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How—and why—to teach innovation in schools.



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eSCHOOL NEWS

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March 2011

Fight looms over school funding

President Obama calls for more investment in research and education, setting up a showdown with House Republicans

From staff and wire reports

In his State of the Union address on Jan. 25, President Obama called for more investment in education, innovation, and infrastructure—setting up a showdown be-

tween his administration and Republicans in Congress who are seeking billions of dollars in cuts to domestic spending.

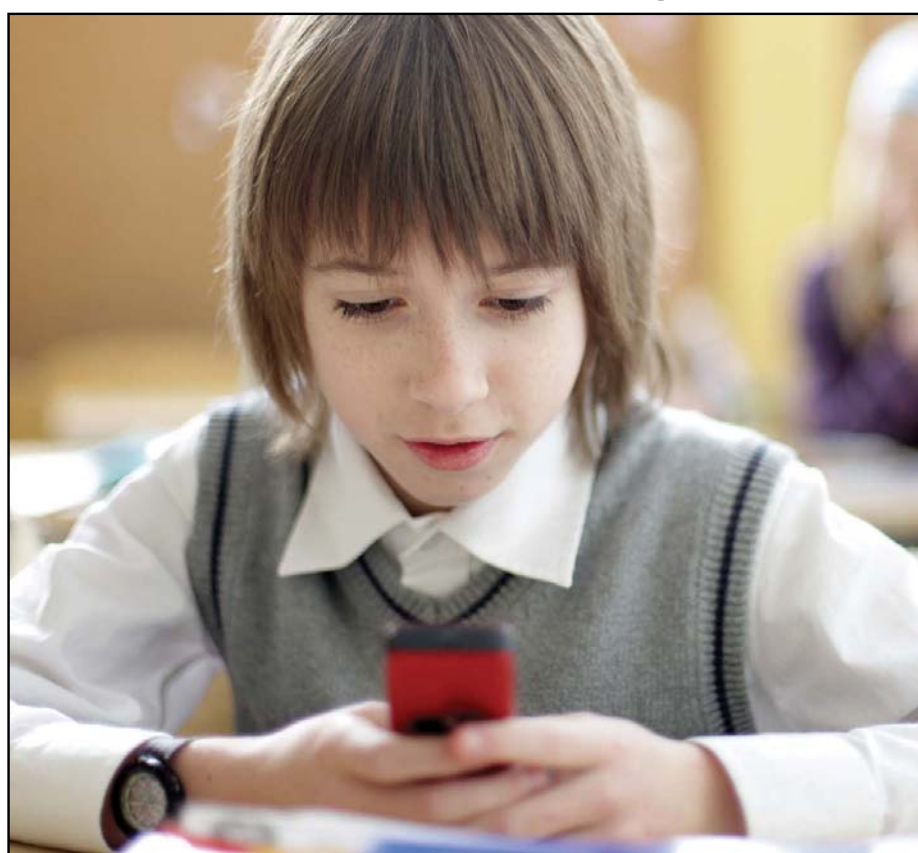
Addressing a nation still reeling from the tragic shooting rampage in Tucson earlier this year that targeted U.S. Rep. Gabrielle

Giffords of Arizona and left six people dead, including 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green, Obama called for a members of both political parties to work together in addressing the challenges facing the nation.

"Each of us is a part of something greater—something more consequential than party or political preference," the president

Funding, page 32

eSN Special Report: Mobile learning sees a shift



Not long ago, the term 'mobile learning' implied laptop computers and mobile carts that were wheeled from room to room. Now, advances in mobile technology could help schools realize the promise of *true* anytime, anywhere learning—see page 17.

Schools: We need faster broadband

Educators say they hope to use digital texts, handheld devices

Laura Devaney
Managing Editor

Two-thirds of school and library respondents in a recent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) survey of e-Rate recipients say they provide some form of wireless internet access for their employees and students, but nearly 80 percent said their broadband connections are inadequate, with most citing connection speeds that are too slow to meet their needs.

Ten percent of survey respondents have broadband speeds of 100 Mbps or faster, and more than half (55 percent) have broadband speeds greater than 3 Mbps. Sixty percent of respondents use a fiber-optic connection.

Still, the increased use of technology in schools has left students craving instant gratification when it comes to internet speeds in classrooms.

Broadband, page 30

Google opens ed apps marketplace

Dennis Carter
Assistant Editor

Google opened an Apps Marketplace for educators on Jan. 25, creating an online repository filled with learning management system (LMS) software, web-based grade books, and other content that can be shared among an entire school district or college campus with the click of a button.

The Apps Marketplace's education category will start with 20 applications from 19 companies, according to Google's official blog, and the applications can be integrated with existing app accounts, such as Gmail, Google Calendar, and Google Docs.

Using free applications from Google's new selection—which includes spelling and grammar tutorials and bibliographical management tools—could help ed-tech officials avoid installing and updating software on dozens or hundreds of computers in a school or on a college campus.

Google, page 41

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The Instant Alert feature on the VoiceLift pendant microphone enables the teacher to request assistance with the push of a button. The feature triggers an integrated relay that may be used with a variety of notification systems. In classrooms equipped with an Extron MediaLink® Controller, Instant Alert sends an email to school officials and safety authorities. Instant Alert can also interface with third party alarm, security camera, mass notification and other systems.

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Online update

Free webinars tackle network security, social learning & more

Nancy David, Online Director, ndavid@eschoolnews.com

At eSchool News Online, we'll be busy bringing you a number of free webinars this month to help you tackle some of your toughest ed-tech challenges, such as protecting your network from emerging threats, managing IT systems remotely, and making mobile and social learning work in your schools.

All of our webinars are available to anyone free of charge. To participate, all you need is internet access. Once you register, you'll receive a link to log in at the scheduled time.

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

Here's a preview of what's available this month. To register, go to:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/events/webinars>

Web 2.0 and Beyond: Protecting your Network from Emerging Security Threats

Date: March 18, 2-3 p.m. ET

School IT directors have to deal with a growing list of internet threats that can affect student safety, compromise networks, and expose district officials to legal liability. In this free webinar from M86 Security, you'll:

- Receive advice on how you can effectively protect your network despite budget cuts.
- Discover ways to be CIPA compliant—without compromising the learning process.
- Learn how to foresee inbound malware threats and ensure privacy of data.
- Learn how to educate your district against internet threats.

Managing Remote IT Systems from Your Office: 5 Tips for Education IT Directors

Date: March 22, 2-3 p.m. ET

Remote IT management sounds easy, but how does it work? Join us to discuss the challenges, solutions, and results from IT administrators who have automated key IT tasks to help them do more with less—without leaving their desk. In this free webinar, participants will learn a new way to:

- Protect endpoints on and off the network.
- Eliminate data loss and maintain data compliance.
- Patch and update applications.
- Install and distribute new software applications.
- Discover and inventory hardware/software assets

Beyond the Classroom: Making Mobile and Social Learning Work in Schools

Date: March 30, 2-3 p.m. ET

Are you increasing your schools' use of mobile devices? Rolling out new online tools? Trying to figure out how you can embrace collaborative learning safely? Join ed-tech visionary Kevin Honeycutt and representatives from the Atlanta Independent School District as they discuss what really happens when a district embraces technology. You'll get innovative ideas, practical tips, and best-practice advice you can use to bring mobility and collaboration safely into your schools.

Survey reveals educators' most valued technologies

Interactive whiteboards, free digital content cited

Laura Devaney
Managing Editor

Interactive whiteboards are the classroom technology that teachers say they most value, and though tablet-style eReader devices such as Apple's iPad haven't been around for long, they're already considered the second most useful mobile classroom technology behind laptops, according to a national survey of teachers' digital media use.

Educators are incorporating more internet-dependent technologies into their instruction, the survey also reveals—but shrinking school budgets are prompting many educators to look for free resources.

"Deepening Commitment: Teachers Increasingly Rely on Media and Technology," a national research report on teachers' media usage from PBS and Grunwald Associates, found that more than half of the 1,400 teachers surveyed reported continued cuts to their school media budgets, which has led to increased reliance on free instructional content.

Teachers also reported spending 60 percent of their time using educational resources in the classroom that are either free or paid for by the teachers themselves.

More than half of K-12 teachers (62 percent) say they frequently use digital media in classroom instruction. Forty-six percent of teachers cited cost as the main barrier to using subscription-based digital resources, and 33 percent cited time constraints.

Teachers are using digital tools more than ever, but "they're under the constraint of fewer resources and support from districts," said Rob Lippincott, senior vice president for PBS Education, noting that teachers are using more of their own money and time to find effective digital resources.

When asked to rank mobile technologies with the greatest educational potential, teachers rated different technologies on a 10-point scale. Eighty-one percent of teachers rated laptops as an 8 or above, followed by 53 percent who gave tablets or electronic readers a score of 8 or above. Cell phones appeared at the bottom of the list, at 11 percent.

"As much as teachers perceive the educational value of digital resources and recognize some potential in smart, mobile devices, students' ability to use these devices at school is severely limited," the report notes. Most personal mobile technology is off-limits and must be turned off during school.

"Simply put, when teachers are asked about cell phones, right now there's a bit of a mixed reaction, at least in the U.S., because cell phones are seen by some as a potential cause of disruption as much as a tool for instruction," said Peter Grunwald, founder and president of Grunwald Associates, a market research and consulting firm. "We think that's going to change, and probably fairly quickly."

Grunwald likened the hesitation to the early years of the internet's first forays into classrooms, when it was initially met with concerns about student safety. While some of those concerns remain, it is on a smaller scale, and most educators recog-

nize that the internet has "striking educational potential," he said.

Teachers also reported that interactive whiteboards are the most valuable digital resource in the classroom.

Sixty-eight percent of K-12 teachers said they value interactive whiteboards, 67 percent said they value online images, 63 percent value online video content, and 62 percent said they value web-based interactive games or activities.

"Not surprisingly, use of interactive whiteboards seems to be tied to classroom availability," the report notes. Forty percent of K-12 teachers reported using interactive whiteboards to supplement or support teaching, with 59 percent saying the technology is available in their school and 36 percent saying it is available in their classroom.

The technology also appears at the top of teachers' "must-have" list—17 percent of all teachers report that interactive whiteboards are a resource they do not have but want.

"In some ways, part of the appeal of whiteboards is that teachers can understand pretty quickly the potential value there," Grunwald said. "[The devices] can help do some of the same things they're already doing, but also at the same time, with the right kind of training, allow them to do some things they aren't doing."

Educators are probably more comfortable using interactive whiteboard technology, and the technology offers "a way to keep a pretty strong hand on the flow of activity in the classroom," he added.

Ninety-three percent of teachers who use interactive whiteboards say the technology helps them be more effective, 83 percent say it increases student motivation, 78 percent say it stimulates student discussions, 75 percent says it stimulates student creativity, and 70 percent say it is directly related to student achievement.

Seventy-six percent of teachers said they stream or download TV and video content, up from 55 percent in 2007's survey. Teacher access to video content is changing, and 24 percent of teachers access content stored on a local server, while only 11 percent reported doing so in 2007. Twenty-nine percent said they use short video segments (three to five minutes in length) during class time.

Eighty-two percent of teachers said video is more effective in the classroom when integrated with other instructional resources or content. Two-thirds of teachers (67 percent) believe digital resources help them differentiate learning for individual students, and 68 percent believe TV and video content stimulates classroom discussion.

eSN

New at eSN Online this month

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eSCHOOL NEWS

MARCH 2011

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Keeping students on a path to graduation.

– Jennifer Nastu



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Poor test scores have schools rethinking science instruction.

– Jenna Zwang



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eSN SPECIAL REPORT



17 Mobile learning: Not just laptops

New advances in mobile technology could help schools realize the potential for *true* anytime, anywhere learning.

– Jennifer Nastu

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Public school employees under attack

Fallout from campaign to limit teacher benefits could hurt students, too

Dennis Pierce, Editor
dpierce@eschoolnews.com

Conservative lawmakers are targeting educators as part of a broader attack on public-sector employees in states from coast to coast—and the fallout could have lasting implications for the nation's students.

Consider these examples:

- State legislatures in Tennessee and Indiana are among those considering new bills that would eliminate or severely curtail teachers' collective bargaining rights in negotiating contracts.
- Wyoming lawmakers are entertaining a measure to end teacher tenure, which would allow the immediate suspension or firing of teachers for any reason not expressly prohibited by law.
- New Jersey is one of many cash-strapped states looking to cut public employees' pensions to help balance their budgets. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie recently skipped a \$3.1 billion payment to the state's pension system as part of an effort to cut benefits for public workers, and some conservative groups are suggesting that states be allowed to declare bankruptcy to escape their debt—including their pension obligations.

Supporters of these measures say they're necessary to cut wasteful spending and rein in lavish benefits for public-sector employees. They cite a few outlandish examples to prove their point, implying these are the norm and not the exception.

For instance, in lobbying for a bill to restrict collective bargaining in Indiana, the state's education department has described some strange contract stipulations from districts around the state. According to the Associated Press, these include a clause that says teach-

ers' lounges must be "attractive, comfortable, and spacious" in the School City of East Chicago—and one that says carpets must be vacuumed using a "filtration method that filters at greater than 99 percent efficient at 0.3 micron" in the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corp.

Yep, those teachers sure do drive a hard bargain. Now we know what's holding back our schools' success; they're clearly too busy trying to vacuum the carpets correctly.

Listening to the torches-and-pitchforks brigade, you might think the negotiating power of teachers and other public-sector employees is the main reason so many states are awash in red ink. But the facts don't bear this out. As former Labor Secretary Robert Reich has noted, there is little or no correlation between public employees' bargaining rights and states' budget situations.

"Some states that deny their employees bargaining rights—Nevada, North Carolina, and Arizona, for example—are running giant deficits of over 30 percent of spending," he wrote in a blog post earlier this year. "Many [states] that give employees bargaining rights—[such as] Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Montana—have small deficits of less than 10 percent."

What's more, he wrote, "... over the last 15 years the pay of public-sector workers has dropped relative to private-sector employees with the same level of education. ... Even if you include health and retirement benefits, government employees still earn less than their private-sector counterparts with similar educations."

Proponents of these bills argue that teacher contracts often stand in the way of real education reforms aimed at helping students. And while there is some truth to this idea, making public employees the scapegoat for tax-

payers' wrath is also a convenient shell game that diverts attention from the fact that conservative lawmakers are pushing for more tax cuts for the wealthy at a time when middle-class families are suffering.

"The irony should be lost on no one that the very people who seek to deprive public employees of their federally protected right to organize, and to deny them a portion of their health and pension benefits, are the ones who have championed giving tax cuts to millionaires, further exacerbating the fiscal crisis," says the American Federation of Teachers. "Requiring sacrifices from working people but not from the very wealthy is not a viable solution."

Are there reforms that should be made to schools' collective bargaining practices? Yes, but lawmakers should leave these to local municipalities—a concept that I thought was central to the conservative movement.

Beyond the hypocrisy of passing sweeping legislation that infringes on the rights of individuals, these attacks on public school employees will make it harder to recruit and retain more highly effective teachers in the nation's schools—something those from both sides of the political spectrum agree is important.

President Obama is asking for money in his 2012 budget to recruit 10,000 new math and science teachers over the next few years to fill what experts say is a dire need. How likely is it that the brightest young minds are going to want to enter the teaching profession when they see educators' benefits being hijacked?

If U.S. schools continue to lose too many smart, dynamic college graduates to the private sector, it won't just be current teachers who are stung by these attacks; the nation's students stand to suffer, too.

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

Judging schools like a business isn't fair, readers argue

Associate Editor Meris Stansbury's story "Can schools be evaluated like a business?" (page 12) drew quite a response from readers when it appeared online Jan. 24. In an accompanying poll, which asked: "Should districts be judged by their economic efficiency?" 45 percent of readers said "Yes, it's only fair to taxpayers and students," while 55 percent of readers said "No, it's a faulty rubric."

"Until public schools transform into a 'for-profit' entity, quit all of this nonsense about 'if schools were businesses!'" wrote **paul.rutherford**.

"... The student achievement model for determining school productivity misses the point of education if standardized tests are the only measure of student achievement," said **myoung10**. "Our education system exists in the greater culture of our society, and there are too many factors outside the sphere of influence of the schools that impact test scores. Schools do not exist in a vacuum and will not 'produce' by CAP standards until many other societal factors are addressed and realities of testing are thoroughly examined and changes made to assessment tools."

Yet, some readers said that while the business model might not be perfect, schools shouldn't be free from efficiency rubrics altogether.

"While it's quite true that ... we've no data on the long-range economic impact [of a K-12 school's education], it's equally true that Harvard (and many other high-pressure postsecondaries) keep precisely those data, in order to hit alumni for contributions," wrote **oekosjoe**. "Why has no one done anything at all like this in public primary and secondary education? It used to be very hard, since people move so much. But with Facebook, and many other social networking resources, it is finally quite easy to track alumni for a while, and some alumni for a very long time indeed."

"School is a business. Billions of dollars go into ... materials, supplies, and contracts. Education is big business," said **msrobins**. "I sat on a state data team that looked at scatter plots for data reporting that were used in this report. The government wants better results for dollars spent."

Innovation at odds with traditional assessments

Alexander Hiam's Viewpoint, "How—and why—to teach innovation in our schools" (page 48) also elicited many opinions when it appeared online Feb. 1. Nearly all respondents agreed that schools should be encouraging innovation among students—but traditional assessments and requirements too often get in the way, readers said.

"It seems to me that our present political climate and

systems of accountability are directly conflicted with the conceptualization of innovation presented in this article. There is no doubt in my mind that the success of our citizenry in work and life will be dependent on creating possibilities, critically evaluating possibilities, and implementing possibilities with the greatest potential value. Indeed, all of us must be prepared to think as the innovators of the future," wrote **kcornier**. Yet "our present models of curriculum and instruction are ill equipped to confront this necessity."

"Our current test-driven system of education makes it difficult to schedule additional topics into the classroom," wrote **wilkcd**. "Until we are ready to extend the school year (in my state, students go 174 days and teachers work 180 to 185 days) and pay teachers accordingly, we will not make progress. Otherwise, there is no way that I can fit more into my classes—I need every single minute I have just to cover the basics that are tested on the state tests."

Reader **Jessica Reeves** shared how she encourages innovation in her classroom: "One thing I love to do is set out a pile of random material and have groups create something of value out of the material. [Students] then write a summary ... about their journey to innovation. They can market their product, create advertisements, write business plans, etc. ... With a little forethought on the part of the teacher, innovation can be taught."

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Amid budget cuts, ed-tech leaders do more with less

Laura Devaney
Managing Editor

Though education budgets might be frozen or face further reductions in school districts from coast to coast, some district leaders have found innovative ways to update their schools' technology and expand their ed-tech initiatives.

In San Antonio's Judson Independent School District, Chief Technology Officer Steve Young has saved the district valuable dollars by examining current ed-tech practices and moving toward more "green" computing.

With 22,000 students, Judson ISD is facing the likelihood of a 5- or 10-percent cut in state funding next year.

"We know we need to cut more than we have in the past and do things differently," Young said during a Jan. 18 webinar sponsored by the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN). That includes going green by reducing electricity consumption and reducing heat creation to lower building HVAC costs. San Antonio's local energy provider estimates a 50-percent increase in electricity bills over the next 10 years, Young added.

Judson ISD started its money-saving initiatives by examining its ed-tech use, and district leaders ultimately decided to develop a green computing initiative in order to run more efficiently.

Young and his IT team opted to run virtual servers with VMWare software to reduce the number of physical servers in the district, which has reduced power consumption, cooling, and data center requirements. The district also purchased Energy Star and EPEAT certified computers.

Eliminating all inkjet printers and moving to shared laser printers and networked

copiers helped Judson ISD cut down on the amount of technology it used as well. Whereas each teacher previously had a printer in his or her classroom, Young said, small groups of teachers now share a central printer.

Young also automated computer shutdown for nearly all district computers.

"Ultimately, people leave computers on all of the time, and if you can get those turned off, you'll be saving money," he said.

Pushing student data to parents through the web, and using electronic forms instead of paper forms for business processes, has saved the district money as well.

Judson ISD's green computing initiative is certified by CoSN's Green Computing Leadership Initiative. The district's desktop virtualization was funded with a 2006 bond issue.

"We knew at the elementary level that we needed to get more computers in the classroom and needed to increase computer access, but cost was a factor," Young said. The district purchased 761 of NComputing's X300 and X350 desktop virtualization kits, which added 2,283 additional computer seats.

Estimates show that a PC-only deployment would have cost the district \$2.3 million, with a possible \$775,220 in additional network equipment and growth. The X-series deployment, which virtualized district desktops, saved the district 50 percent and cost \$1.1 million.

"Go green where you can to help trim your operating costs," Young advised. "To go green in some ways takes a lot of capital outlay, so this may not be the time to take on some of those projects, but take a look and see what might work for your district."

Mable Moore, chief technology officer for Jefferson Parish Schools in Harvey, La., said her district's focus has been on rethinking education for the 21st century.

"We imagined a new digital school district, where technology and curriculum could draw our students into places they had not been before," she said. "We knew we needed a state-of-the-art network to get there."

Through a combination of grants, Title I funding, state and local resources, and e-Rate funds, the district created an implementation schedule, updated its telecommunications services, and completed a \$50 million network upgrade with wired and wireless access and voice over IP service. This upgrade was completed in phases from 2006-09.

School technology leaders should "look at the budget crisis as an opportunity to really clean ... house and try to drive some efficiency through the whole organization," said Rich Kaestner, project director for CoSN's Total Cost of Ownership, Value of Investment, and Green Computing initiatives.

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Comcast-NBC deal raises questions for education

From staff and wire reports

Educators and students could see new internet service options after the federal government on Jan. 18 gave Comcast Corp., the country's largest cable company, the green light to take over NBC Universal, home of the NBC television network, in a deal that is likely to shake up the internet landscape.

Public-interest groups, meanwhile, hope consumers won't see new restrictions on content distribution as a result of the deal.

Comcast is buying a 51-percent stake in

NBC Universal from General Electric Co. for \$13.8 billion in cash and assets. The deal raises many questions, however, as public-interest groups have expressed concerns about what will happen to accessibility when one of the country's largest suppliers of broadband pipeline joins forces with one of its largest suppliers of content.

The Justice Department said it reached a settlement with Comcast and NBC Universal that allows the companies to proceed with the deal, subject to several conditions. Among these conditions are provisions that could increase the amount of

children's programming available and help subsidize broadband service in low-income communities.

Still, education officials have tracked Comcast's imposition of fees for online video after a Netflix partner raised concerns about the practice in November. And while many school technology officials have supported the Federal Communications Commission's "net neutrality" plans, Comcast has stood in firm opposition to new regulations that would prohibit broadband internet providers from slowing access for some customers or to certain websites.

The five-member FCC voted 4-1 to approve the Comcast-NBC Universal deal. Michael Copps, one of the commission's three Democrats and an opponent of media consolidation, voted against the transaction.

With the deal certain to transform the entertainment industry landscape, both the FCC and Justice Department are attaching conditions to prevent Comcast from trampling competitors once it takes control of NBC's vast media empire.

Among other things, they're requiring Comcast to make NBC programming available to competitors, including rival cable companies, satellite operators, and new internet video services that could pose a threat to Comcast's core cable business.

Philadelphia-based Comcast has about 23 million cable TV subscribers and nearly 17 million internet subscribers. It also owns a handful of cable channels, including E! Entertainment and the Golf Channel.

Taking over NBC will transform the company into a media powerhouse.

NBC Universal owns the NBC and Telemundo broadcast networks; 26 local TV stations; cable channels that include CNBC, Bravo, and Oxygen; the Universal Pictures movie studio and theme parks; and a roughly 30-percent stake in Hulu.com, which distributes NBC and other broadcast programming online.

The regulatory approvals establish an arbitration process to resolve disputes between Comcast and competitors who want to buy programming. Some are designed to ensure that Comcast cannot stifle the growth of the fledgling internet video market, such as requiring the company to offer its programming to legitimate internet video providers on the same terms and conditions that it offers other pay-TV providers.

Another condition requires Comcast to continue offering an affordable, standalone broadband option for customers who want internet access but not TV service.

Yet another condition bars Comcast from discriminating against internet video traveling over its broadband network. Although the FCC recently adopted "net neutrality" rules barring broadband providers from interfering with internet traffic on their systems, those regulations are being challenged in court. The condition would ensure that Comcast still would have to abide by the rules.

At least one public-interest watchdog was pleased with the government's conditions. Mark Cooper, director of research for the Consumer Federation of America, said they could help pave the way for internet distributors to break the cable industry's "stranglehold" over the video market.

Others weren't so sure. "This will ultimately mean higher cable and internet bills, fewer independent voices in the media, and less freedom of choice for ... consumers," said Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn. **eSN**

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Can schools be evaluated like a business?

Researchers take a controversial approach to measuring educational success

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

A controversial new study published by the Center for American Progress (CAP) analyzes K-12 school districts based on their efficiency: the academic achievement a district produces relative to its education spending.

CAP researchers call their new index for evaluating school systems “educational productivity,” and according to the study, low efficiency costs the nation’s school sys-

tems as much as \$175 billion a year in unproductive spending. Released in January, the report was blasted by many critics who argued that the success of a school system cannot be measured like that of a business.

“At a time when states are projecting more than \$100 billion in budget shortfalls, educators need to be able to show that education dollars produce significant outcomes—or taxpayers might begin to see schools as a weak investment,” says the report.

Called “Return on Educational Investment: A district-by-district evaluation of U.S. educational productivity,” the report was written by Ulrich Boser, a senior fellow at CAP.

The study is not meant to undermine the need for education spending, CAP says, but to explore whether school systems can be evaluated like companies: If public education were a business, would its customers be happy, or would they demand refunds?

According to the study, a year-long ef-

fort that analyzed more than 9,000 school districts in more than 45 states, after adjusting for inflation, education spending per student has nearly tripled over the past four decades. “But while some states and districts have spent their additional dollars wisely—and thus shown significant increases in student outcomes—overall student achievement has largely remained flat,” the report says.

Besides Luxembourg, the U.S. spends more per student than any of the 65 countries that participated in the recent international reading exam from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the report says—and while Estonia and Poland scored at the same level as the U.S. on the exam, the U.S. spent roughly \$60,000 more to educate each student to age 15 than either nation.

Boser and a panel of experts relied on education spending data from the 2008 school year, the most recent available, as well as on the results of 2008 state reading and math assessments in fourth grade, eighth grade, and high school.

Educational productivity was measured based on a district’s return on investment, controlling for differences in special education, low-income students, and living costs. This measure rates districts on how much academic achievement they get for each dollar spent, relative to other districts in their state.

The report’s main finding is that many school districts could “boost student achievement without increasing spending if they used their money more productively.”

To illustrate this point, the report cites the Wisconsin school systems of Oshkosh and Eau Claire: the districts are about the same size and serve similar student populations. They also get largely similar results on state exams; however, Eau Claire spends an extra \$8 million to run its school system.

“Schools and districts have long been effective at deflecting or watering down meaningful change in order to protect entrenched bureaucracies and interests,” the report says.

Several critics of the report have fired back, arguing that it’s a mistake to measure educational productivity based on student achievement. Even when comparing similar student populations, there are huge variances from one district to another that make such comparisons unfair, they say.

“This is quite simply an abhorrent way to measure the quality of education,” said Diane Ravitch, an education researcher at New York University. “Education is not a business. We can’t know its value for many years.”

The report offers several recommendations, with one being that policy makers promote educational productivity and conduct further research on this issue. **eSN**

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Verizon challenges new net-neutrality rules in court

From staff and wire reports

In a case with important implications for schools as well as consumers, Verizon Communications Inc. on Jan. 20 filed a legal challenge to new federal regulations that prohibit broadband providers from interfering with internet traffic flowing over their networks.

In a filing in federal appeals court in the District of Columbia, Verizon argues that the Federal Communications Commission overstepped its authority in adopting the new “net neutrality” rules in December.

The rules prohibit phone and cable companies from favoring or discriminating against certain types of internet content and services—including online calling services such as Skype and internet video services such as Netflix, which in many cases compete with services sold by companies like Verizon.

The FCC’s three Democrats voted to adopt the rules over the opposition of the agency’s two Republicans just before Christmas. Republicans in Congress, who now control the House, have vowed to try to block the rules from taking effect. They

argue that the new rules amount to unnecessary regulation that will discourage phone and cable companies from investing in their networks.

Several key House Republicans, including newly designated House Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton of Michigan, welcomed Verizon’s actions as “a check on an FCC that is acting beyond the authority granted to it by Congress.” The court challenge had been widely expected.

In a statement, Verizon said that while it is “committed to preserving an open in-

ternet,” it remains “deeply concerned by the FCC’s assertion of broad authority for sweeping new regulation of broadband networks and the internet itself.”

The company is taking the case to the same federal court that ruled last year that the FCC had exceeded its legal authority in sanctioning cable giant Comcast Corp. The agency had cited Comcast for discriminating against online file-sharing traffic on its network—violating broad net-neutrality principles first established by the agency in 2005. Those principles served as a foundation for the formal rules adopted by the commission in December.

Last year’s court ruling forced the FCC to look for a new framework for regulating broadband to ensure the commission would be on solid legal ground in adopting net neutrality and other rules. The agency currently treats broadband as a lightly regulated “information service,” as opposed to phone service, which is more heavily regulated as a so-called “common carrier.”

At one point, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski proposed redefining broadband as a telecommunications service subject to common carrier obligations to treat all traffic equally. But he later backed down in the face of fierce opposition from the phone and cable companies, as well as many Congressional Republicans.

And he now argues that the agency has ample authority to mandate net neutrality under the existing regulatory framework for broadband—an assumption that will be tested in the Verizon court challenge.

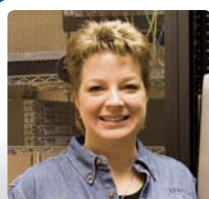
The rules represented an attempt to craft a compromise on an issue that has divided the telecommunications and technology industries. On one side, internet companies such as Skype, as well as public interest groups and many education organizations, argue that strong rules are needed to prevent broadband providers from becoming online gatekeepers that can dictate where people go and what they do online.

But the big phone and cable companies insist that they need flexibility to manage internet traffic to keep their networks running smoothly and preventing bandwidth-hogging applications from slowing down their systems. They also maintain that they should be able to charge extra for special services over their broadband lines and earn a healthy return on the billions of dollars they have spent on network upgrades.

The new regulations try to find a middle ground. They require broadband providers to let subscribers access all legal online content, applications, and services over their wired networks. But they give providers flexibility to manage data on their systems to deal with network congestion and unwanted traffic, as long as they publicly disclose how they manage the network.

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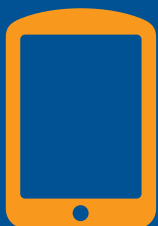


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Study: Students need more paths to career success

From staff and wire reports

The current U.S. education system is failing to prepare millions of young adults for successful careers by providing a one-size-fits-all approach, and it should take a cue from its European counterparts by offering greater emphasis on occupational instruction, a Harvard University study published on Feb. 2 concludes.

The two-year study by the Pathways to Prosperity Project at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education notes that while much emphasis is placed in high

school on going on to a four-year college, only 30 percent of young adults in the United States successfully complete a bachelor's degree.

While the number of jobs that require no postsecondary education have declined, the researchers note that only one-third of the jobs created in the coming years are expected to need a bachelor's degree or higher. Roughly the same amount will need just an associate's degree or an occupational credential.

"What I fear is the continuing problem of too many kids dropping by the wayside

and the other problem of kids going into debt, and going into college but not completing with a degree or certificate," said Robert Schwartz, who heads the project and is academic dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "Almost everybody can cite some kid who marched off to college because it was the only socially legitimate thing to do, but [who] had no real interest."

The report highlights an issue that has been percolating among education circles: that school reform should include more emphasis on career-driven alternatives to a four-year education.

The study recommends a "comprehensive pathways network" that would include three elements: embracing multiple approaches to help youth make the transition to adulthood, involving the nation's employers in things like work-based learning, and creating a new social compact with young people.

Many of the ideas aren't new, and leaders, including President Barack Obama, have advocated for an increased role for community colleges so the country once again can lead the world in the proportion of college graduates.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan spoke at the report's release, saying career and technical education has been "the neglected stepchild of education reform."

"That neglect has to stop," Duncan said.

But the idea of providing more alternatives, rather than emphasizing a four-year college education for all, is controversial. Critics fear students who opt early for a vocational approach might limit their options later on, or that disadvantaged students at failing schools would be pushed into technical careers and away from highly selective colleges.

"Nobody who spends much time in America's high schools could possibly argue that they are focused on college for all, or ever have been," said Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust, a non-partisan think tank. "Most schools still resist that idea, instead continuing long-standing, unfair practices of sorting and selecting like an educational caste system—directing countless young people, especially low-income students and students of color, away from college-prep courses and from seeing themselves as 'college material.'"

The study recommends that all major occupations be clearly outlined at the start of high school. Students would see directly how their course choices prepare them for careers that interest them—but still would be able to change their minds. Students also should be given more opportunities for work-based learning, such as job shadowing and internships.

Students, the researchers recommend, should get career counseling and work-related opportunities early on—no later than middle school. In high school, students would have access to educational programs designed with the help of industry leaders, and they'd be able to participate in paid internships.

The report notes that many European countries already have such an approach, and their youth tend to have a smoother transition into adulthood. Not all separate children into different paths at an early age; Finland and Denmark, for example, provide all students with a comprehensive education through grades 9 or 10. Then, students can decide what type of secondary education they'd like to pursue. **eSN**

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MOBILE LEARNING:

Not just laptops any more

*New advances in mobile technology could help schools realize the promise of true anytime, **anywhere learning***

Not all that long ago, the term “mobile learning” implied laptop computers and mobile carts that were wheeled from classroom to classroom. Now, as a growing number of students carry smart phones, tablets, and other mobile devices that can connect to the internet wirelessly through a cellular as well as a Wi-Fi connection, the definition of “mobile learning” is expanding—and with it, the possibilities inherent in the term.

The rise of mobile technologies small enough to

carry in one’s pocket, and the increasing power and functionality of these devices, is causing a seismic shift in education technology.

Last fall, nearly 50 percent of middle and high school students said they carried some type of smart phone—a 47-percent increase from fall 2009, according to Project Tomorrow’s annual Speak Up survey of students, parents, teachers, and administrators on their uses and views of school technology.

Mobile Learning, page 18



Mobile learning...

continued from page 17

There are now five billion wireless subscribers in the world, and of those, 1 billion are 3G subscribers, according to Wireless Intelligence. By 2014, there will be 2.8 billion 3G subscribers. (3G refers to a third-generation cellular network, which is capable of streaming video and other bandwidth-intensive applications wirelessly. Already, some providers are rolling out 4G services that promise even faster download speeds and more capabilities.)

As mobile learning has come to mean something very different than it once did, the very definition of a mobile device may be changing. Mark Anderson of Strategic News Service, a predictive newsletter covering the computing and telecommunications industries, says there are three categories of today's popular computing devices: the laptop, the carry-along (which includes netbooks, iPads, and other slates), and the mobile.

"The 'mobile' is your phone; you never leave home without it," explains Cathie Norris, Regents Professor at the University of North Texas, who works with Elliot

Soloway, founder and chief executive of GoKnow, an education consultancy. Soloway and Norris have been following education and technology for decades, and they work, via their consultancy, to get technology into the hands of every student.

"When you go out, you bring your keys, your wallet, and your mobile," Norris says. This, she explains, is different than other mobile devices like the iPad, which you have to "consciously carry."

As one educator said at a recent conference: Devices like laptops or iPads might never leave the classroom. How is that mobile? The promise of mobile learning, some believe, comes from the true capacity for anytime, anywhere learning—or, as Soloway puts it, "everywhere, all-the-time learning."

True anytime, anywhere learning

"Smart phones rival laptops and the computers of just a few years ago, and they're much more affordable," says Michael Flood, education solutions practice manager at AT&T. "The ultimate question, and goal, is how we can get devices—with computing power and access to the information that will help them learn more effectively—into the hands of students."

Laptops and netbooks, useful as they have been, are not with students all the time. "But as we move toward getting students engaged with other students and teachers outside the classroom, they need their devices with them anytime, anywhere," Flood says. "They won't have a netbook in the lunch line, but they will have a phone, and they will pop it open to seek an answer to a question."

Students with smart phones, 3G (or 4G) access, and a data plan can use the device on the school bus to look up information for a report on their way home in the afternoon. They can do their homework while waiting in the dentist's office. That's the real power of mobile learning, says Norris, who points to the Tom's River School District in New Jersey, which gave every fifth grader a mobile device and access to the internet.

"Every single child did every single piece of homework, on time," she says. "That's pretty unusual. The real power of mobile is just that: If a student has to go to his little sister's soccer practice after school, he's not going to carry his books, he's not going to carry his homework. But he's certainly not going to watch his little sister play soccer, either, so he'll pull out his smart phone and get it done."

Mobile learning, page 20

Three (wildly) successful mobile learning projects

The Katy Independent School District in Texas has about 60,000 students. During the 2009-10 school year, the district used bond funds and federal e-Rate funding to create a program that put the Incredible Droid from Verizon into the hands of all fifth grade students at a single elementary school.

The calling and paging features of the phones were turned off, and students were allowed to use the phones both within and outside of class. Students were encouraged to use Edmodo, a secure social learning network for teachers and students, to share ideas with peers, ask questions, and post answers. The phones were incorporated into the students' everyday math and science classes.

"The kids use their mobile phones to do their homework. That's been the most advantageous thing we've seen with the devices," says Lenny Schad, Katy ISD's chief information officer. "It's more interactive, it taps into that creative side, much more so than pen and paper."

The district took advantage of a number of Web 2.0 applications that run on Google's Android mobile operating system. For example, one app allows students to point their phones up to the sky, take pictures of the stars, and have the constellations mapped for them, which they then shared in class. There are math wikis that help students with difficult concepts, and websites that allow students to create their homework online.

"It's been so powerful. The kids are coming back to the teachers and saying, 'Hey, look what I learned we can do on this phone,' so they're showing their teachers and peers how to do new things," says Schad.

Already, the district has seen "huge, huge gains in math and science," says Schad. Benchmark scores for math and science at the pilot school went up between 20 and 30 percentage points, he says. Attendance has gone up, and discipline issues reportedly have plummeted. Teachers in subjects other than math and science have begun using the phones as well, and scores are improving in those areas, too. Music teachers, for example, have had kids use a keyboarding app to study music.

The program was so successful that it was expanded to 10 more elementary schools this year, with 1,500 devices distributed. Katy ISD also allows students to

bring in their own devices and use them for educational purposes in the classroom.

Virginia's York County School Division is another school system that allows students to use their own mobile devices in the classroom for instructional purposes, and teachers are incorporating the devices into their curriculum. For example, one high school civics class has small teams of students working together on a mock election. They create position statements for their candidates, research issues using their own mobile device, save their position statements on the school's network, and share them with one another.

"We constantly hear from students and teachers that they need more computers, more devices, but we have significant fiscal challenges, and our sense is we'll never be able to keep up with demand for computing devices," says Superintendent Eric Williams. "But students have ... iPhones and other mobile devices, so we want to make use of those."

The school system does not have the resources to set up a separate wireless network comparable to what you might find at an airport or a coffee shop, but it will be piloting a program to let users register their devices by their MAC address to the existing network. "This way, the user is known to us. The possibilities are pretty exciting in terms of having access to additional computing devices," Williams says.

Project K-Nect's pilot program began in the 2007-08 school year and was continued in 2009, during which 150 eighth through 12th grade students were given 3G-enabled smart phones to connect wirelessly to educational resources on the internet and to each other, both on and off campus.

The phones provided access to supplemental math content aligned with teachers' current lesson plans, and they also allowed students to collaborate with each other and contact after-school tutors who could assist them with mastering a targeted skill set. Teachers used software apps on their laptops to send messages to students on their phones, giving them homework assignments and viewing collaborative work.

The project has shown positive qualitative and quantitative results. The average math proficiency rate of K-Nect students at one of the participating high schools was 30 percentage points higher on North Carolina's state exam than that of students



not in Project K-Nect but taught by the same teacher. Throughout the project, students have discovered creative ways to use the phones and the 24-7 internet connectivity to increase their understanding of Algebra I, especially with social networking tools such as blogging and instant messaging.

According to an evaluation by Project Tomorrow, teachers revealed that the mobile devices and the problem-based learning approach encouraged by Project K-Nect transformed the way they taught math. The pilot program has been expanded beyond North Carolina to include Virginia and Ohio, with approximately 4,500 students. **eSN**



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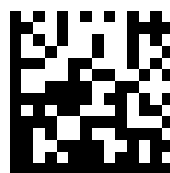
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Rethink Possible



Where are we going? A look at the future of mobile learning

The movement toward a one-to-one computing environment—that is, one device for every child—soon will be moot, says Phil Emer, director of technology planning and policy for The Friday Institute, which is housed within North Carolina State University. “The truth is, we’re going to blow through one-to-one. Right now, we might have four kids to one machine, but two years from now, we’ll have one-to-four. That is, one kid to four devices.”

That might not seem possible for schools to manage or support—but to remove some of the burden, schools should consider stopping the practice of doing certain things locally and do them online instead, Emer says.

“Why run your own eMail service now?” he says. “Have Microsoft or Google run it, [and] save a bunch of money. Get out of the business of running eMail servers and domain control servers and servers that run your finance systems. There are services available now that do that very well, very inexpensively—and big enterprises use them. So why don’t [schools] use them and free up time and money, and invest that money in devices?”

Another key shift is that telecommunications companies are no longer in the business of selling and managing wireline or even wireless telephone service. They’re in the business of wireless data networks. “We can talk about my iPhone being a phone, but it’s really an eMail device, a phone device, an internet device,” Emer says.

Along those lines, Emer believes that eventually the telecom companies will be “involved in the whole solution: not just the 3G wireless solution, but how do you provision the end devices? How do you engineer, manage, and monitor the wireless networks? How do you ensure that the students have data access outside of school? There’s an AT&T answer” to all of these questions.

A third thing that will have to change, according to Emer, is the Federal Communications Commission’s e-Rate program, which currently helps schools connect to the internet. “What we need to be doing is having the e-Rate discount the cost of the data plan,” he says. “So, fix the e-Rate, which the telecom companies can help us to do, so that it addresses the data connection to users.”

The FCC is already funding a study to look at the merits and challenges of funding wireless off-premises connectivity for mobile learning devices. The pilot program will help the FCC decide whether—and how—those services should be eligible for e-Rate support. As part of the pilot program, the FCC authorized up to \$10 million for funding year 2011 to support a small number of innovative, interactive off-premise wireless connectivity projects for schools and libraries. As of the December 2010 due date, the FCC had received 85 “seemingly valid” applications. **eSN**

Mobile learning...

continued from page 18

It’s not just the convenience of mobile devices that is driving an increased interest among educators; smart phones also have been shown to help improve student performance in the classroom.

In 2008, public high schools in North Carolina began a pilot program to see if they could improve Algebra I performance among low-income students who lacked wireless internet access at home. The program, called Project K-Nect, started with 150 ninth-grade students who were given smart phones equipped with Algebra I content. Project K-Nect chose tech-savvy teachers—those already using technology in their classrooms—to implement the course. Content on the phones aligned with their current lesson plans, and students were encouraged to learn from each other both inside and outside the classroom. Students did so by using social networking applications on the smart phones, as well as other internet resources such as Algebra.com. By the end of the school

because they didn’t have enough of them, so the best they could do was supplemental. And supplemental use is just that. It’s not enough to move the needle.”

To really change student achievement, Soloway says, computers need to be used as essential tools, for up to 70 percent of the school day. When schools can supply a device for every student, the pedagogy and curriculum can change. Teachers stop “telling,” and students start “finding,” which moves teaching from a teacher-centric to a student-centric experience.

But is such student-centric learning really effective? Absolutely, says Tom Greaves, founder of education technology consulting firm The Greaves Group and co-author of a study called Project RED, a national effort to analyze what’s working in technology-rich schools.

In a recently completed large-scale study of 1,000 schools, Greaves found that in schools where every student at a particular grade level was given a computing device, the students significantly outperformed those from schools where every student did not have his or her own device. This better performance was consistent across a



While the potential for learning with smart phones is huge, many challenges remain.

year, the students’ average math test scores were 30 percent higher than the average scores of students taught by the same teacher in a different class.

“These were students who were struggling in math ... and now some of them are even thinking of pursuing careers in math. Some of the students originally in the program are seniors now, and they’re taking calculus,” says Kristin Atkins, director of wireless reach at Qualcomm Inc., which funded the Project K-Nect program.

Having a one-to-one ratio of mobile devices to students is a key to moving education forward, Soloway believes.

“Up to now, schools have spent billions of dollars on technology, and the result is zero,” he says bluntly. The question is why. “First, we’ve used computers as supplements to existing curriculum. We’ve taken the existing pedagogy, the existing curriculum, and added some computers when we could. Teachers couldn’t count on the devices

variety of other factors, from teacher attendance to demographic characteristics.

Those same benefits are available with laptops as well, Atkins acknowledged, but she said students in the pilot projects funded by Qualcomm vastly preferred smart phones, even compared to laptops or netbooks.

Overcoming hurdles

While the potential for mobile learning with smart phones or other portable devices is huge, many challenges remain before “everywhere, all-the-time learning” becomes a reality.

One such challenge is how to police the devices to make certain students are using them only for tasks that have to do with learning and are not accessing inappropriate content.

A simple way to do this is via identity management,

Mobile learning, page 22



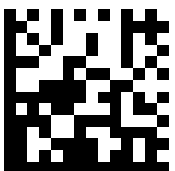
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Mobile learning...

continued from page 20

says Phil Emer, director of technology planning and policy at The Friday Institute, which is housed within North Carolina State University.

Emer says it's inevitable that students eventually will be allowed to bring their mobile devices into school, and identity management can help make this happen. Each child should have an account, and any time students use a wireless device, they should be required to log into the school's wireless network, just as enterprise users do, where they can be monitored. "You can even put it all together on a website for parents," he says. If a student is doing something inappropriate, either the parent or the

school sees it and can put consequences into place.

"People over-interpret CIPA [the Child Internet Protection Act]. They do little or no monitoring, they just filter the whole internet," Emer says. Instead, he suggests, schools should filter the "clearly unsavory stuff" and leave the rest flexible.

Still, students will always look for ways around security. "It's almost like an ongoing arms race between students and administrators," says AT&T's Flood. But there are solutions, such as "middleware" software that AT&T and other companies provide.

In a mobile device environment, "you can force all traffic from mobile devices to route back through the district, so you have some assurance that access is as good as it is on campus. You can also implement a filtering system through the mobile network, through the carrier," he

says. Mobile device management (MDM) software also can help solve the problem. "Some districts require that MDM be installed on any student- or faculty-owned device if they want to use it at school," Flood says.

He adds that some school leaders look at the issue simply from an "acceptable use" perspective, addressing it purely from a policy standpoint and not a technological one.

That viewpoint is similar to what Eric Williams, superintendent of the York County School Division in Virginia, believes. Dealing with mobile devices in the classroom, he says, is a classroom management issue.

"Teachers have always dealt with classroom management issues like off-task behavior, cheating, and inappropriate materials," he says. Technology simply offers new versions of these same issues. "They exist separate from technology, and they exist with technology. It's a challenge for teachers regardless of whether cell phones are allowed in the classroom or not."

Greaves says there are two camps: advocates of "lock and block" solutions, who want to lock everything down and block all inappropriate content, and advocates of giving students some responsibility. The latter camp is gaining in popularity, largely because students will, eventually, have to learn how to use discretion and make smart decisions regarding their online use. Besides, says Greaves, "if a student has done his homework, is finished with what he needs to be doing, and is watching ESPN Sportscenter for five minutes, is that the end of the world? I think the issue is going to resolve itself."

Another challenge is whether to allow children to bring their own device to school—or whether they should be given school-issued devices. If students bring in their own, there could be equity issues: Some students will have a device, while others may not. And not all devices are created equal.

For now, schools that are encouraging the use of a child's own device in the classroom for learning purposes are taking a laid-back approach. For example, next year the Katy Independent School District, in a suburb of Houston, will allow students to bring their own personal devices; the district is installing public Wi-Fi at every campus.

"Public Wi-Fi does not address the equity issue, of every kid having a device, but it does leverage the personal investment parents have made," says Lenny Schad, the district's chief information officer. "If not every student has a device, we have mobile carts, so teachers can supplement that way. [Or,] they can pair up with students who do have a device."

The York County School Division also allows students to bring in their own devices and use them for instructional purposes. Recently, a middle school forensics science teacher had students taking photos of mock crime scenes using their cell phones. Students sent the photos to the teacher, who displayed them on a screen in the classroom for use in analyzing the crime scenes. When a student doesn't have a device, he or she simply works with a student who does.

At this point in time, at the high school level, a very high percentage of students do have their own mobile devices, says Schad.

Additionally, Project Tomorrow's Speak Up survey indicated that 67 percent of parents said they would be willing to provide their child with a smart phone if the school allowed it to be used for education. That number was pretty stable across urban and rural districts, says Julie Evans, CEO of Project Tomorrow.

"Parents are thinking of smart phones as different from a laptop. It's like paying for violin lessons, paying for a field trip or a calculator," Evans says. "It's a whole different category."

In fact, Soloway predicts that by 2016, nearly every K-12 student in the U.S. will be using a mobile handheld

Mobile learning, page 23

Innovative mobile content

Though many educators believe there needs to be more content developed specifically for mobile devices in order to take full advantage of mobile learning, some excellent sources of content already exist, with more on the way. Here are a few sources to get you started.

For Apple devices: 10 of the best apps for education

<http://is.gd/WDqJH3>

eSN readers: Here are our favorite apps for education

<http://is.gd/DljCzA>

Opera Mobile: Smarter mobile browsing for phones

<http://www.opera.com/mobile/>

Android Manager Wi-Fi

<https://market.android.com/details?id=com.mobileaction.AmAgent>

Edmodo: A secure social learning network for students and teachers

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

Discovery Education

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

Algebra.com

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

Learning in Hand's podcasting tool

<http://learninginhand.com/podcasting/>

iPod Touch Projects: The blog at this site contains helpful ideas

<http://tinyurl.com/iPodprojects>

IEAR.org: A community effort to grade educational apps

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

Cellphones in Learning: A conversation about integrating cell phones into classroom curricula

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

Useful apps from Android Market (<https://market.android.com/>)

- Math Blitz game app
- Math Attack
- Dictionary.com
- Thinking Space
- ColorNote Notepad Notes
- StickDraw
- FX Camera
- Mind Map Memo
- Typing Zombie
- AnDrawing
- Wordoid



Mobile learning...

continued from page 22

device as an important part of his or her education. Greaves agrees: "I think the issue of whether it's a student-owned device or a school-owned device is in migration. I think in five years or so, it will shift to student-owned devices. It's like calculators: bringing a calculator to school is your own responsibility."

Pricing is another major hurdle. The devices themselves often are subsidized by wireless providers; second-generation devices can be given or sold cheaply to schools once a new generation of device is released to the market. And besides, the devices are significantly less expensive than PCs or laptops. But the data plans that enable students to access the internet anytime, anywhere—that is, via a 3G or 4G network, allowing students to go online even when they are not connected to the school's wireless network—can cost as much as \$35 per student, per month.

mal training," he says. "At a lot of schools, they just provide the technology and think that, by itself, will carry the day. But if you don't actually give [educators] the training of what to do with it, nothing changes."

A change management leader looks at the students within a class and evaluates to what extent they are working on a fully personalized basis. "If 30 kids in class are all doing the same thing, that's a clear sign that you haven't changed anything," Greaves adds.

Greaves suggests not starting a mobile technology implementation without having a plan: "If you don't know what the right way is, don't start. You'll have a failed project, cost a lot of money, and set back the movement." Don't know how to begin? Go visit schools that are successfully implementing these projects, he says.

A strong curriculum must be built around the use of mobile devices, rather than the devices simply being integrated into an existing curriculum.

At the Katy Independent School District, where 1,500 smart phone devices were handed out to fifth graders, the district has a group of people whose sole responsi-

be just a scaled-down app, but a completely new platform and interface for using the software anytime, anywhere on an Apple mobile device, says company president Adam Hall. He describes the benefit of true mobile learning as "increasing the time students are learning without increasing the cost."

Not a panacea

Despite the excitement among many educators that smart phones and tablets could change the way students learn significantly, others warn that such mobile devices are not a panacea for education.

"You're not going to do your dissertation on a cell phone," says Eileen Lento, government and education strategist for Intel Corp. "A cell phone enhances a tiny piece of what we need to address. What we're really trying to do is move students up the learning curve. I certainly wouldn't go to a school and say, 'I think you should buy everybody a cell phone.' I don't think that would be the best use of their money."

School leaders need to pinpoint the results they want to achieve, Lento says, and then make smart buying decisions from there. And part of what will move education forward, she adds, are robust learning platforms that allow for rich content creation—something not easily done on a mobile device.

But the potential for mobile devices to deliver information to students' fingertips no matter where they are has many educators intrigued—and this could help students learn to take ownership of their education.

Teachers could begin encouraging students to find information on their own, for example, and to incorporate what students are learning on their own in the classroom. If a student has a question, instead of raising his hand to ask the teacher, he might Google it and find the answer on his own. What's more, he might learn something the teacher didn't know, and raise his hand and share this newfound knowledge with the teacher and the rest of the class.

"The model of teaching where the teacher is the sole source of information is changing," says Norris. "Teaching is not telling, and learning is not listening—it's doing. So curriculum changes need to take place. And if we can pull it all together, the U.S. will no longer be 15th in the world."

eSN

LINKS:

Project Tomorrow

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

Project RED

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

Project K-Nect

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

The Friday Institute

<http://www.fi.ncsu.edu/>

The Greaves Group

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

GoKnow

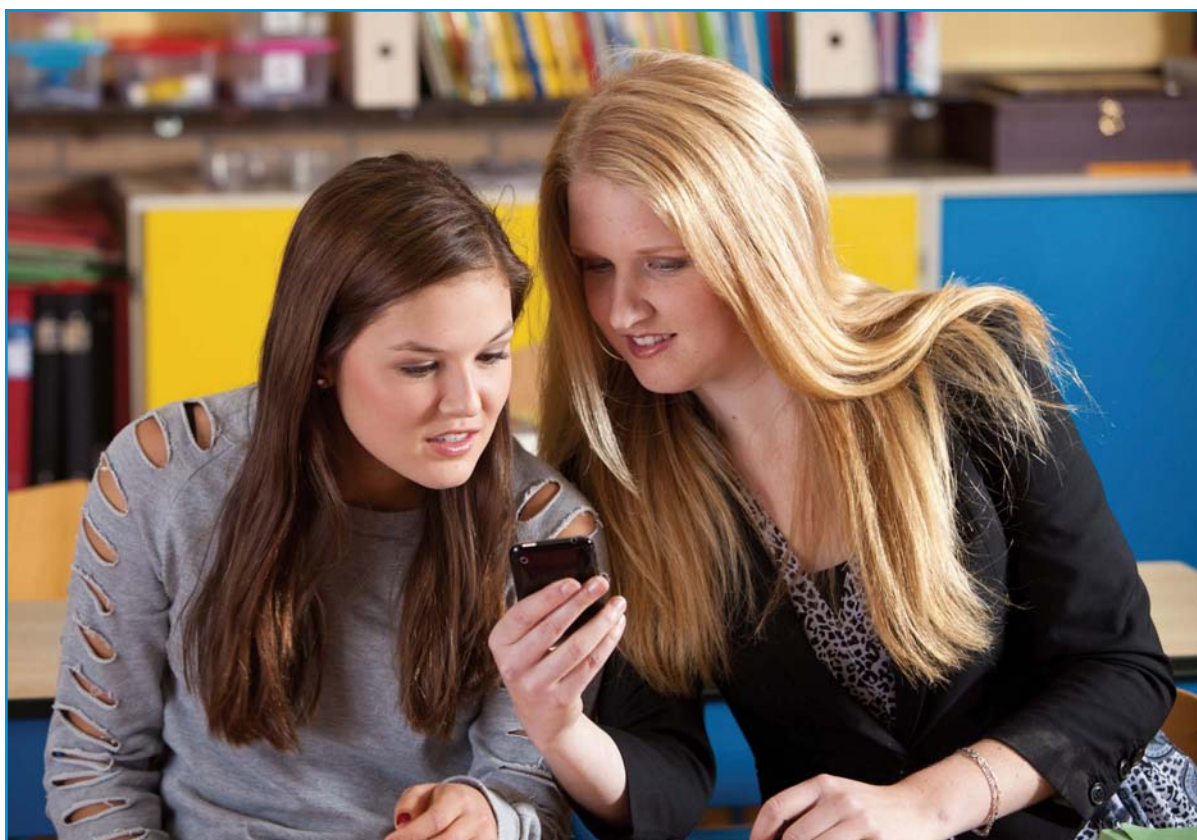
<http://www.goknow.com>

Katy ISD

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

York County School Division

<http://yorkcountyschools.org/>



To make the most of mobile technology, teachers must have proper training.

Part of the challenge for schools is that the federal e-Rate program, which provides telecommunications discounts to eligible schools and libraries, does not discount the cost of the data plan—although there is an e-Rate pilot program for wireless internet services for off-campus student use planned for next year (see the sidebar "Where are we going?").

Cost might not be an issue for long, Norris believes. "Eventually, you'll get to the point where every student will be able to use [his or her] own device" at school, she says—the implication being that parents will be paying for the data plans themselves.

Content, curriculum, and pedagogy

But if learning with mobile devices is really to take off, the challenges of finding good content and changing classroom pedagogy will need to be addressed.

To make the most of mobile technology, teachers must have proper training, and schools must go through a change management process, says Greaves.

Technology-rich schools whose principals "have formal training in change management far outperform the technology schools where [principals] don't have this for-

bility is the integration of technology into the classroom, with three people dedicated to mobile learning devices. That group works with curriculum specialists, and together they are writing the curriculum for the district's mobile learning initiative. Meanwhile, the fifth grade science teachers who are having the students use the mobile devices in the classroom are sharing ways they're using the devices via Adobe Connect sessions online.

Qualcomm's Atkins acknowledges that the industry needs more instructional materials developed specifically for mobile devices.

"What we learned from Project K-Nect is that we need more content that fits on the small screen," she says.

But as mobile technology continues to advance, that's changing, too, and ed-tech companies are beginning to respond to this demand.

For example, the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt division SkillsTutor is about to release a version of its software that is tailored for use on iPhone and iPad devices. SkillsTutor provides cloud-based diagnostic and prescriptive software for building skills in reading, writing, language arts, math, and science.

The company's mobile version of SkillsTutor won't





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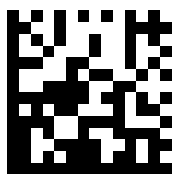


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Rethink Possible



How to share YouTube videos at school, safely

Free video library helps teachers show YouTube clips without fear of showing inappropriate material

Dennis Pierce
Editor

As most teachers know, there's a lot of great educational content on YouTube—and there's a lot of inappropriate material, too, from racy images to offensive comments that might sully an otherwise perfectly good video clip.

That's why many schools block access to YouTube on their networks, which can be frustrating for teachers who want to use YouTube at school. Now, a new service from internet security company M86 Security aims to solve this problem.

Called VuSafe (www.m86vusafe.com), it's a free website that lets educators search for relevant video content from YouTube and other sources, add video clips from these sources to an online library, and then share these clips with their students—without the inappropriate ads, comments, or outside links that might accompany them.

"Our teachers are increasingly using more online videos on YouTube as tools in their classrooms, but there is apprehen-

sion because of possible inappropriate comments that might pop up as the videos are being viewed by students," said Ralph Osmolinski, technology director for the Conemaugh Township Area School District in Pennsylvania, in a press release.

A key difference is that VuSafe can be used even without M86's filtering software. But there's a catch: Schools that aren't using M86's web filter would have to unblock YouTube in order for the videos in the VuSafe library to display at school.

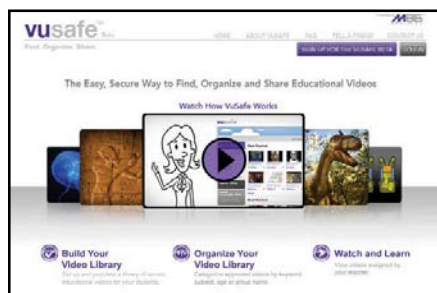
In that case, although content from the VuSafe library would be safe for viewing,

students searching the web on their own from a school computer might have access to the entire YouTube archive.

For schools using M86 filtering software, that's not a problem, as the software would allow content from the VuSafe video library to be shown while blocking the rest of YouTube. For other schools, if their filtering software is sophisticated enough, IT officials could grant access to YouTube through the teachers' computers and block access to YouTube from other machines.

VuSafe is still in beta-testing mode, but schools can sign up for access any time.

M86 plans a full launch of the service in April. **eSN**



M86 Security's VuSafe

Once they've registered on VuSafe, teachers can search for and preview video clips from YouTube and other sources through the website, and they can add clips they think are relevant for use in the classroom to their school's VuSafe video library.

As they add relevant videos to their school's video library, teachers tag these snippets by subject and age-appropriateness, and they can also grant access to certain groups of students.

Teachers can show videos from the library to an entire class during instruction, or they can allow students to watch videos individually while at school or from home by giving students their own VuSafe account.

In the latter case, students would only be able to find and watch videos they have been given access to; a video tagged for students in grades six and above wouldn't be accessible to a fourth-grader, for instance.

Any time a video from YouTube or another source is played from the VuSafe library, it is stripped of all advertisements, comments, and outside links, so educators don't have to worry about students seeing something they shouldn't.

M86 competitor Lightspeed Systems already offers a similar service, but only for



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Kineo: Like an iPad, but made for students

Brainchild describes its tablet as a low-cost, secure alternative to Apple's popular product

Dennis Pierce
Editor

As more school leaders look at using iPads and other tablet computers as learning tools, the Florida-based company Brainchild has developed an iPad-like device that is designed specifically for elementary and middle school students.

Built on Google's Android operating system for mobile devices, the Kineo—which is Greek for “to excite”—acts as an eBook reader with internet access and Flash capa-

bility. Its replaceable battery reportedly lasts for up to 12 hours on single charge, and at \$299 it costs far less than Apple's iPad.

Perhaps best of all for educators who work with young students, the Kineo enables teachers or school leaders to specify the applications that students can use on the device by “locking down” apps they don't want students to access.

That enables educators in schools serving a broad range of grade levels to customize each user's experience based on

age-appropriateness—so the apps the third graders would have access to on the device might be different than the ones the eighth graders could access, for instance.

What's more, the Kineo can only access websites that are pre-programmed by an administrator or teacher, and its messaging capabilities have been disabled to make sure students use it for learning, not texting.



“A teacher can have full confidence that when her students are working on Kineos, they are on task and won't get into trouble,” said Brainchild President Jeff Cameron, who introduced the product at the Florida Educational Technology Conference (FETC) in Orlando Feb. 1.

Cameron's company has more than 15 years of experience in building handheld devices for education.

Introduced in 1995, Brainchild's first product, the PLS-1000, ran on one of the first operating systems designed for a handheld computer. A decade later, the company's Study Buddy—with a color screen, stereo sound, and multimedia lessons—replaced the PLS-1000, but it was still just an offline practice device.

With the Kineo, students can learn and practice their math and reading skills either offline or online using Brainchild's Achiever! assessment system. Students' offline results can be synched with the server-based Achiever! software through a technology that Brainchild calls GlobalSYNCH, so educators can track their students' progress toward mastery of state standards.

Besides the Achiever! application, the Kineo includes eReader software, a web browser, and an MP4 video player. Teachers or administrators can add other Android-based applications to the device, but students can't add software themselves.

The Kineo features a 7-inch touchscreen display, an 800 MHz dual-core processor, and an SD card slot for up to 32 gigabytes of memory. It also includes a USB port and an HDMI port for connecting the tablet to a projector or interactive whiteboard.

Students at several schools in Naples, Fla., tested the Kineo before its official launch at FETC.

“The Kineo ... is like a portable textbook with study guides, calculators, [and] movies that is handy and portable, that you can pretty much bring anywhere instead of using textbooks and big bulky computers,” said Callie Lawfer, a student at Manatee Middle School. “I have a lot of trouble in math, and this device is just so helpful with that, because it has study guides and it lets me just practice all the things that I need.” **eSN**

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Security checkpoint

Social media monitoring services stir debate

Software aims to keep kids safe online, but children might resent involvement by parents

Laura Devaney
Managing Editor

As cyber bullying and inappropriate online behavior become commonplace, some companies are offering services that alert parents when their children are at risk or are misbehaving on a social network. Critics say the services amount to spying, but supporters say they open lines of communication and help children understand what is, and is not, acceptable online.

The services typically work like this: A parent opens a Facebook account and runs the monitoring service as an application. Once the parent and child are “friends” on Facebook, the parent invites the child to run the monitoring service as an application on the child’s own Facebook account.

When the child accepts the application, the parent is notified and is able to view his or her child’s Facebook activities only when the service detects pre-selected words or phrases that the parent deems worrisome or inappropriate. Some services also send notifications when children establish new friendships on Facebook, or when their children are tagged in photos on the site.

Company representatives say the services are necessary even if a parent and child are “friends” on a social networking site, because sites such as Facebook let users choose how much personal information—including wall posts and photos—their different friends can see. These monitoring services notify parents regardless of the parent’s permission status.

Chicago-based TrueCare has introduced one such social media monitoring service. Parents are notified with real-time alerts whenever questionable content is found on a child’s social networking profile. TrueCare sends an eMail message with the full content and context of the post, along with a link to the page.

The \$9.99-a-month service will search a child’s social media accounts, including posts, photo captions, and friends’ posts, for more than 500 keywords from categories such as bullying, suicide, and drugs. It also includes an online reference dictionary of slang and acronyms.

“These problems, whether they be cyber bullying, damaged reputations, or online predators, are real issues that our kids deal with,” said David Barker, product manager for TrueCare. “Parents, schools, and teachers lack the tools, and perhaps the resources, to help kids protect themselves.”

And as more news headlines feature reports of cyber bullying among students of all ages, parents and teachers might need to play a more active role in their children’s social networking practices.

“It’s unfortunate that over the last year in particular, we see more and more of these stories where kids are just being really nasty to one another online,” Barker said. “We definitely think there’s a need right now, for parents and teachers.”

TrueCare helps create a dialogue between schools, parents, and children, so they all can work together and send the same message on creating safe social networking habits, he said.

“We don’t want to take this technology away from kids, because this is the way they live, communicate, and exchange information,” Barker said. “We need to find a way to educate them on the best way to go about using social networks.”

Part of that education should include how online communication differs from face-to-face communication, he said.

Barker and his team are visiting schools and talking with administrators and teachers about TrueCare in an attempt to increase parental awareness about their children’s online and social networking behavior.



Experts say there’s a delicate balance between kids’ online privacy and safety.

Barker said he hopes to get teacher feedback on how TrueCare can help educators communicate with their students and make social networks a safer environment.

Another service, GoGoStat Parental Guidance from Schakra, runs as an application on a child’s Facebook page. Parents and children define rules and criteria to be monitored on Facebook and then exchange a security code offline to ensure that only parents can monitor the child’s Facebook account. The cloud-based service is free.

Once these steps are completed, Parental Guidance notifies parents about potentially harmful details in their children’s profiles, such as exposed contact information that might lead to unsafe situations. Parents receive alerts if established rules are violated, inappropriate text is posted, new friends are made, and when photos of their children are uploaded. The Parental Notification database includes acronyms, curse words, and slang terms.

Ron Stevenson, a product manager at Schakra, said the company envisions GoGoStat Parental Guidance as a way for parents and teachers to work together.

“With cyber bullying, most parents think their child is the victim, and they don’t always think their child might be the [perpetrator],” Stevenson said. “When parents see these notifications pop up, they can tell their child’s teacher that they keep seeing certain names or things come up” and can ask the teacher if their child is having problems with people in school or is causing problems for other students.

“The relationship between parents and teens as the teens get older is interesting,” Stevenson said. “What boundaries does the

teen have? Most don’t like it when their parents want to ‘friend’ them and look over their shoulder.”

But Stevenson said children are more likely to accept a monitoring service if they know parents are only notified when pre-selected or flagged language appears.

Some parents might be tempted to block social networking sites from home computers or networks. This, Stevenson said, does not educate children about appropriate online behavior, and it doesn’t keep them from accessing those sites in other places.

Informed parenting versus snooping

Lori Getz, founder of Cyber Education Consultants, said there exists a delicate balance between children’s online privacy and their safety, and open discussions about social networking can help children remain safe.

“Setting expectations by maintaining a presence while respecting boundaries will help guide children to making the right decisions about their social networking behavior,” she said.

Children are likely to be more receptive to the application if they know parents aren’t standing over their shoulders reading every social networking communication.

“We don’t want this to be used as spyware,” she said. “The child has to know the application is running on their social networking site and has to grant permission.”

“It’s a tool that will help parents engage their children and be more involved” in their children’s online lives, Barker said. “Parents aren’t reading every post; they’re only alerted to what’s harmful, and they have the opportunity to start a dialogue if they do see things that are inappropriate.”

Barker said parents who snoop in children’s computers and on their social networking profiles have a harder time bringing up worrisome material, because the parent first must explain why he or she snooped and how the information was discovered.

While acknowledging that parents want to protect children from harm online and off, “employing social network monitoring

services to monitor your son or daughter’s Facebook account is misguided for several reasons,” wrote Christine Greenhow, an assistant professor in the University of Maryland’s College of Education and College of Information Studies, in an eMail message to *eSchool News*.

“First, while it’s true that young people face risks online, these are often the same risks that they face offline—bullying, encountering problematic content, sexual solicitation—and despite publicity surrounding unfortunate incidents, the majority of social networking teens do not experience these harmful behaviors,” she said.

Some parents might not realize how personal their child’s Facebook account is and how highly it is valued.

“Parents might cringe at the thought of installing hidden cameras in their child’s bedroom, school cafeteria, or friend’s house or eavesdropping on a cell-phone conversation, but this is, in a sense, what such services advocate,” Greenhow said. “A better solution is education, not infiltration.”

Greenhow said using such services could be “potentially harmful to effective parenting practices, such as establishing trust, discussing responsible, ethical online and offline practices, and educating one’s children on potentially risky behaviors.”

She suggested parents become familiar with social networking websites and open their own accounts to gain a sense of how the sites work and what privacy settings are available.

Parents might be pleasantly surprised by their children’s behavior while on social networking websites, she said.

“In my research with high school students, I’ve found that high school social networkers rarely friend people they don’t already know or who do not come recommended through their existing network,” Greenhow said. “I’ve also found that young people’s social networking practices can have positive effects on their relationships. ... Over time, we might find that such positive effects on their relationships may benefit students’ sense of social belonging and, ultimately, their success in school.”

GoGoStat’s Stevenson said the service is designed for kids ages 12-16, “where parents still have some ability to influence behavior, provide some guidance, and where hopefully some trust still exists between kids and their parents.”

And it might be more alarming if parents do not want to be involved in their children’s social networking use, he added.

But Greenhow said too much monitoring could have the opposite impact on a parent’s relationship with his or her children.

“My concern is that social network monitoring services could short-change the parent-child (and the teacher-student) relationships, shut down these educational conversations, and move teenagers from sharing to silence, which is something that no parent, educator, citizen—none of us—wants.”

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Forum explores how to spur school innovation

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

Innovation was a key theme of President Obama's State of the Union address on Jan. 25, and it also was the theme of a recent forum in Washington, D.C., that explored how policy makers and education leaders can encourage more innovation in the nation's schools.

Hosted by the Aspen Institute, the Education Innovation Forum kicked off Jan. 20 with Education Secretary Arne Duncan calling on states to implement the Common Core standards and integrate more technology into classrooms.

"We're nowhere near where we need to be as a country," Duncan said. "The brainpower here, the innovation, the creativity [can help us] get not just incremental change, but ... dramatically better outcomes for young people."

Chinese President Hu Jintao's recent visit to the United States raises questions about U.S. competitiveness in the global economy, and Duncan listed several facts that "compel us to act differently."

For one thing, the high school dropout rate in the U.S. is around 25 percent, which translates into about a million students every year. "That's economically unsustainable [and] morally unacceptable," Duncan said. "There are no good jobs out there in a globally competitive economy for high school dropouts."

He also cited the mediocre performance of U.S. students on a recent international exam, as well as the nation's college attainment rate.

"A generation ago we led the world in college graduation rates, [and now] we've flat-lined," he said. "While we've stagnated, nine other countries have passed us by. They're out-educating us, they're out-investing, they're out-innovating, and they're going to ... continue to out-compete us."

Duncan said common standards are necessary to accurately compare schools across the nation.

"We haven't had a common yardstick. ... As a country we've been very loose with this—50 different standards, 50 different goal posts, every state with [its] own measuring stick," Duncan said. "I think that lack of transparency has led to the acceptance of the status quo that is fundamentally harmful to children, harmful to states, and ultimately harmful to the country."

He said common standards are the most critical factor for school innovation.

"I think that's the game changer. I think when the history of education is written, this is going to be a big piece of the story. With a common measuring stick ... we'll be able to look across the country to see who's moving the needle, and then take that to scale very rapidly," Duncan said.

Technology also holds great potential for innovation in education, Duncan said—although he noted that technology has yet to transform education like it has other sectors.

"If we're not using technology to engage students' learning, I think we're missing the boat now," Duncan said, adding that by making assessments digital, schools can help teachers improve as well.

"Every single high-performing school I've visited uses data and formative assessment to drive instruction," he said, explaining how technology can help drive school innovation. "This is taking great teachers and taking their craft to a different level, as they're finally able to understand what students are actually comprehending, how to better differentiate instruction, how to do small groups. Great teachers live for this kind of feedback, and they've just never gotten it before."

Duncan acknowledged that the federal Education Department (ED) has been part of the problem by not doing enough to seed

school innovation. For years, ED has administered most of its grants by formula, he explained, adding: "Everybody got their tiny slice of the pie, and we perpetuated the status quo."

Instead, ED "should be in the business of innovation," he said. "We need to be in the business of trying to fund fundamental breakthroughs."

That's what new competitive grant projects such as Investing in Innovation (i3) and Promise Neighborhoods have been about, he said: funding public-private partnerships designed to change the status quo.

Stressing the importance of such public-private partnerships, Duncan called on companies to step up and partner with school districts to help spur innovation in education.

"I'm convinced the answers are out there," he said. "If we can just take to scale what we know is working, millions more children would benefit."

In a separate panel discussion later in the day, John Katzman, chief executive officer of 2tor Inc., took issue with the idea of finding what works and replicating it everywhere.

"We don't do that in any other sector," he said. "We think in terms of, let's create a system that evolves."

Marguerite Kling, a social studies teacher at Nature Coast Technical High School in Brooksville, Fla., revealed how her students define innovation in education: as student-centered learning. One of Kling's former students said the way she was taught in most of her high school classes "did not adequately prepare me for college," because she never learned how to take ownership of her own learning.

Paul Pastorek, superintendent of education for the state of Louisiana, said policy makers often think of school innovation in terms of classrooms, when they should

be thinking in terms of entire systems.

Too often, he said, systems get in the way of school innovation. He explained that administrators from many of the top-achieving high-poverty schools in his state have told him their key to success is that they "fly under the radar"—that is, they don't listen to what the district says and do their own thing instead.

Katzman agreed that school districts weren't designed to be innovative; they have too many competing factions, all with different agendas. The challenge, he said, is: "How do you subvert the school district model in sort of subtle ways" to foster innovation in education?

Jean Desravines, CEO of New Leaders for New Schools, said policy makers need to create incentives for entire systems to change, such as what the federal Race to the Top grant program has done for states.

Pastorek said he often hears from many school leaders that they don't have time to be innovative, because they're too busy focusing on getting students to pass high-stakes tests.

"I do think testing can stifle innovation in the classroom," he said, if it's approached from a position of fear. But if teachers and school leaders focus on rigorous teaching, and on using data to help them improve, then "the testing should take care of itself."

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Broadband...

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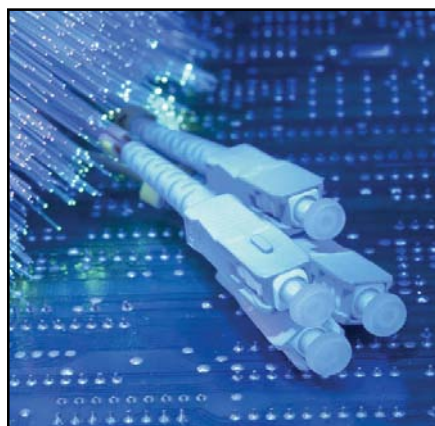
And the survey results are telling: Students and teachers need fast, reliable broadband access as part of a 21st-century education.

"The [e-Rate] is a victim of its own success," said John Harrington, CEO of e-Rate consulting firm Funds For Learning.

"For years we've talked about integrating technology" in schools, Harrington said, and now more teachers have access to streaming video and other technologies that can put a strain on school networks. "What you multiply that across a school district, the demands on the broadband multiply significantly. ... People want it, they need it, they're counting on it, and the demand is blowing up. The demand for broadband access is pushing up against the limits of the e-Rate program."

Slightly more than half (56 percent) of survey respondents said they plan to implement or expand their use of digital textbooks in the next two to three years, and 45 percent said they hope to implement or expand their use of handheld devices for educational purposes.

As young children today—who already are used to constant technology access—enter school, ed-tech leaders will have to find solutions to provide access to the tech-



Schools' broadband needs have risen.

nology tools that children and their parents desire, Harrington said.

"It's going to be crucial for the schools to capitalize on the technology and really meet the expectations of students, parents, and teachers," he said. "As it stands right now, the e-Rate is not going to be enough to cover it. Some of that is going to take schools reprioritizing and reshuffling some of these dollars."

Citing the results indicating that more than half of respondents plan to implement digital textbooks in the near future, Harrington said some schools might want to redirect their textbook money, freed up in the move toward digital textbooks, to

augment their broadband access.

"It's not to say that digital text is the answer to everything, [but] we need to maintain basics and find ways to make sure there's access to these tools and services," he said.

Funding remains a key concern, with 39 percent of respondents reporting that cost of service is a barrier when it comes to meeting their internet needs, and 27 percent reporting that cost of installation is a barrier.

The survey also asked school and library respondents to rank the three technology and infrastructure areas in which their institutions could most benefit from improvement over the next two years.

Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed said computers and desktop equipment needed the most immediate improvement, and 42 percent chose server hardware, operating systems, and storage solutions. Professional development and tech support remain a large need as well, with 38 percent of respondents saying their staff needs more training and support. Twenty-eight percent said their network equipment needs updating.

Schools use eMail applications the most, with 98 percent reporting regular use of eMail, and 69 percent of schools surveyed consider it the most essential technology tool. Libraries responding to the survey indicated that online reference materials are their most used application (86 percent) and the most essential (62 percent).

The Obama administration's efforts to expand broadband access in schools and communities are "dead on," Harrington said. "We have to push that deeper into our communities. I think you'll see districts becoming more intelligent and sophisticated in [deploying] technology and services that help stretch bandwidth further."

The FCC's survey examines the current state of the federal \$2.25 billion-a-year e-Rate program, and how it has contributed to broadband use among schools and libraries. It was conducted by Harris Interactive from February to April 2010.

The Universal Service Administrative Co., the agency that administers the e-Rate, gave Harris Interactive a list of all 22,819 e-Rate recipients from the 2008 funding year. Harris Interactive surveyed 5,000 of those recipients and received completed surveys from 1,060 recipients.

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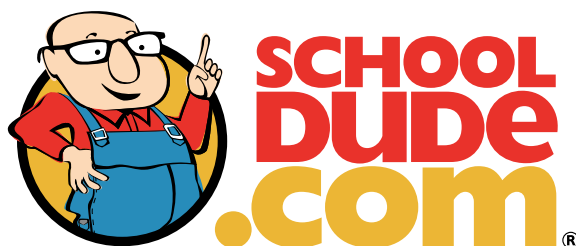


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said. “We are part of the American family.” Breaking with tradition, members of Congress adopted a bipartisan seating arrangement that saw many political adversaries sitting shoulder-to-shoulder in an unusual demonstration of unity.

But the spirit of compromise might be short-lived once lawmakers get down to business this spring, as there are stark differences in how each political party views the solutions to the nation’s challenges—which include steep budget deficits, aging infrastructure, stagnant academic achievement, and competition from other nations for 21st-century jobs.

How these differences play out will have important implications for U.S. schools and colleges, as well as their students.

Recognizing the need to scale back government spending, Obama called for a five-year freeze on domestic discretionary spending. But he wants to exempt spending on education and research from this freeze.

“I recognize that some in this chamber have already proposed deeper cuts, and I’m willing to eliminate whatever we can honestly afford to do without,” he said. “But ... cutting the deficit by gutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine. It may feel like you’re flying high at first, but it won’t take long before you’ll feel the impact.”

Repeating a line from a speech he gave at Forsyth Technical Community College last month, the president called this “our generation’s Sputnik moment.” He noted that China now boasts the world’s fastest

computer, and South Koreans have faster internet access than Americans.

To compete in the new global economy, “we need to out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world,” Obama said. “The first step in winning the future is encouraging American innovation.”

He said he would propose a budget for fiscal year 2012 that invests more money in biomedical research, information technology, and clean energy technology—“an investment that will strengthen our security, protect our planet, and create countless new jobs for our people,” he said.

On education, the president will ask Congress to extend a \$10,000 college tax credit and pay for thousands of new science and math teachers as part of a broad rewrite of the nation’s education system.

The tax break for students originally was included in the economic stimulus bill passed shortly after Obama took office. In his State of the Union address, Obama reiterated his call for Congress to make it permanent.

Obama also called for 100,000 more science and technology teachers by the end of the decade. And he wants Congress to replace the No Child Left Behind law with new measures giving more flexibility to schools.

The president asked for more federal investment in infrastructure as well, saying: “Within the next five years, we will make it possible for business to deploy the next generation of high-speed wireless coverage to 98 percent of all Americans.”

“This isn’t just about a faster internet and fewer dropped calls,” he continued. “It’s about connecting every part of America to the digital age. ... It’s about a firefighter who can download the design of

a burning building onto a handheld device, a student who can take classes with a digital textbook, or a patient who can have face-to-face video chats with her doctor.”

To help pay for these initiatives, Obama wants to eliminate billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies to oil companies, get rid of corporate tax loopholes that allow some companies to skate by



Obama, GOP at odds over spending.

without paying U.S. taxes, and roll back the Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans.

“Before we take money away from our schools, or scholarships away from our students, we should ask millionaires to give up their tax break,” the president said. “It’s not a matter of punishing their success; it’s about promoting America’s success.”

Some of Obama’s proposals will face opposition from members of his own party.

Touting the success of his administration’s Race to the Top (RtT) program in spurring widespread education reforms in states across the nation, Obama said RtT “should be the approach we follow this year as we replace No Child Left Behind with a law that is more flexible and focused on what’s best for our kids.”

That might not resonate with some Democrats, who hear from school leaders they are concerned that a shift from formula-based funding to more competitive grant programs will leave many poorer school districts behind.

But it’s the Republicans now controlling the House of Representatives who present the biggest roadblock to Obama’s proposals.

“We face a crushing burden of debt,” said Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan in the official Republican response to Obama’s State of the Union speech. “The debt will soon eclipse our entire economy and grow to catastrophic levels in the years ahead.”

House Republicans have passed a resolution setting appropriations for the rest of the year at 2008 pre-recession levels, as part of a pledge to cut \$100 billion from the budgets of domestic U.S. government agencies.

The vote is largely symbolic, because the actual cuts would have to be made in appropriations bills that would have to clear the Senate, where Democrats still hold a majority. However, it sets up a showdown in which members of both parties will have to convene to hammer out a compromise—and education might not be spared from the cuts that result.

“There are no sacred cows,” said newly appointed House Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers, R-Ky.

Any cuts to federal spending on education or infrastructure would come at a particularly bad time for local communities, many of which already face the prospect of steep cuts in state funding.

A report by the National Conference of State Legislatures, released in December says the fiscal crisis reshaping the level of services that government can deliver is likely to last at least another three years for many states.

So far, budget deficits are anticipated for at least 15 states, the report said. Among the hardest-hit states are California, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Texas.

In releasing his latest budget proposal, California Gov. Jerry Brown told his state’s lawmakers that “the year ahead will demand courage and sacrifice” as the state faces a deficit projected to hit \$25.4 billion over the next 18 months. His proposal combines spending cuts to Medi-Cal, in-home services for the elderly, and higher education with a five-year extension of income, sales, and vehicle taxes.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo demanded shutting 20 percent of state agencies as part of “radical reform” to pull his state out of its fiscal crisis. And Gov. Chris Christie in New Jersey skipped a \$3.1 billion payment to the state’s pension system in a push to cut benefits for public workers, while proposing higher employee contributions and a boost in the retirement age from 62 to 65.

Public education in Texas, meanwhile, is facing billions of dollars in proposed budget cuts that would include slashing arts education, pre-kindergarten programs, and teacher incentive pay as lawmakers take on a massive deficit with the promise of no new taxes.

Texas lawmakers got their first glimpse of what the next state budget might look like on Jan. 18, including a \$5 billion cut to public schools, as Republican Gov. Rick Perry and his supporters were dancing at an inaugural celebration.

Texas is facing a \$15 billion revenue shortfall, and few corners of state government were spared in the draft proposal for the next two years. The Texas Constitution requires a balanced budget, and Republican leaders have vowed not to raise taxes.

Perry’s budget proposal would shutter four community colleges and generally eliminate financial aid for incoming freshmen and new students. The Texas Grants scholarship program would drop by more than 70,000 students over the next two years.

“It’s a catastrophe. No financial aid for kids to go to college. No pre-kindergarten for kids to learn their numbers and their letters. Health and human services slashed,” said Rep. Pete Gallego, D-Alpine. “No Texan can be proud of this.” **eSN**

Sens. pledge bipartisan effort to revamp NCLB

Less than a day after President Obama asked Congress to overhaul No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in his Jan. 25 State of the Union address, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators said they would work together to revamp the nation’s education law—and Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, said he hopes to have a bill on Obama’s desk by the end of the summer.

“Last night, President Obama clearly stated his desire to help education and his desire to fix No Child Left Behind,” Education Secretary Arne Duncan told reporters during a Jan. 26 phone conference. “No one likes how No Child Left Behind labels schools as failures even when they are making significant gains.”

Duncan was joined on the call by Harkin, who is chairman of the Senate education committee; Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., ranking minority member of the committee; Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M.; and Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

In overhauling NCLB, Duncan said the focus should be on rewarding schools that have made large improvements rather than penalizing them for still not reaching a higher standard.

Alexander, himself a former education secretary under President George H.W. Bush, said the problem lies with imposing federal regulations instead of

allowing states to control their own education systems.

“Federal doesn’t equal national. For example, I believe in national standards on education, but I don’t believe Washington ought to set them,” he said, adding that Duncan has worked hard to encourage states to create their own common standards. “I don’t want us to become a national school board.”

Duncan said NCLB is far too rigid to allow states to enact their own policies.

“Washington shouldn’t provide one-size-fits-all mandates. We need a law that provides most schools with flexibility to decide how to improve and accelerate student achievement,” he said.

Without this flexibility, many school stakeholders say, too many schools are left facing sanctions for not reaching standards that they don’t have the resources to reach in the first place.

“I think what No Child Left Behind got wrong was [that] it was very tight on how you got there, but very loose on the goals,” said Duncan, who added that it should be the other way around.

All spoke of a bipartisan effort to improve the education law.

“I’m pleased with how much collaborative effort has already gone into this, and how much people seem to be together on this,” Enzi said. **eSN**

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Keeping students on a path to graduation

Early intervention and credit recovery programs are helping at-risk students achieve success

“College-ready” and “career-ready” are major buzzwords in the educational field these days, as President Obama’s push to increase graduation rates gains traction. Educators have spent a great deal of time and energy deciphering what it means to make students college- and career-ready—but a significant portion of the conversation has focused on finding ways to keep kids in school in the first place.

Early intervention and credit recovery programs can pave the way for students to remain on the road to graduation, and a growing number of school systems are turning to online options for delivering these services.

“My members have been having conversations about the fact that, before we can talk about kids being college- and career-ready, we have to reduce dropout rates [and] increase our graduation rates,” says Brenda Welburn, executive director of the National Association of State Boards of Education. “Many kids don’t find school relevant, especially as they get older.”

The challenge, she says, is not just to give lip service to the need for relevance, but to make the connection real for today’s learners between the outside world and that of school.

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Educators are determined to find that relevance by giving students more of the skills they'll need to succeed in a globally competitive economy—the so-called “21st-century skills” such as problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration—in addition to traditional skills such as reading and writing.

In the 2010 Speak Up survey from Project Tomorrow, a national survey of the attitudes and opinions of students, parents, teachers, and administrators toward education and technology, 38 percent of the nearly 15,000 K-12 school leaders who responded said that “integrating 21st-century skills into the curriculum” was the best way to improve student outcomes, particularly in terms of increasing college and career readiness. This was the second most popular response to the question, following 49 percent of administrators who believed the best way to improve student outcomes was by enhancing teacher effectiveness through professional development or professional learning communities.

Going hand-in-hand with developing students' 21st-century skills and making school relevant for today's learners is keeping them engaged in their education.

Today's students have gotten used to being “plugged in” and connected with technology nearly constantly when they are outside of school, whether through PCs and laptops, or gaming systems like the Nintendo DS or the Wii, or through phones and tablet computers—and their interest in school often lags when technology is not integrated into instruction.

“These kids matured in a digital world. They love technology, they have multiple devices that they manipulate seamlessly outside of school, but when they come to the classroom they're being asked to leave those devices at the door,” says Melanie Pritchett, director of education policy for CompassLearning.

The 2010 Speak Up survey, in fact, found that just one-third of high school students agreed they are interested in what they're learning in school. Forty-seven percent said they wished their classes were more interesting, and just 27 percent said they were motivated to do well in school because they liked school.

These findings make it clear that engagement is a key factor in keeping kids in school: Unless students are engaged, they have nothing keeping them anchored in their education, because too many kids today don't see school as meeting their needs, explains Julie Evans, chief executive officer of Project Tomorrow.

Once students begin heading down the path of failure—whether it's because they don't believe school is relevant to them, or they've become bored, or they didn't understand the material—it can be difficult to reroute them and get them engaged again. And because course failure often leads to delinquency or other school failures, this can begin a trend that leads to dropping out of school.

When a student drops out, he or she has been failed by the education system; on the other hand, high school dropouts cost their school districts millions of dollars each year—and they cost society even more when you consider the amount of lost productivity and potential revenue they represent.

Fortunately, a number of programs exist that can intervene with students early on, or help them make up enough course credits to keep them on a path to graduation. In this special report, we'll look at how some K-12 districts are solving this challenge in their own schools.

Online programs: A departure from what wasn't working before

Aventa Learning by K12 is an online credit recovery program designed to help students earn course credit toward high school graduation. The credit recovery



Online credit recovery lets students retake only those portions of a course they didn't understand.

courses are designed and created for students who have attempted yet failed to pass particular courses.

Aventa says it has seen a significant increase in the demand for online credit recovery programs over the past few years. This increase is being driven by a couple of factors, the company says.

For one thing, the old model for reaching at-risk students—providing summer school programs or after-school help, for example—wasn't working particularly well. Because the traditional classroom environment wasn't successful for the student the first time around, there's a good chance these methods won't work, either. Additionally, there's a certain stigma associated with attending a credit recovery class.

What's more, many students feel lost in overcrowded classrooms that might be moving at too fast a pace, or in the chaotic environment of large high schools. Because many students fail for contextual, rather than academic, reasons, Aventa says its credit recovery courses eliminate this negative influence on learning by delivering more personalized instruction in a quiet computer lab or library, or with headphones at a computer in the back of a classroom.

“A lot of district officials think this at-risk population of students needs a face-to-face, high-touch, structured environment,” says Greg Levin, vice president of

school services at K12 Inc. “But we're finding that that environment is part of what has led to their being in this situation in the first place. Giving them an environment where they can create their own schedule, when they're ready to learn, in some cases had kids complete their courses in a week or two, because they're engaged and their confidence is built from the first problem.”

There is also a significant cost associated with summer school and other traditional credit recovery programs. “That, coupled with the budget crisis that is hurting every state at every level, and that is trickling down to the education budget, makes the traditional model one which ... wasn't providing the results that districts want,” says Levin.

When a student takes Aventa's online credit recovery classes, he or she is likely going to a computer lab or working on the class at home, rather than in a credit recovery class. “And chances are, you might be sitting next to an AP student who is taking Mandarin, so there's not as much stigma,” says Levin.

Just because these students have previously failed the course they are retaking doesn't mean they didn't master at least some of the content. The Aventa program allows students to take an assessment to determine where their understanding of a particular topic

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How four districts have had success with credit recovery

Although the Spring Branch Independent School District in Houston, Texas, has a strong early intervention program that is successful in keeping more kids from failing classes, the district still uses credit recovery as an element in its overall student graduation plans.

Students who have failed a course may take credit recovery with Aventa's online courses, or they may be required to retake a class in the traditional way. The choice is sometimes up to the student, but the teacher, the counselor, and the parents all have a voice in the decision. If a student simply missed too much of the course, he or she likely will be required to retake it in a traditional setting. But other students can benefit greatly from online credit recovery, says Sheri Alford, director of educational technology for Spring Branch ISD.

"We like it because it's a continuous enrollment," says Alford; students can begin taking the online course as soon as they're in trouble.

The district gives each student in an online credit recovery course a liaison—a teacher who can help when that student hits a snag. "The liaison is also the person who says, 'I notice you didn't log in yesterday,' or, 'You were only online for so long, and you're not progressing.' So the liaison can provide one-to-one help," Alford says.

The liaison also sets up tutorials. For example, if the liaison is an English teacher and the student is struggling with a certain portion of an online math course, the liaison can set up a tutorial with a math teacher.

Alford says Aventa is far superior to a prior credit recovery program the district was using. That program, from another vendor, was not as rigorous, and students had figured out how to manipulate it without actually learning anything.

The Tucson Unified School District in Arizona is another district that is offering online credit recovery to students. If a student is a junior or senior, has failed a class, and needs those credits to graduate, the student is eligible to take an online credit recovery course free of charge.

Stuart Baker, Tucson USD's coordinator for online learning, likes the Aventa program because the focus is on the skills a student learns, not on the amount of time he or she spends on the class. Additionally, Baker says, the speed at which a student learns is entirely up to the student, not up to the online class.

"For a regular comprehensive high school trying to set up something based on how slow or fast kids learn, it would be a nightmare. Semesters would have to begin and end at all different times; it just can't work," Baker says. "But in an online situation, it's much easier to handle" this kind of personalization.

Tucson USD requires students to log in for at least five hours per week, per class. Students have two months to get through a credit recovery class, though some get through the courses much faster.

Baker points out that the personnel costs don't go down significantly with online courses, because you still need teachers, administrators, and counselors involved. But when you balance those costs against the cost of a senior taking up a seat in algebra that a freshman could take in the fall, then online credit recovery often becomes worth it.

"When you're talking about credit recovery and today's student, who wants information in a variety of different ways, the more flexible you can be, the better," Baker says.

Baker says there has been a real revolution in how colleges are delivering classes, offering more flexi-



Spring Branch ISD in Houston, Texas, gives each student in an online credit recovery course a liaison—a teacher who can help when that student hits a snag.

ble schedules with evening classes, online classes, and even weekend classes.

"High school hasn't really caught up with that idea," he says. "Part of that is, what do you do with a 14-year-old kid who doesn't have to go to school all day? There remains the idea of schools being able to watch the kid. Still, we're stuck with the ideal of how we've done schools for the last 100 years. We need to start redefining how we present information, how we can draw on a variety of sources."

John Glenewinkel, superintendent of the East Valley School District in Spokane, Wash., seems to have embraced the idea of flexibility in moving more students toward graduation. He has put a number of programs into place to serve students whom he calls "truly displaced and nontraditional learners."

For example, the district has recently begun working with the Hutterite community. The Hutterites are very self-sufficient and community-oriented, and they are committed to education, but their children become adults at about age 15, and they have not had much of a desire or a need for a high school education. The community has begun to recognize that their children need more educational opportunities—yet their culture does not support their children being integrated into high schools, which means that very few Hutterite children in the area ever earn a high school diploma.

Working with the community, the East Valley School District pays for a portion of the salary of a high school teacher for the Hutterite community (the Hutterites pay for the other part). The Hutterites do have a school building equipped with computers, and high school students can go to that building, where they can take online learning classes. "By using our shared teacher, online learning, and our assessments and curricula, we are basically operating a K12 school there. And students are actually graduating," says Glenewinkel.

Glenewinkel admits there is still much to be done around the effort. "One of the things we really need

to be able to do is increase the career and technical education programs, particularly around animal science and agriculture. We're striving to do that while at the same time working to deliver the computer-based instruction. So it's a work in progress, but everyone appears to be very pleased."

Another program from the East Valley School District is a blended learning program with the Squaxin Indian nation. "We have a teacher, and we're working with students who have been displaced from school because their culture doesn't support traditional high school," Glenewinkel says.

The Squaxin have a long history of fishing and being connected to the land, so they need flexibility to engage in these activities. By giving them a chance to work out of the tribal center via distance learning, Glenewinkel has provided a program for students who might have started high school but found that the cultural differences were too vast to be overcome. "We monitor the program to make sure that the learning is at the right level, and we can modify the learning to make it culturally relevant," he says.

Another program works during an unusual mid-winter break that comes in February. During the week off, students who are struggling in a class or who have failed a class can come to school for an intensive program to make up credits. The program is personalized for each student; a plan is put together, a teacher is made available, and the student can work online to accomplish what he or she needs to make up the credits.

"They have a very specific learning plan," Glenewinkel said of program participants. "We don't want them to go through this week and not get it done. It's the completion of the plan we're aiming for, whether they finish it in the week, or complete most of it during the week and then finish through the following weeks."

Glenewinkel also has implemented a system whereby the principal and counselors of each school

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broke down; they are not required to retake the entire class, but only those portions in which they failed to demonstrate mastery of the subject, which means they can complete the course more quickly—without getting bored or turned off because they are repeating material they already know.

Aventa credit recovery courses also are designed with simpler, more accessible reading levels to aid in students' learning and mastery of the material. If Algebra I is considered a ninth-grade course, then the reading level for the Aventa Algebra I course is at a seventh or eighth grade level, explains Levin.

Before each unit, vocabulary is pre-taught. Additionally, if a student is having trouble reading the material, he or she can choose text-to-speech audio.

Much of the content is taught through non-textual activities, such as games and drag-and-drop activities. "We want to grab a student's attention through engagement. We want [the student] to be an active learner, so almost from the first page, there's some type of interactive activity for [students] to complete," Levin says.

All Aventa courses are delivered online, supported by a certified Aventa teacher and, in many cases, by an on-site mentor within the school itself. Additionally, an Aventa teacher helpline is available from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Eastern time. Courses can be taken from anywhere, at any time, as long as a student has internet access; giving students this kind of authority over their learning can be incredibly empowering and motivational, Aventa says.

Because there is such a large bank of questions connected to each course, a student can retake each assessment multiple times. If a student fails an assessment, he or she can go back through the course material related to that assessment and try again. Giving students multiple tries to pass reduces the possibility they will fail a credit recovery course.

CompassLearning is another company that provides online credit recovery programs. Students who are failing a course can receive course credit without repeating an entire year of school by working through the online courseware successfully.

When a student is working through a CompassLearning program and answering questions, the program doesn't just say, "That answer is incorrect," says the company's Pritchett. Instead, the program "takes [the student] through a critical mistakes framework, discusses why the answer was wrong, and helps guide the

Unless students are engaged, they have nothing keeping them anchored in their education, because too many kids today don't see school as meeting their needs, says Julie Evans, CEO of the nonprofit group Project Tomorrow.



student back toward the correct answer, reviewing content and giving hints on where [students] might look again in order to come to the correct response."

Products such as these can be used for credit recovery, but also for online tutoring or for creating individualized programs for students. "Schools are using it when they do their benchmark assessments, and if they find students are having trouble with particular concepts, they can provide tutorials and pull together individualized learning paths," Pritchett says.

Other innovative approaches to keeping students on track

Such frequent benchmark assessments are important for keeping students on the path to graduation.

The Spring Branch Independent School District in Houston, Texas, implements Response to Intervention plans to keep students moving forward at an appropriate pace. Every six weeks or so, all students take benchmark exams in their classes. A school improvement specialist looks at the data and identifies students who are at risk of failing the class. Those students are put into smaller classes with a teacher who tutors them on the objectives that they missed. This intervention program

is designed to help students succeed by ensuring that they get back on track before they fall too far behind.

Another program at Spring Branch that aims to keep students engaged is the district's 21st-century learning initiative. This program is designed to equip every classroom with relevant technology, based on its needs and the content being taught in that class. For example, an Xbox 360 Connect was put into gymnasiums for use during physical education.

"We look at the grade level, the content, and what each teacher needs to engage students in the curriculum and to keep kids from needing this intervention or credit recovery," says Sheri Alford, director of educational technology for Spring Branch ISD.

Alford emphasizes that all decisions about what technology is needed in each classroom are made in conjunction with content directors. The project also includes a redesign of the curriculum so that teachers incorporate the technology into what students are learning in ways that make sense, rather than having the teachers try to slot the technology into their existing classroom practices or schedule.

For its part, the National Association of State Boards of Education is building two projects designed to keep students engaged and on the road to graduation.

NASBE noticed that, statistically speaking, students in the Junior ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corp) had better attendance rates and participation in school, as well as higher graduation rates, and they seemed more ready for life after high school. So the organization has teamed up with the U.S. Army to create a brand-new high school program, called Project PASS (Partnership for All Student Success).

Project PASS combines tutoring, mentoring, summer school programs, and older students working with younger students to keep them on track. The program is all about leadership and citizenship, and it focuses on topics such as how to engage with adults and how to be a part of a community. Program participants meet at certain assigned times during school, as well as in after-school programs.

"It's part of their structured schedule," explains Welburn. "It will also include summer programs."

Partners such as 100 Black Men of America and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America have signed on and are figuring out how they will work with Project PASS moving forward. Groups within the business community also are coming aboard by offering students sum-

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sit down with a list of all students and look at where each student should be at benchmark moments. For example, he says, if a student needs 24 credits to graduate, then students should have 12 credits at the end of their sophomore year. If a student doesn't have these 12 credits, the principal and counselors come up with any necessary interventions, either in class or online, to get that child back on track.

It's too early to see the results of these programs at East Valley, which have been rolled out slowly over the last two years, just yet. But Glenewinkel believes he will see graduation rates improve this year. Beyond graduation rates, he believes the programs are working, because the district has seen significant increases in the number of students wishing to take AP classes. "We're seeing this academic success carry over in some unexpected ways," he says.

Glenewinkel stresses that the district is "very, very

cognizant" of the need to make sure that what is provided to students is of high quality.

"We're not interested in just creating a credit mill," he says. "We could give a kid all the credits we wanted, but if [the student] didn't meet assessment mandates, [he or she] wouldn't graduate. We believe we're offering a high-quality program, as well as individualized programs students can tailor to their needs."

While East Valley is still waiting to see the results of its intervention programs, Chicago Public Schools has seen great success in helping students recover credits lost as a result of failing a class. Beginning with a small pilot program in 11 schools, the district offered the Aventa program to at-risk youth in 2008. By 2010, more than 3,500 students had enrolled in credit recovery courses. And in those courses, more than 80 percent of students passed.

This helped ensure graduation for more than 1,000 at-risk students in the spring of 2010, says Robin Gonzalez, manager of distance education for the district.

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mer jobs and showing them what types of careers are available to them.

A similar program, called the Junior Leadership Corp, has been created for middle school students as well, says Welburn.

"Students who drop out have usually already made that decision in middle school and are just waiting until they're old enough. So, we wanted to capture them at the middle school level," she explains.

The PASS program is brand new, but already Welburn is thrilled about the student response. "They're excited, they're volunteering in their communities," she says.

Project PASS will have its national launch on March 11. It is currently being implemented on a pilot basis at five schools in Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, and Kansas. After the national launch, NASBE will encourage other states to follow the model or to become PASS sites on their own.

No single solution is enough

Credit recovery programs such as those from Aventa and CompassLearning, and intervention programs such as those enacted at Spring Branch ISD and being put into place by NASBE, are useful in part because they can be implemented during the school year.

Summer school can be a challenge for schools to implement, not to mention unpopular from a student's standpoint.

"Trying to run a summer school class is difficult. You don't really know that you're going to be able to fill a class until the end of the semester. Or, you know that you have enough to fill the class, but you don't know how many students are actually going to take advantage of it," says Stuart Baker, the coordinator for online learning at Tucson Unified School District. "You don't know how many students are going to do it this summer rather than next, or whether they'll switch to a charter school. Parents are setting up their vacation plans, they've got their tickets and schedules locked in. From a student and parent's point of view, credit recovery online, during the school year, is more flexible."

Still, some believe that summer programs remain critical to today's youth and should not be ignored.

States and school systems are very concerned about their budgets, and many are deciding that summer school can be sacrificed—but that's not always a good answer, Welburn says: "If we're losing summer enrichment, summer learning, we're doing a disservice to kids. We know that kids in the lower income bracket have a higher percentage of learning loss during the summer months. If a little guy comes to elementary school already with a limited vocabulary because [he's] not using English at home, and then he loses a significant amount of learning over the summer months, that child could be two grades behind by the time the next school year begins."

Math is in particular need of summer enrichment programs, Welburn says.

"We do well with reading. We give kids summer reading lists, but we do nothing with math," she points out.

The bottom line is that, as with nearly every issue in the education field, there is no single answer to keeping students engaged, in school, and on the path to graduation. Rather, it is the schools that combine a variety of solutions—from early intervention and credit recovery, to strong summer enrichment programs and innovative whole-student approaches—that are most likely to bring the highest number of college- and career-ready students to the podium to receive their diplomas.

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Former First Lady Laura Bush announces new graduation initiative

Program seeks to put students on a path to graduation by focusing on the middle school years

From staff and wire reports

The George W. Bush Institute has introduced its second big education initiative, a program that seeks to improve graduation rates by focusing on middle schools.

Former first lady Laura Bush announced the initiative, called "Middle School Matters," at Stovall Middle School in the Aldine Independent School District on Feb. 9. She said research has shown that middle school—and sixth through eighth grade in particular—is a crucial time in determining future success.

"We know now from research that a lot of kids that drop out in high school really drop out in middle school. They just leave in high school," she said. "One of the goals will be making sure they are prepared for high school."

For the program, the institute has compiled research done by various institutions on what determines success in middle schools and plans to take that information and work with middle schools to implement new practices.

The program focuses on 11 elements for success, including school leadership, reading interventions, effective teachers, dropout prevention, and school, student, family, and community support.

The Bush Institute's research team has come up with specific measures that can be taken in the classroom to improve performance in all of these elements.

"Within each area, researchers are coming up with principles and practices to implement," said Kerri Briggs, the Bush Institute's director of education reform.

For example, the institute said, dropout preventions could include assigning adult advocates to meet regularly with students at risk of dropping out. Those advocates also could greet students as they arrive, meet with students to review grades and assignments, and regularly talk with the student's parents.

The research team is working to make sure all the components of the program are in place. They plan by the 2012-13 school year to implement the program in 10 to 15 schools. And then, making adjustments in the program from what they've learned, they will add more schools in the 2014-15 school year.

"We've got a lot of good feedback so far," Briggs said. "We think there's an appetite for this."

She said the program brings "an integrated, holistic approach," adding that many schools are facing a budget crunch and are mindful of costs.

"Middle school is such a time of transition," Briggs said. "Lots of things are going on with them. It's those middle school years that we think are foundational to success in high school."

The Alliance for Excellent Education, a policy institute, says nearly one-third of students—about 1.3 million each year—leave high school without a diploma.

Wanda Bamberg, superintendent of the Aldine school district, who helped develop the program, said she would like at least one of her middle schools to participate.

She said it would be a good opportunity for teach-



Former First Lady Laura Bush

ers and school officials to get guidance from researchers from around the country.

"They will actually have people come into the schools and work with staff, and that's an opportunity," she said. "When people are trying to improve, they really do value those opportunities."

Andrea Prejean, deputy director of education policy and practice for the National Education Association, a teachers' union with 3 million members, notes that there are many "outside fixer" groups focusing on education that incorporate research.

She said there is a lot of good research out there and that the key to interventions is making sure educators are part of the process.

"Certainly we welcome any group that wants to join us in making sure that every student has a great public school," she said.

Noting that there are no "quick fixes," she said it takes at least five years to determine whether an intervention has been effective.

The Bush Institute is part of the George W. Bush Presidential Center, which also will include a presidential library and is set to be completed in 2013 on the campus of Southern Methodist University.

The institute, which is already up and running, focuses on education reform, global health, human freedom, and economic growth.

Last year, the institute unveiled its first big education initiative, which focuses on improving the performance of school principals.

The institute's Alliance to Reform Education Leadership, or AREL, will consist of school districts, universities, and foundations offering educational programs to current and future school leaders.

Initial funding for the Bush Institute's middle school project comes from a \$500,000 donation from the Meadows Foundation.

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Panel: How to improve special education

Experts debate IDEA's success in helping students with disabilities

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

As the push for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act increases, leaders in the field of special education recently debated whether the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act should be reworked to further align with ESEA, and how else the law might be improved to better meet the needs of students with disabilities.

"The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has changed priorities for special-needs students. It's been credited with improving outcomes for students but criticized for generating bureaucracy and rules and regulations that some believe stand in the way of providing more effective services," said Darrell West, vice president and director of governance studies for the Brookings Institution. West moderated a Jan. 18 panel discussion on how to improve special ed.

Alexa Posny, assistant secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services with the U.S. Department of Education (ED), argued that IDEA has been very successful in meeting the needs of students with disabilities—and aligning it with ESEA would boost its strength even further.

Better alignment of IDEA and ESEA would allow policy makers to use the same definitions for what makes a highly effective teacher; use the same data-collection system for both general and special ed; coordinate initiatives within schools districts and education agencies; and concentrate on results rather than enforcement, she argued.

But others weren't so sure that aligning the laws' policies would have the best outcome.

"At first glance, the notion of blending these laws has an incredible intuitive appeal. I mean, it's the ultimate goal—the total seamless education and full integration of students with disabilities. [But] I think it's a lot more complicated than that," said Marilyn Friend, a professor of educa-

tion at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

ESEA mandates the scrutiny of academic achievement for whole subgroups of students within a school or district, while IDEA requires close measures of individual students, Friend explained. What's more, IDEA focuses on more than just academic achievement, such as the social and emotional requirements of special-needs students.

"It seems that instead of debating one law or two, our time really is best spent ... focusing on the critical issues that data and experience inform us. These are issues that we should tackle," Friend said.

For instance, she said, policy makers and education leaders should work to raise the quality of instruction among both general and special-ed teachers, as well as increase the focus on Universal Design for Learning and ensure access to—and appropriate uses of—classroom technology.

"And then, of course, ... we really must insist on full funding, appropriate funding, for [IDEA], to be sure that all the different aspects of it can be addressed in a way that's actually valid—because if we don't have adequate resources, that's not possible," Friend said.

IDEA stipulates that the federal government pay for up to 40 percent of the cost of providing special-ed services for students with disabilities, but estimates show that federal spending typically covers only 15 percent to 20 percent of these costs—leaving states and local school systems to foot the rest of the bill.

One area of alignment between ESEA and IDEA that panelists seemed to agree on was including language on Response to Intervention (RtI) in the new version of ESEA. RtI is a method of intervention designed to provide early assistance to children who are having trouble learning. Originally intended as a way to identify special-needs students early on in the education process, it has become an effective tool

for educating all children, panelists argued.

Posny noted that 6.6 million students with disabilities are learning alongside their peers at a neighborhood school, up from 1.7 million in 1975. Of those 6.6 million, 60 percent graduate with a regular high school diploma, and half of those students enroll in a postsecondary program.

"The bottom line [is], IDEA has resulted in improvements as we come to learn more about how best to educate students with disabilities," Posny said.

Doug Fuchs, Nicholas Hobbs Chair in Special Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt University, disagreed.

"There is no clear, strong message that the academic performance of students with disabilities is improving as a function of IDEA. ... The data generally indicate that most students with disabilities are continuing to perform poorly," said Fuchs.

He explained that, among schools failing to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress because of the academic performance of one subgroup, it's the students with disabilities subgroup that is most frequently identified as the reason.

Special ed "has lost its way in this country," Fuchs said. "It's lost its capacity to provide intensive and expert instruction to our most academically vulnerable children and youth. There needs to be national recognition of this fact, and a collective rethinking of special education and the role of special educators in our nation's schools. Until these things happen, there will be no important academic improvement for students with disabilities."

He later explained that, by his estimate, roughly 10 percent of the general student population is what he called "chronically unresponsive" to intervention efforts. Placing these students in a mainstream classroom that is co-taught by a general and a special educator cannot help them, he said, as he argued for a more intensive approach.

Lon Jacobs, a lawyer for News Corp. whose 14-year-old daughter has Down Syndrome, argued that mindsets need to be altered before any real change can occur.

"The biggest problem that we have in special education is the attitudes of some of the people in mainstream America," said Jacobs. "Our children are often considered not quite human, that they're not deserving of the attention they're given, the money is better spent on other students, and it's these attitudes that have to change before we'll ever fix the special-education system."

Jacobs said he believes that incorporating special-needs students into mainstream classrooms is far more beneficial than isolating them from the general population. But he acknowledged that it doesn't have to be an "either-or" scenario, and he called for a rethinking of the idea of "least restrictive environment" (LRE).

"The notion of inclusion, introducing these special kids to the mainstream, is important. They need to humanize these children; they need to realize we're all part of the human civilization," he said of educators. But inclusion probably works best in the elementary grades, he added, and it might not work as well in high school, where special-needs students often are marginalized or bullied.

"What we need is to broaden the concept of LRE, find the programs that work, and find a way where they become scalable and where you can incorporate them into the public school system," Jacobs said. **eSN**

Google...

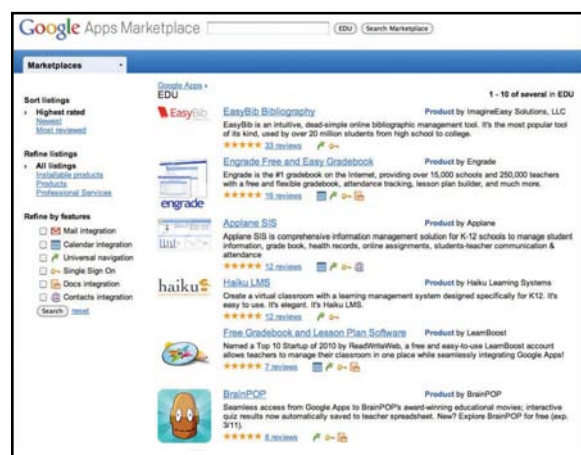
continued from page 1

Instead, ed-tech officials in K-12 schools and universities now can offer access to online grade books, for example, to every person on the institution's network with the click of a mouse.

The initial selection of ed-tech apps are "just the beginning," according to Google's blog. The company soon will make available applications from LMS industry giant Blackboard and test-preparation company Knewton as well.

Claiming a spot on Google's education apps menu could prove to be a boon to companies that once relied on word-of-mouth advertising. With 10 million users, Google Apps for Education provides an expansive market of technology-savvy customers, educators and business experts said.

Google's application evangelism made headlines in October when New York state education officials deployed Google Apps for Education to any of its nearly 700 schools that wanted to use the tools. Other states that offer statewide access to Google Apps for Education include Oregon, Iowa, and Colorado.



Google's new Apps Marketplace for education

Zach Posner, CEO of Engrade, a free web-based grade book accessible for teachers, students, and parents, said making it into the Apps Marketplace's education category has transformed the way educators will hear about Engrade.

The company, Posner said, now will be heard about from "the top down," as IT officials make the application available on campus via Google's online marketplace.

"Top date, we've really relied on teachers telling teachers [about Engrade]," said

Posner, adding that Engrade has more than 275,000 educators among its 2.3 million members. "Now there's a whole other way for people to hear about us."

Controlling school-wide apps, Posner said, will help IT decision makers phase out antiquated software that requires constant updates.

"A lot of this stuff looks like it was developed 20 years ago, and a lot of it was," Posner said of software programs that serve as computer-based grade books.

Engrade is one of the Apps Marketplace's grade books. The online service also lets educators track attendance, create an assignment calendar, and make online quizzes with questions that are automatically graded.

ThinkWave is another online grade book available in Google's marketplace. The ThinkWave app allows teachers and professors to view student data in a variety of formats and permits assignment weighting so educators can measure quizzes, tests, and assignments differently.

For K-12 educators, the Google Apps Marketplace includes access to BrainPOP, which offers animated movies, interactive quizzes, and online games.

Some apps in the Google marketplace, like BrainPOP, have expiration dates for free access. BrainPOP will be available at no cost in the Google Apps Marketplace until March 11.

The Grockit Learning Platform is another app in the marketplace that could prove popular among educators.

Grockitt, a collaborative learning program that includes a social networking and gaming platform, lets students learn from and compete with their peers on a range of subjects using the site's live chat service. **eSN**

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Daniel A.
Domenech

Learning Leadership By Daniel A. Domenech

School leaders need more help, and not red tape, to transform education

Here are the ideas that AASA hopes will guide renewal of the nation's education law

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.



"We [want] to ensure that no additional harm is done by well-meaning legislators and regulators who do not realize the potential havoc their actions will wreak upon an already overburdened system."

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 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.

CSN

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

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- Joe Slifka, 9th grade Science Teacher - Liberty High School, OH

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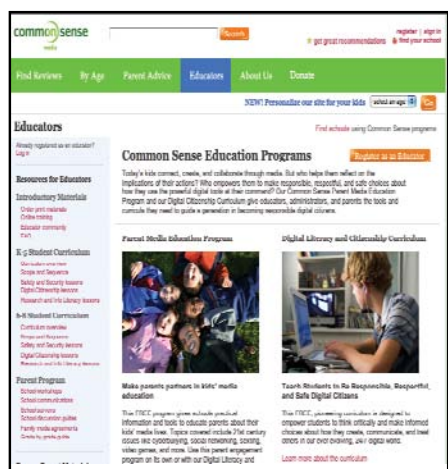
In a move that will make primary-source documents more accessible for students, Caroline Kennedy unveiled the nation's first online presidential archive on Jan. 13, a \$10 million project to digitize the most important papers, photographs, and recordings of President John F. Kennedy's days in office. Users can browse through the drafts of Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you" speech and see how he tinkered with the words of that most famous line from his inauguration. Or, they can listen to his personal phone calls and read his letters. Archivists digitized more than 200,000 pages, 1,200 recordings, and 300 museum artifacts, as well as reels of film and hundreds of photographs. Library Director Tom Putnam said they started with all of Kennedy's Oval Office files—everything that went across his desk—along with his personal papers, official White House photos, audio of all his public remarks, video of his famous speeches, and home movies. Private partners—including AT&T, EMC Corp., Raytheon Co., and Iron Mountain Corp.—contributed \$6.5 million in equipment and technical services to digitize thousands of records. The library will continue digitizing about 100,000 pages a year, along with thousands of photos and recordings.



Digital citizenship curriculum targets 4th, 5th graders

<http://www.common SenseMedia.org/educators>

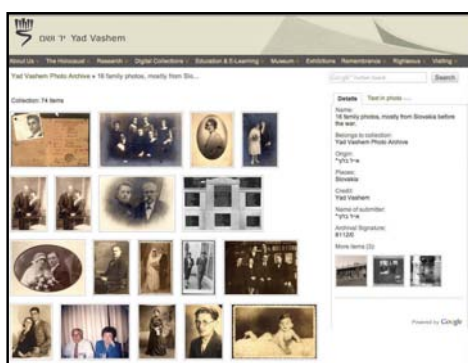
Common Sense Media has launched a new version of its free digital citizenship curriculum, Digital Literacy and Citizenship in a Connected Culture. The new version adds student, teacher, and parent resources, including comprehensive lessons on cyber bullying, for fourth and fifth graders. The program, which empowers students to think critically and make informed choices about how they live and treat others in today's digital media world, covers topics from internet safety and security to privacy, with a deep focus on cyber bullying and responsible digital behavior. Recent stories of the tragic consequences of cyber bullying highlight the need to teach kids how to prevent and respond to digital harassment, beginning at a young age, Common Sense Media says. The curriculum, which is based on the digital ethics research of Howard Gardner and the GoodPlay Project at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, uses content that ranges from print and video materials to interactive components and real-life student stories to inspire kids to be responsible digital citizens.



Holocaust historical data goes digital

<http://collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/>

The world's largest collection of Holocaust documents is going digital: Israel's Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, is teaming up with Google to make its photographs and documents interactive and searchable on the internet. The project launched Jan. 26 with a collection of 130,000 photos that now can be searched directly from Google, using standard keywords and other data that make it far easier than in the past to find the desired information. The collection soon will expand to other parts of the memorial's vast archives as well, including survivor testimonies. A social network-like component allows viewers to contribute to the project by adding their own stories, comments, and documents about family members who appear in the online archives. Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev said even though that feature could be misused to post anti-Semitic comments, the risk is outweighed by the benefit provided to future generations seeking information about their ancestors. "This is part of our vision—to connect Yad Vashem's knowledge and information to modern technology and bring it to youngsters," he said. Google used experimental optical character recognition technology to make text within documents and photos searchable in multiple languages.



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

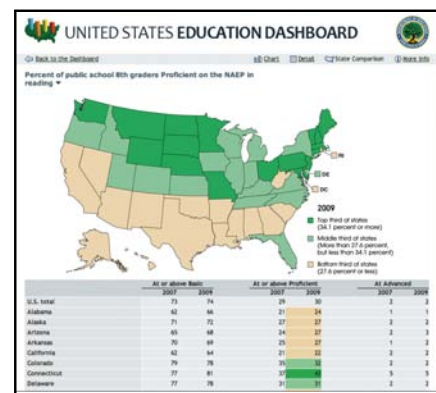
Leadership

Research and management resources for the K-20 decision maker

Feds launch new education data tool

<http://dashboard.ed.gov>

The federal Education Department (ED) has launched a new website that aims to provide easy access to key state and national education data for all school stakeholders. The United States Education Dashboard highlights the progress being made across the country at every level of public education, and it encourages communities to engage in a conversation about their schools, ED says. Users can view indicators of the nation's performance in education, gauge their state's progress, and see how their state is performing compared to others. The initial version of the website contains a set of 16 indicators that range from participation in early childhood education through completion of postsecondary education. These indicators include the percentage of eighth graders who were judged proficient in reading (30 percent) and math (33 percent) on the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress; the percentage of freshmen who graduate from high school within four years (74.9 percent); and the percentage of the nation's 18- to 24-year-olds who are enrolled in college (44.7 percent). For each of these indicators, an arrow points up, down, or from side to side to indicate how the data are trending. Users of the website can drill down further to see state comparisons and other information.



New website helps school leaders use data to improve instruction

<http://www.data-first.org>

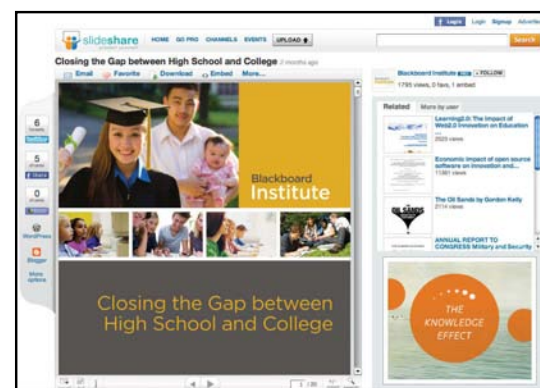
The Center for Public Education has launched a new website designed to help school leaders use data and research to improve student learning and school effectiveness. "School board members and others need solid evidence and facts in order to make tough decisions," said Patte Barth, the center's director. "The Data First website provides education data, research, and tools to help school leaders make sure their policies will result in higher student achievement." Funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the site features interactive polls, videos, and discussions on key education issues, including student achievement, teacher effectiveness, college and workforce readiness, school funding, and more. Local communities also can use the website's tools to analyze information and proposals that affect schools, teachers, and students. "Data allow school leaders to set priorities, target resources, and monitor results based on evidence, not on hunches," said Barth.



Report: How to prepare students for college success

<http://www.slideshare.net/BlackboardInstitute/closing-the-gap-between-high-school-and-college>

High school students should be exposed to college-level courses early on, and they should learn in technology-rich classrooms that redesign the learning process to emphasize problem solving, critical thinking, and other higher-order skills, if they are to succeed in college, according to a new report. Called "Closing the Gap between High School and College," the report is based on interviews with education experts from K-12 schools, community colleges, research institutions, and nonprofit organizations. Published by the Blackboard Institute, an independent research organization within the ed-tech company Blackboard Inc., the report says that of the students who enter college, nearly a third drop out after their first year—and 50 percent never graduate. Many students enter college not prepared for higher education, the report notes; at community colleges, nearly a million students reportedly take remedial courses each year at a cost of \$1.4 billion. The report recommends new practices to help improve college success, including training teachers to optimize students' college success, assessing college preparation early and often, and adopting national standards that are more aligned with collegiate entry requirements.



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Poor test scores have educators rethinking science instruction

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

The release on Jan. 25 of disappointing science results from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a federal test known as the Nation's Report Card, has educators doing some serious soul searching as they try to understand why fewer than half of U.S. students were considered proficient in science—and just a tiny fraction showed the advanced skills that could lead to careers in science and technology.

Only 35 percent of fourth graders scored above a basic level of knowledge in the exam, with that figure dropping to 32 percent for eight graders and 22 percent for 12th graders. What's more, only 1 percent of fourth-grade and 12th-grade students, and 2 percent of eighth-graders, scored in the highest, or advanced, group.

"The results... show that our nation's students aren't learning at a rate that will maintain America's role as an international leader in the sciences. When only 1 or 2 percent of children score at the advanced levels on NAEP, the next generation will not be ready to be world-class inventors, doctors, and engineers," Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in a statement.

The exam tests students' understanding of physical, life, Earth, and space sciences. Examples of skills students need to demonstrate to perform at the advanced level include designing an investigation to compare types of bird food in fourth grade; predicting the sun's position in the sky in eighth grade; and recognizing a nuclear fission reaction for those in 12th grade.

The test was given to more than 150,000 students in both fourth and eighth grade, and a nationally representative sample of 11,100 high school seniors. The last time it was given was in 2005, but the test was significantly updated in 2009, making a comparison between years unreliable.

Alan Friedman, former director of the New York Hall of Science and a member of the board that oversees the test, said the 2009 exam tested students more on how well they know how to apply scientific knowledge, rather than memorization of scientific terms and formulas.

Friedman said that while there are too many differences between the 2005 and 2009 exams to make a comparison, the overall trend is one of stagnation. He pointed to the Programme for International Student Assessment, a key international assessment, which shows U.S. students trailing many other nations in science.

Friedman and other experts described a variety of factors that might have contributed to the lackluster results.

One unintended side effect of No Child Left Behind, Friedman said, has been less emphasis on science, history, arts, and other subjects in order to emphasize performance in math and reading.

Francis Eberle, executive director of the National Science Teachers Association, suggested that a lack of funding for science education programs is partly to blame.

"If we look at what the science teachers are given right now, it is not very much. They don't have any real support for professional development, their materials have been reduced," said Eberle. "You can't really expect them to do their job without the resources and support that they need."

The excitement of science has been lost in many classrooms, Eberle said. He explained that the ability to innovate and uncover explanations for everyday events is a fascinating part of science that isn't being communicated well to students.

"We need to be able to... help children understand that there's a reason that science is so valuable," Eberle said. "It helps you understand the world, and there are great opportunities for solving mysteries, for making discoveries, for understanding new things about the world."

He added: "Right now, there's often the sense that we sort of know everything—and [yet] it changes all the time."

Companies answer the call for more engaging content

While science test scores for the nation's students appear to be lagging, North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) has seen double-digit gains in students' science scores over the last two years, thanks to a two-pronged approach that emphasizes highly engaging digital content and high-quality professional development for teachers.

"If we don't engage students with science by the fourth grade, we have lost them," said Cindy Moss, director of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education for the 140,000-student district.

CMS uses digital video content from Discovery Education to bring science to life to students. Discovery's digital science offerings include video clips and interactive lab activities designed to stimulate interest among the "YouTube generation."

Another company that is using multimedia to spark students' interest in science is Defined Learning, which was founded by the same executives who created United Learning (whose video streaming service, incidentally, was bought by Discovery).

Defined Learning offers a service, called Defined STEM, that aims to make science relevant for students by showing them how science is used in everyday careers.

In one video demonstration, a test lab manager for Easton Sports Inc. in Van Nuys, Calif., explains how company engineers use principles of science to design and manufacture baseball bats with the largest possible "sweet spot" for hitting the ball. In a follow-up exercise, students design their own bats by virtually changing the characteristics of a bat online, and they can see how the changes they've made affect the force and trajectory of a ball coming off the bat.

This kind of simulated lab activity can be more cost-effective than a traditional science lab, allowing schools to reach



The excitement of science has been lost in many classrooms, experts say.

more students with an inquiry-based approach to science at a lower cost.

Other companies that make virtual lab activities for students include School Specialty, which sells iNeo/SCI Virtual Labs, and American Education Corp., whose products are called A+VLabs.

These virtual labs allow students to participate in common lab experiments online. Students carry out the experiments step by step, log the results in a virtual lab book, and then analyze the results. The results are as variable (but scientifically accurate) as they would be in an actual lab setting, but the costs are kept low as schools purchase a reusable software system instead of expensive lab equipment.

CompassLearning is taking this inquiry-based approach to instruction and is combining it with students' love of video games to develop a new online science curriculum for middle school students. CompassLearning Odyssey Middle School Science, to be released in June, combines live action and animation in a story format to engage students, says Melanie Pritchett, director of education policy for CompassLearning.

One multimedia lesson, called "The Mind Keepers," sets up a storyline in which the animated characters must save the planet's watersheds. Students watch videos in which live-action news reporters and other experts explain where river water comes from, where it goes, and what impact watersheds have on the environment. Teachers can use these videos as lesson starters, or they can use them to launch more intensive project-based learning, Pritchett said.

Free lessons help educators teach about global climate change

To help meet the demand for better science instruction in the nation's schools, PBS TeacherLine has teamed up with NASA to offer a series of free, self-paced professional development modules around the topic of global climate change. These three- to five-hour online modules are intended to increase teachers' knowledge of the science behind global climate change and give them classroom resources to share with their students.

As of press time, there were four of these modules available to teachers. The first module offers an introduction to global climate change and discusses the

evidence of climate change from different parts of the Earth. It also considers what it means to live on a planet with a dynamically changing climate.

The second module explores the relationship between the increased concentration of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere and the historical record of global temperatures to help teachers explore whether humans are responsible for global climate change, and to what extent.

The third module helps teachers make the topic more immediately relevant to students by examining local climate data, and the fourth module looks at other scientific theories about global climate change, such as whether variable energy output or the Earth's nearest star might be responsible.

New tools encourage hands-on learning

RM Education has released several new products that allow for more hands-on instruction in science, including the Geosafari Tuff Cam, which features a child-friendly grip that makes it easy to use in the classroom or on field trips. Students can use the camera to record their observations, then attach it to a PC or Mac for review.

Ken-a-Vision's new "kena" digital microscope connects to a computer via a USB port and easily disconnects from its base to offer a more portable lens. The detachable head makes it easy to magnify a variety of objects in the classroom, while the base allows for easy viewing of slides. It's built to withstand even the clumsiest of hands, the company says, and it's simple to maneuver and magnify objects. Students can use it during experiments or to show the rest of the class anything they've found that is interesting. **eSN**

Material from the Associated Press was used in this report.

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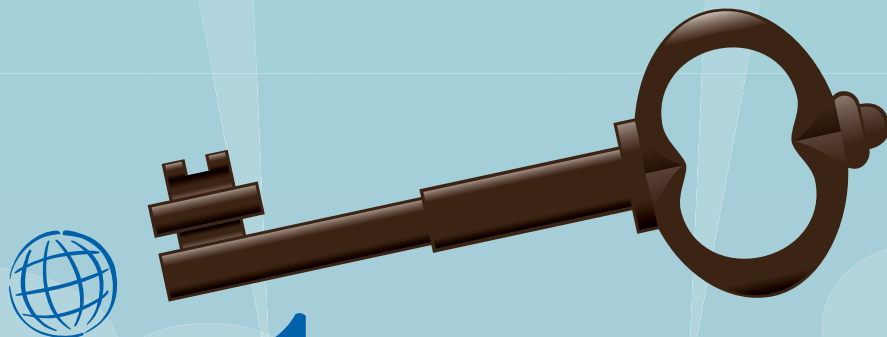
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View point By Alexander Hiam

How—and why—to teach innovation in our schools

The call for a more innovative society raises important questions about education

It's wonderful to hear President Obama call for a nationwide emphasis on innovation, but it raises an interesting challenge: Where will all those innovators come from? Currently, we are chasing testable competency in academic core skills. It is quite a different thing to try to educate future innovators. We don't test for that.

An innovation curriculum requires an emphasis on what I am going to call, for lack of a preexisting term, the Five I's: Imagination, Inquiry, Invention, Implementation, and Initiative (the latter being a foundational trait that enables the other four). Here is my take on how to teach each of the Five I's of innovation in our schools.

Imagination

Day-dreaming is discouraged in most classrooms. If a student focuses on anything except the assignment or the teacher, it is a problem that needs to be fixed. Enter discipline; exit imagination. There was, traditionally, a peripheral home for imagination in our schools in the ancillary arts instruction that has now fallen to the budget axe in so many schools. How can we teach imagination and nurture the imaginative and the innovators?

For starters, educators must learn the skills of creative expression. We are talking about a set of practices, not some magical thing that just happens without conscious effort. I spend a lot of time designing training programs and writing how-to guides to help adults engage their imaginations with their work. It's a relatively simple matter for people like me who work in the field to design age-appropriate learning activities aimed at training the imagination. Nobody asks us to help out, so we don't. It's probably time to change that tradition. Combining creativity and invention experts with master teachers might produce some rapid breakthroughs in curriculum design.

Imagination needs fuel, and the best fuel comes from bridging between apparently diverse or unrelated ideas, skill sets, or objects. Many—in fact, most—inventions are actually innovative combinations. To make such innovative combinations, the inventor must know about more than one domain. In fact, I would hazard the claim that all leading innovators share one interesting characteristic: They gained, early in life, a fair amount of mastery in at least two separate domains or fields. This dual focus gave them rich opportunities for creative combinations and fueled them to imagine outside of the two boxes in which they were trained. We need to stimulate imagination by encouraging students to master, say, an instrument plus a science, or any other such combination of skills. (And that, I believe, is the strongest argument for why we must bring the arts back into our schools.)

Inquiry

Who asks the questions in classrooms today? If the teacher asks, or even frames, most of the questions, then our educational approach discourages inquiry and innovators. It's pretty clear that teaching people to focus on the right answer has the unintended consequence of reducing their tendency to inquire broadly and curiously about things. Research and exploration are essential innovative behaviors. Students need to ask their own questions and then poke around in pursuit of possible answers. There has been a reduction, I think, in the amount of curious research students do, rather than an increase. And no, looking up an answer on Wikipedia does not qualify!

One fairly simple way to add curious inquiry is to incorporate a question-asking module into existing curricula. For example, after running a science activity,

the teacher can pause and ask students to generate questions the activity prompts them to think of. Then the students can pursue answers to their questions.

Invention

Students need to be challenged to invent things more than once or twice in their school careers. A science fair or challenge to launch an egg safely from a tall building are great examples of student invention, but they are unusual instances. Invention must be woven into the learning routine. "Can you think of a better way to do this math problem?" and "Can you apply what we've just learned about how the ancient Egyptians moved stones to build pyramids in some modern-day invention of your own?" These are two examples of invention challenges that students should be tackling in their weekly learning routine. Most are not.



"Currently, we are chasing testable competency in academic core skills. It is quite a different thing to try to educate future innovators. We don't test for that."

Implementation

Innovation is creativity, applied. At least, that's a simple working definition of it, and it reminds us that a good idea doesn't amount to anything unless it is translated into action. Students get remarkably little practice at implementing ideas. Implementation should be linked to some of the inventing students do, so as to give them hands-on experience in the challenges of making ideas work. Usually, ideas don't work the first time you try. It takes refining the plan, learning from errors, and persisting. These skills, like imagining, inquiring, and inventing, are learned—or not.

Initiative

Initiative may be the hardest of the Five I's to teach, because it runs against the current of centralized classroom control. Students sit at desks and work on the same learning tasks, while the teacher runs activities from the front of the classroom. Efficient, yes, but is it inventive? No.

Think of the classroom as a miniature society, and

apply the widely accepted finding that "inventiveness is more likely to occur if a society is less hierarchical, since bureaucracy reduces creative activity." This is according to "Why do some societies invent more than others?" by Scott A. Shane of The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, which appeared in the *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 7, Issue 1, January 1992, pages 29-46. Using patent filings as a measure, he found that individualistic and non-hierarchical societies were more inventive than other societies.

In individualistic, non-hierarchical contexts, people are more likely to take creative initiative. How can we stimulate and exercise creative initiative in our classrooms? Clearly, there are some good answers already. Activity-based learning is a component of most curricula. Research projects are right on target. However, the bulk of the curriculum hours logged in most class-

rooms do not meet the kind of individualistic inquiry and project pursuit that qualifies as exercising the students' initiative.

The problem, of course, is dual: (1) Instructors need to be coaches and mentors during initiative-based learning, and they might lack the preparation to play these roles. (2) The school needs to support the teachers as they guide students through the messy, individualistic process of learning how to be inventors, and this means appreciating the value of guided, enthusiastic decentralization of student work (a challenge to the value systems of many administrators), plus making more resources available to make sure the facilitation is there and students aren't just fumbling complex projects that don't get completed at a high level of competence.

Inventive behavior is more common among people who, as adults, exhibit high agency (sometimes called self-efficacy), which means they feel in control of things and able to make a difference. Agency is both a personality variable and a context-driven attitude. People have maximum agency when they grow up do-

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Stakeholder & Community Relations

Know the warning signs for teen 'bullycide'

Victimization, stress, anxiety, depression can have tragic consequences

By Nora Carr, APR, Fellow PRSA

Mainstream media outlets have coined a new term to describe the rash of student suicides committed in the wake of persistent bullying and harassment.

Called "bullycides," the issue has spawned significant new research to determine whether the phenomenon is really new, or simply being reported more often.

Either way, school officials need to do more to make parents aware of the stress today's teens and tweens face.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 12 percent of all deaths among youth and young adults in the U.S. result from suicides.

Nearly 20 percent of high school students surveyed by the CDC report being bullied on school property during the previous 12 months; 5 percent report not going to school on a least one day during the past 30 days as a result of safety concerns.

Perhaps even more telling, 26.1 percent of the CDC survey respondents felt so sad or hopeless for a two-week period or more that they stopped doing their usual activities—a clear sign of depression.

Nationwide, 13.8 percent of students reported they had seriously considered committing suicide. The numbers are particularly bleak for female students, 17.4 percent of whom reported suicidal tendencies.

Another recent CDC study might point to some possible causes. According to the CDC, adverse childhood experiences (called ACEs) are common across

racial/ethnic groups and states.

For example, 22 percent of adult women and 16.7 percent of adult men in the study reported having grown up with a mentally ill household member. When substance abuse is included, the number skyrockets to 30.6 percent for women and 27.5 percent for men.

Women are also more than twice as likely as men to become victims of sexual abuse while growing up, 17.2 percent for women as compared to 6.7 percent for men.

Because the CDC identifies a family history of suicide, mental illness, and alcohol or drug abuse as major risk factors for suicide, school personnel need to stay alert for signs of trouble and recognize that bad behavior might just represent a cry for help.

No wonder a recent article in the *Washington Post* cited bullying and abuse at home by older siblings or parents as a primary cause of bullying behavior at school.

"Domestic violence and bullying feed each other," wrote Susan M. Swearer, an associate professor of school psychology at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

According to Swearer, a 2007 study indicated that "72 percent of children who were physically abused by their parents became a bully, a victim of a bully, or both."

Both bullies and victims are at risk for significant mental health issues, from low self-esteem to anxiety and depression.

So, while bullying might serve as a triggering event, or increase a young person's tendency for "self harm," other risk factors

also likely are involved, according to Swearer.

"Interpreting a teenager's suicide as a reaction to bullying ignores the complex emotional problems that American youth face," writes Swearer, author of *Bullying Prevention and Intervention: Realistic Strategies for Schools* and co-director of the Bullying Research Network. "To understand the complexity of suicidal behavior, we need to look beyond one factor."

In addition to mental illness, Swearer says easy access to firearms and medication, exposure to the suicidal behavior of others, and isolation might all contribute to a child's feelings of hopelessness and despair.

Major shifts or changes in behavior, such as isolating former friends, changing peer groups, dropping grades, and losing interest in favorite activities, should raise red flags for educators, parents, neighbors, friends, or other individuals concerned about a child's well-being.

Other warning signs include difficulty sleeping or over-sleeping, changes in body weight or appetite, irritability, sadness, lethargy, and difficulty concentrating. Younger children might report vague physical symptoms or have more frequent emotional outbursts.

For most young people, developing resiliency and responding well to adversity represent learned skills. As such, we need to help students develop these characteristics and not simply judge them for not having them.

The National Association of School

Psychologists (<http://www.nasponline.org/>) offers several tips for parents and educators for increasing student resiliency, from encouraging students to express negative emotions to modeling positive attitudes and getting more physically fit.

Connect with Kids, a video production company, offers documentary-style programs on a wide range of social and emotional health concerns, including teen stress, over-scheduled children, bullying, teen suicide, cutting, and other often taboo subjects.

These programs are available online for a subscription or may be purchased for use in training and informational sessions.

Connect with Kids also will create videos and other custom-made content using local talent, or help school leaders plan town hall forums to get more parents and community members talking about issues of concern to educators.

North Carolina's Guilford County Schools is using Connect with Kids' digital content as part of its recently launched Parent Academy program. Parents can view the content online or via GCSTV-2, the district's public access cable channel.

As economic woes create more burdens for American families, we'll continue to see more signs of stress in the students we serve. Providing more resources for parents and educators to help them cope with the increase is an important first step. **eSN**

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

Innovation...

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ing difficult things, sometimes successfully but always with support and encouragement from those who believe they can succeed.

How many inventors do we need?

When President Obama calls for us to be a nation of innovators, does he literally mean we all should rush to our drawing boards and start inventing things? Probably not. Inventiveness is a treasured national trait, and at a basic level, everyone ought to be able to solve problems and try new things without excessive fear of failure or change. However, the reality remains that economically important innovations (as well as socially and artistically important innovations) arise from a small minority of the population.

We don't all need to be Edisons. But we do need to produce more Edisons. So, does it make sense to rethink our educational approach just to increase the quality and quantity of future innovators, even if they make up, say, no more than 5 percent of the average classroom today?

There is linkage between society and its innovators. An open-minded, inquiring society encourages and supports its

leading innovators, while a closed-minded society shuts them down. There are many elements to this society-innovator linkage, not all of them fully understood, but here are a few that everyone probably can agree on:

- Somebody's got to consume the results those brilliant innovators produce. It takes open-minded customers to purchase early-stage innovations, and open-minded investors to fund them. All of society participates in the nurturing and implementation of good ideas. Put another way, no inventor is an island.
- The collective consciousness may be important to the quantity and quality of innovations. Historians often remark on the oddity of breakthroughs coming in clusters. If one person publishes a breakthrough book on evolution, for example, you can be sure that it appears in the letters of some of his contemporaries. Similarly, a perusal of the patent records shows that Edison was not the only person working on electric light bulbs. In fact, another inventor's patent turns out to be the one most closely related to the form of incandescent light bulb generally in use today. It may be quite important to have many people thinking about a challenge at the same time. In fact, it may be essential.

- For every inventor who comes up with a great new idea or design, there needs to be a large team of people working to develop and implement it. Whether in economic or other arenas, no idea is implemented without a lot of help. In a truly innovative society, I believe that almost everyone who isn't a brilliant inventor is helping to refine and implement some good idea. Imagine our society as a baseball team. We need the home-run sluggers, to be sure, but we don't need or expect them to make up the entire team. The rest of us play our roles in the innovation process, too, and we all need to be good at the game.

For these reasons, I believe it does make sense to raise a nation of innovators. Then, there is the added problem of not knowing who will turn out to be our heavy-hitters of the future. So far, nobody has come up with a good way to identify the next Bill Gates from a cohort of third graders. However, we do know some general things about the personalities of innovators.

Primarily, we know they rate higher than average on openness to experience, which is a broad personality trait that is made up of a varied mix of inquisitiveness, creativity, adventurousness, and intelligence. It can be measured in children and remains fairly stable through life.

Yet of the, say, 15 percent of elementary school students who measure high

on this openness scale, only a handful will contribute major innovations to society in future years—although most will do something innovative, creative, intellectual, adventurous, or artistic. We are playing the numbers when we invest in innovators, rather as venture capital firms do when they invest in business plans, and we cannot expect more than a few percent of creative or innovative people to produce anything that is game-changing for our society. That's okay; we need small innovations, too, but the point is that it's impractical to single out and educate future innovation leaders separately from everyone else.

We need classrooms that encourage and enable innovation in all students, and then we need the patience to help them mature. They will sort out who will do what in the future, and some of them will rise to the top of the innovation charts, while others will play more quiet, but equally important, roles. **eSN**

*Alexander Hiam designs curricula for workplace leadership training and has authored more than a dozen books, including *Innovation For Dummies* (Wiley, 2010). He currently teaches in the Independent Concentration program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and has taught for many years at the Isenberg School of Business there.*



Grants & Funding

Seven keys to successful grants management

By Deborah Ward

The current economic situation has prompted many entities to apply for grants they've never applied for in the past, which has resulted in even more competition for grant funds. One of the possible by-products of this increased level of competition is that applicants might make promises in their proposals that they would be unable to fulfill if funded.

Unfortunately, mismanaging grant funds can lead to negative publicity, the revocation of grant dollars, an adverse effect on future prospects for grant funding, and—in the worst case—criminal prosecution.

It's important to submit any grant proposal with the best of intentions, so make sure you read the RFP or guidance carefully to ensure that you can meet the funder's expectations if you receive an award. For example, do not agree to over-ambitious goals that cannot be met during the funding period—and don't accept an award if you do not have the internal

financial capability to track the use of funds.

Before accepting any grant award, review the grant agreement carefully to make sure you completely understand the expectations for accepting funds and can meet these expectations to the best of your ability. It is wiser to pass on grant funds rather than accept them knowing that your organization is not capable of carrying out the project as stated.

If you are the recipient of grant funds, do you have safeguards in place to make sure funds are not mismanaged? These safeguards can include the following:

1. Make sure that all staff involved in the project are familiar with the budget and the allowable line-item expenses for the project. Distribute a copy of the budget and the budget justification to all key staff members to use as a reference as the project is implemented.
2. If necessary, provide key staff with Time and Effort reports early in the project period, and discuss the importance of completing these reports on an ongoing basis. These reports are especially critical if there are multiple funding streams for the same project, and time is allocated under different funding streams at different levels. Remind project staff on a regular basis of the importance of keeping careful Time and Effort records.
3. Review project goals and objectives and the associated budget costs on a regular basis during the project implementation. Compare the project budget to actual expenses on a quarterly basis to make sure that you are on the right track.
4. If there is any question about an expense, contact the program officer or grants management specialist before making the expenditure.
5. Do not allow project staff to receive grant award checks or reimbursement checks for project expenses directly. These checks should be routed to the finance office of your organization first.
6. If you are using an external contrac-

tor to provide services, make sure you have an agreement in writing that specifies what services will be provided and in what timeframe. Carefully monitor the performance of the contractor to make certain that the scope of work is being met.

7. Review the goals and objectives during the project period, and determine whether you are in compliance with the grant conditions. If you find that you are not, contact the funder immediately and discuss the situation. If you make changes to the project, make sure they are expressed in writing.

Successfully managing grant funds is possible if you carefully weigh the costs and benefits associated with applying for each grant—and only pursue funding opportunities and accept awards for projects that align with your organization's mission, strategic plan, and goals. **ESN**

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

Grant Deadlines

March

\$1,500 in travel expenses and science equipment for a biology teacher

Vernier Software & Technology and the National Association of Biology Teachers are offering a grant worth \$1,000 for travel expenses and \$500 in Vernier science equipment to a secondary school teacher who has successfully developed and demonstrated an innovative approach in the teaching of ecology or environmental science and has carried his or her commitment to the environment into the community. In addition to travel and equipment, the recipient also will receive a recognition plaque to be presented at the 2011 NABT Professional Development Conference in Anaheim Oct. 12-15, as well as a one-year complimentary NABT membership.

Deadline: March 15

<http://www.nabt.org/websites/institution/index.php?p=132>

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/>

May

Matching grants of up to \$3,800 to buy interactive technologies

Through a program called "Fund Your Dream ActivClassroom," Promethean has joined forces with the National PTA to help fund the purchase of classroom technology. Conduct a PTA-sponsored fundraiser at your local school during the 2010-11 school year, and Promethean will match the dollar amount raised—up to \$3,800 per school—toward the purchase of any combination of qualifying Promethean ActivClassroom products, which include interactive whiteboards, projectors, and student response systems.

Deadline: May 1

<http://www.prometheanworld.com/server.php?show=nav.21613>

More than \$170,000 in ed-tech equipment and prizes

CDW-G and Discovery Education have teamed up again to offer their annual "Win a Wireless Lab" sweepstakes. Employees of K-12 schools in the United States

can enter for a chance to win one of three wireless labs from CDW-G valued at more than \$40,000, as well as a \$5,000 digital media grant from Discovery Education. In addition to these grand prizes, the companies will award five first prizes, each consisting of a Promethean interactive whiteboard valued at approximately \$2,000; 10 second prizes, each consisting of a netbook computer worth about \$350; and five third prizes, each consisting of a Canon digital camcorder worth \$300. What's more, the companies will give away one Flip video camera each week, valued at \$150, as well as monthly drawings for digital signage packages worth between \$6,000 and \$10,000. Applicants can enter once per day online, as well as once per day via Twitter; no purchase is necessary to enter or win.

Deadline: May 2

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

Ongoing

Up to \$5,000 per award for projects that support early childhood creativity and technology

The LEGO Children's Fund provides grants ranging in value from \$500 to \$5,000 to nonprofit organizations for education projects, with a special interest paid to collaborative efforts and in providing matching funds to leverage new dollars into the receiving organization. The foundation's two areas of focus are early childhood education that is directly related to creativity, and technology and communication projects that advance learning opportunities. Grants funds may not be used to purchase LEGO products. Beaver Creek School recently won a grant to fund a movie-making project in its after-school program, and the New York City nonprofit organization A Place for Kids won a grant to support an interdisciplinary project that engages elementary-level immigrant students in reading and writing with hands-on art, technology, and experiential activities. Grants are made quarterly; the next deadline for applying is April 15.

<http://www.legochildrensfund.org>

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Education Programs & Grants Management Senior Staff Consultant NJ - Basking Ridge

Job Responsibilities

This position serves as the program manager for Verizon Foundation's education content partners and education grantees. Incumbent is responsible for ensuring these partners and grantees programs are aligned with the Foundation's strategy of using technology to improve education. These partners and grantees include Thinkfinity Content Partners, which are 10 national educational organizations, and organizations who receive grants to address issues in education. As the program manager, the incumbent is responsible for:

- Managing relationship with the education content partners, the day to day development, implementation and reporting of specific activities and strategies established in grant agreements and work plans including lesson plans, student interactives, and the use of technology and broadband. It is anticipated the incumbent will devote 60% of his/her time on this work.
- Managing the development, approval process, ongoing management and required reporting of all education-related grants/programs funded by Verizon. It is anticipated the incumbent will devote 40% of his/her time on this work.

Required Skills:

- Minimum of a Bachelors degree but Master's degree or equivalent experience preferred.
- Minimum of 6 years experience in K-12 classroom teaching, or informal learning environments, curriculum development and/or teacher training.
- Training and/or experience in working in diverse, students with differing level of skills and multicultural learning environments.
- Experience in grant management, including writing and/or reviewing grants, establishing grant analytics or metrics, and evaluating grant outcomes based upon metrics.

Desired Skills:

- Strong knowledge and use of education technology in classroom or informal teaching and learning environments.
- Pedagogical interdisciplinary and project-based learning models knowledge.
- The incumbent should have very strong program management skills and an existing and expanding base of knowledge in education technology to ensure the quality, interactivity, relevance and standards alignment of Thinkfinity resources.
- Program Management skills and knowledge.
- Microsoft Project and/or other tools for project planning.
- Well-versed in the current research and trends in technology impacts on learning and technology solutions for learning.
- Excellent written and verbal communications skills.

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IT Solutions Architect NJ - Basking Ridge

Job Responsibilities

The IT Solutions Architect will build and implement the technical and management roadmaps needed to support the Foundation's work to integrate Verizon's technology in the education philanthropic activity. Specifically, this individual will:

- Ensure the continued development, management and security of the Verizon Foundation IT Infrastructure & Web/Network servers.
- Develop and implement a strategy for managing, upgrading and recommending changes to IT applications that are needed to support the Verizon Education program and partnerships.
- Leverage Verizon's mobile solutions by creating and implementing a mobile learning strategy for the Foundation.

Specific Duties & Responsibilities:

- Build and implement a technical roadmap that ensures the development and management of the Verizon Foundation IT Infrastructure & Web/Network servers.
- Develop the technical requirements and strategy for managing, upgrading and recommending changes to IT applications that are needed to support the Verizon Education program and partnerships.
- Create a technical roadmap for leveraging Verizon's mobile solutions and implementing a mobile learning strategy and program.

Required Skills:

- Minimum of a Bachelor's degree.
- Minimum of 5 years experience in strategic IT planning and hands-on systems, network and applications management such as Microsoft.Net and SQL Server systems. Knowledge and experience in Mobile computing is a plus.
- Minimum of 2 years experience in software solutions architecture as evidenced by roles leading product and/or solutions development teams.
- Program management experience with complex matrix organizations.
- Experience with Corporate Giving and/or Charitable Foundation desired.

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Class.com doesn't stop at high-quality courseware. We partner with schools to offer exceptional instruction for students, and we train teachers in effective online learning techniques. Beginning with Class.com's implementation and throughout our ongoing customer care, Class.com provides partners with the best customer service in the industry.

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Extron's PoleVault and WallVault AV systems support HDMI digital video sources

Extron PoleVault and WallVault Systems now include options for accepting input signals from HDMI digital video sources, such as laptops, document cameras, and Blu-ray Disc players. The optional HDMI input enables direct connection of high-definition video sources and provides support for future technologies.

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Product Spotlight



New tablet-style device acts as a mobile interactive whiteboard

eInstruction's new Mobi View is a wireless tablet device that the company calls "the industry's first mobile interactive whiteboard with an interactive touch-screen display." At \$449, Mobi View delivers the same functionality as a fixed interactive whiteboard (IWB), eInstruction says—untethering teachers from the front of the classroom and allowing them to move around the room while they teach.

With Mobi View, content can be projected to any surface with the same interactive capabilities as a traditional IWB. The device offers one-touch access to annotation tools, favorite files, folders, applications, websites, and a touch-screen keyboard. Pairing Mobi View with eInstruction's Mobi Student-Centered Learning Pack can transform classrooms into student-centered collaborative environments where students can project their work simultaneously, or one at a time, to learn from one another, the company says; Mobi's multi-user capabilities allow up to nine groups to contribute content to the lesson display simultaneously, from anywhere in the room.

<http://www.einstruction.com>

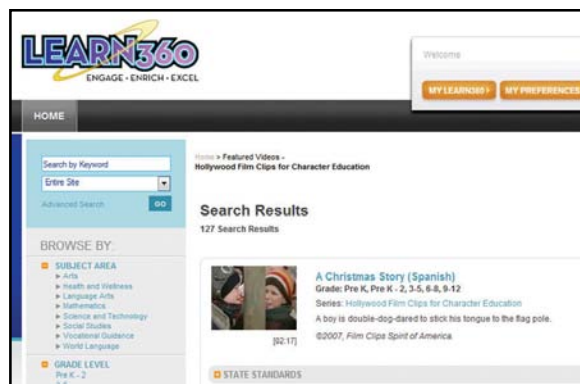
Partnership brings video use into character education

Learn360, an interactive media-on-demand service for K-12 education, has partnered with Film Clips for Character Education to add more than 100 fully licensed film clips from award-winning Hollywood movies. The

clips come with teacher guides to help teach character education for students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The clips address a wide range of common problems in today's schools, from bullying and peer pressure to respecting diversity.

The clips themselves can be used as discussion starters in the classroom, and they may be applied to subjects such as language arts and social studies in addition to character development courses. They also are frequently used in special-education settings. The teacher guides contain discussion questions, writing assignments, and follow-up activities that support the character lessons from the film clips.

<http://www.learn360.com>



Robotics-building kit challenges students to build a 'green city'

The new LEGO Education Green City Challenge Set and Activity Pack asks students to come up with ways to solve the energy crisis. The Challenge Set includes three training mats, a challenge mat, and more than 1,300 elements for students to use in building models of energy-saving devices and structures, such as wind turbines and power plants.

Before beginning the Challenge segment of the pack, students go through a training session until they are confident in their robotic building and programming skills. The Challenge offers a number of different missions that simulate real-life situations. For each mission successfully completed, students are awarded an energy brick that they can then use to power the "Green City."

Teachers are able to select from a beginning, moderate, or advanced skill set, while the kit itself includes build-

ing instructions, programming examples, teacher notes, extension ideas, and mission rules to simplify the implementation process.

<http://education.lego.com>



Software update helps teachers create visual learning tools

Varitronics' VariQuest Design Center provides simple ways for educators to create posters, cutouts, flash cards, awards, and other objects to supplement instructional materials and benefit their students, especially those who learn best visually.

The company's Design Center Software v2.0 improves on the original version with its browsing and editing additions. Users now can search for content based on instructional and grade-level needs, type in Spanish, and access advanced editing tools for further customization options. Design Center Software v2.0, which includes the Design Center 1000, Poster Maker 3600, Cutout Maker 1800, and Awards Maker 400, also allows customers to import lists from Microsoft Excel in order to create award plaques, nametags, desk labels, and other items quickly and easily.

<http://www.variquest.com/software-update>



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Highlights

- State of the Union 2011: Teachers**
In this video from CBS, President Obama urged those who are contemplating a career choice to become a teacher while stressing the importance of education in his 2011 State of the Union address.
- Using Agriculture to Spur Achievement**
Facing shrinking enrollment and in danger of closing its doors, in 2007, the Newton (KS) School District reestablished Newton as a public charter school. Bolstered by Charter School Program funds from the U.S. Department of Education, the Walton 21st Century Rural Life Center became the first public school in the nation to completely incorporate agriculture into its elementary classrooms and curricula.

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www.eschoolnews.com/eSN-TV/ViewersGuide

Most Popular

- Teaching fellows discuss ESEA proposal**
Teaching Ambassador Fellows talk about the Obama Administration's blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind).
- The Refugee Transition Center Story**
In January of 2008, the Kent School District opened the Refugee Transition Center to assist refugees in their attempt to overcome the barriers and unknowns they face while attempting to assimilate into a new world.
- Personalized Learning Initiative Overview**
A short overview presentation of the Institute @ CESA 1 and the Personalized Learning Initiative. SE Wisconsin is mobilizing as a region in transformation of public education through personalized learning for all.
- The Story of America's Black Patriots**
The critically acclaimed PBS documentary is now available for educational use in a new 3-disc DVD set customized for high schools universities and libraries. The collection features 9 hours of material including the 4-hour film and additional exclusive content created for the educational editions.

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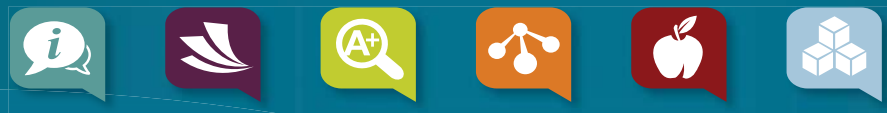
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