gives] our families the ability to accurately track the progress of their students."

"This funding will allow partnership states to make an 'apples to apples' comparison of student achievement," said Louisiana State Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek.

"The immediate assessment results will provide teachers the information they need to adapt their instruction to the needs of each student," said Judy Park of Utah, cochair of the newly elected SBAC executive committee. "Those results will also improve student motivation during the testing process and help students better understand their current knowledge and skills."

Duncan also explained that these assessments will ease the burden of testing and teaching to the test.

"As I travel around the country, the No. 1 complaint I hear from teachers is that state bubble tests pressure teachers to teach to a test

that doesn't measure what really matters," he said. "These new assessments will allow for a more rigorous and relevant curriculum."

Though changing the design of state assessments is a large step in the right direction, Duncan also pointed out that assessments are only as good as the standards being tested.

Duncan recommended that states should seriously consider adopting the Common Core State Standards. Already, 35 states and Washington, D.C. have adopted these standards, and ED estimates that within the year 40 states will support the standards.

"These new assessments are not going to create an educational nirvana," said Duncan, "but by creating these assessments and adopting common core standards, it lays the foundation for better curricula and teaching."

Duncan closed by mentioning that the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now known as No Child Left Behind, is a good opportunity to revamp assessments for other subjects, such as science and history.

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### Five lessons from the nation's best online teacher

### From staff and wire reports

Educators who teach in an online setting should foster strong relationships with their students' parents and should offer plenty of positive feedback, says the nation's first-ever K-12 Online Teacher of the Year.

Teacher Teresa Dove of the Florida Virtual School

(FLVS) last month was chosen for the new award, which not only recognizes excellent teaching but also the importance of online learning across the country.

The award was created by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL). According to Myk Garn, director of SREB's Educational Technology Cooperative, the award program evolved from a regional program run by the Educational Technology Cooperative in 2009.

Recognizing that the number of online teachers (and the quality of their instruction) was growing nationwide, the cooperative—which has worked closely with iNACOL on a number of online-learning initiatives before, including guidelines for high-quality online teaching—crafted a plan for a national award for 2010.

The judging committee selected Dove, a Virginia resident who teaches math online for FLVS, and two other finalists from more than 50 nominations of online educators in public schools and state virtual schools in 24 states.

Dove, who made distance education her focus and life's ambition long before she began teaching online, attained both



Teresa Dove

her master's and doctoral degrees online, studying Instructional Technology and Distance Education.

"For years, I had a dream of being able to teach students using web-based technologies, and FLVS allowed me the opportunity to fulfill this dream. That was 4.5 years ago, and I have never looked back," she said.

Dove said that teaching online allows her to spend much more time working individually with students than she did previously in a traditional classroom. Spending only a moment with students in a traditional classroom is "not enough, and our kids deserve better," she said. It also has allowed her to care for two young children at home and to teach while caring for her mother in the hospital.

She explained that the big key to success for being an online teacher is to get to know your students.

"You might be separated geographically, but spending that one-on-one time with the kids is the biggest asset for an online instructor," she said. "Not only does it personalize their educational experience, it lets them know that someone is there who cares for them. Education should be centered around the student, and when they feel that, you would be amazed at how motivated they will become and how much you will learn about them."

For Dove, their are five practices that she says make her effective:

- 1. Keep the student at the center of every decision that needs to be made.
- 2. Foster relationships with students and parents, because parents can be a teacher's biggest help.

3. Talk with your students every day by phone. Dove said that the majority of her day is spent talking directly with students to build a one-on-one relationship with each of them.

4. Celebrate every effort and success, no matter how big or small.

"Always be positive in your feedback, even if the assignment may not be stellar. The written word is so powerful online, and you always want your students to feel that you are cheering them on and appreciate their hard work," she explained.

5. Build relationships with fellow teachers. Share resources, best practices, and stories to feel less isolated in a home office.

"This is one of the greatest things about my Algebra II department," said Dove. "There is always someone there to give advice, lend a helping hand, or share something they have created."

According to SREB and iNACOL, criteria for the award included the skills for high-quality online teaching as defined by the two organizations, as well as the ability to (1) inspire students of all backgrounds and abilities to learn; (2) have the respect and admiration of students, parents, and colleagues; and (3) play an active and useful role in the community as well as in the online classroom. Judges also reviewed submissions and comments from parents and students.

Judges included Bruce Friend from SAS Pathways, Darcy Hardy of the University of Texas System, Cathy Cheely from Virtual Virginia, Themy Sparengus from the Los Angeles Unified School District, and Patrick Perkins from FLVS.

Garn said Dove stood out as an excellent online teacher not just for her qualifications, but from the comments received from students and parents.

"Dr. Dove truly has a teacher's heart. Her love and gift for teaching is obvious in all that she does to teach and encourage her students. I am very grateful to her for being such a wonderful teacher to my son," wrote one parent.

"In the beginning, I thought that [taking an online course] was going to be very difficult, but I am happy to say that I have completed the Florida Virtual course with an A," said student Aerial Baez. "One of the main reasons for my success was having a teacher as wonderful and dedicated as Dr. Dove. She was always very understanding and readily available to answer all my questions. In fact, I was usually amazed at how quickly she responded. ... She would even go the extra mile and add a funny cartoon to her eMails to motivate her students."

The other finalists for the award were Gabrielle Bray from the Gwinnett County, Ga., Online Campus and Steven Sproles from Virtual Virginia.

Dove, Bray, and Sproles were recognized at a Sept. 8 dinner during SREB's joint annual meeting of its Educational Technology Cooperative and Electronic Campus state representatives. Nominations for the 2011 competition are due Dec. 6 and can be submitted at the SREB web site (www.sreb.org).

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### STEM...

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effort to dramatically improve STEM education in the United States.

The National STEM Video Game Challenge competition will be led by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop and E-Line Media in partnership with sponsors Microsoft Corp., the AMD Foundation, and the Entertainment Software Association.

The program features two competitions:

- The Youth Prize aims to engage middle school students (grades five through eight) in STEM subjects by challenging them to design original video games. The program will be open to students from any U.S. school, with a special emphasis on reaching students in underserved urban and rural communities. The total prize pool will be \$50,000. The winners will receive AMD-based laptops, game design books, and other tools to support their skill development. Cash prizes and educational software also will be awarded to the winning students' sponsoring organization, with additional prize money for underserved communities.
- The Developer Prize challenges emerging and experienced game developers to design original games for young children (grades pre-K through four) that teach key STEM concepts and foster an interest in STEM subject areas. The program will feature a special prize for

developers actively enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program in the United States. Special emphasis will be placed on technologies that have high potential to reach underserved communities, such as games built for basic mobile phones that address urgent educational needs among at-risk youth. Developers will be competing for a grand prize of \$50,000. Prizes of \$25,000 also will be awarded to the top entry submitted at the collegiate level, as well as the top entry for reaching underserved communities.

The STEM Video Game Challenge will accept entries from Oct. 12, 2010, through Jan. 5, 2011. Complete guidelines and details on how to enter are available at www.cooneycenterprizes.org and at www.stemchallenge.org/youthprize.

"Children of all ages are immersed in technology; today's kids spend as much time with digital media as they do in school. With the need to make learning both more engaging and productive, we need some real game changers," said Michael Levine, executive director of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center. "The Cooney Center and E-Line Media are delighted that national leaders in policy, practice, and philanthropy are investing in video games' potential to help change the equation."

The National STEM Video Game Challenge is just one of several new initiatives the Obama administration has announced to encourage students' interested in STEM.

The initiatives are part of Obama's campaign to raise American students to the top of the pack in science and math achievement over the next decade.

Change the Equation (CTEq), a new 501(c)3 nonprofit organization consisting of CEOs from 100 leading U.S. companies, is a response by the business community to the president's call to action on the issue.

All of the new STEM initiatives announced Sept. 16 were created by the companies that are part of CTEq, in partnership with public organizations.

"Our success as a nation depends on strengthening America's role as the world's engine of discovery and innovation," said Obama. "I applaud Change the Equation for lending their resources, expertise, and enthusiasm to the task of strengthening America's leadership in the 21st century by improving education in science, technology, engineering, and math."

"'I can't do math' has become an iconic excuse in our society," said Linda Rosen, chief executive officer of CTEq, in a statement. "Many Americans have expressed it, but I don't believe it's an accurate reflection of who we are, or, more importantly, what we can do."

Rosen added: "It has been said that conscience is a person's compass. CTEq can, and will, fuel the nation's conscience on STEM education. We will monitor our own progress and the progress of others, identifying what is working and what isn't. CTEq will apply lessons we learn so that the nation continues to move toward a future where

every American is literate in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics."

CTEq has set an ambitious agenda for its first year, including creating a snapshot of existing STEM investments by its 100 member companies and creating a state-by-state scorecard to assess the condition of STEM education in all 50 states.

The organization also will create a self-evaluation mechanism for member companies to measure the effectiveness of their STEM programs. In addition, it will initiate a core set of "very" effective programs in 100 new sites across the country to broaden the philanthropic reach of CTEq members.

The programs will allow more students to engage in robotics competitions, improve professional development for math and science teachers, increase the number of students that take and pass rigorous Advanced Placement math and science courses, boost the number of teachers who enter the profession with a STEM undergraduate degree, and provide new opportunities to traditionally underrepresented students.

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### Ratings...

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District teachers have been at improving their students' performance on standardized tests," the newspaper wrote in explaining its actions. "The *Times* has decided to make the ratings available because they bear on the performance of public employees who provide an important service, and in the belief that parents and the public have a right to the information."

The *Times* rated the city's third-through fifth-grade teachers using an approach called the value-added model, which is gaining popularity nationwide but remains controversial.

The value-added model seeks to determine the effectiveness of a teacher by looking at the test scores of his or her students. Each student's past test performance is used to project his or her performance in the future. The difference between the child's actual and projected results is the estimated "value" that the teacher has added or subtracted during the year. The *Times* says its ratings of teachers reflect their average results "after teaching a statistically reliable number of students."

Using test-score data covering seven years, the *Times* analyzed the effects of more than 6,000 elementary school teachers on their students' learning in English and math. The analysis reportedly found huge disparities among teachers, some of whom work just down the hall from one another.

"After a single year with teachers who ranked in the top 10 percent in effectiveness, students scored an average of 17 percentile points higher in English and 25 points higher in math than students whose teachers ranked in the bottom 10 percent," the newspaper reported. "Students often backslid significantly in the classrooms of ineffective teachers, and thousands of students in the study had two or more ineffective teachers in a row."

The Los Angeles school district has had the ability to analyze these differences among teachers for years "but opted not to do so, in large part because of anticipated union resistance," the *Times* reported.

The newspaper acknowledges that its methods aren't perfect.

"Scholars continue to debate the reliability of various statistical models used for value-added estimates," it notes. "Each has



Unions object to measuring teacher quality using only test-score data.

an inherent error rate that is difficult to measure. Value-added estimates may be influenced by students not being randomly assigned to classes, or by students moving from class to class during a single year. Likewise, they could be misleading for teachers who team-teach. Even many critics of the approach, however, say value-added is a vast improvement on the current evaluation system, in which principals make subjective judgments based on brief pre-announced classroom visits every few years."

In the days leading up to the *Times*' Aug. 29 publication of its database, the president of the Los Angeles teachers union said he was organizing a "massive boycott" of the newspaper.

"You're leading people in a dangerous direction, making it seem like you can judge the quality of a teacher by ... a test," said A.J. Duffy, president of United Teachers Los Angeles, which has more than 40,000 members. Duffy said he would urge other labor groups to ask their members to cancel their subscriptions.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) also weighed in on the newspaper's move.

The head of the AFT, Randi Weingarten, said she believes parents have a right to know how well their children's teachers are rated on employee evaluations—but she disagreed with the newspaper's decision to publish data from its value-added analysis. Such data should be considered only as part of a broader evaluation of a teacher's performance, she said, and they should be available only to the teacher, his or her prin-

cipal, and individual parents.

"The Los Angeles Times chose to ignore experts from across the country who have pointed out both the limitations and dangers of using, in isolation, the value-added method to rate a teacher's performance. We are extremely disappointed that the Times gave no weight to these opinions, but we are more disturbed that teachers will now be unfairly judged by incomplete data masked as comprehensive evaluations," Weingarten said in an Aug. 29 statement.

Comments left at the *Times* web site revealed a heated debate within the district itself about the newspaper's actions.

"Although the value-added measure may not be the most effective tool at measuring teacher effectiveness, it is a tool," wrote one reader. "Many teachers who are upset over these ratings need to read what is value-added; it does not judge the teacher by how many students are at proficient or advanced level, it looks at student improvement—regardless of where they scored. Teachers should be held responsible for teaching and stop pointing out the injustices of the students they had to work with."

Others were highly critical of the approach.

"Given the complexity of the issue, a public newspaper isn't the proper forum for this discussion," a second reader wrote. "Value-added evaluation and, for that matter, standardized testing are very limited indicators. What about personal evaluations? School funding? One-parent families who don't read to their kids? The [Times] tossed about a bunch of highly limited if not mis-

leading statistics in an inflammatory way to gin up hatred of teacher's unions. This was the most slanted, sickening thing I've seen from a mainstream newspaper."

The Los Angeles controversy mirrors that experienced in the Houston Independent School District when district leaders earlier this year led an initiative to make the value-added model a formal part of the city's teacher evaluation system.

Prompted by the *Times*' analysis, Education Secretary Arne Duncan called on schools across the country to disclose more information about student achievement and teacher effectiveness, saying too much information that would help teachers and parents is being kept out of public view.

Duncan said schools too often aren't disclosing years of data on student achievement that not only could help parents measure a teacher's effectiveness, but also would help teachers gain better feedback.

"Too often, our systems keep all of our teachers in the dark about the quality of their own work," Duncan told an audience in Little Rock, Ark., on Aug. 25. "In other fields, we talk about success constantly, with statistics and other measures to prove it. Why, in education, are we scared to talk about what success looks like?"

Duncan said he's not advocating posting the results online, like the *Times* did—but he noted that some teachers said their districts had never provided them with such data. He said more than 2,000 teachers asked the newspaper for their scores before the full database was published.

"The fact that teachers did not have information like this for all those years is ridiculous," he said. "Local school districts, in real partnership and collaboration with their teachers, must decide how to share this information, how to put it in context, and how to use it in order to get better."

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### Dilemma...

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PowerSchool customers that outlined the issue and gave schools several options.

"New customers, and existing customers who want to upgrade their hardware, would find new Apple servers are incompatible with the current Oracle database. Oracle has not provided a date by which the current version of the Oracle Mac Database will be certified on Mac OS X 10.6," the letter said.

Pearson said it has "limited options" for school districts operating on Mac servers.

The letter advised that "all Mac customers should make plans to replace their Mac database servers with a Windowsbased database server (physical or virtual). Pearson will discontinue support for the Mac database server effective December 31, 2010."

Pearson said it will evaluate Mac support options if Oracle issues a Mac-compatible 11g version.

Customers using a Mac database server are eligible for six months of free hosting if they choose to move to a cloud-based implementation of PowerSchool, eliminating the need for a new server purchase. Pearson would be responsible for all software upgrades, backup, and restoration in its hosting environment. That offer expires on Dec. 15.

It would be difficult for Pearson to add a new Mac-compatible database to PowerSchool, the company said, because alternative database options for the Mac OS are limited and do not offer Oracle's performance. Also, offering an additional database would mean large-scale new and duplicate development work, and the additional testing required to ensure proper functionality would "be better used to ensure the highest possible quality of core features and not just validate database-to-database equivalency."

Some customers might opt to run a Windows emulator on their Mac servers—and virtualization is a viable choice, Pearson said, especially for small-

er school systems.

Richard Bowler, director of technology for the Hardin School District in Montana, said his district opted to install Parallels Server for Mac 4, a virtualization technology optimized for Apple server hardware, which installs directly onto existing hardware and its host operating system and consolidates Windows Server applications on Apple hardware.

Bowler and his staff soon will move their district's PowerSchool database from its existing server to the virtualized environment.

The district has fewer than 2,000 students and has 250 staff. Bowler said virtualization appealed to his staff because although the district is small, it has an extensive investment in technology and multiple servers.

"All of our schools are connected to a wide area network, so their internet service all comes through us and all use the same basic PowerSchool server," he said. "So if we have to make a change, it will affect use widely."

Bowler said a move to Parallels will cost the district less than it if it opted to move to the cloud. The district already has saved more than \$50,000 because the product eliminates the need for multiple servers, and Bowler said he anticipates more savings as well.

Although different districts have different needs, "this is the way that we need to go," Bowler said. "We're very lucky to have a forward-thinking superintendent and board. We're interested in technology suit the needs of our students."

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# Top 10 districts choose NETOP



THE TEN LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICTS in the U.S. use Netop classroom management software. Find out why teachers prefer Vision to monitor student progress, engage students with on-screen demonstrations, control Internet browsing and more.

### Vision for elementary school teachers:

"Vision allows me to come as close to 1:1 instruction as I can...
I have already found even my most challenging learners are able to follow through on the instruction more consistently."

- Margie Maier, Highlands Elementary School, Renton, WA

### Vision for MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS:

"I like being able to showcase to the class what other students can do...this gives that student the chance to shine without saying a word."

- Amanda Girvin, Ockerman Middle School, Boone County, KY

### Vision for high school teachers:

"Once you've used Vision, it's hard to imagine living without it."

- Daniel Gould, Whitefish Public School District, Whitefish, MT

### Vision for media center specialists:

"This is a lifesaver for every librarian!"

- Mona Shehata, Newberry High School, Newberry, FL







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# **Grants & Funding**

# Where to find grants for education

This was readers' top concern in a recent Q&A session-so here's where to begin

### By Deborah Ward

I recently held a question-and-answer session with *eSchool News* readers via Twitter—and the No. 1 question that kept coming up was, "Where can I find a grant for ?"

Because this seems to be such a popular topic, I've decided to devote my next two columns to finding grant opportunities. Why two columns, you might ask? Because, depending on the type of grants you're looking for, there are several different resources you can use to find this information.

There are two main groups you can turn to for grant support: public funders and private funders. Government grant sources fall under the umbrella of public funders and include federal departments and agencies (such as the U.S. Education Department, or ED), as well as state agencies. For private funders, you can look to foundations, corporations, and national organizations for potential grant opportunities.

Looking at private funders might offer more grant opportunities than restricting your search to public funders. But there are many other benefits to pursuing private funders, too

Usually, private funders offer more proposal deadlines during a 12-month period than public funders, which typically will have only one grant cycle per year for each program. Private funders also might have a

simpler application process, although there are exceptions to this general rule. In addition, the decision-making process typically takes less time for private funders than it does for public funders. With a private funder, for instance, you might find out within a month or two if your request has been funded—whereas for public funders, this process might take between six and nine months. And finally, the reporting requirements for privately funded grants typically aren't as complex as those for public funders—but again, there can be exceptions.

To begin the grant-seeking process, you should have a project idea in mind that is more specific than "I need a grant for technology." Typing "education grants" into a search engine will return a glut of web sites that you'd then need to pore through until you find opportunities you're eligible for and that match the project you want to implement. Instead of looking for grants using general search terms, try using more specific terms, such as "grants for math programs for elementary students."

Where can you look for grant opportunities from public funders in particular? The most obvious place to start is ED's web site, www.ed.gov. On the department's home page, you'll find a "Funding" tab; click there, and you'll find numerous programs listed under a link called "Discretionary grant opportunities."

This page lists all of the grant competitions from ED that are currently open. One challenge is that these competitions generally are announced only four to eight weeks before the deadline, so you'll need to check back frequently for new opportunities.

To help you better plan your grant-seeking efforts, you can also go to ED's Funding Forecast page (http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html) to look for anticipated grant competitions organized by specific offices within the department. This page gives grant seekers a "heads up" as to when competitions are expected to be announced during the next three to six months, and it offers a variety of information about each program.

Don't forget to explore grant opportunities from other federal agencies, too. The National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Commerce Department, and Agriculture Department all offer grants that are relevant to education technology, such as the Agriculture Department's Distance Learning and Telemedicine grants and loans.

Grant seekers also can follow the latest federal funding opportunities in the Federal Register, where the details for each grant program are outlined as competitions are announced. And if you have the Catalog of Federal and Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number for a grant program you're interested in—it's typically five digits long, and all

of the education programs begin with "84"—you can go to the CFDA web site, www.cfda.gov, type in the number, and receive details about the program in question.

Finding state grants for education might be a little tricky. I've found that some states tend to bury their grant opportunities several pages deep on their web sites, while others have a "Grants" or "Funding" tab that is clearly visible on their home page. If you haven't looked for grants from your state education department before and you cannot find information about these opportunities, ask a colleague at another district, or ask state officials directly. If it's an elusive site to find, make sure you bookmark it for future reference!

Next month, I'll discuss resources to help you find grants from private funders.

(Editor's note: To read the full exchange between Deborah Ward and eSN readers on Twitter, as well as follow other ed-tech developments in real time, go to www. twitter.com/eSchoolNews. For \$35 per year, you can also receive our Grants & Funding ALERT electronic newsletter, which delivers the latest federal and private grant listings to your eMail in-box twice a month; to sign up, go to http://www.eschoolnews.com/funding.)

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

### **Grant Deadlines**

### October

# Classroom AV systems and cash prizes from AVerMedia

The 2010 AVerMedia Interactive Classroom Video Contest asks K-12 educators to create a two-minute or shorter "commercial-style" video showing how AVerMedia products have helped or could help in the classroom, or how educators and/or their students would promote AVerMedia and its products. First, second, and third prizes will include an AVerPen Interactive Collaborative Learning System, AVerVision Document Camera, AVerComm Video Conferencing System, and a cash prize.

Deadline: Oct. 15

http://media.community.avercampus.com/page/avermedia-contest.html

# \$5,000 per award for school improvement projects

Through its Toolbox for Education grant program, Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation supports school improvement projects initiated by parents in recognition of the importance of parent involvement in education. K-12 public and private schools are eligible for grants of up to \$5,000 each.

Deadline: Oct. 15

http://toolboxforeducation.com

### November

# \$21,000 in cash and prizes for teachers who use data-collection technology

The Vernier/NSTA Technology Awards promote the innovative use of data-collection technology using a computer, graphing calculator, or other handheld tool in the science classroom. Seven awards will be made; each award will consist of \$1,000 in cash for the teacher, \$1,000 in Vernier products, and up to \$1,000 toward expenses to attend the National Science Teachers Association's 2011 national conference in San Francisco, March 10-13. K-12 and college-level science teachers are eligible to apply.

Deadline: Nov. 30

http://www.vernier.com/grants/nsta.html

### **Ongoing**

# Up to \$5,000 per award for innovative math and science projects

The Toshiba America Foundation is a nonprofit grant-making organization dedicated to supporting science and math education in the United States. The foundation contributes to the quality of science and math education by investing in innovative projects designed by classroom teachers to improve instruction for students in grades 6-12. The foundation

awards grants of \$5,000 on a rolling basis. For grants of more than \$5,000, applications are due Feb. 1. http://www.toshiba.com/tafpub/jsp/home/default.jsp

# Free classroom AV solutions from Extron Electronics

The Extron Classroom A/V System Grant Program provides selected pilot classrooms with advanced audio/video solutions for mounting and controlling wall or ceiling-mounted projectors and for classroom sound amplification. The goal of the program is to demonstrate the ease of use and benefits of Extron classroom AV technology to students, teachers, and administrators. Grants include the installation of a PoleVault, WallVault, or VoiceLift system from Extron, as well as full training.

http://www.extron.com/k12/polevaultgrant.aspx

# 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

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# Stakeholder & Community Relations

# How to avoid committing social media gaffes

Strategies for keeping your staff out of hot water in today's new media world

### By Nora Carr, APR, Fellow PRSA

Once primarily the purview of college students, social media use is growing exponentially across all demographic groups, including senior citizens.

With social media use becoming more mainstream, principals, teachers, parent volunteers, and other adults affiliated with public schools are frequently using social media for networking and communication purposes. But while social media offers school leaders an opportunity to interact with parents and other constituents on a more informal and interactive basis, don't let the informal tone fool you.

A new superintendent who boasted online that he slept until 10 a.m. and surfed the internet on his first day under contract with his new employers recently became the subject of intense mainstream media scrutiny.

As this superintendent discovered, humor—however well intended—often backfires, especially online or in print when body language, facial expressions, vocal tone, and other cues are missing.

Even though the district offices were closed, employees, parents, school board members, and taxpayers generally don't appreciate hearing that their new leader thinks he's now on easy street. Most new superintendents face a tough enough job without shooting themselves in the foot before they even show up at the office.

Legitimate concerns regarding federal eRate dollars and Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) regulations aside, avoiding social media isn't the answer.

According to the Pew Research Center, 86 percent of young adults ages 18 to 29 use social media networking sites.

Use has nearly doubled for older adults during the past year, with 42 percent of adults ages 50-plus now using social media network sites. Pew Research also shows that 20 percent of adults 50 to 64 years of age connect via these sites on a daily basis.

With social media use nearly universal, districts need to develop guidelines to help employees navigate this new terrain successfully. Here are some tips to avoid committing major social media gaffes:

- Develop guidelines for use and share with your staff. Update your acceptable-use policy as well as personnel policies to reflect your position on appropriate use of social networking sites. For ideas, check out the Social Media Guidelines for Schools Wiki: http://socialmediaguidelines.pbworks.com. Many of the ideas presented here are adapted from this resource, which is meant to be shared and expanded as new information becomes available.
- Create an official site for your school or district. To protect others' privacy, set it up as a fan page so people can post comments or become a fan without giving you access to their personal pages. Commit staff time or resources to daily updates. Keep the tone conversational, but represent your organization and your position respectfully and responsibly. According to Pew Research, "44 percent of online adults have searched for information about someone whose services or advice they seek in a professional capacity."
- Keep your personal business private. Don't list your place of work, job title, or work eMail address on sites meant to be strictly personal. Use the privacy

settings to restrict access to family and friends. Even so, recognize that privacy really doesn't exist on the web. Don't post any comments, pictures, blogs, presentations, or words that you don't want circulating more broadly.

- Recognize that as public employees, you always represent your school or district. The power of social networking is that these sites instantly connect you with colleagues and anyone associated with the institutions you list, whether as an alumnus or as an employee. If you don't want to see it on the front page of the daily newspaper, don't
- Avoid participating in the cutesy, sometimes raunchy online surveys and other gimmicks that social media sites use to generate traffic. Again, employees have lost their jobs and suffered a great deal of embarrassment as a result of inappropriate and compromising photos or comments posted online that they mistakenly thought were private, and yet were easily forwarded, copied, or photographed by individuals to whom they'd granted access.
- Don't connect personally with students, ever. There's never an appropriate or legitimate reason to develop online relationships with students. Employee content should project a professional image and should not have a negative impact on the employee's ability to maintain the respect of students, parents, and peers.
- Recognize that the parents of your students are your partners in the educational process, not your "friends."
   It is simply too easy to cross lines that should not be crossed.

- Use group sites or pages to connect with students and parents for educational purposes, such as homework help or assignments. Group pages should not give access to teachers' personal and private information and accounts. Don't post student photos on group pages without parental permission, and don't post student photos on personal pages.
- Hold employees personally responsible for all content they post online. Digital content lives in perpetuity online. What seems funny and innocent at 22 might not seem so funny just a few years later. Classroom guidelines, along with state and federal laws regarding educational privacy, still apply in online settings.
- Avoid anonymous or misleading postings and comments. Don't misrepresent your identity and post a comment on someone else's site or blog without identifying yourself as a public school employee. If you're not willing to own your comments, don't post them. Just because social media sites offer anonymity doesn't mean you should use it.
- Teach employees how to use social media and networking sites wisely and well. Policies and procedures are important, but they only represent a first step. Provide training, and include information about how to use these sites in a professional manner in school and district newsletters and other communications.

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

### **Grant Awards**

# Raytheon awards more than \$1 million in grants and scholarships

Raytheon Co. celebrated the beginning of the school year by awarding more than \$1 million in scholarships and grants through its MathMovesU program, which supports students who excel in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), as well as teachers who engage students in STEM subjects.

One hundred fifty students from across the country each received a \$1,000 MathMovesU Middle School Scholarship, with the option to attend a math and science camp or technology program this summer or save the money for college. The scholarship winners were chosen from a pool of 2,727 applicants who created multimedia presentations about the importance of math in their daily lives. Each recipient's middle school also received a matching grant from Raytheon.

As part of the MathMovesU Bonus Award Scholarship program, Raytheon also honored 30 previous MathMovesU Middle School Scholarship recipients who are now pursuing undergraduate STEM degrees with an additional \$20,000 each.

In addition, the company recognized 32 teachers from across the country as part of its MathMovesU Math Hero Awards program for engaging students in math through interactive and creative learning initiatives. Each winner received a \$2,500 award and a matching grant for his or her school.

Since the start of its MathMovesU program almost five years ago, Raytheon has awarded more than \$4 million in scholarships and grants to students, teachers, and schools nationwide.

http://www.raytheon.com/responsibility/community/scholarships/index.html



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# Recertified laptops help a Pennsylvania district stretch its ed-tech budget

Buying high-quality refurbished equipment from CDI, and hiring an integration specialist, have ensured a huge return on Eastern Lancaster County's technology investment

### Cara Erenben, Contributing Editor

Having a dedicated staff member available to help teachers integrate computers in the classroom has ensured that a Pennsylvania school district has gotten a huge return on its investment in laptop carts—and buying recycled equipment certainly has helped as well.

Eastern Lancaster County School District bought 21 30-unit laptop carts from CDI, Computer Dealers Inc., one of the largest computer resellers in North America.

Instead of buying new machines, the district bought high-quality recertified laptops and was able to stretch its technology budget much farther.

"We started out cautiously, as this was the first time we actually used refurbished computers—and after seeing the product and using it, we decided it was just as good as anything else that was out there," said Eli Steiner, systems administrator for the district.

techniques for using classroom computers to enhance their instruction.

"I offer support during the day, and I offer training sessions after school. We have weekly one-hour sessions after school, and we offer a lot of opportunities in the summer for the teachers to learn new things," I eister said

He also keeps tabs on what is new and innovative with technology and shares that with teachers.

Currently, each department has several laptop carts to share. "Ideally, we would love for every teacher to have [his or her] own cart in the classroom, but that would be expensive to do and we haven't gotten to that point yet," Leister said.

The classrooms also have LCD projectors, and the math classrooms have interactive whiteboards. The students use Google Docs and have Gmail accounts. with the Advanced Placement biology teacher. Each student was assigned a different class of invertebrates. Students had to make a PowerPoint presentation with a recording of their voice and post it to Wiki Spaces. Then, students used the classroom laptops to view the peer-created materials.

"In the past, she might have [students] do a report and present the report to the class," Leister said of the teacher. "It was pretty one-sided. Now, they could put a lot of pictures up there, they could put in animation, interactive activities, and the students learn from each other, rather than the teacher saying, 'Here's the packet on invertebrates.""

He added: "Knowing that there's somebody to go to when these questions arise, or saying, 'Hey, can you come to my class, I'm going to try this out,' kind of brings that anxiety level down and allows [the teachers] to be a little more creative then they might normally be."

Using laptops in the classroom lends itself to a project-based learning environment, he said. Instead of teachers lecturing and telling students what to learn, it's now up to the students to find and present the content to each other.

"It allows students to be in charge of the content," Leister said. "By allowing the students to go out there and find the content and share the content, in some cases, it really makes a big impact. The kids feel like they are a big part of what's happening in the classroom. They are not just taking in information, they are creating it as well."

Laptops integrate well into science, English, history, and social studies classes, Leister said. The computers also help students to be more creative.

"The kids can generate things that are really visually appealing. They can include sounds and video. To create projects before, it might have been a cutout paper poster or something like that. And now we can use iMovie to create videos and movies of themselves or pictures put to music, where you couldn't do that before," he said.

Computers also force each student to be more involved, engaged, and interactive. And this, he said, leads to higher-level thinking.

"It allows the students to be part of the class a little more. It forces them to be interactive, and it really engages them. It keeps their interest a little bit more than in the past," Leister said.

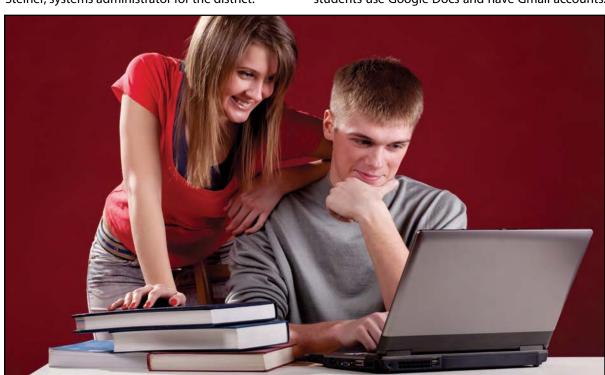
Before, learning was more about memorization and regurgitating facts on a test. "Now, [students] really have to think about topics at much higher levels than they did before. Now, they are creating work and evaluating things on their own, rather than just [absorbing] the teacher's perspective," he said.

Most of all, Leister stresses to teachers: "Don't just use technology because it's cool and kids like it." He focuses on showing teachers how they can enhance how students connect, how they write, and how this increases engagement in the classroom.

"If it's an online activity that requires a writing assignment, or something like that, then all the students are forced to participate because they have to submit something that the rest of the class might have to read," he said.



Eastern Lancaster County School District http://www.elanco.org



Thanks to recertified equipment from CDI, Eastern Lancaster County students have easy laptop access.

"The value is definitely there," Steiner said. Compared with the Apple computers the district was replacing, he said, "we can get three of these computers for one Apple Macbook."

Buying recertified computers really has helped Eastern Lancaster County get the most bang for its technology buck. "Our budget keeps on getting smaller, but we can do more with it now," Steiner said. "We will definitely be buying more as we phase out older laptops."

To maximize the use of the laptop carts in the classroom, the district hired a technology integrator with grant money from Pennsylvania's Classrooms for the Future program, a three-year state grant program that—owing to budget cuts—couldn't be continued.

"That's how my job got created," said Tim Leister, technology integrator for Eastern Lancaster County School District. He supports teachers at the middle and high school in integrating technology into their lessons.

"The grant provided a stipend that allowed for somebody in my position to assist the teachers in getting familiar with [the technology] and learning effective ways to use it, so it didn't just become something in the classroom that wasn't used," he said.

His role, he said, is to show teachers how technology can benefit students' learning and show them

Students also have wiki accounts through Wiki Spaces, which offers simple web sites to which students can post their work to share with the class. It's a way to showcase their work and also foster collaboration.

Using these Web 2.0 services means students have access to documents online and at home as well, but they don't have to take discs or flash drives back and forth. "They can save their work essentially in the cloud technology and just access it from home. They can also share those documents with other students and teachers," Leister said.

He added: "Most teachers feel comfortable with the computers for their own use." But integrating them seamlessly into instruction is a challenge. Teachers already do grading and administrative tasks on the computers, he explained—but "when they try to step outside of their normal routine and try something new, that's where I come in."

Leister often co-teaches lessons with teachers. If something goes wrong with the technology, he's there to answer questions and solve problems. This eases the stress level for some teachers and makes them feel more comfortable, knowing that if something goes wrong in front of a class full of computer-savvy students, it will be OK.

Recently, he co-taught a lesson on invertebrates

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## Net watch

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

#### Curriculum

Best new instructional resources on the internet

#### Deep-sea images reveal colorful life on ocean's floor http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/okeanos/welcome.html

Scientists using cutting-edge technology to explore waters off northern Indonesia were wowed this past summer by colorful and diverse images of marine life on the ocean floor—including platesized sea spiders and flower-like sponges that appear to be carnivorous. They predicted that as many as 50 new plant and animal species might have been discovered during the three-week expedition that ended Aug. 14. More than 100 hours of video and



100,000 photographs, captured using a robotic vehicle with high-definition cameras, were piped to shore in real time by satellite and high-speed internet. Scientists used a powerful sonar mapping system and the robotic vehicle to explore nearly 21,000 square miles of sea floor at depths ranging from 800 feet to more than two miles. A project of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the mission was carried out on a ship called the Okeanos Explorer; visitors to the expedition's web site can view the images themselves, and an Education section is geared toward teachers and students. Verena Tunnicliffe, a professor at the University of Victoria in Canada, said the images provide an extraordinary glimpse into one of the globe's most complex and little-known marine ecosystems.

#### FTC site helps students become smarter consumers

http://www.ftc.gov/YouAreHere/

"You Are Here," a web site from the Federal Trade Commission, provides lessons on advertising, marketing, recognizing scams, protecting personal information, and other consumer concepts. The site is intended for students in fifth through eighth grade and can be used to complement lessons in critical thinking, writing, language arts, media literacy, business, civics, and social studies. In a virtual mall, students can play games, design ads, chat with customers and store owners, and more. Along the way, they'll learn about key concepts, such as business competi-



tion, supply and demand, mergers and monopolies, and the history and purpose of the FTC. Students also can learn about protecting their privacy (both online and off), then lay a game in which they protect the citizens of Earth against identity-stealing invaders. A "Parents and Teachers" page contains suggested activities and ways to use the site in your classroom.

### New web site lets students explore STEM careers

http://education.ti.com/studentzone/StudentZoneUS/careers/index.html

Educators who want to help students better prepare for the technology careers of the future now have a new resource in the Math & Science Career section of Texas Instruments' Education Technology Student Zone. As the need for technical work continues to grow, the ability to use math and science to solve



problems, make discoveries, and develop new products is critical, TI says. Rewarding STEM careers can begin from two-year and four-year degrees—and the more science and math courses that students take in high school, the broader their college degree options and career choices will be. TI and the Sloan Career Cornerstone Center have teamed up to offer resources that can help students explore possible STEM careers and planning strategies. Site visitors can compare different STEM degrees; learn the courses that help keep STEM career options open; read the profiles of professionals in STEM fields and their career paths; and find links to national STEM programs and projects.

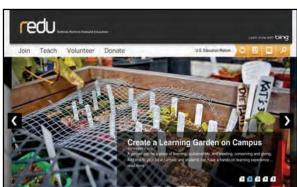
### Leadership

Research and management resources for the K-20 decision maker

# Microsoft's REDU aims to galvanize discussion —and action—to improve education

http://www.letsredu.com/

REDU is a new web site from Microsoft Corp., powered by the company's Bing search engine, that aims to help parents, teachers, students, and education advocates learn more about the state of U.S. education, have conversations about education, and take action to bring about change. The site provides links to cur-



rent events and issues, a forum for discussion, and ways for people to take action as the United States tries to remodel its approach to education, says Cameron Evans, Microsoft's U.S. Education chief technology officer. Issues such as teacher quality, lack of school funding, or academic performance "aren't problems that can be solved in one administrative term or election cycle, and it's overwhelming for one corporation, political party, or community organization to think about alone," Evans says. "The focus of REDU is to take these voices and put them together to bring about change." Along with presenting key information and encouraging dialog, REDU has tools and resources to help people take action, whether that's donating money to local classroom projects or finding out how to become a teacher in their state.

# EdMoney.org tracks billions of dollars in stimulus spending on education

#### http://edmoney.org

EdMoney.org, a project of the Education Writers Association with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, lets users track spending on K-12 education from the federal economic stimulus law in states and school districts nationwide. The site currently features data on \$62.1 billion in grants from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, including



more than 39,500 grants to more than 12,000 school districts and other education agencies across the country. Among other features, the site shows how districts' grant information compares with that of other similar-sized districts. Users can compare how fast urban, rural, and suburban districts are spending their money—and they can see if their district is spending stimulus money faster or slower than the rest of the state. The site also lets users upload links to relevant articles, blog posts, and other resources onto pages for each state and school district.

#### New white paper gives steps to prevent cyber bullying http://www.ncta.com/PublicationType/WhitePaper/Cyberbullying-Damage-in-a-Digital-Age.aspx

Cyber bullying can take many forms—sending hurtful text messages and pictures, posting cruel comments online, or creating fake Facebook or MySpace pages to impersonate other kids, for example—and it can have a devastating effect, especially considering the amount of time kids today spend online, texting, and us-



ing digital media. While cyber bullying might start from home, it can quickly move to the school environment—and yet many schools may not be prepared to address it. This timely white paper from Common Sense Media is designed to help parents, educators, policy makers, and the online industry explore proactive steps to prevent cyber bullying, such as through digital literacy and citizenship education programs.





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# Music instruction goes virtual

#### Trend could have a huge impact on how professors teach and students learn

#### From staff and wire reports

As online courses spike in popularity across the nation, students are finding that even the most traditional face-to-face courses offer virtual options that are just as thorough as in-person classes—and music instruction courses soon could follow suit.

This past spring, Louisiana State University (LSU) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) partnered for a remote piano teaching demonstration using technologically enhanced pianos from Yamaha.

During the demonstration, LSU connected a Yamaha Disklavier IV piano over the internet with another Disklavier at UCLA. The demonstration featured a minimaster class with LSU School of Music professor Michael Gurt teaching a UCLA piano student, UCLA visiting associate piano professor Jennifer Snow interacting with an LSU piano student, and LSU graduate students in piano pedagogy teaching a UCLA undergraduate student.

Such a program could have great implications for aspiring music students and professors alike.

"This has big potential for us at the university level. We've wanted to do this for a few years. I'm very intrigued by it," said Pamela Pike, assistant professor of piano pedagogy at LSU. "Yamaha experts have demonstrated this long-distance teaching at professional conferences, [but] this is the first time that faculty at a uni-

versity have engaged in this type of longdistance teaching."

Music educator, clinician, author, performer, and music software developer George Litterst led the LSU demonstration. He showed that while the Disklavier looks like an ordinary piano, it is digitally enhanced and uses a musical instrument digital interface program (MIDI) to communicate with another Disklavier.

The pianos' audio signals are transferred through the connection. Also, through the use of optical sensors, keys played on one piano show up as being played on the other, as well as pedals being depressed.

"It is an acoustic piano. It has hammers and strings and must be tuned, just like a regular piano," Litterst said. "But, it has something regular pianos don't—the ability to record and play back and to be connected to other Disklaviers."

Litterst and Snow have been part of a multinational team working on behalf of Yamaha to help develop the remote learning program. Other members of the program are located in Texas, Minnesota, and Colorado, as well as in Toronto

"There are many ways the piano can connect," Litterst said. "For this demonstration, we used a built-in program called Remote Lesson. The program has been evolving over the past few years. We're still working on some aspects of the software and hardware, such as microphone audio cancelation."

Litterst said the schools used a telephone-based internet connection during the demonstration to link the two pianos, and operated the connection through the use of a smart phone that calls the IP address of the other piano to connect.

"Basically, we're making a piano-topiano telephone call," he said.

Video cameras at each location, connected through the Apple iChat program for this demonstration, also allowed participants to communicate, as well as to see hand positions, arm movements, and musical gestures during performances. Litterst said popular video conferencing programs such as Skype or iChat can be used to provide visuals for Disklavier connections.

The idea to hold a demonstration came several months ago, Pike said, as she and LSU School of Music and Dramatic Arts Dean Laurence Kaptain attended a conference that featured Yamaha representatives, including Litterst.

Kaptain "really encouraged us to go for this and have a demo here at LSU," Pike said. Rafe O'Neill, owner of local music store O'Neill's Music House, and Litterst joined the efforts.

Pike said the options are vast for such a program at LSU, with benefits that reach throughout Louisiana and beyond.

"We could have professors here like Michael Gurt teach others across the area and state, including potential students, which makes it a great recruiting tool," Pike said. "This also offers good teaching op-



Schools try online piano instruction.

portunities for our students interested in music education, who can use this for internship teaching. LSU can also collaborate with other universities to teach and share and create a much richer experience."

From her classroom in Los Angeles, Snow expressed her excitement about the program and being able to connect with LSU as part of the demonstration.

"I'm thrilled that we're able to do this," she said. "I spoke with Dean Kaptain, who showed great interest in such a program. It's a terrific way for us to share knowledge, whether it's through practice, teaching, or reflecting back and forth—even though we're thousands of miles apart."

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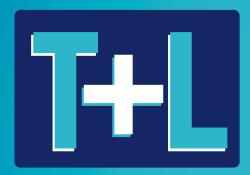
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#### http://www.crestron.com

# MimioView document camera has everything you need for presenting images

What if your document camera had everything it needed, and nothing it didn't? The new MimioView document camera from DYMO/Mimio gives you a hassle-free way to teach with a camera. It includes everything you need to capture images and present them in your lessons. And because it's powered by a single USB cable, there's no extra cord to get in the way.



The simple-to use MimioStudio software is fully integrated with your MimioView camera. Its menus and toolbar give you instant access to useful editing and storage features right from your whiteboard. Automatically focusing and adjusting images is easy with only three simple buttons on the front of the camera and the gooseneck arm. Along with high-resolution optics, two adjustable LED lamps are built in. They provide natural, consistent lighting and operate at a safe, child-friendly temperature. The MimioView even has a handy straight edge at the camera's base to ensure perfect document placement every time.

The MimioView camera's advanced design includes:

- USB cable operation—no wall cord;
- 5x mechanical zoom;
- 1,600 x 1,200 UXGA resolution;
- Two adjustable light sources;
- Automatic focus and color balance;
- Freeze function; and
- Video annotation.

#### (877) MY-MIMIO

#### http://mimio.dymo.com/new66



# **ELMO's Wireless Tablet a** 'handheld, hands-on' platform for creative visual learning

ELMO USA's Wireless Tablet is a 21st-century classroom technology that provides a "handheld, handson" platform to learn and create in the digital medium. Teachers and students can use the ELMO Wireless Tablet to draw, annotate, manipulate images, and interact with multimedia resources and applications from all areas of the classroom (with a working range of 50 feet). When fully charged, the Wireless Tablet provides approximately 18 hours of continuous operation time.

The ELMO Wireless Tablet functions with an ergonomically designed electronic pen that provides smooth annotation with pressure-regulated line width. The pen can be switched between "Pencil," "Brush," and "Marker" modes and used for multiple functions, including blackboard, document camera, PC operation (to work as a mouse), and PC drawing.

The ELMO Wireless Tablet comes with Image Mate Accent software, a suite of annotation tools used to create and add effects for greater visual impact. Through the Image Mate Accent interface, users can draw on live images projected from a document camera, as well as incorporate digital multimedia, capture still images, and record video with audio in four modes, including time lapse for stop-motion or model animation.

The ELMO Wireless Tablet is available a retail price of \$399

http://www.elmousa.com

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# Advertisers' Showcase

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# Easy-to-use video platform gives schools their own IP-TV broadcast station

More than a powerful video streaming platform, JDL Horizons' EduVision is a full-featured communications package that essentially provides any school, district, or association with its own IP television broadcast station. It's built around Flash-format video streaming, the simplest and most trouble-free technology available for users of all popular computer operating systems, and works within a full range of web browsers.

Unlike more technically involved video solutions, EduVision requires virtually no up-front investment in either technology or technical training. JDL Horizons provides complete portal management, hosting, and distribution, including customization for stand-alone video use or embedding in your own web site. Start your free trail now!

http://www.eduvision.tv



# New portable digital microscope can be used in the classroom ... or in the field

Ken-A-Vision introduces the kena, an award-winning new portable digital microscope that performs in the class-room or in the field. Simply plug the USB cable into your computer or netbook, launch the multi-platform Applied Vision Software, and go! You can magnify, capture, and modify still images and videos.

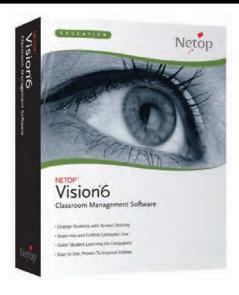
The removable camera head fits snugly in your hand or onto the sleek, sturdy metal base, kena has 2x, 4x, and 10x objectives (for 20x, 40x, and 100x magnifications) and cool, bright LED lighting on top and bottom for viewing of specimens and slides. The unique silicone stage pad eliminates the need for stage clips.

Additional features include a convenient handle that acts as a cord wrap, an easy-turn turret that houses the objective lenses and top light, a touch tube extender to gauge focal distances when being handheld, and a storage bag.

Innovative, affordable, and energy efficient, kena is an ideal 21st-century classroom solution.

#### http://www.ken-a-vision.com





#### See why 4,000 schools in North America use Netop classroommanagement software

Netop is the most widely used classroom-management solution for screen sharing, activity monitoring, internet blocking, remote control, and more. The No. 1 choice of teachers, Netop Vision6 has become the most popular brand of classroom-management software because it makes teaching with computers easier and more effective.

Vision6 gives teachers complete control over classroom computers from an easy-to-use console that shows each student computer screen. Teachers can monitor student progress, engage students with on-screen demonstrations, control web browsing, and guide student learning from their computer with Vision6, which has been proven to improve student performance. And only Vision6 offers the unique Vision Teach-Pad for push-button control over student computers; there's no easier way to teach with technology.

The 13 largest U.S. school districts and 34 of the top 50 U.S. school districts use Netop software. Overall, more than 4,000 schools in North America deploy Netop classroom-management software from Netop.

(866) 725-7833 http://www.netop.com/vision

#### NetSupport School classroommanagement software offers a range of unique features

Liberate your computer lab with NetSupport School, a classroom-management solution that offers crystal-clear student screen monitoring, internet and application con-



trols, real-time presentation tools, student testing, keyboard monitoring, and the ability to power on/off all computers.

Those are the things you would expect from class-room-management software. However, NetSupport School provides additional unique features as well, such as printer management, a language lab including microphone recording and playback, student journals to retain a digital copy of all class content, an interactive lesson planner and custom test designer, and a built-in interactive whiteboard environment. With all these extra features included in the standard version, NetSupport School provides the most comprehensive classroom-management solution available today.

Classroom management need not be restricted to a traditional classroom. As well as full wireless support, NetSupport School also includes a unique Technician Console that allows support staff to discretely perform remote diagnostics and troubleshooting to ensure equipment is always available when needed most. The technician is able to see real-time thumbnails of which teachers are connected to students within each room and take full remote control of any PC that requires attention.

http://www.netsupportschool.com

# Bring learning to life with ino click by PolyVision

Get interactivity in an instant with the ino click interactive whiteboard from PolyVision. Designed with built-in magnetic-mounting hardware and no cords or cables to manage, ino click attaches instantly to most any chalkboard or whiteboard without damaging the surface—no tools required. Since ino click can be removed as quickly as it installs, you have the flexibility to move the board to another wall or share it with another classroom as often as needed.

Like all other ino interactive classroom solutions, ino click is environmentally certified and combines the simplicity and ease of a traditional dry-erase board with high-performance interactivity—without cords, cables, or costly installation. With a "Forever Warranty" on ino's virtually indestructible e3 environmental ceramicsteel surface, plus an open architecture for using any software, ino offers the lowest total cost of ownership on the market.



When it comes to teaching and learning, ino click opens a world of imagination for students. According to Eva LaMar, third grade teacher and technology integration specialist at Riverbend Elementary School in Springfield, OR, "It is extremely motivating to watch my students develop a thirst for knowledge when using ino click. When students have the drive to explore, take chances, and learn along-side their teacher, they are learners by choice."

http://www.polyvision.com

# Bring interactivity into every classroom with money-saving mobile carts

RM Education's mobile interactive teaching centers are a great way to bring engaging interactivity to every student, even in those schools with limited technology budgets or portable classrooms. RM Carts are an effective way to increase the return on investment of a school or district's technology expenditures.

RM Education offers two standard-model cart configurations—RM eCart and RM



Classcart. The RM eCart is the economic AV mobility and security solution, and the RM Classcart is a premium mobile solution that provides greater durability and flexibility. They both come complete with an XGA DLP projector, a Progressive Scan Component Video Output DVD/VCR combo, and a Cyber Acoustics CA-3602 2.1 Speaker Sound System. The components are contained in a steel-constructed cart with rubber caster wheels for easy mobility. Each unit includes a lock to secure the equipment safely inside.

RM Education also provides Mobile Interactive Classroom Solutions, money-saving bundles that include a cart, a UPIC wireless interactive panel (a portable and wireless roll-up board that serves as a full-featured interactive board, dry-erase board, and projection screen), and RM

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Easiteach Next Generation software—an award-winning, dynamic program that facilitates whole-class instruction with curriculum-based activities, resources, and tools.

(866) 728-6758 http://www.RMeducation.com

## SAMSUNG UF-130ST breathes more life into live presentations

For unparalleled 3D high-definition display of any subject matter, Samsung's UF-130 series combines superior optics with innovative, noglare LED lighting and a unique flexible light arm—all for under \$2,610. This presentation camera provides dramatic illumination of objects and docu-



ments. Its updated DSP chipset provides the ultimate in image quality at 720P HD resolution with 30FPS. The state-of-the-art document camera also includes:

- 1.32 Megapixel Progressive Scan CCD;
- 48x Zoom (14x optical + 3x digital);
- Energy-efficient, glare-free LED lighting;
- Support for DVI, VGA, and USB 2.0 output; and
- Selectable resolution: 720P, SXGA, or XGA.

(877) 213-1222, ext. 3306 http://www.samsungUF-130.com

# New Skyward module helps track Response to Intervention activities

The need to document Response to Intervention (RtI) activities is gaining traction, and having a solution to collect, manage, and analyze these activities is becoming increasingly important. Skyward's RtI module, the latest module of the Skyward Student Management Suite, provides a comprehensive solution to meet your needs.

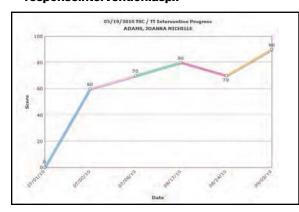
Based on extensive customer feedback, Skyward RtI allows schools to formally manage their RtI activities without creating a burdensome workload on administrators and teachers. Information that is already loaded into Skyward, such as test scores, GradeBook assignments, attendance, and discipline information, is used interchangeably with RtI progress monitoring, which allows teachers to track how a student is improving in working toward meeting intervention goals.

Another benefit of Skyward's RtI is the ability to create custom graphs that generate a visual representation of student data to evaluate the outcome of an intervention. Graphs created through RtI are a great visual tool to use when meeting with parents to help them understand the ongoing progress of their child.

More than 1,400 districts around the world trust Skyward for their administrative software needs; find out why.

#### (800) 236-7274

http://www.skyward.com/products/student/responseintervention.aspx



#### TI-Nspire with Touchpad adds interactivity to math classes

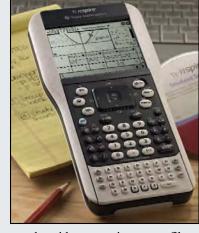
The TI-Nspire with Touchpad is a new handheld, graphing calculator from Texas Instruments that features touchpad navigation and computing functions, which help better show math concepts in action while enabling students to take a more active role in their learning, teachers say.

TI-Nspire with Touchpad demonstrates math problems four ways simultaneously on a single screen—as a graph, table, equation, and text problem. This capability helps students visualize math and science concepts to make it easier to explore math equations, see patterns, and understand the concepts behind the formulas.

Some of the new features of TI-Nspire with Touchpad include:

- A streamlined touchpad keypad that gives the handheld device the feel and function of a laptop computer touchpad;
- An alpha keyboard at the bottom of the keypad that enables easier text creation:
- An enhanced home screen that makes it easier to access files and applications; and
- A scratchpad feature that lets users perform quick calculations and create graphs without opening a new file. The handheld device is compatible with the TI-Nspire Navigator, the TI-Nspire Teacher Software, and the TI-Nspire Student Software. The TI-Nspire with Touchpad handheld is permitted on SAT, AP, ACT, IB, PSAT/NS-MQT, and Praxis exams, as well as many state tests.

http://www.ti-nspire.com



# **TI-Nspire Navigator increases engagement,** helps teachers track performance

TI-Nspire Navigator is a wireless classroom learning system that helps engage students, encourages classroom participation, and increases achievement, research shows. TI-Nspire Navigator connects students' TI-Nspire handheld calculators to the teacher's computer, enabling shared learning experiences. For teachers, it's a potent way to gauge student understanding and foster engagement. For students, it's an interactive tool that encourages them to become more involved in learning.

When linked to a networked classroom TI-Nspire Navigator system, a teacher can view each student's progress on important math concepts in real time and provide individual coaching. The same system also links students together during class for collaborative exercises, and it displays and manipulates math exercises in a more dynamic and interactive fashion.

TI-Nspire Navigator enables more dynamic interactive teaching and learning with:

- Instant student assessment: With quick polls and automatic screen captures, teachers can instantly gauge understanding and adjust instruction based on student progress.
- Increased student engagement: Any student can present his or her calculator screen from anywhere in the room. Teachers can redirect their lesson to target their students' trouble areas.
- Maximized classroom learning time: Teachers can wirelessly transfer documents and collect, grade, save, and record students' work, leaving more time for instruction and interaction in the classroom.

http://www.ti-nspire.com

http://www.mathnspired.com

# TI's Math Nspired helps educators teach hard-to-master concepts

Combining classroom-ready lessons with self-paced online professional development resources, Math Nspired from Texas Instruments harnesses the power of TI-Nspire technology to help students build a deeper understanding of the math concepts that are the toughest to learn. Algebra Nspired and Geometry Nspired are the first offerings in this series, with Algebra 2 Nspired and Calculus Nspired content available in fall 2010.

Designed to be used by new educators as well as their experienced colleagues, Math Nspired features a variety of lessons that can be taught "as is" or modified by educators to meet the needs of their students. In addition, Math Nspired includes a selection of blended professional development opportunities that can be customized to meet educator, school, and district needs.

Math Nspired lessons are developed hand-in-hand with educators.

The most unique of these are the Texas Instruments action/consequence lessons, in which:

- Students take action on a math object in a TI-Nspire document, observe the consequence, and are able to reflect on the math implications.
- Teachers ask probing questions that lead students to productive discussions about the math.
- Students interact with numerous mathematical representations to develop understanding in a way that is not possible with paper and pencil alone.
- Educators are able to engage students more effectively in their mathematics learning.

  Additional lessons have been created and selected from other sources to complement the action/consequence lessons.



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# SN.tv viewer's guide www.eschoolnews.com/eSN-TV/ViewersGuide

With dozens of videos being uploaded each week on eSN.TV, eSchool News has created a Video Viewers' Guide to help navigate our archive. Below you will find our videos of the month-selected based on their relevance to educational technology and viewer popularity. Our video site is powered by Eduvision from JDLHorizons-http://www.jdlhorizons.com/eduvision/

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

#### A STEM Education. Tools to Change the World

Energy Secretary Steven Chu and business leaders discuss how, with an understanding

of Science and Math, individuals are shaping the world we live in.



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www.eschoolnews.com/eSN-TV/ViewersGuide

#### **ECS National Forum on Education**

#### **Tim Pawlenty Interview**

Pawlenty is the Governor of Minnesota and the 2008-10 ECS Chair. He discusses: The US' role in the global economy; Minnesota's test scores; parental involvement in education; and teacher compensation.

#### **Norman Sakamoto Interview**

Sakamoto is the Majority Floor Leader and Chair for the Senate Education and Housing Committee in the Hawaii Senate.

#### Virginia Barry Interview

Virginia Barry is the Commissioner of Education for the New Hampshire Department of Education.

#### 2010 National Teacher of the Year

Sarah Brown Wessling describes her passion for being the lead learner in her classroom and embraces a learner-centered approach.

#### **Vendor News**

#### **How To Get More From Your Datacenter**

See how the University of Miami reduced costs by leveraging Microsoft virtualization technology to deliver high availability and flexibility-all with limited resources.

#### The JASON Project

Demo award-winning science resources available free online in the JASON Mission Center.

#### **Audiobooks**

Teachers discuss the benefits of using Recorded Books in the classroom.

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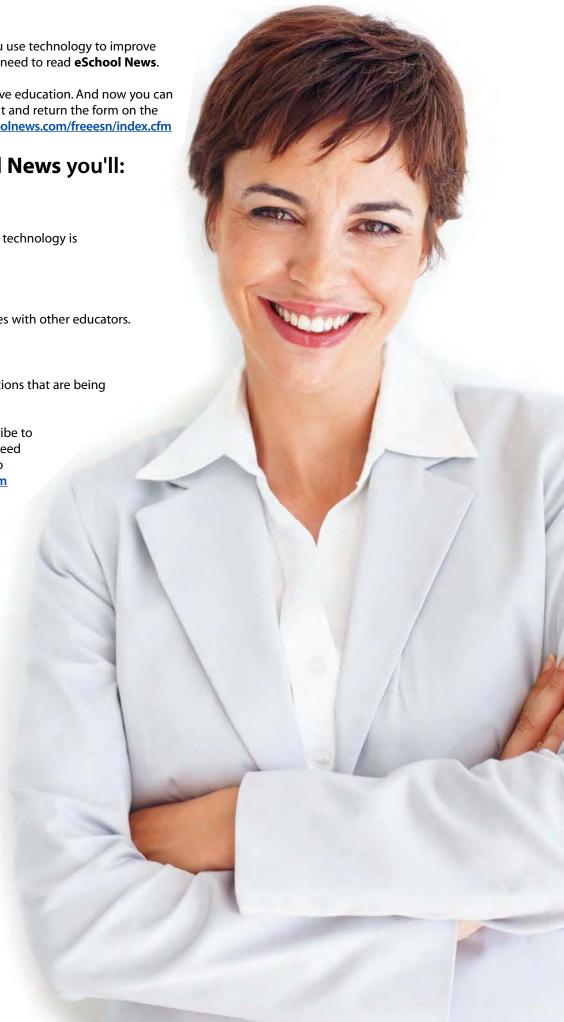
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"Technology News for Today's Educator"





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## It's easy. Just look for the Crestron inside logo.

Take control of your classroom technology by simply purchasing your next projector with Crestron Inside. All your favorite brands, including Acer, BenQ, Dell, InFocus, Mitsubishi and Viewsonic, provide easy point-and-click control right from your laptop.

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