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What U.S. schools can learn from abroad

After more mediocre scores on international exams, experts say the U.S. should look to Asia and restructure its education investments

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

U.S. students once again placed near the middle of the pack in the latest international comparisons in reading, math, and science—and the program's organizers have issued a list of key characteristics that top-

performing nations share. These keys to success include training, respecting, paying, and empowering their teachers more fully; emphasizing preschool education; pairing successful schools with struggling ones; and personalizing the learning process for students.

With the release of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in December, the U.S. has ranked between 14th and 25th in reading, math, and science when compared with other industrialized nations.

PISA exams, completed every three years and based on two-hour tests of a

Learn, page 24

Measuring the value of a teacher



Amid a heated debate over whether—and how—to use student test scores in evaluating teachers, early results from a new study add even more fuel to the fire. The study's authors say their work supports the use of the 'value-added' model, but a researcher not connected to the project disagrees. **See story, page 26.**

How to spur more technology use in the classroom

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

Superintendents and ed-tech directors discussed how to ensure that technology is integrated more fully into the curriculum during a Dec. 7 webinar sponsored by the Consortium for School Networking.

The webinar, entitled "Bridging the Chasm Between Curriculum & Technology," featured a panel of four superintendents and ed-tech directors from across the country, who shed light on what adding more technology in the classroom has done for their students.

"We use technology as a tool to enhance student learning and really enhance students' engagement in the content," said Suzanne Freeman, superintendent of Trussville City Schools in Trussville, Ala. "We know that technology really entices children."

Freeman encouraged other districts to hire a technology integration specialist to optimize the use of technology in the class-

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Ed groups slam net-neutrality 'loopholes'

New federal rules could favor larger schools, they say

From staff and wire reports

Rules meant to prevent internet service providers from discriminating against online content might not be the safeguard that schools and colleges were hoping for, as net-neutrality supporters believe the Federal Communication Commission's new policy might lead to "bidding wars" that could leave smaller school districts and campuses without access to a high-speed web connection.

The FCC passed the rules in December, 3-2, with all three of the commission's Democrats voting for the measure and both Republicans voting against it.

Republican opponents of net neutrality

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Teachers turn learning on its head

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

Some innovative teachers are turning the traditional K-12 classroom model on its head in an effort to make instruction more valuable to their students.

In this new teaching and learning style, often called "flipped," or "inverted," learning, students absorb the content as homework, and what we normally think of as "homework"—the practicing or application of what is learned—is done in class. That way, the teacher is available to help when he or she is most needed, and student mastery becomes the focus.

Inverted learning typically happens by having students watch a lecture at home and then apply the lesson with the teacher in the classroom. This not only makes class time more productive for both teachers and students, proponents of this new learning style say, but it also increases student engagement,

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Daniel A.
Domenech

Learning Leadership By Daniel A. Domenech

Let's work together to reshape education

It's time we had a new education law—one that works better for schools *and* students

From Feb. 17-19, the "Great Education Conversation" will take place in Denver as part of the American Association of School Administrators' national conference. It will be a dialogue between traditional educators and those the media has branded as reformers.

Though we all share the same goal—providing our children with the best education possible—we differ as to the means of achieving that goal. AASA's thinking is that we might be better off working together than at odds with each other. In line with that theme, the conference will be preceded by two days of "conversations" between superintendents, school board presidents, and labor union presidents, intent on advancing student achievement through improved labor-management relations. The event is being jointly sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, AASA, the National School Boards Association, the Council of Great City Schools, the American Federation of Teachers, and the National Education Association; the Ford Foundation is underwriting this invitation-only event.

An important theme of the great conversation will be the future of education as determined by the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Obama administration's success during the lame-duck session of Congress in December has given me renewed hope that perhaps, just perhaps, the reauthorization of ESEA might have a chance of passing this legislative session. In preparation for the discussions that will precede passage, I dug up my old, wrinkled, and frayed copy of the administration's "A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act."

Re-reading it for the umpteenth time reminds me there are many ideas in this document that I really like. We have been laboring for so long under the unreasonable and unrealistic demands of No Child Left Behind that we are anxious for changes in what President Obama refers to as a "flawed law" in his introduction to the Blueprint. Indeed, the president's introduction speaks to the many changes that educators have looked forward to since passage of NCLB.

In laying a foundation for the changes that must take place, the president says, "The countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow." This is a clear reference to the fact that the United States, once the leader of the world in college completion, now ranks 11th. The president wants to regain our leadership role in education, and so he sets a new goal: By the year 2020, the U.S. once again will lead the world in college completion.

At first, this seems a more achievable goal than

NCLB's task of having every school in America making Adequate Yearly Progress by 2014. At this stage of the game, it appears likely that most schools in America will have failed to make AYP by 2014, including many schools acknowledged to be among the best in the country. This anomaly has less to do with the quality of the school and more with the logistical requirements for making AYP. Thus, the need for change.

However, a close inspection of the president's goal reveals how difficult his goal will be to achieve. The Blueprint is the plan for achieving the goal and ensures that "every student graduates from high school well prepared for college and a career." That's a mouthful, and we need to examine the three very significant components embodied in that quote.

We know for a fact that today, not every student graduates from high school. In fact, approximately one-third of our students are not graduating, and among that third are a disproportionate number of black and Hispanic students. To get our high school graduation rate up to 100 percent is an impossible task for any year, let alone 2020. Consequently, a more realistic measure will have to be agreed upon as part of the reauthorization process.

Getting beyond the high school graduation piece—no small feat, mind you—we must next consider the "well prepared for college" component. If we assume, and we must based on the president's goal, that well prepared implies graduating from college, we have even a steeper hill to climb. There is research in the works that strongly suggests that, when we reverse-engineer to the K-12 performance of college graduates, we see students taking a much more comprehensive and challenging curriculum than what the Common Core standards will produce. Getting students to stay and complete high school is challenging enough, but getting those same students to graduate from college will be the much bigger challenge.

The third piece refers to career ready, and this may well be the most viable solution to our dilemma, but there is not much emphasis on that component. Is this a reference to vocational education? In a recent conversation with Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Duncan assured me that it is, but this needs to be clarified and reinforced.

We know that, perhaps for very legitimate reasons, vocational education has fallen out of favor. For many years, occupational education programs were the dumping ground for minority students. Today, we envision a world where every child is college-bound, even though the reality is that only about one-third of our students wind up with a college degree. And many of our students who do go to college and graduate from college are ill prepared for the workforce.

There is a good chance that many of the 30 percent of our students who drop out of high school would stay in school if they were learning a marketable skill that would lead to employment upon graduation. The very European nations that we unfavorably compare with on the international tests have a system of occupational and apprenticeship programs that have resulted in their having significantly lower youth unemployment rates than the U.S. Thus, there is a need for further refinement of what is meant by career ready. If we mean having a skill that leads to employment and possibly the completion of a postsecondary trades program, then our first task is to change the current culture that looks at occupational education as an inferior accomplishment to being college bound.

The Blueprint openly stipulates what many of us have realized in the absence of reauthorization: The administration used the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to push its policies forward without a single vote by Congress. Race to the Top, Investing In Innovation (I3) grants, and School Improvement Grants have all required adherence to the administration's priorities for reform. Thus, states and local school districts have agreed to adopt the Common Core standards, institute the evaluation of principals and teachers based on student performance, consider pay for performance, fire principals and teachers, and more, to be eligible to receive federal competitive dollars.

Once ARRA funds are spent, the administration will need to rely on Congress's approval of its education budget and the reauthorized ESEA, according to the Blueprint, to maintain its competitive programs. We have objected to the use of Title I funds for competitive grants because we feel that the intent of Title I has been to be the great equalizer to poverty. Formula funding ensures that all impoverished children receive funding equally, and not that some receive more because their districts have better grant writers.

But there are many aspects of the Blueprint that need immediate implementation, such as abolishing the current method of establishing AYP and moving towards more comprehensive assessments that measure growth. We need to eliminate the labeling of failure and instead reward success. We need to revise the federal role in education so that it is less intrusive in the local decision making process and more focused on providing the necessary resources to ensure that, for real, our black, Latino, and impoverished children are not being left behind. **eSN**

Daniel A. Domenech is executive director of the American Association of School Administrators.

Online update

Win recognition for exemplary ed-tech use at eSN Online

Each February, we honor 10 superintendents for their outstanding leadership and vision in using technology to advance teaching, learning, and school administration. (You can read about this year's winners starting on page 27 of this issue.)

But that still leaves dozens of exemplary school systems without the recognition they deserve. So we're launching another awards program designed to let readers share their ed-tech success stories with others.

We want to recognize the hard work that has helped your school system become a model for others seeking to integrate technology more effectively into every aspect of the educational process. That's why, beginning this month, we're accepting nominations for our new School District of the Month program at **eSN Online**.

To nominate your district, go to:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/school-district-of-the-month>

Here, you'll find the characteristics of a winning district of the month, along with a nomination form for school leaders to complete. Some hallmarks of a School District of the Month include:

- District leaders, administrators, and educators use technology effectively each day in administration and instruction.
- Technology resources are equitably distributed among students and staff.
- District leaders think about technology not only in the short term; they also consider its long-term potential impact on teaching, learning, and school operations.

- Professional development and communication with stakeholders are key parts of every ed-tech initiative.
- District leaders are willing to experiment with new technologies, but they have a solid plan in place for how these technologies can be used effectively.
- Data are used to inform instruction and increase student achievement.

If your school district fits these criteria and is selected as a winner, we'll feature your accomplishments in a story, mention your award in our eMail newsletters, and send you a logo to use on your website proclaiming your status as a district of the month.

Nominations are accepted on a rolling basis and will be judged by the editors of *eSchool News*.

Don't wait—nominate your district today! **eSN**

eSCHOOL NEWS

FEBRUARY 2011

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Meet 10 superintendents whose leadership and vision have spurred an ed-tech revolution.



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We've assembled a list of 10 education 'apps' we think are noteworthy.



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Debate rages over using the 'value-added' model of using student test scores to measure a teacher's effectiveness.

— Cara Erenben

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www.eSchoolNews.com

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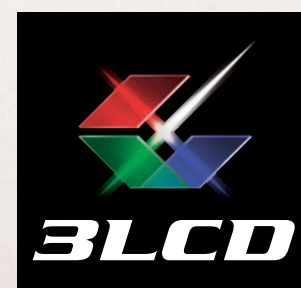
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Three-part harmony

Dennis Pierce, Editor
dpierce@eschoolnews.com

Last month's tragic shooting rampage that targeted U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona and left six people dead has prompted calls for Americans of all viewpoints to tone down the divisive rhetoric that has poisoned the nation's political discourse.

It hasn't been only health care or immigration reform that has inflamed passions on both sides of the political spectrum; education reform, too, has sparked intense debate among the nation's citizens.

Plenty of blame has been ascribed for all nature of problems within our public school system, such as mediocre scores on international benchmark exams (see our lead story on page 1)—and plenty of solutions have been discussed and dissected, such as using test scores to evaluate a teacher's success (see our Special Feature on page 26).

And while it hasn't yet driven anyone to the depths that allegedly gripped 22-year-old Jared Loughner in Tucson on Jan. 8, the rhetoric surrounding these issues has been no less heated.

On Jan. 13, an eMail message from the Education Action Group Foundation—a self-described “non-partisan, non-profit organization” based in Michigan—left little doubt as to where the group stands on education reform, claiming the nation's teacher unions “have presided over the decline of American public education.”

“...There is broad agreement that the teachers unions and their political surrogates have steered our public schools into an iceberg,” the message read. “Not only is student academic achievement embarrassingly low, but it is clear that union members have been busily feathering their own nests with automatic pay raises (re-

gardless of performance), lavish pension and health insurance benefits, and teacher tenure.”

That must be news to the thousands of teachers who could be earning far more in the private sector but have chosen education out of a higher sense of duty ... and who now see their benefits and pensions threatened by state fiscal crises from coast to coast.

Fortunately, most Americans are more level-headed than this in their assessment.

An Associated Press-Stanford University poll found that only a third of Americans blame teachers for the struggles of public schools, and 57 percent believe teachers are paid too little. Still, a large majority of Americans think that tenure is a problem, and that it's too hard to get rid of bad teachers. (For more coverage of this poll, see our story on page 14—and for readers' reaction to the poll results, see the “Your Turn” section below.)

Hoping to dampen the flames of passion from all sides of the school-reform debate, Education Secretary Arne Duncan has called for a meeting of superintendents, school board presidents, and union leaders later this month in Denver. The goal of this high-level meeting, which we'll be covering as it happens at **eSchool News Online**, is to help all parties involved learn how to set aside their differences and work together to improve the nation's schools.

There hasn't been much support expressed on this page before for many of the administration's education policies, but here's a loud cheer for Duncan's move.

As American Association of School Administrators Executive Director Dan Domenech writes on page 3 of this issue: “Though we all share the same goal—providing our children with the best education possible—we differ as to the means of achieving that goal. AASA's

thinking is that we might be better off working together than at odds with each other”—a sentiment obviously shared by Duncan.

Domenech's thoughts are part of a new regular column in *eSchool News*, devoted to the art of school leadership. One of the hallmarks of an effective leader is the ability to bring together people who disagree, sometimes passionately, and find common ground in the pursuit of a shared goal. That's what Duncan hopes to do for U.S. public education this month, and it's something that has become even more necessary in light of the tragic recent events in Tucson.

Bringing together a diverse group of people to work toward a common goal is also something the winners of our annual Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards have been able to do. These 10 outstanding leaders have marshaled their districts' resources, even in tough economic times, to ensure that technology is used wisely and equitably to enhance teaching, learning, and school administration. (You can read about their accomplishments beginning on page 27 of this issue.)

In his weekly address to Americans on Jan. 15, exactly one week after the Tucson shootings, President Obama said he looks forward to working with members of both political parties to meet the steep challenges facing the country.

“As shrill and discordant as our politics can be at times,” he said, the aftermath of the Tucson shootings “reminded us of who we really are—and how much we depend on one another.” He added: “Before we are Democrats or Republicans, we are Americans.”

And whether we are school administrators, teachers, or parents—despite what some high-minded reformers might say—we all care deeply about our students' welfare. **eSN**



Your Turn

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

Readers:

'Bad' teachers aren't the problem

Our story “U.S. public wants an easier way to fire bad teachers” (page 14) led many readers to weigh in with their own opinions when it ran online Dec. 15. Some readers took issue with the public perception that it's hard to fire bad teachers, while others argued that “bad” teaching is really a symptom of larger problems beyond a teacher's control.

“I feel the need to comment on the subject of how difficult it is to fire bad teachers, because I don't understand where this assumption comes from,” wrote one anonymous reader. “As a teacher in the state of Texas, we can be fired at any time for any reason. I have been teaching for 20 years, and I don't remember any school district ever offering tenure to anyone. ... We have to constantly prove our worth as teachers each day. Contracts are only one year at a time, and even with a contract we don't have much protection against job loss. I never see this information in articles that I have read about firing teachers.”

“Anyone who purports to be involved in education should know that nearly half of new teachers quit within five years of beginning their career,” wrote Christopher Dahle, 6th grade math and science teacher at Ortega Middle School in Alamosa, Colo. “With half of new hires abandoning the profession, the problem is not getting rid of the bad teachers. The problem is convincing the good ones that there is any reason to stay

in a profession where they can count on being treated like garbage by politicians, parents, administrators, and the press, and paid at a level only marginally higher than that enjoyed by a fry cook. ... For a society to expect that one of its most important functions will be adequately met by its most poorly paid members is more than misguided, it is insane.”

Reader Doyle J. Potter offered a different take: “I agree terminating poor performing teachers is nearly impossible. I am witness to this in the past. With that said, however, I don't believe we can terminate a teacher based on the poor test results due to some standardized test conceived by a group of professors, attorneys, or business people who have never been in the classroom with students whose parents are not involved in their child's education.”

He continued: “As I see it, we are leaving many children behind because teachers, through no fault of their own, are required to maintain a pacing schedule set up by sources outside the classroom. Poorly performing students are left behind because teachers cannot stop to see that students are really understanding the lesson being taught.”

On the subject of teacher compensation, reader Jessica Reeves wrote: “As a teacher, it never occurred to me that I may do my job better with more pay. I know this argument rages too often, but I can't stress enough just how much pay does not factor into my happiness and willingness to do more. Only an idiot would go into education for the pay. Patronizing us

about our 'low' pay will not keep the good ones teaching; listening to my concerns about student learning, getting me great [professional development], and helping me with classroom discipline will keep me.”

Finally, a reader identified only as “mears619” wrote: “I have to agree that there must be a way to rid [schools] of poorly performing teachers. I also have to add that it is possible to consider that some of the poorly performing teachers wouldn't be so terrible if the parental support and student cooperation was improved. We must start to hold parents responsible for their actions, and their children's actions, within the education environment. Students have been given a pass to behave however they want, with little to no repercussions. Instead, student behavior or non-performance is said be a result of their culture, socioeconomic circumstance, and even race. On top of that, teachers are inundated with conferences, paperwork, discipline, lesson planning, testing, and trying to meet the needs of individual students to an extent that they cannot possibly focus on teaching.

“...Many teachers [who] are considered poor performing might not be if they were not so disenfranchised by the end of their first year in the classroom. On the other hand, teachers [who] would be dynamite in the classroom, but exited the profession because of the lack of respect and authority for the job they have to do, might stick around if the field of education were not so chaotic and stressful.” **eSN**



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Edmodo: A free, secure social network for students

Online 'learning network' allows for communication and collaboration without compromising safety

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

Teachers seeking online communication and collaboration opportunities with students and other educators have another free resource at their disposal: Edmodo, an education-based social networking site.

The social learning network for teachers, students, schools, and districts offers free classroom communication for teachers, students, and administrators on a secure social network. Professional development for teachers is another component.

Teachers and students can post class-

room materials, share links and videos, and access homework, grades, and school notices within Edmodo, which stores and shares all forms of digital content—including blogs, links, pictures, video, documents, and presentations.

Edmodo recently released new enhancements to its gradebook feature in response to teacher feedback.

"I think the real power of Edmodo is it's completely based on teacher demand, and the way the service has evolved has been based on teachers requesting new features," said Betsy Whalen, vice president of social

media and marketing for Edmodo.

The social learning network is accessible online or using any mobile device, including Android devices and iPhones, and has special institutional features for schools and districts that can be accessed free of charge by administrators.

Whalen said a new library feature, which lets educators share content, was created after Edmodo users said they needed a way to exchange information.

"The idea behind Edmodo is to provide a platform for teachers to be able to communicate with students, post messages,

share content with each other, and post and grade assignments—but do it in a safe environment where we aren't requiring any private information from students," said Whalen.

More districts are using Edmodo as a platform for teacher professional development, because of its "ability to share content globally," Whalen said.

Co-founders Nic Borg and Jeff O'Hara, former technology directors based in Chicago, consistently received requests to shut down social networking sites from schools around their district.

"Teachers were then coming to them, saying they were frustrated with constantly being told they had to block social networking sites, because the teachers recognized there was a real need for social networking tools in the classroom," said Whalen. Edmodo grew from those requests.

With social networking playing an integral role in today's society, Edmodo has discovered a way to safely integrate it into the education sphere.

Students do not need to provide eMail addresses to sign up. Teachers give students access codes, and students can either put their first and last names into the system or go by student identification numbers instead.

Once using Edmodo, teachers can communicate with students individually or with the entire class. However, while students can communicate with teachers or the entire class, they cannot talk directly with each other.

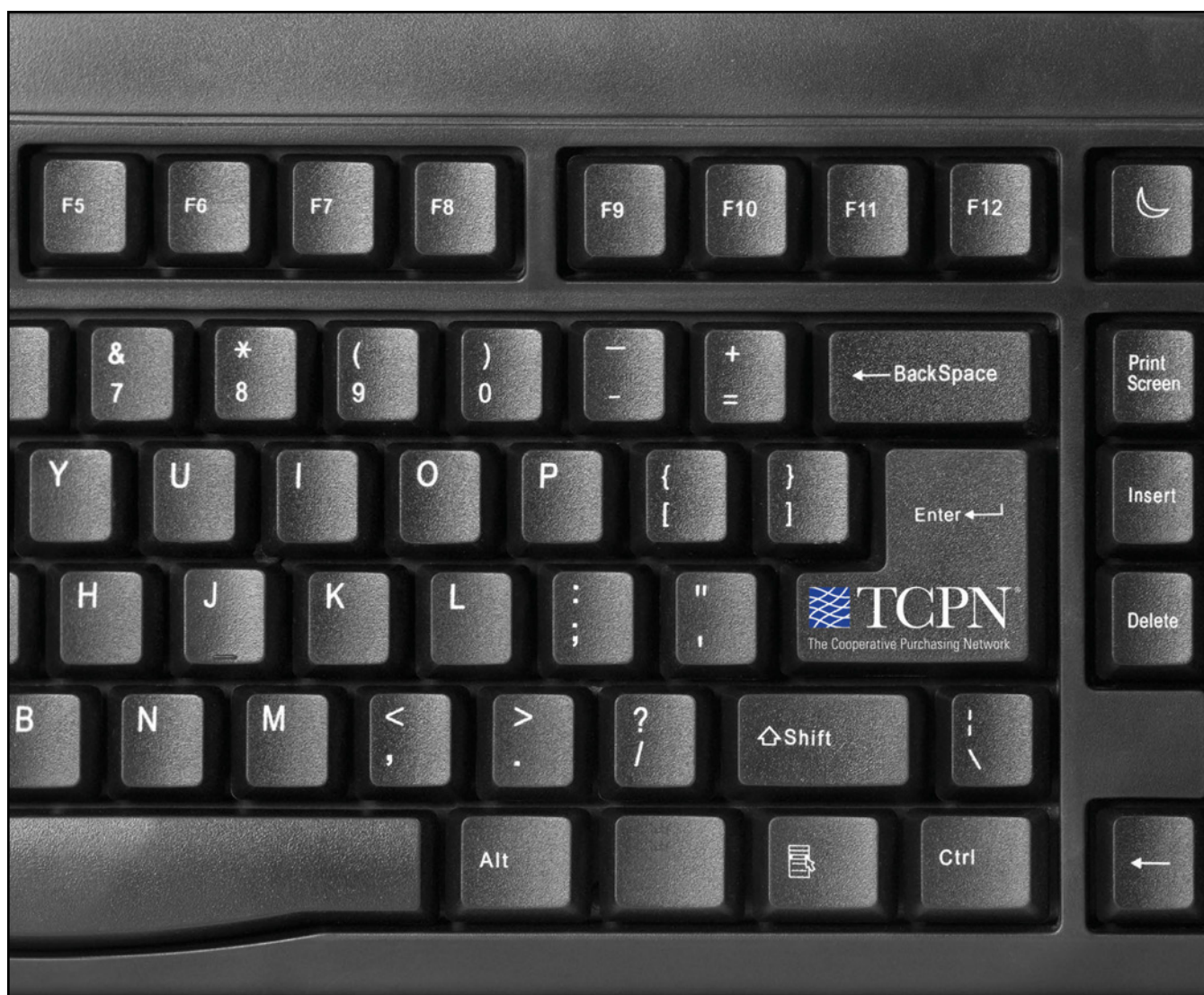
"We cut out any issue with inappropriate chatter between students individually, and that provides an extra level of security," Whalen said.

Using Edmodo's gradebook feature, teachers can post and grade assignments. Students can only view their own grades. Edmodo also hosts a library where educators can post digital content. The library can be shared with any teacher on the Edmodo network, but students can only share content with those in their classroom.

Edmodo launched two years ago, but it has seen its enrollment numbers jump significantly this year.

"The momentum we're seeing has been incredible. We now have at least one Edmodo user in every country in the world," said Whalen. The site reportedly hit 500,000 users in September and saw its 1 millionth user register in early December.

"Edmodo has really grown completely based on word-of-mouth from teachers," Whalen said. "More and more, we are seeing school districts and a lot of states coming and expressing interest and finding a resource that can be globally rolled out for all of their teachers." **eSN**



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States having problems with Common Core standards

Implementation won't happen until at least 2013; few states have plans to link them to higher ed

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

As states move forward in their adoption of the Common Core State Standards, a new survey reveals that thorough implementation of these standards is still years away, and many states are forgetting a key piece of the common standards movement: linking to postsecondary education.

In the survey, released by the Center on Education Policy (CEP), states were asked whether they planned to make certain changes in their policies and practices for elementary and secondary education as part

of their approach to implementing the common standards, and how soon these changes would be fully implemented.

As of press time, 43 states had adopted the Common Core standards, as well as the District of Columbia. Back in October and November, when the CEP conducted its survey, 32 states had adopted the standards and four had provisionally adopted the standards. CEP surveyed these 36 states and uncovered some interesting findings.

For example, though many states plan major changes to their assessments, curriculum materials, professional develop-

ment, and teacher evaluation in adopting the new state standards, many of these changes are years away from being realized: 23 of the 32 states that plan to require school districts to adopt the Common Core standards do not expect to implement these requirements fully until 2013 or later.

The survey also found that states lack solid plans to coordinate with higher education on linking college admission requirements or curriculum to the common standards. Just seven states plan to align first-year undergraduate core curriculum with the standards, while 26 states did not

know if this change would be implemented and three said it would not.

What's more, 24 states did not know if their undergraduate admissions requirements would be aligned to the standards, while eight said they would and four said they would not.

These numbers are disheartening, considering that a main goal of the Common Core state standards is to ensure that high school graduates have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and careers, CEP said.

"Accomplishing this goal will require coordination between the elementary, secondary, and higher-education systems," said the report.

Although most adopting states will require their school districts to implement the standards, the majority are not requiring districts to change their curriculum and teacher programs to support, or complement, this requirement.

Though getting the majority of states to adopt a common set of rigorous standards might seem like the hardest hurdle, realizing the implementation in an effective, sustainable plan will be the hardest part, CEP speculates.

"It is disappointing to learn that major changes will not occur for several years, but this is probably due to the enormity of the task and the lack of new funds," said Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO.

Indeed, although 11 states are Race to the Top (RttT) funding recipients, the rest are not, meaning implementation of the common standards might take longer.

For example, 10 out of the 11 RttT recipients plan to create or revise educator systems linked to student mastery of the Common Core standards—a major challenge named by 19 states in the survey as a result of funding constraints.

RttT winners also make up a majority of the states that expect to put in place standards-related initiatives for low-performing schools by 2012 or to require districts to implement the common standards by that time.

"Funding will always be a major issue for schools, but especially now with such a large undertaking during a difficult economy," said Chris Minnich, director of membership for the Council of Chief State School Officers—the organization that, along with the National Governors Association, developed the standards. "Now's the time to really re-evaluate where we're putting our dollars."

Minnich continued: "This amount of change is ... not going to happen overnight. In order for effective communication to happen between the state, the districts, the teachers, and higher-education organizations, there needs to be time to do this."

Minnich hopes the survey will help bring to light what the states really need to work on and where to go from here. **ESN**

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Coming soon: Faster, cheaper color printing

From staff and wire reports

For a long time, the two choices in desktop printers have been inkjet and laser. This year, a significant twist on the inkjet is hitting the market and promises higher color printing speeds—think one color page per second—at a relatively low cost.

The company behind the new technology, Memjet, hopes to snag a significant share of the \$250 billion-per-year worldwide printing market.

“We’re bringing revolutionary change to the industry,” said Len Lauer, Memjet’s CEO.

Memjet can be several times faster than a regular inkjet printer, because instead of

having a small print head that sweeps across the page, over and over, Memjet’s head is as wide as the page and doesn’t move. As the paper travels underneath it, 70,000 microscopic nozzles spurt ink all at the same time.

High-end laser printers can match Memjet’s speed but they cost more, both to buy and to use. Lauer expects Memjet-equipped printers to hit the market this year for \$500 to \$600. The ink will cost about 5 cents per page, compared with 12 cents to 25 cents per page for laser toner or consumer inkjet ink.

The page-wide heads and tiny nozzles are made possible by advances in micro-

electro-mechanical systems, or MEMS. These are parts made out of silicon using many of the same techniques that go into making computer chips, so manufacturers can create tiny and very precise mechanical assemblies. MEMS are also used in digital cinema projectors and in the sensors that capture the motion of the Nintendo Wii’s remotes and such smart phones as the iPhone.

Other companies have demonstrated wide inkjet heads, but Memjet appears to be the first to make it a finished desktop product.

The inventor of the Memjet head is Kia Silverbrook, an Australian, but the privately



A prototype of a Memjet printer

held company is based in San Diego. Lauer comes from another San Diego-based company, wireless technology developer Qualcomm Inc., where he was chief operating officer.

The first Memjet printer for the office market will be sold by computer maker Lenovo Corp. in China early this year and by other partners in Taiwan and India, the companies have announced. Memjet hasn’t announced a partner for the U.S., but Lauer said the printer would be sold here this year as well.


In a demonstration last month at the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, a prototype of the Memjet printer churned out color pages, one per second, of a quality indistinguishable from a good inkjet printer.

“It’s a disruptor in that it’s very fast for a very low price,” said Keith Kmetz, a printing industry analyst for IDC. The Memjet technology “has had the market abuzz,” he said, but he added that there’s more to market success than technology. Memjet still has to prove that its partners can market the printers effectively.

Memjet has talked about its color printing technology for years while it straightened out some kinks, so it won’t catch well-established players such as Hewlett-Packard Co., Lexmark International Inc., and Canon Inc. by surprise.

“I haven’t noticed in my conversations with them that they’re gravely concerned,” Kmetz said.

Memjet isn’t targeting individual consumers with its printers, at least for now. The home printer market is even tougher than the office market, because manufacturers such as HP subsidize their products heavily, then make the money back from sales of ink cartridges. Fast color printing also isn’t as important to consumers, who are printing less and toting more information and pictures around on their smart phones.

Memjet is also targeting commercial printing applications, such as photo finishing, with a unit that prints page-wide glossy photos. The goal is to replace drug-store minilab prints, which are still mostly created using light-sensitive paper and noxious chemicals. Memjet’s unit is smaller, cheaper, and faster. Prints from a prototype shown at CES weren’t as vividly colored as regular minilab prints, but Lauer said the technology is still being tweaked. 

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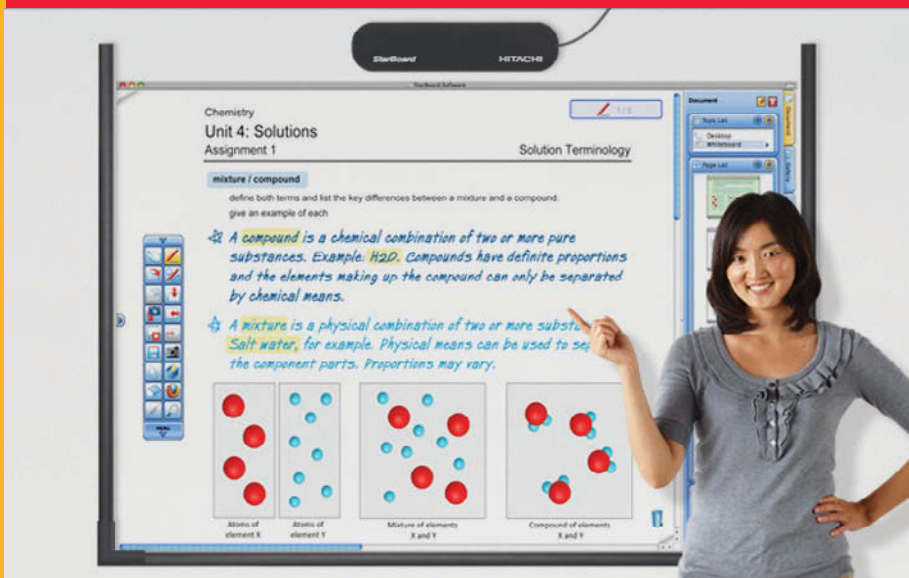
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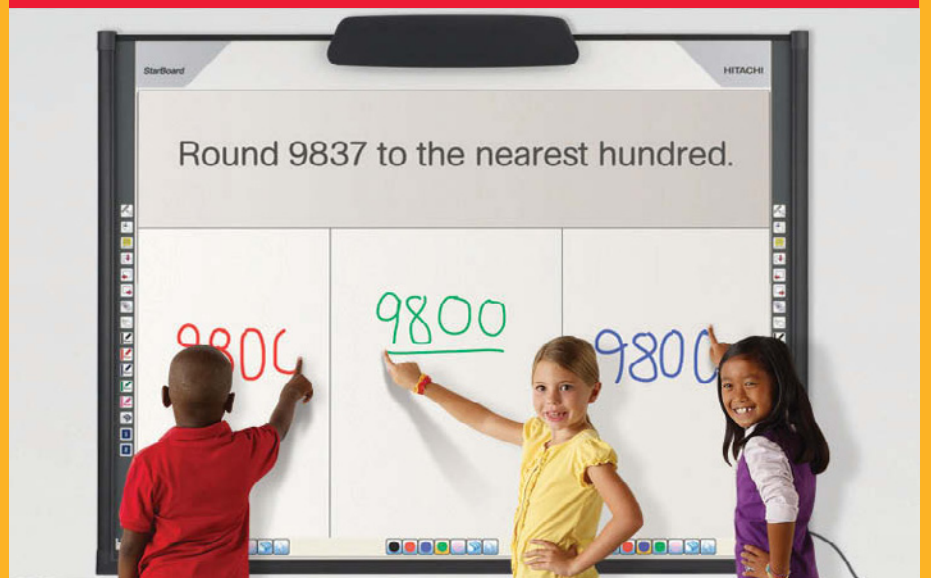
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U.S. public wants an easier way to fire bad teachers

However, only a third of Americans blame teachers for the struggles of public schools

From staff and wire reports

An overwhelming majority of Americans are frustrated that it's too difficult to get rid of bad teachers, while most also believe that teachers aren't paid enough, a new poll shows.

The Associated Press-Stanford University poll found that 78 percent of respondents think it should be easier for school administrators to fire poorly performing teachers.

Yet overall, the public wants to reward teachers—57 percent say they are paid too

little, with just 7 percent believing they are overpaid and most of the rest saying they're paid about right.

School districts have struggled for years over how to keep good teachers. This has led to controversial techniques like using standardized test scores to measure how much a student has learned in a teacher's class.

Some districts, like New York City schools, are considering making the data public so parents know how teachers rate.

The Los Angeles school district announced in late August it would adopt such

a model to assess teacher performance. Unions have fought against the release of such data, saying it's an unproven methodology that doesn't truly reflect how a teacher is performing in the classroom.

Carmen Williams, 53, an office manager from Yates City, Ill., said the issue is simple: Pay teachers more and get rid of the bad ones.

"Good teachers are hard to find, and one of the reasons they are hard to find is because they're not paid enough to support themselves, especially if they have a family," she said. "There are very good teach-

ers out there, but there comes a day when they need to retire and they don't, and what happens at that point is the kids suffer."

It's not just bad teachers whom people want set loose. Nearly as many in the AP-Stanford poll—71 percent—say it should be easier to fire principals at schools where students are performing poorly.

Half say that teachers' salaries should be based on their students' performance on statewide tests and on the evaluations they receive from local school officials.

About 1 in 4 say pay should be determined solely by school administrators' ratings, while fewer than 1 in 5 say salaries should be based only on how well students do on statewide testing.

While eager to send bad teachers packing, just 35 percent of respondents said a large number of bad teachers is a serious problem in America's schools, and only 45 percent say teachers' unions are to blame.

In contrast, more than half are critical of parents and federal, state, and local education officials, and 55 percent say the inability to recruit and keep good teachers is a big problem.

Larry Cuban, a professor emeritus of education at Stanford University, says some of the public's negative views come from frequent criticism from policy makers and in news reports.

"It's become a throwaway line: 'Oh, sure, U.S. schools are lousy,'" said Cuban. "I think we have schizophrenia in the U.S. that we believe all U.S. schools are lousy—except the schools we send our kids to."

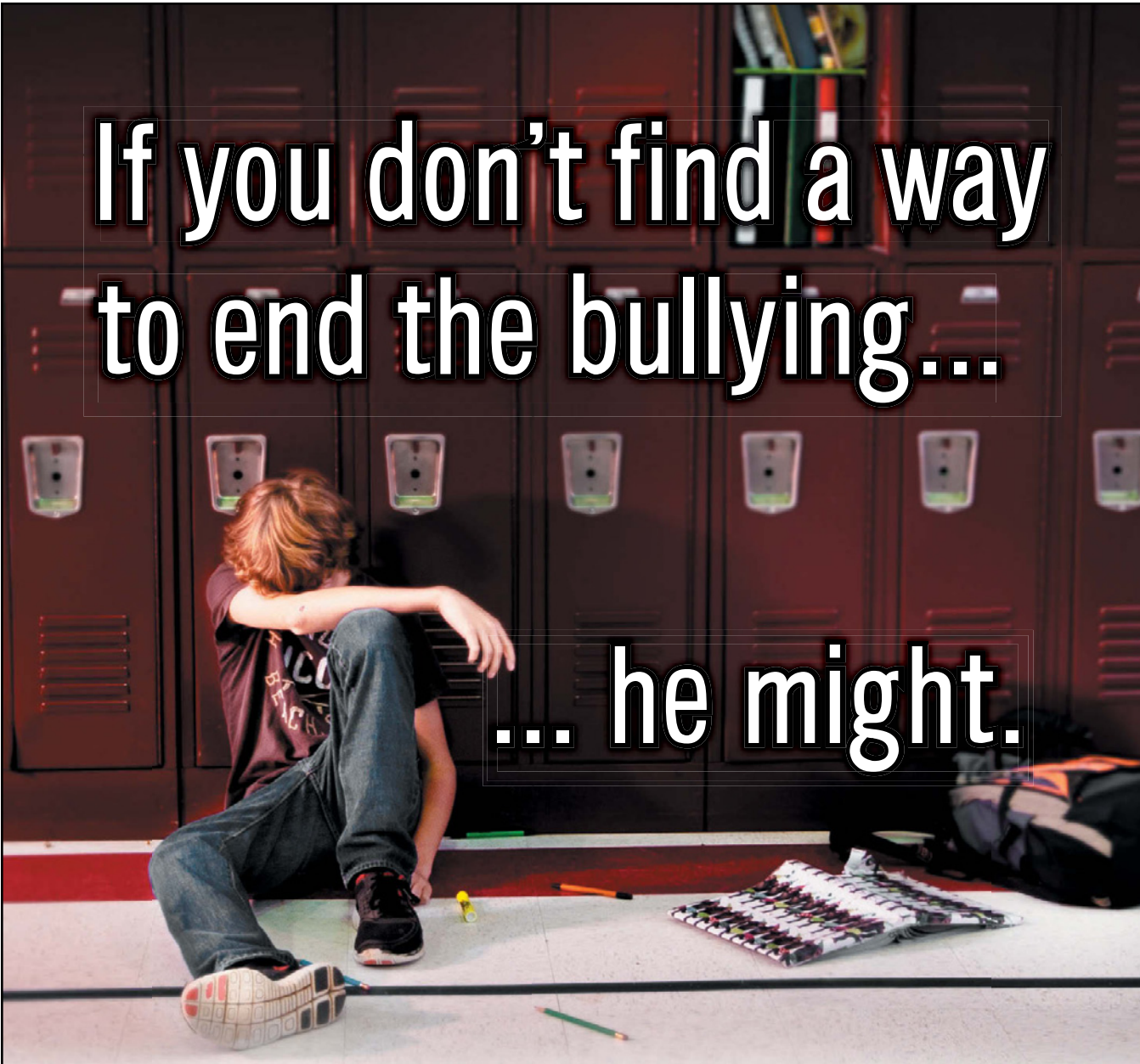
To help school districts cope, the Obama administration has begun programs like the \$4 billion Race to the Top initiative, which gave money to 11 states and Washington, D.C., in exchange for promises of innovative reforms to raise student achievement and improve graduation rates.

Part of the requirements for getting the money included a teacher performance pay program and better use of student achievement data to make sure teachers are doing their jobs.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said the poll results show that parents understand teachers are not to blame for all the woes in public education.

"The scapegoating of teachers must stop, and collective responsibility must start," Weingarten said. "This should be a wake-up call to education leaders and policy makers that all of us have to do our part. Of course teachers are important, but they can't do it all—and policy makers have to stop blaming them."

The AP-Stanford poll on education was conducted Sept. 23-30 by Abt SRBI Inc. It involved interviews on landline and cellular telephones with 1,001 adults nationwide and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points. **ESN**



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Commerce Department tackles online privacy

New report calls for online privacy 'bill of rights' to protect personal data

From staff and wire reports

Aiming to set ground rules for companies that collect personal data online and use that information for marketing purposes, the U.S. Commerce Department is calling for the creation of an online privacy "bill of rights" for internet users.

The proposal, outlined in a report issued Dec. 16, is intended to address growing unease about the vast amounts of personal data that companies are scooping up on the internet, from web browsing habits to smart phone locations to Facebook preferences. The information often is mined to help companies better target their advertising—a practice that has children's advocacy groups in particular calling for more online privacy safeguards.

The Commerce Department proposal is intended to guide lawmakers, industry executives, and a White House group looking at issues of online privacy and internet policy. It came two weeks after the Federal Trade Commission recommended the creation of a "Do Not Track" tool to let consumers stop or restrict advertisers from studying their online activity—including the websites they visit, the links they click, their internet searches, and their online purchases—in order to target ads.

The new Commerce Department report proposes the creation of a broad framework for industry behavior to ensure that companies give consumers clear notice about what personal data they are collecting and exactly how they are using this information.

The proposal would give consumers the opportunity to "opt out" of, or decline, some or all of that data collection and to correct errors in the information. It also would set clearer limits on the use of this information and would require companies to secure the data they gather.

These so-called "fair information prin-

ciples" would require legislation before they become binding.

In addition to these broad principles, the Commerce Department also envisions specific codes of conduct for particular segments of cyberspace. Those could include social networking websites, services that deliver location-based pitches to mobile devices and web publishers, and marketers that target ads based on a consumer's browsing activity and other online behavior.

Those codes of conduct would be voluntary, but enforceable. The FTC could take actions against companies that commit to abiding by the codes and then don't comply, the proposal says.

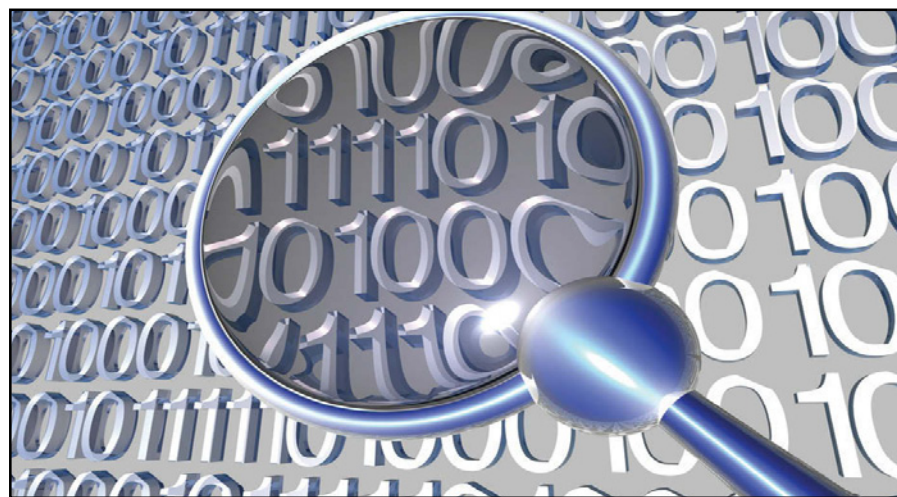
In what could become one of the more controversial elements of the plan, the codes of conduct would be developed by internet advertising networks, web publishers and marketers, social networking websites, and other online services, as well as government officials, consumer groups, privacy watchdogs, and others concerned about online privacy.

Those groups would work together under the guidance of a new online privacy office to be created within the Commerce Department. The office would work with the FTC, the White House, and other federal entities.

James Steyer, CEO of the children's advocacy group Common Sense Media, issued a statement applauding the Commerce Department's report but suggesting that even more needs to be done to protect the online privacy of children and teens.

"Online privacy is a huge concern for Americans, and it is important that agencies are taking the issue seriously," Steyer said. "We can't expect consumers to continue making purchases online unless they are confident that their privacy is being protected, which isn't the case today."

He added: "The Commerce



Data privacy is an important issue for educators and their students.

Department's idea of creating a privacy policy office is a good one, and it's a long time coming. Canada and Europe already have privacy officers responsible for constantly working with key stakeholders to keep privacy policies up to date with ever-changing technologies. This position would be an important step forward in protecting the privacy of consumers in this country, especially our youngest consumers—kids and teens, who also need new laws and broader protections to keep their personal information safe—and we believe it is something that the industry should fully support."

The Commerce Department report, which has been approved by the White House, is intended to guide internet companies and marketers, as well as lawmakers and policy makers, as they develop a new framework to safeguard online privacy without stifling internet commerce.

"America needs a robust [online] privacy framework that preserves consumer trust in the evolving internet economy, while ensuring the web remains a platform for innovation, jobs, and economic growth," Commerce Department Secretary Gary Locke said in a statement. "Consumers must trust the internet in order for businesses to succeed online."

The Commerce Department report does not take a position on the FTC's Do Not Track proposal, which is at the center of a debate over how to give consumers more control over their personal data online. The tool most likely would take the form of a browser setting that would let consumers signal to websites that they do not want to be tracked or want only limited tracking.

Although privacy watchdogs have welcomed the FTC's proposal, the online advertising industry has warned that allowing consumers to turn off all online tracking could have unintended consequences because tracking is used to deliver all sorts of personalized web content—from sports scores to stock prices—and not just internet ads.

Microsoft, too, is taking online privacy seriously. An upcoming version of its Internet Explorer web browser will let users add lists of sites that they don't want tracking them. The new feature, however, won't be as sweeping as the FTC's "Do Not Track" option. Users will have to create or find their own lists of sites they want to block, and the feature won't be turned on automatically when it debuts with the release of IE9 this year.

Fran Maier, president and executive chair of TRUSTe, which certifies websites that abide by certain privacy rules, believes the Do Not Track initiative and Microsoft's IE9 update will not cause problems for a majority of web users.

"For most web users, no, simply because industry data reveal that the vast majority of users won't opt out of online tracking when given the choice," Maier said. "That may sound counterintuitive and suggest to some people that consumers don't actually care about online tracking, but they're missing the point: What consumers really want is to have control over their information. Offering consumers notice about what's happening with their information and the choice to opt out is enough for most consumers to feel that they have control. They don't actually need to opt out to achieve that."

For consumers who do choose to opt out of online tracking, "yes, they might find that their browsing experiences are less satisfying—but that's a tradeoff they're consciously making," Maier added. "Online tracking not only allows websites to serve more targeted and lucrative ads, but also allows them to provide consumers with enhanced browsing experiences, such as automatically showing them weather reports for their local area or remembering their preferred volume setting on a video website. Consumers who choose to opt out of online tracking will not be able to enjoy these personalized features and could be part of the reason so few consumers opt out ... when actually given the choice."

The Commerce Department also recommended national standards on data breaches, requiring companies to adopt strong measures to protect electronic records and notify consumers in the event of a breach. And it called for a review of the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, a 1986 law that extended wiretapping restrictions to eMail messages and other data files but is now considered out of date.

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Students arrested for Facebook 'Attack a Teacher Day'

Educators use the arrests as a 'teachable moment' to discuss responsible online behavior

From staff and wire reports

Six girls were arrested last month in connection with a Facebook invitation to take part in what the poster called "Attack a Teacher Day" at two Nevada middle schools.

One girl was accused of inviting about 100 students on the social networking website to participate in the event on Jan. 7, and the other five were accused of responding with online threats against specific teachers, Carson Middle School Principal Dan Sadler said.

The Nevada Appeal in Carson City reported the girls were booked Jan. 5 at juvenile hall on a misdemeanor charge of communicating threats. Their names were not released.

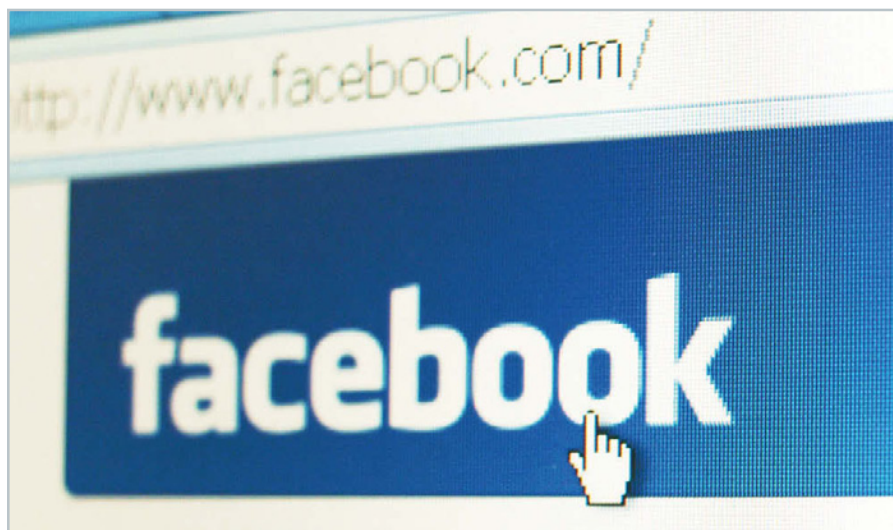
While the students insisted it was a joke, Sadler noted they were arrested on the same day a suspended 17-year-old student in Omaha, Neb., fatally shot an assistant principal and wounded his principal before fleeing the campus and taking his own life.

"School shootings really happen. That's why we took it seriously," Sadler told the Associated Press. Such online behavior is "not OK, and it's not funny in this day and age if you're going to make a threat against a teacher."

Five of the students attend Sadler's school, and the other attends Eagle Valley Middle School. Both schools are in Carson City.

Eighteen students accepted the Facebook invitation to participate in the attacks at the two schools, which had been set to take place from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. on Jan. 7. A parent brought the posting to the attention of authorities, Sadler said.

Classes took place that day without in-



The arrests gave teachers a chance to review appropriate online behavior.

cident at both schools after students earlier were notified of the arrests, and after parents of the students who were arrested or accepted the invitations were contacted by authorities.

The 12- and 13-year-old students were arrested after allegedly posting threatening statements against six teachers at the two schools. One student used the word "die" before a teacher's name, while others wrote that they would "attack" certain teachers, Sadler said.

No specifics, such as weapons or how the attacks would be carried out, were mentioned, said Carson City sheriff's Deputy Jessica Rivera, the school district's resource officer. The Facebook invitation to join the attacks went out either Jan. 3 or Jan. 4.

"Even if the six girls meant it as a joke, there's no way to know if the other students who accepted the invitation weren't going to

carry out the attacks in some fashion," Rivera said. "The school shooting in Nebraska is just another thing that shows us you can't take this kind of situation lightly."

The girls were released to the custody of their parents after their arrests. They were suspended from school for between three and five days.

The Facebook invitation was removed by a parent of the girl who posted it.

Sadler said the teachers targeted by the threatening comments were shocked by the arrests, because the six girls were good students. Some held leadership positions, while others had top grades.

"I would say their reaction was, 'Are you serious? Is this really happening?'" Sadler said. "The more they thought about it, they said they were not OK with it. This is kind of disheartening to an educator."

Kathy Haas, a Carson Middle School

teacher who taught two of the students who were arrested, said she was surprised because they seemed normal.

"It shows you just don't know what's going on in their minds," she said. "I don't understand their motivation. I don't think they think about the consequences, because they're young. They're pretty immature then."

The arrests gave teachers at the schools a chance for classroom discussions with students about appropriate online behavior, Haas added.

"It's a teachable moment, and hopefully it prevents [this kind of online behavior] from happening in the future," she said. "Most students know it was wrong. A lot of students said they knew about [the Facebook invitation] and deleted it."

Carson City Sheriff Ken Furlong said the case demonstrates the need for parents to monitor their children's online activities.

"They made some pretty violent comments about some teachers, and this isn't even close to a joke," he said. "Children's stresses are so great that they can act out on their frustrations. Parents need to monitor what their kids are doing on communication devices."

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Civil-rights groups seek review of Texas curriculum

At issue are controversial changes to the state's social studies curriculum

From staff and wire reports

Two civil-rights groups are seeking a federal review of public school education in Texas, accusing state school administrators of violating federal civil-rights laws as a result of social studies curriculum changes approved last year by the Texas Board of Education.

The request to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), made by the Texas NAACP and Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) on Dec. 20, contended that the social studies curriculum changes passed in May "were made with the intention to discriminate" and would have a "stigmatizing impact" on African-American and Latino students.

"The State of Texas is failing to provide many of its minority students with equal educational opportunities," said the documents sent to ED.

The request, signed by Gary Bledsoe, president of the state NAACP, and Joey D. Cardenas Jr., state director of Texas LULAC, asked that implementation of the social studies curriculum changes and new standardized tests be stopped for being racially or ethnically offensive or historically inaccurate.

Besides the curriculum complaint, the

two civil-rights groups accused the state, the Texas Education Agency, and the Texas Board of Education of "miseducation" of minority students, disparate discipline for minority students, using accountability standards to impose sanctions on schools with high numbers of minority students, and rules leading to underrepresentation of minorities in gifted and talented school programs.

Texas Education Agency spokeswoman Suzanne Marchman said the complaint was being reviewed but had no immediate comment. Gail Lowe, chair of the Texas Board of Education, said she was aware of the filing "but I don't know the specific nature of any allegations or problems they allege."

Capping a contentious meeting in May and after months of discussions, the Republican-dominated Texas Board of Education, voting along party lines, adopted a history and social studies curriculum that amended or watered down the teaching of the civil-rights movement, religious freedoms, America's relationship with the United Nations, and hundreds of other items. Supporters said the revisions were intended to correct decisions by a previous board a decade earlier.

"This is like in your face, like showing the ultimate in disrespect," Bledsoe

said. "To suggest the positive aspects of slavery or to exalt Jefferson Davis of the Confederacy is just an abomination. I mean no disrespect to people who may have had ancestors who were part of that, but it is what it is."

The ideological decisions by the Texas Board of Education contribute to what 4.8 million Texas students learn about political events and figures over the next decade. The request by the civil-rights groups argued those decisions might have influence beyond the state boundaries because Texas, as one of the nation's largest textbook purchasers, influences publishers whose textbooks are sold elsewhere.

"It is our contention that the [social studies] curriculum changes were made with the intention to discriminate," Bledsoe and Cardenas said in their filing to ED's Office for Civil Rights in Washington, and the board's action "has violated or will violate" the Civil Rights Act and the Constitution.

"It's not a lawsuit, but it is kind of a potential legal proceeding," Bledsoe said of the request in an interview with the Associated Press. "We've asked them to do a proactive review, to do a more in-depth review in reference to the concerns we've raised, and in the course of that

review we're asking that if we're vindicated that some of the things we get would be stopping them from implementing these standards."

The civil-rights groups' request for a federal review also pointed to "high stakes" state assessment tests "that do not adequately test for all relevant and important educational information," contending the standardized tests given to students "disproportionately fail minority students and ultimately are important factors in causing large numbers of minority students to drop out of Texas public schools."

In addition, they contended that disciplinary actions against minority students as compared to white students "are grossly disproportionate and unjustified."

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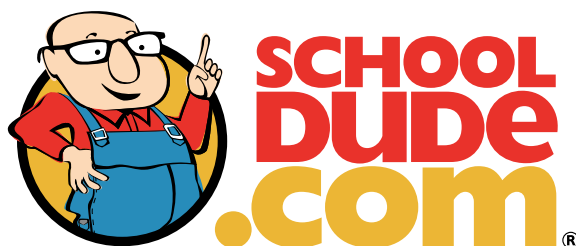


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Ore. district says iPods fire up kids for reading

Ed-tech leader continues to embrace mobile learning devices, even amid budget restrictions

From staff and wire reports

With a furrowed brow and a deep breath, 9-year-old Dallis Engel pressed down on the screen of her iPod touch. Then, she began to read.

"My brother William is a fisherman," she said, using a finger to trace words in Patricia MacLachlan's book, *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.

The fourth-grader stumbled over pronunciations and skipped words as an application recorded her voice. When she finished the passage, she glanced over at her teacher, Kelly Turcotte, and explained her next step.

"I have to listen to it and make sure it's perfect," she said. "If you sound like a robot, you have to do it again."

In Oregon's Canby School District, it's a familiar scene. While other school systems across the nation have banned personal cellular phones or mobile internet devices, the Canby School District is one of a growing number of districts that is fully embracing mobile learning technology.

During a time of steep budget reductions—employees must take 14 furlough days this school year—Canby has issued an iPod touch to every third-grader, challenging the idea that digital technology exists largely as a distraction for a plugged-in generation.

Since implementing a pilot project at Philander Lee Elementary School three years ago, the district has used about \$250,000 in state and federal grant and rebate money to purchase the iPod touches, a portable media player that connects to the internet through a Wi-Fi network.



iPod touches can help with reading.

In addition, the parent-teacher association at Lee Elementary raised about \$12,000 to buy 60 iPod touches for the school's fourth- and fifth-graders, and another parent organization pitched in about \$15,000 for 30 iPads at Eccles Elementary School.

The choice of equipping third-graders first was intentional, according to Joseph Morelock, the district's technology coordinator. The third grade is the first to take state tests, and administrators are eager to help students pass math achievement standards that recently have been raised.

In presentations, Morelock has shown that several classrooms using the iPod touches generated better test scores than the district average. He looks at iPod touches and other mobile learning devices as unparalleled tools that can be used in nearly every class.

"Every kid now has [his or her] own dic-

tionary, calculator, graphing calculator, [and] connection to the internet," he says.

Turcotte and other teachers say the devices enthrall students, giving them the opportunity to practice multiplication using animated games, listen to books on iTunes, or record their own reading voices.

"These are the kids who hated reading, but now there are all these things you can do on that iPod touch," said Turcotte, who heads a language arts class for struggling fourth-graders. "Suddenly, they feel like readers."

Students also learn at a comfortable pace, she said. Now, they can go back and practice a word or a math problem they've missed, minus the embarrassment.

For their part, third- and fourth-graders mostly praise the goofy multiplication games, which have students play tic-tac-toe or combat aliens.

Engel says books become more exciting with the iPod touch. Students often research settings of books on the internet or listen to book recordings.

"There are all these sound effects," Engel said. "It makes you want to keep on reading and to know what happens next."

As budget cuts continue to loom, public perception has become an issue for schools dealing with dozens of flashy digital tools. But Superintendent Jeff Rose defended the move to expand Canby's iPod program, saying the money comes from grants and rebate dollars that cannot be used for teacher salaries.

Besides that, he said, the school board had made the decision a few years ago to maintain its ed-tech investment: "In some

ways, it jump-started this idea that technology needs to be somewhat of a funding priority."

Canby's emphasis on using technology to improve teaching and learning began with former Superintendent Deborah Sommer, who in 2006 was chosen by *eSchool News* as one of its Tech-Savvy Superintendent Award winners. [Editor's note: For our 2011 award winners, see page 27.]

The district's efforts at infusing technology in the classroom are attracting notice. Districts from as far as Alaska and Hawaii are looking to tour Canby's classrooms, and Apple recently named Canby's technology innovation grant project an Apple Exemplary Program for 2010-11.

Even with many districts looking at multimillion budget gaps next year, Morelock would not be surprised if Canby parents and educators pour more money into ed tech.

"People like to bet on a winner," Morelock said. "When they see kids doing well and kids getting excited about school, they want to get on board." **eSN**

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730 U.S. schools trying to reinvent themselves

School across the country are trying to get community and parents involved in reform efforts

From staff and wire reports

The federal government has enticed 730 schools across the nation to reinvent themselves this school year, and nearly a third have chosen the most difficult paths to get a piece of the more than \$500 million set aside for transforming schools where too many children are failing to learn.

"This is tough, tough work, but it's desperately needed," U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in December.

Most of the schools fired their principals and changed their entire approach to learning this school year, while others replaced much of the staff. Yet Duncan said "there's been no drama about it. Folks have moved with an urgency that's sort of fantastic to watch."

The lack of drama was in sharp contrast to a couple of early school invention efforts, including one in Central Falls, R.I., where a high school's entire teaching staff was fired last February and got their jobs back in May after community protests.

To get federal school improvement money, schools in the bottom five percent of those not making adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law must choose from among approaches to turn around student test scores. The program is voluntary.

The approaches include closing the school and moving kids to other buildings; restarting a traditional public school as a charter school; firing most of the staff and starting over with a new team; or firing the principal and taking a new approach to learning.

Duncan's preliminary report on the success of the program noted that 71 percent of participating schools chose the fourth approach, called transformation.

Another 21 percent replaced the school principal and at least half of the teachers. About three percent closed down the school, and five percent are restarting.

Union leaders said the program became less controversial as school district officials started collaborating with teachers instead of blaming them for their problems.

"Our members are excited. They want to make a difference in these schools," said Dennis Van Roekel, president of the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers union.

Not every school has chosen to involve teachers in their transformation plans, Van Roekel said, but he predicted long-lasting success won't be possible without teacher engagement and collaboration.

Regardless of which improvement model they choose, Van Roekel said success also requires community and parent en-

gagement, effective school leadership, more time for learning and staff collaboration, social services for children, and conditions that attract educators to the neediest schools.

His message to administrators who haven't involved teachers in their planning: "It's never too late."

The school improvement grants are spread across the country and distributed among urban, rural, and suburban schools. Of students in the affected schools, 44 percent are African American, 34 percent are Hispanic, 16.5 percent are white, 2.5 percent are Asian, and 2.2 percent are Native American.

Nearly half the schools implementing one of the improvement models are high schools, 24 percent are elementary schools, 21 percent are middle schools, and seven percent are some combination of the three.

In two schools in Marysville, Wash., the district initially planned to fire the principal and redesign its education plan. But more than half the teachers at Tulalip Elementary said they didn't have the energy or the time over the summer to make sure their "new" school was ready to open in the fall.

So instead, most of the teachers and principal were replaced; many were moved to other schools.

That made it possible for the school to get more money to pay for the more dramatic change, said Arden Watson, president of the Marysville Education Association.

Tulalip Elementary, which is located on an Indian reservation, now has a strong focus on Native culture.

But the main changes at Tulalip are the same ones taking place at schools across the country: a longer school day, more time for teachers to plan and collaborate, smaller classes, thoughtful examination of student improvement data, better professional development, and extra help for students struggling in math or reading.

"The work is not easy in any way. We're moving forward, though. We feel like we're on the right path," said Judy Albertson, the district's school improvement facilitator.

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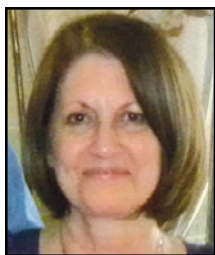
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Best Practices

Math software helps students 'Ascend' to new heights



By Judy Senter

Like so many other districts, we at Brazosport Independent School District in Texas have struggled with ensuring that our ninth-grade students start high school with the foundation in math skills necessary to tackle algebra and higher-level math. Many of our students were entering their freshman year with significant gaps in their skills and had not passed the math portion of the state assessment for several years.

Recognizing that research shows students who fail algebra in ninth grade are at a significantly higher risk of dropping out of school, we knew we needed a proven intervention program to help students fill the gaps and be on track for success in high school and beyond.

We turned to Ascend Math, a complete math intervention program. Ascend combines continuous assessment, targeted instruction, prescriptive tutorials, and powerful reporting tools to give students a direct route to improved math performance. Research demonstrates that Ascend Math closes math gaps of up to two grade levels in a semester—and the results realized by our students support and exceed those findings.

Located on the Gulf Coast, our district serves 13,000 students from a number of nearby small communities. More than 50 percent of our students are minority, and many are English language learners.

When Ascend Math first was introduced, some of our teachers had doubts. As one teacher said, "Administration made me go to the Ascend training in December. I didn't want to go. I knew I wouldn't like it."

The teacher continued: "Guess what? I immediately saw the value. Ascend was user-friendly and covered all the bases with the study guide, video, practice, review, and assessment. I was so impressed."

Other teachers worried that Ascend Math would replace them in the classroom. What they realized is that the program made them even more effective teachers, because they knew where students needed help and could work with them individually. That's the key to successfully implementing Ascend Math.

Our teachers particularly appreciate that Ascend Math is a complete math intervention solution. It begins by diagnosing students' strengths and weaknesses and then prescribes targeted instruction and ongoing assessment.

However, even with a highly effective intervention program, it takes time and focus to get students back on track. They didn't become deficient overnight, and they aren't going to recover overnight. You have to devote time to the process. Implementing Ascend Math with high fidelity is critical to its effectiveness. Students must use the program at least three times per week.

Our faculty and administration at Brazoswood High School have seen the most significant improvement in math skills. Implementation began with special-education students in Algebra I and expanded to students in a credit-recovery course. Students are using Ascend Math during their regular

math class time each day and in an after-school lab for 50 minutes, two to four times per week. They typically spend six to 12 weeks learning with Ascend Math and then return to regular classroom algebra, poised to succeed.

In these tight financial times, districts might worry about where they will find funding for a high-quality intervention program. However, a variety of federal funds are available for just this type of purchase. For example, we used American

Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Special Education Intervention, and Title I funds.

The improvement in student math skills in our district has been rapid and amazing. At Brazoswood High School, one teacher had 58 general and special-education students, none of whom had passed the math portion of our state exam in recent years.

After just four months of learning with Ascend Math, 45 percent of those students passed the high-stakes test. In addition, 60 percent of students realized achievement

gains of one-and-a-half grade levels in that short amount of time, and 38 percent saw remarkable gains of two or more grades during the same timeframe.

Nancy Barberry, one of our teachers at Brazoswood High School, said: "I have watched students find success who haven't succeeded in math in years. They see they can pass. They see they can learn." **eSN**

Judy Senter is executive director of curriculum and instruction for Brazosport ISD.



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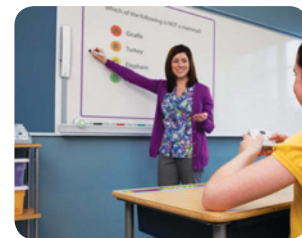
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Electronics show brings fiercer competition to iPad

From staff and wire reports

Apple Inc.'s popular iPad is getting its strongest competition thus far as consumer-electronics manufacturers unveil tablet computers with bigger screens, front-facing cameras for video chatting, and other features that could be useful for education.

The iPad has been a smashing success since its April launch, leaving other companies to play catch-up in the suddenly hot market for the keyboardless, touch-screen devices.

Rivals made a bigger push at last month's International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, betting they can challenge Apple in the market for tablet computers with such features as Android, the popular smart-phone software that Google Inc. developed to compete with the iPhone; high-definition touch screens; and cameras for video chatting and taking photos.

The competition is going to be fierce. DisplaySearch analyst Richard Semenza estimated that a hundred different tablet computers are in development, though not all of them will reach store shelves.

Major companies such as Motorola Inc. and Dell Inc. trotted out new models at CES. And at least two companies—high-definition TV makers Vizio Inc. and AOC—announced tablet computers Jan. 3, days before the official opening of the conference on Jan. 6.

Toshiba Corp. also unveiled a new tablet computer. Tentatively called the Toshiba Tablet, it will include two cameras for video chatting and taking photos, a high-definition screen that is larger than the iPad's screen, and the upcoming Honeycomb version of Android that is more optimized for tablet computers.

"This is the starting gun for tablets, except Apple had a yearlong lead in the race," BGC analyst Colin Gillis said.

Apple was expected to sell more than 13 million iPads in 2010, making up the vast majority of the total market. Although analysts believe the iPad will account for the bulk of the 55 million tablets that Gartner Inc. expects will be shipped, there's still room for rivals to vie for sales of the remaining 10 million to 15 million devices.

It's going to be difficult for hardware and software providers to make inroads into the market, though, given the iPad's name recognition and the hundreds of thousands of apps available for it in Apple's iTunes Store.

Android's growing popularity among smart-phone users could give tablet computers that run Google's system a leg up, particularly once Honeycomb is made available.

Google has said little about Honeycomb, other than the fact it will allow applications to present information differently depending on whether they're running on a phone or a tablet.

For example, Gmail on the tablet shows a list of eMail messages in one column and the body of the one you're reading in a second column. On an Android phone, you'd only see one column at a time.

Honeycomb was the operating system of choice on several devices unveiled at CES this year.

One is Toshiba's tablet, which the company said it plans to start selling by the end of June. A price has not yet been set, but the company believes it will be competitive with the iPad, which costs \$499 to \$829, depending on its memory capacity and wireless capabilities.

With so many companies making Android-based tablet computers, electronics makers will need innovative hardware or a super-low price to stand out from the noise, said Gillis.

Companies not known for mobile devices also are getting into the tablet busi-



A Dell exec shows off the Streak 7, a 7-inch tablet with 4G wireless capability.

ness. TV maker Vizio said its offering, the VIA Tablet, will have a screen that measures 8 inches diagonally and can play high-definition videos, an HDMI port, MicroSD memory card slot to add more memory, and a front-facing camera.

It also will include a universal remote control app for controlling devices such as television sets. VIA will run Android, but Vizio did not say which version. It also did not say when it will be available or how much it will cost.

AOC's Breeze Tablet is less flashy and will cost less than \$200. It will include the same size screen as Vizio's VIA, but with a lower resolution that won't show off high-definition video as nicely as the iPad and other higher-end tablets. It also runs an older version of Android—Eclair, which was released in late 2009—and will include Wi-Fi for accessing the internet.

AOC did not say when the Breeze will be available for purchase.

Gillis is overall optimistic about non-iPad tablets, mainly because so few people actually own a tablet device.

"The marketplace is large and just bare-

ly penetrated, so they'll have a modicum of success," he said.

But competitors still will have a hard time catching up with Apple's lead in the near term. Although it might seem as if the iPad business was created overnight, it actually took Apple years to develop, said DisplaySearch analyst Richard Shim.

"I do think there will be a number of failures, and it will take time," Shim said. "I think the expectation is Apple will be the market leader for the next year or two at the very least. Even if you have the best platform out there, it takes time to develop an audience."

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New devices allow for mobile wireless broadband

From staff and wire reports

This year, the big national wireless carriers will be racing to stake their claims in the latest frontier of service: ultra-fast data access through a cellular connection for smart phones and laptops, as well as for gadgets like tablet computers.

The companies are boosting their mobile broadband speeds and revving up the marketing hype. They're moving away from talking about call quality and coverage, and focusing instead on data speeds: megabits in place of minutes.

For education, the new high-speed mobile services could mean always-available broadband access, fast enough to allow for video streaming even outside the range of a Wi-Fi network—enabling true anytime, anywhere learning. But these benefits can be realized only by paying for a cellular data plan, which could prove costly for schools and their students.

At the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas last month, Verizon Wireless revealed the 10 gadgets with built-in access to its new high-speed 4G wireless data network, including smart phones, tablets, and laptops. Some are to launch as early as March.

Along with Sprint Nextel Corp.'s subsidiary Clearwire Corp., Verizon is at the forefront of the move to a new network technology, designed to relay data rather than calls. Verizon's fourth-generation, or "4G," network went live for laptop modems in the last few weeks.

The new mobile broadband network is the nation's fastest. Verizon is hoping to cash in on that advantage by selling tablets and smart phones that devour data.

One of the devices, Motorola Mobility Inc.'s Xoom tablet, will come with a 10.1-inch screen and two cameras: one for video chatting, the other for high-definition videos. The Xoom will begin selling by March. Initially, it will work with Verizon's 3G network but will be upgradeable to work on the speedier 4G network.

Motorola's Droid Bionic smart phone also will have two cameras, to help with video conferencing, a data-hungry task. It will be one of the first phones with a so-called "dual-core processor" that will roughly double its computing capacity. That should help with video processing.

LG Electronics Inc., Samsung Electronics Co., and HTC Corp. are bringing out similar phones for the network.

And Hewlett-Packard Co. is adding 4G capability to a laptop and a netbook.

There also will be two "mobile hotspot" devices for the network: small battery-powered bricks that act as Wi-Fi access points, connecting Wi-Fi-equipped computers to the 4G network.

Verizon didn't reveal what the new devices or wireless plans will cost.

Verizon's size—by number of subscribers, it's the largest U.S. wireless carrier—and the quality of its network are helping it gain traction with manufacturers.

"By deciding to go early and go first to [4G wireless], we sent a signal to the entire consumer electronics market that this technology would develop very quickly," said Lowell McAdam, Verizon's president and chief operating officer, in a keynote address at the trade show Jan. 6.

Verizon's new mobile broadband network is pressuring its competitors to step up their offerings. AT&T Inc. on Jan. 5 said it's on track to launch its own 4G wireless network this summer. Also, it said it will start calling its current 3G network "4G," because it's been upgraded to be capable of nearly 4G speeds.

T-Mobile USA said it will upgrade its 3G network to double the possible down-

load speeds in two-thirds of its coverage area. It started calling the network "4G" in ads last fall. It, too, revealed two tablets for its network, to launch later this year.

Sprint and Clearwire have chosen a slightly different route to 4G wireless service. They've picked a 4G technology called WiMax that was ready before Long Term Evolution, or LTE, which Verizon is using.

Now, however, WiMax looks set to be a niche technology, while the rest of the industry adopts LTE. That will hamper Sprint's efforts to get competitive devices for the network. Still, it was able to launch its first 4G phone last summer, ahead of the competition. On Jan. 5, Sprint announced it would be the first to carry a 4G tablet from Research In Motion Ltd., the maker of the BlackBerry, some time this summer.

The most distinctive feature of 4G wireless technologies like LTE and WiMax is that they're designed to carry data rather than phone calls. That makes them more efficient at serving today's smart phones, tablets, and other gadgets that need data access on the go. It also makes the networks cheaper to build out and manage.

esn

'Loopholes'...

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have long argued that the rules constitute unnecessary regulations for web providers and internet users.

The regulations prohibit unreasonable network discrimination—a category that FCC officials say most likely would include services that favor traffic from the broadband providers themselves or traffic from business partners that can pay for priority access.

The rules do, however, leave the door open for broadband providers to experiment with routing traffic from specialized services such as smart grids and home security systems over dedicated networks, as long as these services are separate from the public internet.

Steve Worona, director of policy and network programs for the ed-tech organization EDUCAUSE, said the net-neutrality rules contain loopholes that one day could lead major internet providers to limit access to campuses that can't pay premium prices for web service.

"If the rules are not effective in maintaining an open internet, the worst case scenario is that a bidding war develops to get access to high speed," Worona said. "In that type of situation, the deepest pockets have the best chance of accessing their end users. ... In that case, it wouldn't be surprising if smaller schools have more trouble than larger universities."

School technology leaders should remain "vigilant" of signs that web providers are using loopholes in the net-neutrality rules, Worona said.

"There's potential for great mischief, and we should watch carefully to see if that mischief is taking root," he said. "It is unfortunate that [the FCC] didn't do more."

Only 16 percent of the 3,439 community college campuses in the U.S. have access to the kind of high-speed internet service that is available at more than 90 percent of research universities, according to statistics released last year by the FCC.

The FCC regulations prohibit wireless carriers from blocking access to any websites or competing applications such as internet calling services on mobile devices, and the new rules require carriers to disclose their network management practices, too.

But the rules give wireless companies more leeway to manage data traffic, because wireless systems have more bandwidth constraints than wired networks.

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said the regulations will prohibit broadband providers from abusing their control over the on-ramps that consumers use to get onto the internet. He said the companies won't be able to determine where their customers can go and what they can do online.

"Today, for the first time, we are adopting rules to preserve basic internet values," Genachowski said. "For the first time, we'll have enforceable rules of the road to preserve internet freedom and openness."

Public-interest groups said the FCC and the Obama administration have missed an opportunity to establish long-lasting rules that would prevent corporations from controlling internet access.

Craig Aaron, director of Free Press, a nonprofit organization that lobbies for greater regulation of web service providers,

said the FCC passed "industry-written rules that will for the first time in internet history allow discrimination online."

"These rules don't do enough to stop the phone and cable companies from dividing the internet into fast and slow lanes, and they fail to protect wireless users from discrimination," Aaron said. "No longer can you get to the same internet via your mobile device as you can via your laptop."

Aaron said Genachowski "ignored policy makers who urged him to protect consumers and maintain the internet as a platform for innovation. It's unfortunate that the only voices he chose to listen to were those coming from the very industry he's charged with overseeing."

Republican outcry was just as loud af-

ter the FCC's vote, as conservative groups and lawmakers derided that net-neutrality rules amounted to an unneeded government intrusion into the private sector.

Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas, the top Republican on the Senate Commerce Committee, plans to introduce a "resolution of disapproval" to try to overturn what she called "troubling regulatory overreach by the FCC."

Wayne Crews, vice president for policy at the conservative Competitive Enterprise Institute, said the FCC's rules "rest on the fallacy that government action is needed to ensure a vibrant, innovative internet."

"In reality, today's internet is as free and innovative as ever, while consumer choice among broadband providers is at

an all-time high," he said in a Dec. 20 statement. "Even the 'limited' net-neutrality rules set to be announced tomorrow would empower a heavily politicized federal agency to dictate the outcomes of otherwise-private disputes over network access and pricing." **eSN**

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half-million 15-year-old students in more than 70 countries, revealed that along with Korea and Finland, the province of Shanghai, China, scored higher in reading than any other countries.

In just the first year that Shanghai has participated in PISA, it also topped the list of nations in math and science performance.

To put this in perspective, more than one-quarter of Shanghai's 15-year-olds demonstrated advanced mathematical thinking skills to solve complex problems, compared to an OECD average of just three percent.

PISA scores are based on a scale, with 500 as the average. Shanghai scored 600 in math; the U.S. scored 487. In reading, Shanghai scored 556; the U.S. scored 500. In science, Shanghai scored 575; the U.S. scored 502.

All in all, the U.S. ranked 25th out of 65 countries in math, 14th in reading, and 17th in sciences—a slight improvement over its 21st place in science in 2006.

These scores carry weight not just because they're embarrassing to a nation that once led the world in education performance and innovation, but because PISA results, even though they poll 15-year-olds, have a direct relation to a country's future economic success.

"Better educational outcomes are a strong predictor for future economic growth," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. "While national income and education achievement are still related, PISA shows that two countries with similar levels of prosperity can produce very different results. This shows that an image of a world divided neatly into rich and well-educated countries and poor and badly-educated countries is now out of date."

Bob Wise, former governor of West Virginia and president of the Alliance for Excellent Education, summed up the U.S. mediocrity with a simple sports metaphor during a recent press conference: "We're like the Redskins. We're doing a little better on the field and we're winning a few games, but we're nowhere near the Super Bowl. We need to figure out how we're going to get each of our kids the Super Bowl ring."

Some critics have pointed out that China's results aren't indicative of the nation as a whole, while others argue that Chinese students are learning how to become adept at taking tests but are not taught creativity or imagination.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals released a statement acknowledging America's stagnant results. The organization also noted, however, that the U.S. cannot ignore "the persistent correlation between poverty and performance," that "students in poverty require intensive supports to break past a condition that formal schooling alone cannot overcome," and that "other nations solve this problem by sorting students into their fates beyond age 15. U.S. educators, however, commit to educating all students and encouraging them to high standards into the high school years."

Still, OECD says poverty alone cannot account for the results. Although every country has different practices, according to PISA officials, socio-economic background plays no part in determin-



Shanghai's results on the latest PISA exam have given U.S. educators pause.

ing student performance in Asia.

And in 10 years, Korea has managed to double its amount of top student performers in all subjects.

"These results are challenging our conventional wisdom," said Carmela Martin, assistant secretary for planning, evaluation, and policy development at the U.S. Department of Education (ED). "It shows us that poverty doesn't mean destiny, and if other countries can improve so much in just one decade, we can do it, too."

"I know skeptics will want to argue with the results," said Education Secretary Arne Duncan during a press conference, "but we consider them to be accurate and reliable, and we have to see them as a challenge to get better. ... We can quibble, or we can face the brutal truth that we're being out-educated."

What are we doing wrong?

According to Andreas Schleicher, head of the Indicators and Analysis Division of OECD's Directorate for Education, although it's important to understand that each economy, province, state, district, and school has its own nuances and challenges, there are some common denominators for success:

- The best school systems are the most equitable—students do well regardless of their socio-economic background, but schools that select students based on ability at a younger age show the greatest differences in performance by socio-economic background.
- High-performing systems allow schools to design curricula and establish assessment policies, but don't necessarily allow competition among schools for students. Also, combining local autonomy with effective accountability produces good results.
- Schools with good discipline and better student-teacher relations achieve better results.
- The more uniform the school system as a whole, the better the student performance.
- Countries that perform the highest tend to partner successful schools with struggling ones to share best practices with the struggling schools.
- Successful countries believe that all students, not just some, need to learn at high levels.
- Successful countries make the teaching profession attractive with good salaries and multiple opportunities for promotions. They also train teachers to become highly-qualified professionals.
- Successful schools have a flat, collab-

orative, collegial-type of work environment, rather than a top-down hierarchical approach.

- Successful schools are accountable to other schools (their peer institutions) and to the school's stakeholders. There is also a clear articulation of who is responsible for ensuring student success.
- Top-performing students usually attend preschool.
- Top-performing students have access to individualized learning opportunities and are taught higher-level thinking skills.
- Successful countries align their standards to global standards and tend to have a country-wide standard system.
- Successful countries also have effective instruments to share and spread their knowledge of what works.

Schleicher said one finding indicated that the amount of money spent on education explains only 10 percent of an economy's success—a point that resonated the most with press conference attendees.

"As the years progress, money spent on education will explain less and less," said Schleicher. "We expect this number to decrease to six percent in the next three years, meaning that 94 percent of success depends on how you invest what you have."

"We need to restructure our investments, and one way to do this is to get our young people interested in foreign cultures and incite a desire to compete in the global economy," said Kolb. "We can do this by focusing more on foreign languages; this will inculcate an investment mentality in our young. American companies cannot compete successfully in the global economy without a workforce that can communicate effectively with their colleagues in other countries."

Schleicher's recommendations to create a national standard relates to goals of the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers, which are leading the creation and adoption of the Common Core State Standards.

"A foundation for helping all students become globally competitive are the Common Core State Standards, internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards that have now been adopted in states representing 87 percent of the nation's K-12 public school population," said Dane Linn, director of the Education Division for the NGA's Center for Best Practices. "When our students have the skills and knowledge needed for


today's workforce, we will be positioned to compete successfully with any country in the world."

Alongside PISA's results, McKinsey & Co., a global management consulting firm, released a new report called "How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better," which analyzes 20 education systems from around the world, all with improving but differing levels of performance. The report examines how each has achieved significant, sustained, and widespread gains in student outcomes.

The McKinsey report identifies reform elements that are replicable for school systems elsewhere as they "move from poor to fair, to good to great, to excellent," says the company.

Many of McKinsey's findings mirror those of PISA in terms of what top-performing education systems are doing. The report's findings include the following eight highlights:

- (1) A system can make significant gains from wherever it starts, and these gains can be achieved in six years or less.
- (2) There is too little focus on "process" in the debate today, meaning that improving system performance ultimately comes down to improving the learning experience of students in the classrooms by changing school structure, resources, and processes (curriculum and instruction).
- (3) Each particular stage of the school system improvement journey is associated with a unique set of interventions.
- (4) A system's context might not determine what needs to be done, but it does determine how it is done.
- (5) Six interventions occur equally at every performance stage for all systems: teacher and administrator professional development, assessing students, improving data systems, introduction of policy documents and education laws, revising standards and curriculum, and ensuring reward and remuneration structure for teachers and principals.
- (6) Systems further along the journey sustain improvement by balancing school autonomy with consistent teacher practice.
- (7) Leaders take advantage of changed circumstances to ignite reform.
- (8) Leadership continuity is essential.

"Aligning education goals to economic development, Asian nations have scoured the world for models of effective education systems, and implemented them consistently through deliberate policies and long-term investments," said Tony Jackson, vice president of education at Asia Society. "Any definition of a world-class education must include knowledge of Asia and the language and cultural skills to deal with Asia. It's a two-way street: America must now learn from—and with—Asia and the world." 

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Teachers...

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increases achievement, and caters to all forms of personalized learning.

"Not all students learn in the same way or at the same pace," said Dan Spencer, a science teacher at Michigan Center High School and educational technology consultant for Jackson County Intermediate School District. "Unfortunately, the way schools are set up, all students are forced to learn the exact same thing at the exact same time and in the exact same way. I wanted to find a way to change that."

Spencer, who currently teaches three sections of chemistry and two sections of engineering every day, got a little help from his superintendent, David Tebo, who eMailed the entire high school staff an idea for a "flipped" classroom model that came from two teachers in Colorado, Jon Bergmann and Aaron Samms.

When Spencer read the eMail, he knew this was how he wanted to run his classroom.

"The main idea behind the 'flipped' classroom is for teachers to be available when students need them most. If I lecture for 30 minutes ... in my chemistry classes, that would leave me about 20 minutes to assign homework and let students start on it," he explained.

At that point, he said, students were left to their own devices to finish their homework and come back the next day for something new. What he found was that when students left his class, many either chose not to do the homework or gave up as soon as they ran into something that didn't make sense.

"Then we would spend the next day going over questions instead of moving on. So what I was doing was using up valuable class time to lecture and then leaving them to figure things out on their own. That seemed like a very inefficient use of class time to me."

Spencer began to create screen casts of his lectures using Camtasia software the day before. Those screen casts then

became the homework—and class time was for doing "homework," or answering questions and doing labs or demos.

"I have now reached the point where, because of the screen casts, my students are all able to work through the curriculum at their own pace," he explained. "Since I'm not lecturing in class, and students can access the information whenever they need, I can now spend that extra time helping students one-on-one."

Because many of Spencer's students lack high-speed internet access at home, Tebo received a grant for Spencer to get a classroom set of iPod touches, which Spencer checks out to students who need them.

Like Spencer, James Yoos, Washington state's 2010 Teacher of the

'Because of the screen casts, my students are all able to work through the curriculum at their own pace,' one teacher said.

Year, teaches science. Specifically, he teaches two sections of honors chemistry, two sections of AP chemistry, and one section of bicycle maintenance at Bellingham High School in Bellingham, Wash.

"There's only so much time in the day," Yoos said, "and I noticed that I was running out of time in class helping students practice and develop their understanding."

Yoos explained that although lecturing was necessary, not all of his students could be engaged through this process. Therefore, many students were trying to modify their inherent learning styles to meet the lecture format.

"It simply was not meeting the needs of my students," he said.

Three years ago, Yoos decided to condense his lectures into 15- to 20-minute

video podcasts, or "vodcasts," that students watch for homework. They are expected to watch and practice with him when they are ready to learn the information.

The power behind the vodcasts, he said, is that students only watch when they need the information or are inspired to learn more. Class time is then dedicated to practicing and using their preferred learning style. This may be small-group learning, hands-on instruction, problem sessions, or conversations with Yoos.

"This allows them the space to ask questions for clarification and use each other as a resource to develop their understanding. I become the facilitator of their learning, rather than the dictator," he said.

And students seem to appreciate Yoos' understanding.

Rather than getting questions like "How do I do this?" Yoos hears more questions like, "I don't understand how to do this specific step," or "I saw this in the vodcast, but need clarification on this..."

"Richer questions from my students have allowed me to engage them in more advanced topics at a deeper level. Kids love it, parents love it," he said.

Yoos emphasized, however, that this inverted style of learning forces students to "own their learning."

"What I mean by this is that they [must] take responsibility for developing what they know. They can't be passive recipients of knowledge; they must engage in order to succeed in this system ... but that's what we want for members of our society, isn't it?" he said.

But this new teaching and learning style might take a while to get used to, he added—for everyone.

"Many students are good at 'playing school' and going through the motions," he explained. "Now that they have to demonstrate what they learn before moving on, some of them get quite upset when they scribble down a page of notes from a screencast without thinking about it and then are asked to redo it when it becomes obvious that they are just trying to work the system."

He added: "Another complaint I have heard [from parents] is that I'm 'not teaching them anything.' Many students and parents expect the teacher to be the 'sage on the stage' and not a voice on an iPod."

Yet, now that students have gotten used to the idea, Spencer sees changes—not just in student engagement and achievement, but in the way students perceive learning as well.

"One thing that I have learned is that students really resent 'busy work' now. If an assignment doesn't directly lead to them understanding one of our unit objectives, it becomes obvious very quickly," he said.

Yoos also warns that this style of learning is not for those looking for a quick fix: "My greatest challenge is time. It does take time to set this up and build in the flexibility to meet the students' needs. Unfortunately, there isn't a lot of compensation for extra hours invested, but for me, the investment in our future is worth it."

Yoos' advice to other teachers and schools looking to implement this inverted learning style is to "start slow—one or two vodcasts a month is plenty to whet your students' appetites. Build libraries collaboratively, and don't be afraid to make a mistake. It is through experimentation and modification that we hone our art of teaching."

Concluded Spencer: "I feel that the typical factory method of education is on its way out. It has to [be]. While it is convenient, it doesn't produce the kinds of 21st-century skills necessary for kids to flourish after high school." **eSN**

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Technology...

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room and help tailor it to the teachers' individual needs. She also said districts should use a wide variety of technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and wikis, and that superintendents should be able to model these for their staff.

"What we are really seeing right now is a true paradigm shift," said Sean McDonough, director of information technology for the Harrisburg City School District in Pennsylvania. "In some ways, we have a whole new way of thinking about how we're truly using technology in today's world because of the omnipresence that technology gives us."

McDonough said superintendents and other district leaders need to make sure that ed-tech directors are included in the curriculum planning process.

"Curriculum leaders need to know more about the technological systems that [can help lead to] effective instruction," McDonough said.

Brian Nichols, executive director of elementary school leadership in Newport News, Va., encouraged schools to push out of their comfort zone.

"We're not afraid to fail, we're not afraid to take risks, but we want to do it on a small-



Identifying 'lead teachers' and trying pilot projects are key ed-tech strategies.

er scale," said Nichols. He said pilot programs that can be developed and then scaled up are extremely effective for schools looking to add to their use of technology in the classroom.

The panel admitted that finding low-cost ways to incorporate technology in the classroom during the current economic downturn is difficult, but not impossible.

"We have really relied on free internet resources, and there are really a lot of them out there," said Freeman. She pointed out Skype and free virtual libraries as some examples.

"The state of Virginia is definitely feeling the economy as well," said Nichols. "As far as technology goes, there are a lot of free resources out there. There are a lot of Web 2.0 tools. We're always looking for re-

sources that are out there that are high-yield [and] low-cost."

The CoSN discussion also touched on how to reach out to faculty who aren't as technologically savvy.

"We have tried professional learning so they know how to use the technology," said Freeman. She also said her district sets goals and checkpoints for everyone to reach within certain time periods.

Nichols said his district uses "lead learners" who are comfortable with a piece of educational technology to help those who are not.

"That way, you're all kind of learning this together, and you all get to that level of comfort," said Nichols.

He added: "There really isn't a division in our school arena now that hasn't been impacted by technology." **eSN**

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Should test scores be used to evaluate teachers?

Debate rages over using the 'value-added' model in measuring teacher effectiveness

Cara Erenben
Contributing Editor

The so-called "value-added" model for using student achievement data is an "imperfect, but still informative" measure of teacher effectiveness, especially when it is combined with other measures, according to the preliminary results of a large-scale study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The study's early findings have ratcheted up the debate over whether student test scores should be used in evaluating teachers—and if so, how.

The report, entitled "Learning About Teaching: Initial Findings from the Measures of Effective Teaching Project," claims to offer the strongest evidence to date of the validity of the value-added model as a tool to measure teacher effectiveness.

The \$45-million Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project began in the fall of 2009 with the goal of building "fair and reliable systems for teacher observation and feedback."

What is the value-added model?

Value-added is a controversial statistical method that relies on test-score data to determine a teacher's effectiveness. Each student's performance on past standardized tests is used to predict how he or she will perform in the future. Any difference between the student's projected result and how the student actually scores is the estimated "value" that the teacher has added or subtracted during the year.

The value-added model is thought to bring objectivity to teacher evaluations, because it compares students to themselves over time and largely controls for influences outside teachers' control, such as poverty and parental involvement.

Value-added has been a buzz word among educators since the Obama administration's Race to the Top grant program began promising money to school systems that adopt to certain requirements, such as evaluating teachers' performance by using factors like student achievement.

Spurred on partly by the hope for Race to the Top funding, a number of states and school systems have moved forward with projects that use students' test scores as the primary indicator of teacher quality—a move that teachers' unions largely have opposed.

In a move that had many local educators seething, the *Los Angeles Times* in August published an online database comparing more than 6,000 elementary school teachers based on the value-added model. The controversy heated up even further when it was revealed that a popular Los Angeles teacher committed suicide in the wake of the *Times*' publication of its teacher rankings, which rated him "less effective than average."

Critics of the value-added model fear school leaders might make serious decisions about individual teachers based on these projections alone.

"This is a problem with value-added," said Raegen T. Miller, associate director for education research at the Center for American Progress. "So far, value-added has been on its own. People are very scared that administrators would start making serious decisions about individual teachers just based on that information—and nobody thinks that should be done. It doesn't



Is there value in the 'value-added' model of measuring a teacher's worth?

take away people's fear of it. We can write all we want that we should use multiple measures; now, we actually [should] start having multiple measures."

That's the good news that comes from the preliminary findings of the MET Project. Based on these findings, researchers recommend that school leaders use multiple measures, in addition to value-added, to evaluate teachers effectiveness.

"I think people who are using test scores and using them wisely include value-added estimates with other measures of evaluations," said Bruce Hunter, associate executive director of the American Association of School Administrators. "If that's what they are promoting, using a wide range of factors, ... I don't know why anybody would object."

More about the study

Nearly 3,000 teachers from six urban school districts volunteered for the study. The participating districts are Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, Dallas Independent School District, Denver Public Schools, Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools, Memphis City Schools, and the New York City Department of Education.

Researchers chose districts that already had state testing and certain supplemental tests in place, such as Stanford 9 Open-Ended Reading Assessment in grades four through eight.

Over a two-year period, researchers are collecting and analyzing the following measures of teacher effectiveness: (1) student achievement gains on state assessments; (2) supplemental assessments designed to test higher-order conceptual understandings; (3) classroom observations; (4) teacher reflections on their practice; (5) assessments of teachers pedagogical content knowledge; (6) student perceptions of classroom instructional environment; and (7) teachers' perceptions of working conditions and instructional support at their schools.

For classroom observations, the MET Project will observe 20,000 lessons via digital video. So far, 13,000 lessons have been recorded.

The preliminary report outlines four

general findings from the study's first year.

First, in every grade and subject studied, a teacher's past success in raising student achievement on state tests (that is, his or her value added) is one of the strongest predictors of his or her ability to do so again. Teachers who lead students to achievement gains in one year or in one class tend to do so in other years and other classes, the report said.

Admittedly, though, the value-added model has "volatility." Reasons for instability from year to year could include factors such as significant differences in class size from year to year, an influenza outbreak, a group of disruptive students, construction noise during testing, and so on.

"Value-added methods have been criticized as being too imprecise, since they depend on the performance of a limited number of students in each classroom. Indeed, we do find that a teacher's value-added [result] fluctuates from year to year and from class to class, as succeeding cohorts of students move through his or her classrooms. However, our analysis shows that volatility is not so large as to undercut the usefulness of value-added as an indicator of future performance," the report said.

Second, the teachers with the highest value-added scores on state tests also tend to help students develop a deeper conceptual understanding as well. "We see evidence that teachers with high value-added on state tests also seem to help students perform better on the supplemental tests. This seems particularly true in mathematics," the policy brief said.

In many classrooms, students reported spending a great deal of time preparing for state tests. "The teachers in such classrooms rarely show the highest value-added on state tests," the policy brief said.

Third, the average student knows effective teaching when he or she experiences it: When collected appropriately, student perceptions of a teacher correlate to the teacher's value-added estimates.

"When students report positive classroom experiences, those classrooms tend to achieve greater learning gains, and other classrooms taught by the same teacher appear to do so as well," the policy brief said.

Fourth, valid feedback need not be limited to test scores alone. By combining different sources of data, it is possible to provide diagnostic, targeted feedback to teachers who are eager to improve.

"The public discussion usually portrays only two options: the status quo (where there is no meaningful feedback for teachers) and a seemingly extreme world in which test scores alone determine a teacher's fate. Our results suggest that's a false choice. It is possible to combine measures from different sources to get a more complete picture of teaching practice," the policy brief said.

Value-added scores alone, "while important, do not recommend specific ways for teachers to improve," the report noted. Instead, the researchers recommend that school leaders begin (1) working with teachers to develop accurate lists of the students in their care, so that value-added data are as accurate as possible; (2) using confidential surveys to collect student feedback on specific aspects of a teacher's practice, including those in non-tested grades and subjects; (3) retraining those who do classroom observations to provide more meaningful feedback; and (4) regularly checking that the measures they use allow them to explain the variation in student achievement gains among teachers.

Criticism of the report

According to Jesse Rothstein, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley, the analyses in the report do not support its conclusions. "Interpreted correctly," he said, they actually "undermine rather than validate value-added-based approaches to teacher evaluation."

Rothstein has conducted research on the appropriate uses of student test-score data, including the use of student achievement records to assess teacher quality. Noting that the MET Project report measures two different value-added scores for teachers—one computed from official state tests, and another from a test designed to measure higher-order, conceptual understanding—Rothstein said: "Many teachers whose value-added [score] for one test is low are in fact quite effective when judged by the other."

He added: "A teacher who focuses on important, demanding skills and knowledge that are not tested may be misidentified as ineffective, while a fairly weak teacher who narrows her focus to the state test may be erroneously praised as effective." If those value-added results were to be used for teacher retention decisions, students would be deprived of some of their most effective teachers, Rothstein said.

The MET Project plans to release its next analyses in the spring and summer, followed by the final results next winter. Project officials weren't available to comment on Rothstein's concerns before press time. **eSN**

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eSCHOOL NEWS

11th Annual Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards

The move toward an increasingly digital society and the emergence of a new era of accountability in the nation's schools have changed our expectations of the superintendency. As school leaders come to rely on technology and the internet to engage students' interest, track their progress, personalize instruction, and aid in decision making, an understanding of how technology works and how it can be used to transform teaching and learning is an increasingly essential characteristic for the 21st-century school superintendent.

In our 11th annual Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards, sponsored by SMART Technologies Inc. and JDL Horizons, *eSchool News* recognizes 10 of the nation's top K-12 executives for their outstanding ed-tech leadership and vision. Chosen by the editors of *eSchool News* with help from last year's winners, these 10 exemplary leaders will be honored in a private ceremony held in conjunction with the Century Club 100 meeting at the American Association of School Administrators' annual conference in Denver this month.



Matt Akin
Piedmont City Schools
Alabama

Before becoming superintendent of the Piedmont City Schools—a small, rural district of 1,100 students—Akin was the district's technology coordinator and also served as principal of Piedmont High School. Because of his technology background, Akin is extremely interested in connecting with the "digital generation." His participation in the Superintendent Leaders Network, an initiative jointly managed by the School Superintendents of Alabama and the Alabama Best Practices Center, further deepened his commitment to engaging students in learning through the use of technology.

In September, Piedmont became one of the first school districts in Alabama to, in Akin's words, "engage in a bona fide one-to-one laptop initiative that provides a computer for students' use 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for all students in grades four through twelve." With the help of a federal technology grant, the district acquired 800 MacBooks through a lease-purchase agreement. As a result, the project—called MPower Piedmont—has put a computer in 500 homes that never had one before.

Understanding that providing laptops for students was only one part of the equation, Akin looked for opportunities to provide staff training around the successful use of technology. He found funding that enabled 80 percent of Piedmont's faculty to attend a conference on successful implementation of a one-to-one laptop initiative, where 40 school systems from 18 states were involved. This initial professional learning is reinforced by ongoing support through the district's technology integration spe-

cialists and the state's Technology in Motion initiative.

Parent meetings were held to review policies and procedures for students' use of the laptops. All parents were required to attend, and students received the laptops to take home once their parents participated in one of the meetings. But Akin didn't stop there. Realizing that 65 percent of his students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, he worried that wireless access might not be available to them at home. So he worked with local businesses and churches to bridge the digital gap. As a result, two of Piedmont's three fast food restaurants now offer free Wi-Fi access. Additionally, churches are now offering free wireless access and supervision of students. Akin is now working with his local housing authority to provide free access there as well.

Ultimately, Akin says, "this project is not only about preparing our students for the future, but preparing our entire community."



Jim Cain
Klein Independent
School District
Texas

Cain was Klein ISD's first technology director in the late '80s. From his initial leadership in using technology to increase productivity both inside and outside the classroom, to his current role as superintendent, he has carried this district of 45,000 students and 6,000 employees to national prominence as a model for effective technology use.

Under Cain's leadership, the Klein ISD school board

operates in a digital, paperless environment, with each member given a district-owned laptop. All board agenda items and support documentation are posted on a web-based application. In 2007, the Klein ISD school board was designated as one of the top 10 tech-savvy boards from the National School Boards Association.

Two major instructional technology initiatives in Klein ISD's technology plan are the Technology Baseline Standard Initiative (TBSI) and the One-to-One Tablet PC program. Through the TBSI, all K-12 core content classrooms have been equipped with a minimum of five networked computers, an interactive whiteboard, a projector, a document camera, and a student response pad system for ongoing assessment. Intensive professional development accompanies the installation of technology tools in every classroom. The One-to-One Tablet PC program now provides nearly 10,000 teachers and students on four different campus locations with 24-7 access to rich instructional materials and powerful productivity tools. With the implementation of the district's Tablet PC program, schools have seen an increase in state test scores in all four core content areas, especially in math and science.

Klein ISD's success in implementing highly effective instructional technology programs starts with Cain's leadership and his ability to clearly articulate—within the district itself, and to the community at large—a vision for education in the 21st century, with a focus on meeting the learning needs of all students. Beyond the use of technology in the classrooms, Cain also leads all support departments in using technology to maximize district resources. Through the use of complex data systems, all departments are better able to manage resources such as funding, staff, buildings, grounds, utilities, security, food service, transportation, and other functions needed to

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run a large school district.

Cain has been a frequent speaker at state and national conferences, where he has been able to share his expertise and help others replicate Klein ISD's success with technology for learning and for running a school district. Klein ISD also frequently hosts visitors from around the state and nation, who come to see firsthand the full scope of the district's technology programs.



Alberto M. Carvalho
Miami-Dade County
Public Schools
Florida

Carvalho is leading Miami-Dade County as it reinvents its business practices, instructional resources, content delivery, and teaching methods.

Board meetings now feature video conferencing and multimedia presentations. The school district connects with the community through Facebook and Twitter, and it regularly provides event webcasts for those who cannot attend. Qualified Zone Academy Bonds have helped the district upgrade its computers, while a \$3.5 million federal broadband grant has given students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches at 35 low-performing schools access to 6,000 computers and more than 10,000 one-year internet subscriptions.

Professional development is the key to any successful technology initiative, and all stakeholders are included in implementation. For instance, when the district began its Saturday School program targeting low-performing schools, video training podcasts were posted on the district's server for easy download, and staff received iPod touch devices to access training videos.

Miami-Dade County has virtualized its IT infrastructure using VMware technology, creating more than 702 virtual machines to deliver applications, including payroll and grade reporting. This migration has saved more than \$2.5 million over three years and has reduced energy costs by \$1.5 million. When he observed that some of the district's digital resources were underused, Carvalho launched Links to Learning, which gives students and parents access to district-licensed online content, including individualized learning paths customized to each student's needs, after school hours. In addition, the district's current implementation of a comprehensive distance-learning initiative to help with class-size reduction mandates has resulted in more than 8,000 high school students taking classes in a virtual environment. This is an 800-percent increase over the previous school year.

Carvalho has made modernizing the district's legacy business operation systems a priority and has launched a more dynamic purchasing system district-wide. Aware of the challenges facing large urban school districts, he understands that technology can be the bridge by which these challenges and barriers to a high-quality education can be crossed.



Camille Casteel
Chandler Unified School
District No. 80
Arizona

Casteel recognizes the promise technology holds in transforming teaching and learning. In her 15 years as superintendent, her leadership has propelled Chandler USD on a sustainable path toward 21st-century learning. Technology is central to the district's strategic plan, called Journey 2020, creating a "district of choice" through personalized learning. Casteel leads the journey, keenly focused on continuous improvement by means of high-quality assessment, high-quality learning experiences, and effective teaching, while

managing costs and increasing productivity. She views technology as the key to innovation and to redesigning how schools do business.

Highly respected by the community, Casteel has forged many strong alliances with businesses and higher-education institutions—most notably with Intel Corp. Through this partnership, Chandler has been able to use Intel's expertise and funding to help with planning its technology infrastructure and to support its professional development in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Casteel led the drive to develop Chandler's website and an integrated suite of network-delivered applications known as Chandler's Information Portal. This allows "one-stop shopping" for administrators, teachers, support staff, and the community. The website is a true content management system, designed to put the tasks of editing and posting content into the hands of those who own the information. All district media resources are available through a single searchable database accessible by staff, students, and the community.

The Assessment Management for Instruction (AMI) system—a segment of the portal—is a realization of Casteel's vision to give instructional staff access to a wide variety of achievement results, including district benchmark tests, state tests, and teacher-created assessments. The data are hosted in a district-developed data warehouse that connects achievement, professional development for teachers, and demographics in a district-developed student information system. Reports available on teachers' and administrators' desktops place data quickly into the hands of those making instructional and resource allocation decisions. High-quality professional development helps instructional staff to be "data wise" and use information in ways that support their planning of student-centered classrooms.

Chandler USD is one of the fastest-growing districts in the state. This district of more than 38,000 students has opened 21 schools since 1998 and now consists of 29 elementary schools, seven junior high schools, four high schools, and two alternative schools. More than 2,000 classrooms in Chandler are equipped with a ceiling-mounted LCD projector, document camera, eInstruction Chalkboard (wireless slate), one to four computers, and a diverse array of software. Casteel is adamant that equipment and software be distributed equitably, with older schools being renovated and outfitted to meet a common district-wide standard, and that teachers participate in professional development before implementing the technology tools. Professional development may be accessed through traditional workshops, podcasts, classroom follow-up sessions, and website information. All projects are reviewed and analyzed to determine their effectiveness; classroom walkthrough protocols, for instance, evaluate the integration of technology to increase active student engagement.



Michael A. Davino
Springfield Public
Schools
New Jersey

Davino came to Springfield Public Schools in 2004 with a great deal of experience in implementing technology initiatives: At the Petrides Educational Complex in Staten Island, N.Y., he created one of the first wireless one-to-one laptop initiatives in the United States. The year was 2000, and the initiative was titled "Leap to the Millennium." This initiative pioneered the concept that each classroom becomes a computer lab in real time.

One of Davino's first actions in Springfield was to assess the district's technology infrastructure. He increased its bandwidth through fiber-optic connectivity, and by 2006 he had successfully implemented a one-to-one laptop initiative for all students in grades six through 12. In addition, all preschool through fifth-grade classrooms received four or five Apple laptops, and all instructional staff have their own laptop. All students and staff have access to interactive whiteboards, iPod touches, and other multimedia tools for classroom assessment and instruction.

In developing Springfield's 21st Century Technology

plan, Davino designed a unique funding model that supports technology through a per-pupil allocation, ensuring that all students have access to the most innovative technology the district can support. School district business is streamlined through the use of SchoolDude.com for online work orders, and the school board is moving toward "paperless" meetings and business. Ongoing professional development is a key component in the district's success, with in-district training from IDC Corp. and online access to Atomic Learning webinars and other resources. Through these means, student instruction has been transformed into engaging, rigorous learning experiences that foster independence and personal growth.

Springfield's technology plan has been used as a template by the New Jersey Department of Education, and recently the district accepted a first-place award from the Center for Digital Education's National Digital School Districts Survey.



Deb Henton
North Branch Area
Public Schools
Minnesota

District employees call Henton "an exceptional role model and leader" with her personal use of technology and her support for integrating technology into the curriculum.

Henton's use of technology demonstrates her commitment to transparent communication with all district stakeholders. Under her leadership, podcasts of school board meetings are available with one click on the district's website. To communicate the district's financial situation more widely during budget and levy discussions, she embraced the use of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and she initiated a "Key Communicators" network to quickly disseminate critical information to community stakeholders using eMail. She also writes about local and global public education issues with her own blog, called "Supe of the Day." To reduce travel time, she participates in meetings through the use of Skype.

Included in the district's strategic plan are action items for integrating technology into the curriculum. Henton was instrumental in seeing that all students have access to Google Gmail accounts through school. She led the way for district leaders to use text messaging long before it reached its current level of popularity. In need of a reading intervention program for students, she was instrumental in securing funds and training to implement Scholastic's researched-based reading program, Read 180. Also, before student response systems became popular, she was using cell phones to engage staff members by having them answer survey questions during staff development meetings.

Even during challenging economic times, Henton continues to see that funds are allocated for professional development workshops related to technology use. She has demonstrated a clear vision for technology integration and continually explores new ways to use technology as a tool for improving teaching, communication, and school district efficiency.



David F. Larson
Birmingham Public
Schools
Michigan

In three years, Larson has moved the Birmingham Public Schools into the 21st century with clear vision and a strategic district plan. A 21st-century goal within the plan calls for a culture that develops creativity, curiosity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and reflection among students, while preparing them for global engagement, competency, and digital literacy.

Through Larson's leadership, the district's Ignite



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Tech-Savvy...

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Professional Development Program has given teachers opportunities to integrate technology seamlessly into their lesson design. A pilot program of eight teachers from four buildings has expanded to about 90 teachers from the district's elementary and middle schools. By the end of 2012, all teachers in grades 3-8 will have completed their first year of Ignite training and will sustain their professional growth through research. Each teacher is given 1.5 days a month of professional development, exploring key principles of 21st-century learning through pedagogy, content knowledge, and technology. Four full-time teachers were hired to develop and implement this training, in which teachers collaborate across the district to develop lessons. This innovative project encourages students to work extensively with digital tools to create podcasts, videocasts, still images, and mind maps, and to use web-based environments (such as Moodle, blogs, and wikis) to construct, communicate, and collaborate across time, space, and geographical boundaries. Each classroom is given four cameras, four video cameras, and a projector. In addition, a wireless laptop cart with 15 computers is shared between two classrooms, and many classrooms have secured Promethean interactive whiteboards with the help of grant funds.

Larson and the school board further support this shift in pedagogy by allocating funds to send several teachers and administrators to various ed-tech conferences. In addition, Larson has invited many ed-tech leaders to speak in Birmingham, such as Troy Hicks, Alan November, Elliot Soloway, Sara Kadjer, and Yong Zhao. After-school technology workshops are offered to staff and parents, and a two-week Summer Institute is offered to staff and their students to build community and 21st-century skills through the use of digital resources.

Larson streamlines communication through the use of a district website that houses curriculum, the strategic plan, and websites for each building and teacher. Smart phones are provided for each administrator, and district board meetings are promoted through a local cable channel. District staff use Pearson Inform software to analyze student data and target instruction.



David McGehee
Lee's Summit R-7
School District
Missouri

McGehee has provided leadership for a number of ed-tech initiatives, including the district's exemplary use of SMART Boards, handheld student response systems, computer software intervention programs such as Fast ForWord, and a new audio enhancement program for kindergarten classrooms.

This year, McGehee spearheaded efforts to move to electronic "walkthroughs" using McREL software and BlackBerry devices as part of R-7 Professional Learning Communities. In addition, he supports an ongoing focus on comprehensive training for employees, ensuring that staff development is included in any new technology initiative. With funding from a district-wide technology budget, enhanced by voter-approved bonds, technology is equitably distributed throughout the district, thanks to consistent district technology standards.

With the nation in fiscal turmoil, school districts across the country have felt the sting of shrinking budgets, which has led to uncertainty and fear. To help alleviate this anxiety, McGehee recently initiated video podcasts to help communicate with staff members and is planning to expand this effort to the community at large. In addition, Lee's Summit offers stakeholders weekly eNewsletters, as well as Facebook and Twitter links, that provide up-to-the-minute news regarding district-level activities and initiatives.

McGehee is also a tireless proponent of preparing students for postsecondary programs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and subsequent careers in these fields. All of the district's middle and high schools house Project Lead The Way (PLTW) courses

that use technology on a daily basis, such as Inventor, a desktop 3D computer-aided design program. Lee's Summit also boasts one of the region's premier STEM programs at Summit Technology Academy. Other local districts that have implemented PLTW courses have visited Lee's Summit to see its model for STEM preparation in action.

McGehee initiated the use of BlackBerry devices among administrators and helped the district launch BoardDocs, providing paperless board meetings that can be easily accessed online. He also promotes paperless meetings and study groups among staff through the use of the Blackboard learning management system.



Kathy Spencer
Onslow County Schools
North Carolina

Armed with her bright purple laptop, Spencer routinely can be found attending Professional Learning Communities, principal meetings, community focus groups, schools, and classrooms. Her peers view her as a leader who truly portrays the need for technology integration in every classroom within the 37 school sites in Onslow County.

The district was chosen among a large number of applicants to participate in Project K-Nect, a research program funded through Qualcomm's Wireless Reach Program that gives students access to mobile devices with instructional software and tools to support secondary mathematics. The project began with two ninth-grade Algebra I classes, and its success enabled Onslow County to raise more than \$2.5 million to replicate the program across all high school Algebra I classes. Participating students have achieved an average of 20 percent better on the state's Algebra I year-end exam compared with non-participating students.

Spencer created a task force to provide teachers with the tools to increase teacher productivity. In October 2007, the first of more than 1,600 laptops were deployed to licensed staff across the district. To date, 1,000 interactive whiteboards, document cameras, and LCD projectors help teachers provide engaging instruction that fosters student participation within classrooms. What's more, registration for all professional development opportunities is automated and tracked to make sure all staff are kept abreast of licensure requirements.

Technology also is evident in the district's use of a parent emergency notification system, automated work order facility maintenance, and a web-based prepayment system for student meals—and Spencer is keenly aware of the need to ensure that technology is used to increase student learning.



Eric Williams
York County School
Division
Virginia

Williams guides decisions for using technology to enhance teaching and learning with a collaboratively developed vision that emphasizes both rigor and student engagement. To improve students' access to technology, he has revised board policy to allow for student cell-phone usage for instructional purposes; pushed central office staff to give students and staff access to Skype, Google Docs, and screencasting tools for meeting, sharing, and broadcasting content; and is finalizing efforts to allow students to access York County's network using their own laptops and other mobile devices.

Williams supported the creation of a Virtual Desktop Infrastructure that will allow teachers and students to use network applications anytime, anywhere. He also led the expansion of York County's virtual learning program. In addition to providing more than 60 virtual courses taught by York County teachers, Williams has encouraged the blending of live and virtual instruction at the secondary-school level—and all high school-level

courses taken by middle school students for credit now have a virtual component embedded in the course. As a result of his leadership in virtual learning, Williams has met with state officials to discuss online-learning legislation that subsequently was adopted by the state legislature.

With regard to professional development, Williams supported the introduction of an instructional content repository so teachers can share lessons, activities, and assessments. He also promoted greater understanding of the link between digital technologies, engagement, and rigor by convening a Leadership Academy that featured Alan November, and he expanded the notion of "leadership" by including teachers and ed-tech facilitators in this academy. In addition, Williams has ensured the equitable distribution of technology by allocating stimulus funds to all schools to purchase peripherals, software, and web-based resources using a formula that provided additional funds for high-need schools. He also successfully requested \$100,000 from a private donor to establish an endowment for technology and initiated a campaign for matching funds with assistance from local Parent-Teacher Associations.

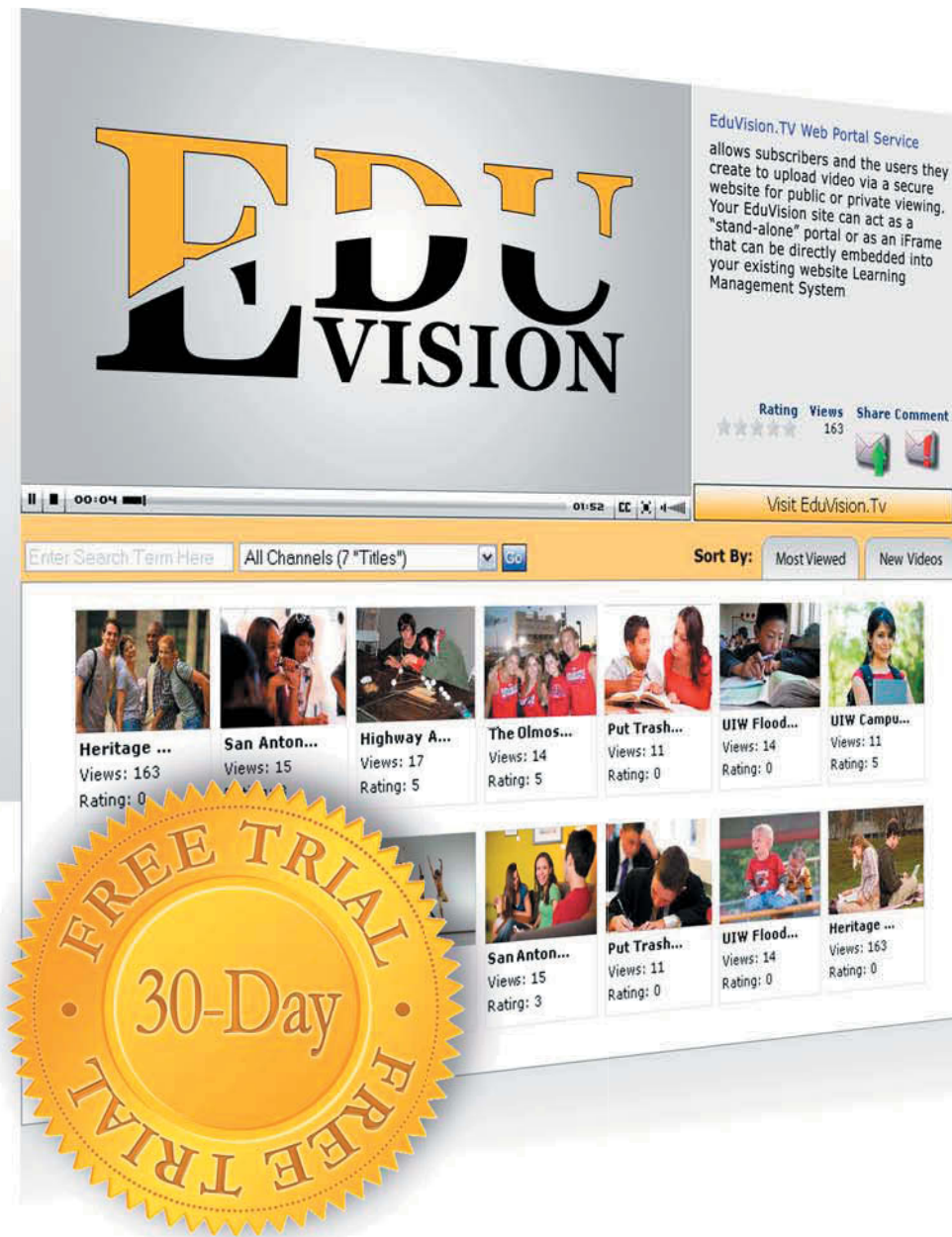
Williams models the effective use of technology by routinely using GoogleDocs, Ning, and other Web 2.0 tools to work collaboratively with staff, and he promotes the use of technology to streamline business operations as well, such as a web-based system for parents to pay for and monitor their children's school meals; a web-based school registration process; and the use of GPS technology on school buses to enhance safety and efficiency.

Ten "Hallmarks of Excellence" for the eSchool News Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards

1. Must be a general superintendent.
2. Models the effective use of technology in the day-to-day execution of the superintendency.
3. Ensures that technology resources are equitably distributed among students and staff.
4. Insists that adequate professional development is a component of every school technology initiative.
5. Demonstrates exceptional vision in leading the development and implementation of a districtwide technology plan.
6. Exhibits a thorough understanding of the role of technology in education and can articulate that understanding to all school district stakeholders.
7. Provides exceptional leadership in supporting the integration of technology into the curriculum.
8. Demonstrates exceptional vision in employing technology to streamline school district business operations.
9. Demonstrates curiosity and open-mindedness in considering emerging technologies and weighing non-traditional solutions to traditional problems.
10. Thinks creatively and strategically about the long-term challenges and opportunities of technology in the school district and in education at large.

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Grants & Funding

Ten ways to become a better grant writer

By Deborah Ward

From time to time, I think it's a good idea to go back and review the basics of grant writing and develop some good habits around them. Here are 10 pieces of advice that are likely to increase your chances of success.

1. Read at least one book about grant writing every year.

There are several books available that deal with grant writing, so have fun choosing one! A few I'd recommend: *Storytelling for Grantseekers* by Cheryl A. Clarke; *Grantseeker's Toolkit* and *Grantseeker's Budget Toolkit* by Cheryl Carter New and James Aaron Quick; and my own books, *Writing Grant Proposals that Win*, *Third Edition* and *Effective Grants Management*.

2. Attend at least one conference or webinar about grant writing each year.

As with suggestion No. 1, the more you can learn from others who have been successful at grant seeking, the better.

3. Plan ahead.

Those of you who regularly read my columns won't be surprised to see this recommendation. I find that the one way to

minimize stress in this field is to plan ahead as much as possible for the grants I'll have to write in the next 12 months. I prefer to keep those last-minute "surprise" proposals to a minimum!

4. Create a grants calendar.

If you take recommendation No. 3 seriously, this suggestion is a natural follow-up. Again, I find it helpful to look ahead at the entire year to get a sense of what grants I'll be working on—and when.

5. Request a copy of reviewers' comments, and resubmit rejected proposals from time to time.

I would bet that every grant writer can name at least one proposal that he or she submitted and then resubmitted, only to be funded the second time around. One of the tips to doing this is to read the reviewers' comments and determine how to improve your proposal, which can increase your chances of getting funded when you resubmit it.

6. Become a grant reviewer.

I don't think it really matters whether you review proposals for a local grant competition (for the United Way, for example) or for

a state or federal grant; either way, the process of serving as a reviewer is an educational one. Pay attention to what types of projects are proposed, how others put their grant proposals together, and how reviewers react to what is included in the proposals.

7. Find at least one grants professional you can "buddy" with to share successes—and failures.

Only those of us who are in the field can truly appreciate the exhilaration you feel when you are funded, and the feelings of sadness and frustration when you are not! I have been very lucky over the years to have a friend who is my best "buddy," and her words of support and encouragement have surely helped me be the grants professional I am today.

8. Try to submit grant proposals three to five days before the deadline.

I heard this from a speaker once, and I have tried very hard to make this happen. Sometimes it does—and sometimes it doesn't. But I still think it's a great goal to have, and it can keep you from having to scramble at the last minute to get your proposal in ... which can lead to mistakes.

9. Read funded proposals written by other grants professionals.

This is related to suggestion No. 6. I learn quite a bit from reading other proposals, and at different points in time I have incorporated formatting techniques that others have used to make proposals more "user friendly." It is also an excellent way to see the writing skills of other professionals and get a real sense of whom you might be competing against.

10. If none exist, develop grant-writing policies and procedures in your district.

This one is a must, I think, if you expect people to treat your role as a grants professional with the respect and admiration it deserves. Having clearly defined policies and procedures also helps your staff understand what they need to do to apply for, receive, and manage grants successfully.

ESN

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

Grant Deadlines

February

\$340,000 for creativity in science teaching

The Amgen Award for Science Teaching Excellence (AASTE) is an annual awards program that recognizes extraordinary contributions by K-12 educators who are elevating the level of science literacy through creativity in the classroom and motivation of their students. Thirty-four teachers in communities where Amgen has a presence (California, Colorado, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Washington, and Canada) each will receive an unrestricted cash award of \$5,000, and their schools will receive \$5,000 for science resources or professional development. An independent panel of judges will select the winners based on the following criteria: creativity and effectiveness of teaching methods; plans for using the grant money to improve science education resources in their schools; and submission of a science lesson plan showcasing innovative methods in the classroom.

Deadline: Feb. 11

<http://www.amgen.com/citizenship/aaste.html>

iPods and reading software for essays on courage

The "Courage in My Community" essay competition, from Cambium Learning Technologies and the Max Warburg Courage Curriculum Inc., aims to help students find inspiration in reading and writing. The contest encourages U.S. and Canadian students in grades 5-8 to write about their experience with courage and how this experience has made an impact in their lives. Winners will receive iPod touches and Kurzweil reading software, and their schools will receive a Kurzweil 3000 Learning Lab Pack and training.

Deadline: Feb. 11

<http://www.courageinmycommunity.com>

March

More than \$5,000 in equipment for teachers who integrate agriculture into lessons

The Realize Science Technology Grant for Agriculture in the Classroom, from School Technology Resources, will award more than \$5,000 worth of cutting-edge science education equipment to K-12 teachers across the United States who integrate agriculture into their lessons. Grants will include new handheld video microscopes with software to take still pictures, video, and time-lapse movies. Fourteen video microscope kits will be awarded to 10 grant winners; the top two winners each will receive three microscope kits. Grant recipients must propose innovative and educationally sound uses for the handheld video microscopes in teaching about agriculture.

Deadline: March 31

http://schooltr.com/Teacher_Resources/realize_science_grant.html

April

Fifty free Samsung document cameras

Through its Digital Preparedness Grant Program, Samsung Techwin America's Electronic Imaging Division is looking to award a total of 50 Samsung SAMCAM 860 digital presenters to U.S. teachers who best can use a document camera that offers extremely sharp resolution and clarity. Applicants must detail their need and answer the question: Will new technology in the classroom better prepare our students?

Deadline: April 30

<http://www.samsunggrants.com>

Ongoing

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

The Toshiba America Foundation is dedicated to supporting science and math education in the United States. The foundation invests in innovative projects designed by classroom teachers to improve instruction for students in grades 6-12. It awards grants of up to \$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 available free of charge to every educator in America. The software provides content in the core disciplines of English, math, social studies, science, and Spanish. Aligned with state standards, it offers hundreds of InterActivities and ready-to-use lessons that enable technology-rich instruction and engage students' higher-order thinking skills.

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



Stakeholder & Community Relations

Can eBooks help bridge achievement gaps?

Research confirms that reading matters, and having books at home is a leading indicator of a child's level of educational attainment. Where do electronic books fit in?

By Nora Carr, APR, Fellow PRSA

A massive study published last spring confirmed what many educators already know: having books in the home is as significant as socioeconomic status or parents' educational level in determining the level of education children ultimately will attain.

Now, as more traditional book content goes digital and smart phones act as electronic readers, educators are left wondering whether technology will make achievement gaps even wider—or whether electronic books might act as a bridge for students traditionally hamstrung by family circumstances and other issues neither they nor their teachers control.

Conducted by university researchers in Nevada, California, and Australia, the study—published in the journal *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*—found that having a 500-book library at home has as great an effect as having university-educated parents. The 20-year study analyzed data from 27 different countries. In the United States, having books in the home push students an average of 2.4 years further in school; worldwide, the average is 3.2 years.

Having books in the home outweighed the education level of the parents, the father's occupation, and the country's GDP or political system. Children of parents with the least amount of education benefited the most.

Even having as few as 20 books in the home still had a significant impact, according to the University of Nevada's Mariah Evans, one of the study's lead researchers. "You get a lot of 'bang for your book,'" she said in a press release. "It's quite a good return-on-investment in a time of scarce resources."

For school officials, teachers, and community leaders struggling to bridge long-standing educational attainment and achievement gaps among different student groups, the implications are clear: We need to get more books in the home and into the hands of students.

Format might not matter. While many people still relish the smell of newly printed books or finding hidden treasures in library stacks, a small Massachusetts boarding school has shifted its media center to an all-digital format.

Now, instead of book stacks, the library at Cushing Academy in Ashburnham, Mass., features electronic books, Wi-Fi access, lounge-type seating, a coffee shop, more librarians—and, not surprisingly, more students.

With access to more and better books online and more comfortable surroundings, the school's library has become a popular gathering place for students doing research and homework.

While cash-strapped public schools likely will skip the cappuccino machine, the concept of trading in 20,000 print books for greater comfort, robust databases, and online access to hundreds of thousands of

high-quality books makes good economic sense.

Electronic books are cheaper to produce, catalog, access, and maintain than print tomes, while eReader costs are much less than laptop computers and netbooks. A \$26 hardcover book costs \$4.05 to produce vs. 50 cents for a \$9.99 eBook, according to *Newsweek* magazine.

eBooks also are greener. While *Newsweek* estimates that the carbon emissions required to make 40 to 50 books equals that of one eReader device, one eReader can hold thousands of books. For eco-conscious students, stats like this might spur faster eReader adoption rates.

More importantly, eReaders and eBooks might help reignite a love of reading among today's tech-oriented students.

Amazon.com, for example, estimates that Kindle users buy and read three times as many books as they did before buying the popular eReader device. Other surveys report similar results. Sales of eReaders and eBooks were brisk for the holidays, and industry experts expect eBook sales to double in 2011.

Because many classics are available electronically free of charge, and as school districts make more academic content available in digital formats for parents and students, putting a 500-book library in the palm of every child's hand suddenly doesn't seem so out of reach.

Detroit Public Schools, for example, is expanding its digital curriculum for students and staff. DPS is now streaming digital content from Discovery Education and Discovery Education Science, including virtual labs, simulations, video clips, and reading passages for secondary school students.

DPS teachers are accessing professional development digitally as well, tapping into multimedia presentations and lesson plans aligned with Michigan's science standards for grades 6-12. The goal? Helping teachers differentiate instruction more successfully.

Similar efforts are under way in Indiana, Wisconsin, Connecticut, California, Ohio, New Jersey, Texas, and a host of other states.

While state governments and school districts pilot electronic book programs, some enterprising teachers and community volunteers are striking up partnerships with book publishers, bookstores, and online charities to put more reading resources in classrooms and student homes.

Programs like Adopt-a-School (www.adoptaschool.org) and Donors Choose (www.donorschoose.org), for example, fuel online donations to worthy classrooms and teacher-developed projects. And rotary clubs, professional associations, alumni organizations for fraternities and sororities, faith-based organizations, and other community groups are developing literacy-based partnerships with schools.

Armed with willing volunteers, these groups are more than willing to provide reading buddies, tutors, media center assistants and mentors, as well as free books,

for schools serving poor neighborhoods. Someone simply needs to ask them to help—and provide some guidance, coordination, and an occasional thank you.

As the study, "Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations," indicates, having 500 books in the home can make the difference between completing high school or dropping out, or graduating

from college versus merely attending for a year or two.

If we want to bridge the educational divide between the haves and have nots, reading—whether electronically or the old-fashioned way—is a great place to start. **eSN**

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

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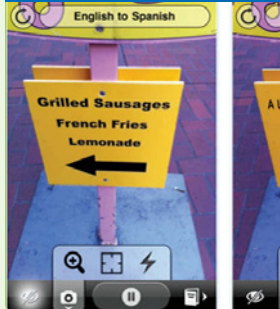


There's an app for that...

As iPhones, iPads, and iPod touches become more integrated in classrooms, educators and students are looking for new ways to apply them to the learning process. Applications on all of these devices can help automate current classroom processes or present new ways to learn that previously had been unexplored. In this special feature, we've assembled a list of education "apps" for Apple devices that we think are noteworthy.

The Best Free iPad/iPhone Applications for Education

Word Lens



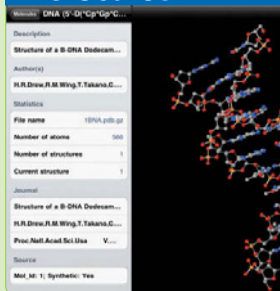
Best For: Language classes

Cost: **FREE**

Features: Instantly translates signage from one language to another through the camera application

How to Use: Language teachers can use this program for scavenger hunts

Molecules



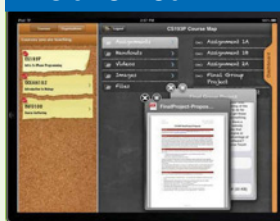
Best For: Science classes

Cost: **FREE**

Features: Allows users to view and manipulate three-dimensional models of different molecules

How to Use: Visual learners can see how protein molecules are composed and can download new molecules from the RCSB Protein Data Bank

Blackboard Mobile Learn



Best For: Students and teachers whose schools already use Blackboard

Cost: **FREE**

Features: Course listings, organizations that users are involved in, as well as access to any readings

How to Use: Users can enroll in any classes or organizations that they have registered for and download any assignment instructors have posted

Today in History



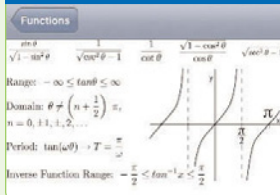
Best For: History classes

Cost: **FREE**

Features: Lists notable events in history and important figures who were born or died on a specific date

How to Use: Use for trivia quizzes or facts of the day

Math Ref Free



Best For: Math classes

Cost: **FREE**

Features: A free version of Math Ref, this app offers 600 out of more than 1,300 formulas, figures, tips, and examples

How to Use: Use as a formula study guide or to view graphs of different equations

Worth the Money

PI83 Graphing Calculator



Best For: Math classes

Cost: **\$0.99**

Features: With more than 100 math functions, the graphing calculator is a clone of the TI-83 without the \$70 price tag

How to Use: Use in place of any calculator to input data and make graphs or matrices

Star Walk



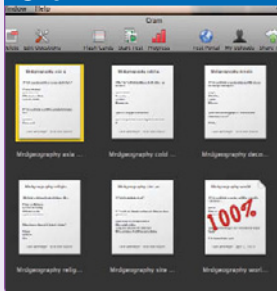
Best For: Astronomy classes

Cost: **\$2.99**

Features: An astral telescope, Star Walk adapts its view to wherever the user holds it up to, highlighting constellations and planets

How to Use: Use for guided tours of the night sky or to find the location of any specific astral objects

Cram



Best For: Anyone in need of test prep

Cost: **\$3.99**

Features: Teachers and students can create flashcards and tests and share them with others

How to Use: Use to study for standardized tests or exams, or to create study materials for students

Essay grader



Best For: Teachers pressed for time

Cost: **\$5.99**

Features: Essay grader comes with a bank of pre-written comments and helps teachers cut down on grading time without writing the same comments over and over again by hand

How to Use: After assigning a grade, teachers can eMail the grade sheet directly to the student or export it to the computer for editing and printing

eClicker



Best For: Teachers looking for classroom feedback

Cost: **\$9.99**

Features: Providing instant results, eClicker charts the results of the class, showing which areas are understood and which need more work

How to Use: Students select a response to a question composed by the instructor and are able to participate without fear of being wrong; only the teacher views the results

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MimioTeach makes any ordinary whiteboard interactive

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<http://www.mimio.dymo.com>

WallVault Systems for classrooms with short-throw projectors now shipping

Extron is now shipping all three of its WallVault Systems designed for use with wall-mounted short-throw projectors. WallVault Systems are a family of complete, centralized AV switching and control systems that are easy to use and install and are economical.



Using twisted pair technology for transmitting signals, WallVault Systems include network connectivity for web-based asset management, monitoring, and control. The newest WallVault Systems includes the unique USFM 100 Short-Throw Projector Mount and Equipment Enclosure for securely mounting the projector, as well as switching and audio amplification equipment, to a wall.

<http://www.extron.com/wallvault>

New Ladibug is the world's first wireless document camera, Lumens says

Lumens has developed what it calls the world's first wireless document camera to address the needs for teach-

ers to present from any location in their classroom.

Simply attach the DCA11 FLYER Accessory to any DC120 Ladibug Document Camera, and teachers can present lessons from anywhere in the classroom. Benefits include no more wires; high-definition image clarity; a five-year unlimited replacement warranty; and free training.

Lumens also offers a 25-foot USB solution for any Ladibug Document Camera. With this increased range, teachers can determine the optimal teaching location, encouraging students to pay closer attention to lessons as they are presented.

Lumens document cameras can be used independently or with interactive whiteboards. The company's portable Ladibug and larger desktop document cameras save teachers time in lesson preparation and encourage creative and innovative multimedia activities.

(615) 530-7236

<http://www.MyLadibug.com>

New online program aims to prevent school violence

Student suicides linked to bullying are on the rise. School violence stemming from victimization is rampant. Urban, rural, public, private—no school is exempt from the possibility of a school shooting. And bullying is linked to most every incident. The problem cannot be ignored, but what is the solution? At the Center for School Safety and Security, we believe the answer is training.

New for 2011 is the online *Preventing Violence in Education* program designed to help students and educators identify and manage threats of campus violence. These short, interactive courses equip participants to recognize warning signs that precede a violent incident, understand factors that contribute to the development of violent behaviors, and offer intervention tools and strategies for threat management.



For about the cost of a single lunch, a student can receive valuable training designed to mitigate bullying and prevent violence. And when you implement this training districtwide, we provide discounted pricing to support your commitment to maintain a safe, high-performing school system. We know preventing violence is important to you. It is important to us as well.

Contact Charles Baisey at charles.baisey@teexmail.tamu.edu or (800) 423-8433 for an opportunity to evaluate these courses.

SchoolDude offers affordable software to help you manage IT requests

Most districts are feeling the effects of budget cuts and reduced spending—and IT staff are being asked to support an increasing number of computers, peripherals, and networks without any additional personnel.

But what if you could save 30 minutes per IT help request?

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process. Save time and money by making your IT staff more efficient with programmed incident routing, automatic eMail notifications, and effective reporting. ITDirect is an affordable, on-demand help-desk management solution to help you do more with less.

<http://www.schooldude.com/save-time>



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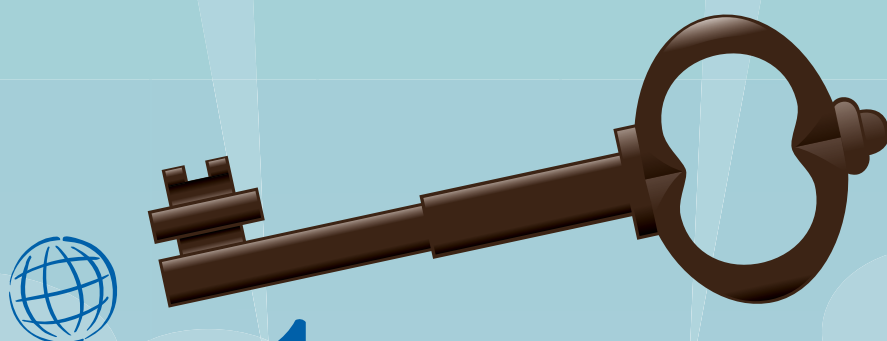
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From the Student Video Network to interviews with leading experts in education, and from important vendor information to conference keynotes, we've collected a large variety for you to choose from. Simply go to our **Video Viewers' Guide** page on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

Highlights


Voices of Reform: Rural Transformation

West Carter Middle School serves fewer than 500 students in the small town of Olive Hill in the rural Appalachian region of Kentucky. Between 2000-2004, the school faced persistent low achievement in math and reading proficiency. See how they turned things around.



Obama and Child Nutrition

CNN's video captures President Obama's signing of a law meant to encourage better eating habits in part by giving the federal government more authority to set standards for food sold in vending machines and elsewhere on school grounds.



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Best User Uploads

Wait for Superman or Build Transformational Teams?

Mark Willis of the Georgia School Boards Association was challenged to give the "talk of his life" in 18 minutes at the NSBA TEDx session.

Green Tech for High School

Lynn Crandall and Ray Cirino show how students in the GADA program, "Green Architectural Design Academy" can get a hands-on green tech learning experience for a sustainable lifestyle.

Interviews

Jamie Yoos

Jamie Yoos, 2010 Washington State Teacher of the Year, Bellingham High School, teaches Chemistry and bicycle maintenance. Yoos' classroom is a place of industry and experiment where every moment is precious and is often full of students long after the bell rings.

Cathy Poplin

Cathy Poplin, deputy associate superintendent for educational technology, comes to the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) with more than 30 years of experience in educational technology. She has administered two federal grants - Technology Innovation Challenge Grant and Teaching American History - and written and received nearly \$2 million in state and federal technology grants.

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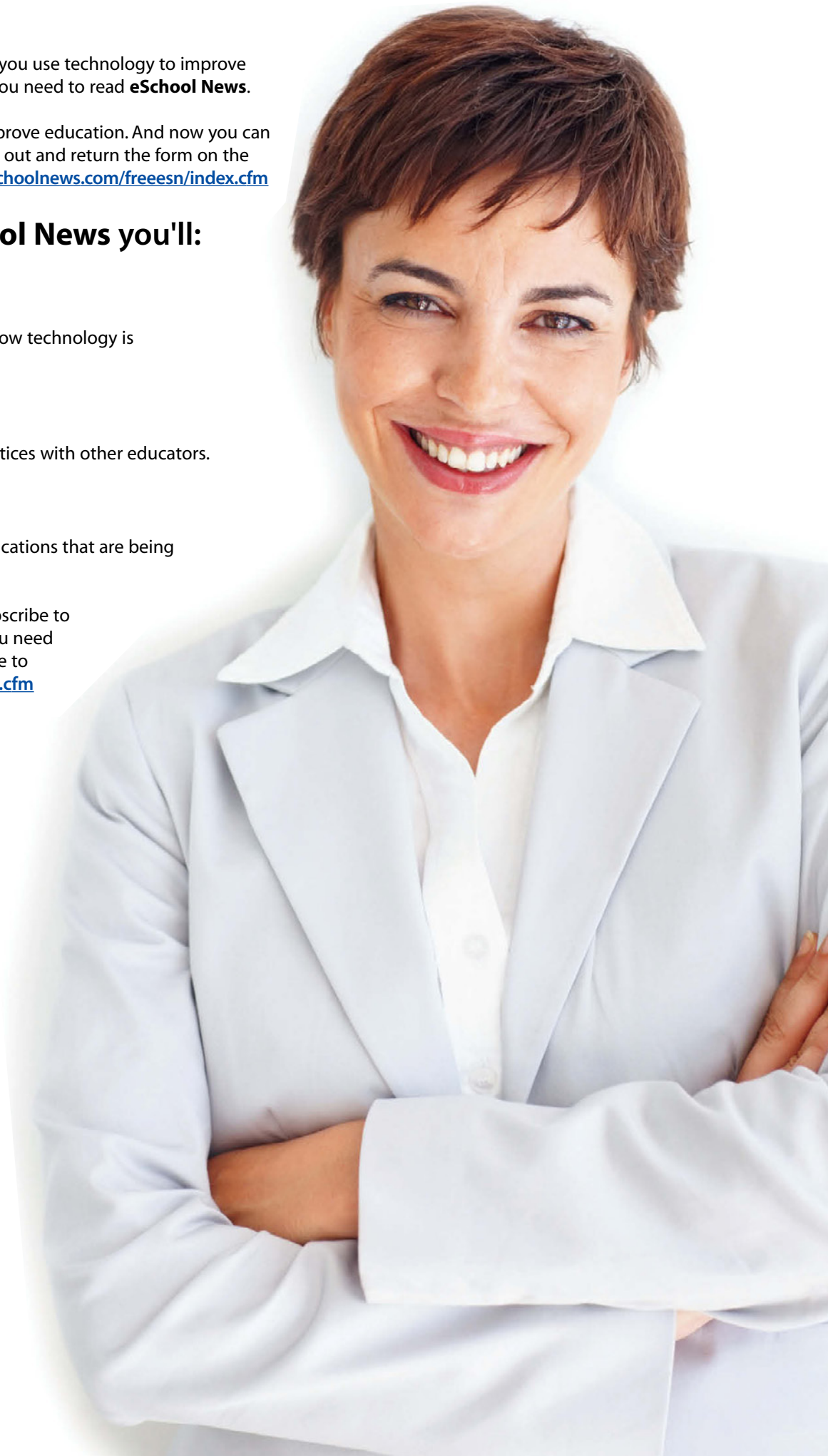
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