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Why education is not like business

Feds seek union-district harmony

First-ever meeting on labor-management relations in schools aims for more collaboration to improve student achievement

Dennis Pierce
Editor

Despite frequent reports of labor-management strife in the nation's schools, there are many school systems in which teachers

and district leaders are working together to improve public education—and some of the best examples of this type of collaboration were on display during a first-of-its-kind national conference in Denver Feb. 15-16.

Organized by the federal Education Department (ED), the event—called “Advancing Student Achievement Through Labor-Management Collaboration”—brought together teams of superintendents, school board presidents, and union presidents from 150 school systems around the

Harmony, page 20

Labor pains in Wisconsin—and beyond



The ability of educators and other public employees to collectively bargain is at stake in many states, led by Wisconsin which passed a bill stripping many workers of this right—see page 21.

Blended learning: Hit or miss?

Strategy holds vast potential—but only if used correctly

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

Blended learning has the ability to transform education, according to a new report—but if certain guidelines and practices aren't ensured, blended learning could become just another add-on to an archaic system of teaching and learning that is on its way out, the report warns.

The report, titled “The Rise of K-12 Blended Learning,” by Michael B. Horn, co-founder and executive director of education at the Innosight Institute, and Heather Clayton Staker, a senior research fellow for education practice at the institute, describes how blended learning can affect education, but why it also could fall short of its potential.

The report defines blended learning as “any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online

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Obama budget gives ed a boost

From staff and wire reports

Despite tough economic times, President Obama's \$3.73 trillion budget proposal for fiscal year 2012 would increase education spending by 4.3 percent in an effort to help students compete on a global level and boost citizens' readiness for college and the workforce.

The administration's 2012 budget request for the U.S. Department of Education (ED) is \$48.8 billion, an increase of \$2 billion over the 2011 budget, which was not approved by Congress and is being funded through continuing resolutions.

The budget proposal requests the following funding levels:

- \$350 million for an Early Learning Challenge Fund to boost early-learning programs;
- \$4.3 billion for teacher and principal preparation programs, including formula

Budget, page 24

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Online update

Free webinars tackle STEM ed, Common Core standards, & more

Nancy David, Online Director, ndavid@eschoolnews.com

At eSchool News Online, we'll be offering a number of free webinars this month to help you tackle some of your toughest challenges, such as integrating STEM instruction into the elementary grades, designing truly interactive lessons, and preparing your students to meet the new Common Core standards in English and math.

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>

Enabling STEM for Your Elementary Students

Date: April 12, 2-3 p.m. ET

Hear the why, how, and how-to in this jam-packed session on enabling STEM instruction for your elementary students. First, award-winning futurist David Thornburg, founder of the Thornburg Center, will unearth the reasons why educators must make STEM education a priority from a global perspective, and he'll provide ideas to support your efforts. Next, former district-level administrator and funding expert Mona McCoy will provide concrete ideas on how you can find funding to implement STEM programs in your schools. And last, hear from two teachers, Jennifer Rosser and Kelly Crowley, who are in the classroom each day implementing lessons and activities to engage and excite their students for further learning in the STEM fields.

'Secrets' of High-Quality Interactive Lesson Content

Date: April 13, 2-3 p.m. ET

Interactive lesson planning is much like what we were taught when we first learned how to write lesson plans. The only difference is that now we have the power of interactivity to incorporate into our lesson design. This opens the realm of possibilities to tap into every student's unique learning style, otherwise known as differentiation. The first part of this webinar will discuss the primary features of high-quality interactive lessons, including student-focused learning objectives that are observable and measureable, assessment that is appropriate to the objectives, and giving the learner numerous opportunities to practice the skills we want them to be able to apply. The second part will show examples of real lessons that illustrate these principles.

Common Core Standards Call for Uncommon Shifts in Practice

Date: April 14, 2-3 p.m. ET

After many years of putting research into action, we finally have a national set of standards that is far reaching and will help us to provide rigorous instruction and assessment. Most districts already have begun aligning their curriculum to their own state standards; the Common Core standards will have implications for the work that has been accomplished so far. This webinar will provide some insights into what is new in the Common Core standards and how to build on what has already been done in your district.

Expert: Federal school reform plan is wrong

Get-tough tactics hurt students instead of helping, education prof Diane Ravitch says

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

The president is wrong. Arne Duncan is wrong. The media are wrong. Many state administrators are wrong: This was the message on the current state of school reform in a Feb. 18 keynote session at the American Association of School Administrators' National Conference on Education.

You wouldn't expect to hear these inflammatory statements boldly pronounced by a woman who looks more suited to serving lemonade to grandchildren than inspiring hundreds of attendees at 8 a.m. amid the mountainous backdrop of Colorado.

With her elegantly cropped gray hair, string of pearls, and deep blue eyes on a petite face lined with years of experiences, Diane Ravitch, research professor of education at New York University and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, had a few choice words on how tough tactics supported by federal policy to encourage school reform are harming education rather than supporting it.

Ravitch read aloud the story of one fifth-grade teacher from California, which explains how school reform efforts are affecting his students and the community. The teacher's remarks are published here, edited for brevity:

Dear President Obama:

I mean this with all respect. I'm on my knees here, and there's a knife in my back, and the prints on it kinda match yours. I think you don't get it.

Your Race to the Top is killing the wrong guys. You're hitting the good guys with friendly fire. I'm teaching in a barrio in California. I had 32 kids in my class last year. I love them to tears. They're 5th graders. That means they're 10 years old, mostly. Six of them were 11 because they were retained. Five more were in special education, and two more should have been. I stopped using the word 'parents' with my kids because so many of them don't have them. Seven kids live with their 'Grams,' six with their dads. A few rotate between parents. Here's the kicker: Fifty percent of my students have set foot in a jail or prison to visit a family member.

Do you and your secretary of education, Arne Duncan, understand the significance of that? I'm afraid not. It's not bad teaching that got things to the current state of affairs. It's pure, raw poverty. We don't teach in failing schools. We teach in failing communities. It's called the ZIP Code Quandary. If the kids live in a wealthy ZIP code, they have high scores; if they live in a ZIP code that's entombed with poverty, guess how they do?

We also have massive teacher turnover at my school. Now, we have no money. We haven't had an art or music teacher in 10 years. We have a nurse twice a week. And because of the No Child Left Behind Act, struggling public schools like mine are held to impossible standards and punished brutally when they don't meet them. Did you know that 100 percent of our students have to be on grade level, or else

we could face oversight by an outside agency? That's like saying you have to achieve 100 percent of your policy objectives every year.

"This frames what I'm talking about," said Ravitch. "I get eMails like this every day from teachers and educators across the country."

If the spirit of the U.S. Department of Education's recent conference on Labor-Management Collaboration (see page 1) is to be taken seriously, the only way to achieve success in public education is to support one another and be team collaborators. However, what kind of leader fires staff rather than helps them, and what kind of team player places blame on others, Ravitch asked?

The current corporate reform agenda "isn't helping; it's only demoralizing teachers and giving them a sense of powerlessness. It's not leadership when, instead of problem solving as a group, you point fingers, lay blame, and dismiss your staff," she explained, referring to the Obama administration's "turnaround" model for improving the nation's lowest-performing schools. "... These get-tough tactics destroy trust and wipe away morale."

She continued: "Reform measures, with their emphasis on charters and vouchers, are trying to privatize education. I know parents want the best for their children, but we must work together as a community to give every child in that community a good education, not just the ones who can afford it. By allowing this to continue, we are unraveling the very social fabric of communities and undermining a cornerstone of democracy: public education."

According to Ravitch, there are some steps that can be taken to help students reach success: access to decent medical care; exposure to the arts and physical education, along with math and science; programs to help strengthen families and help parents; access to nurturing programs for children up to age five; and leaders with real education backgrounds, not those from the corporate sector with a year-long course in education.

Ravitch said teachers will be marching on Washington, D.C., to get their voices heard July 28-30.

"These aren't the bad teachers, the ones who don't care. These are the ones who truly want to help their students and know that basing performance just on test scores, and firing the people who really care about their students' lives, isn't going to help," she said. 

New at eSN Online this month

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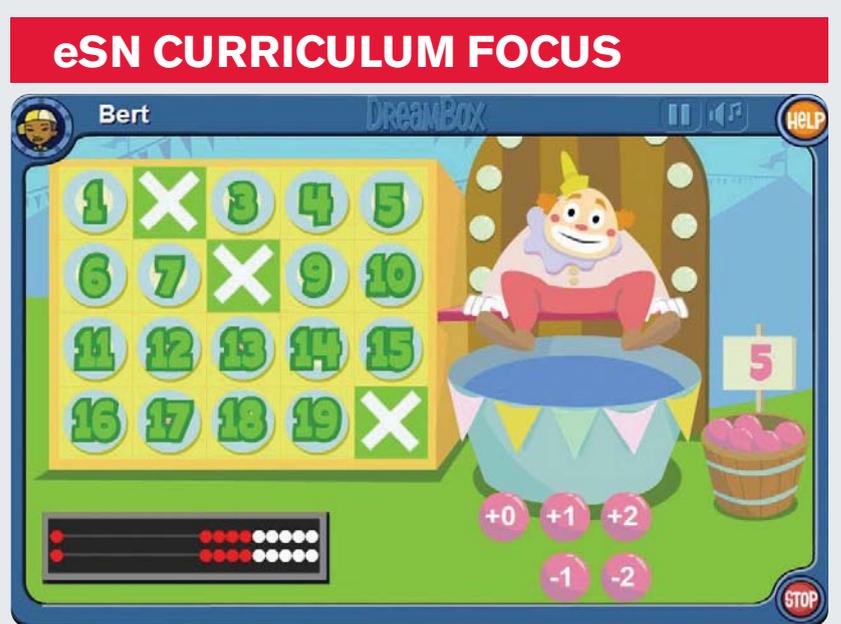


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Strong math skills are important if students hope to succeed—and software that delivers hands-on, personalized instruction can help.
— Jenna Zwang

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Frenemy of the people

Some of the Obama administration's policies seem to contradict its goals

Dennis Pierce, Editor
dpierce@eschoolnews.com

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend": I was reminded of this phrase in attending the Education Department's first-ever conference on strengthening school labor-management relations in February (see our lead story on page 1).

More than at any other education conference I've attended, there was a real energy about this event that was palpable, and the superintendents, school board presidents, and labor union presidents who attended seemed genuinely excited about putting the concepts they'd learned into practice.

Teachers' unions and district administrators both are feeling the heat from parents who want to see better results from their schools. They're also under siege from a new army of education reformers—people such as filmmaker Davis Guggenheim and Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates—who have never worked in a school system before but are convinced they know what's wrong with U.S. public education.

It's as if union and district leaders are fed up with outsiders telling them how to run their schools, and they're now putting aside their differences and joining together in the face of this outside threat to prove they can do the job themselves.

Conference participants seemed grateful to Education Secretary Arne Duncan and his staff for organizing the event, which drew teams from 150 school systems to learn how 12 exemplary districts have moved beyond what Montgomery County, Md., Superintendent Jerry Weast called the "ABCs—accuse, blame, criticize" to foster better labor-management collaboration in their schools.

At the same time, however, there was an undercurrent of distrust in Obama administration officials who have been guilty of practicing the "ABCs" themselves—such as in their "turnaround" model for improving the nation's lowest-performing schools.

As education researcher Diane Ravitch noted during the American Association of School Administrators' conference, held in Denver immediately after the labor-management event: "It's not leadership when, instead of problem solving as a group, you point fingers, lay blame, and dismiss your staff. ... These get-tough tactics destroy trust and wipe away morale." (See story, page 3.)

To many in attendance, the Obama administration's get-tough tactics seemed to contradict its newfound focus on collaboration. But this isn't the only example of how the administration's policies appear in conflict.

As we report on page 24, President Obama has requested \$90 million in his 2012 budget for the creation of a new ed-tech agency that would "support research on breakthrough technologies to enhance learning." The agency's goal would be to transform educational technology just as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency has transformed military technology.

While ed-tech advocates have expressed support for this proposal, they are deeply disappointed with the administration's plan to eliminate the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) program. The Consortium for School Networking, International Society for Technology Education, Software & Information Industry Association, and State Educational Technology Directors Association say this plan would take away the only federal program dedicated to investing in technology and training for K-12 educators.

"Elimination of the program ... is the surest way to devalue the billions of dollars invested over the last two years on improving broadband access to K-12 schools and directly undercuts ongoing ... efforts to deploy education data systems, implement new college and career-ready standards and assessments, and address the well-documented STEM crisis," the groups said in a March 8 statement.

Here's another example of the seemingly schizophrenic nature of Obama administration policy. As part of its efforts to boost college attainment, the administration has turned to online education to help meet this goal; in January, officials announced a \$2 billion federal grant program encouraging community colleges to create open online courseware that can be used by other institutions free of charge. Yet, a new federal rule scheduled to take effect July 1 could have a "major chilling effect" on online instruction, its critics say.

According to the rule, colleges that offer online instruction would have to get approval from every state in which they operate, or those online courses could be shut down. The requirement has drawn the ire of at least 60 higher-education organizations, which sent a letter to Sec. Duncan on March 2 objecting to the rule.

Instead of paying fees necessary to operate in multiple states, many institutions might stop offering online courses in those states—forcing students to find other ways to finish their education. For those schools that pay for state-by-state certification, the costs associated with compliance could lead to huge tuition increases, critics fear.

As educators and administrators band together in the face of opposition, it isn't just vocal school reformers they need to worry about ... but policies that undermine the administration's own stated objectives as well. **eSN**



Your Turn

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

Readers weigh in on treating education as a business

In the article "Viewpoint: Why education is not like business" (see page 32), contributing author Seth Rosenblatt wrote that, although there is a popular school of thought that says government—including public education—should be run more like a business, "government institutions exist for a different purpose than businesses, and they should operate by a different set of rules."

This article prompted a lot of debate among *eSchool News* readers when it appeared online Feb. 15. While many readers argued that schools could learn a lot from business, a majority agreed with the premise that businesses and schools have fundamentally different missions and therefore should not be compared.

"Business and education go hand in hand," stated **Pearcen**. "Both are driven by a mission, responsible to the shareholders (community and parents, students), and should be able to adapt to a changing world. In a business, employees are hired based off of value they can bring into your company. A system engineer will cost you a hefty sum, a janitor, not so much. So why can't most government schools, in general, pay more or less based on need? For instance, a school running on the business approach hires a 1st-year math teacher for \$60K and a 10th-year English teacher for \$50K. The business

knew it was harder to acquire a math teacher more so than the English, so they paid more. However, our current teacher pay scale is nearly the same. Your worth is only based off of years of service, and if you have a master's or doctorate, and not the value you can bring."

"I think these are all reasons why schools should be managed as a business by business people rather than institutionalized educators," said **gramola**. "If you accept the premise that our product is 'producing educated students who will be successful in life,' then we are failing miserably. Our marketing plan is way out of touch with the real world. Our curriculum is 30 years past usefulness. We are boring children and teaching useless information that the real world Googles. A fresh, innovative business approach is what we need to produce outstanding 'products.'"

Other readers pointed out that schools already are learning from the business sector in how they operate.

"It seems there is a consensus that education can be run in many ways like business," expressed **pmaddock**. "I've been an employee in high-tech business, school districts, and nonprofits and have seen some great practices applied no matter what type of organization it is. Some of the best districts in the country apply these approaches to map out processes, identify root causes of waste and ineffectiveness, and innovate using technology to create highly efficient and effective administrative and educational operations. All of this works

when you put the customer ... first, when you create cross-functional teams to eliminate barriers, and measure using data, not opinion. These practices have all come from business, and they work!"

Although education might benefit from applying some of the principles found in the business world, most readers noted that, in the end, the two realms are fundamentally different—and trying to compare them simply isn't fair.

"A widget producer has a product," said **m00r3t3ch**. "It starts with raw materials that are controlled in their quality, price, and abundance (among other controls). If any of these raw materials don't lead to maximum profit, they can be adjusted through negotiations with the supplier. Would the widget company allow the widget to leave the plant every evening to be influenced and changed outside of [its] controlled environment?"

"Some years ago, I read a great analogy that used the dentist-patient relationship as a model," said **friedma**. "A good dentist can do wonders to help her patient go through life with all her teeth; however, the patient needs to follow the dentist's orders—brush her teeth the appropriate number of times a day and in a proper manner, floss regularly, abstain from inappropriate foods, etc. If the patient doesn't follow the advice and her teeth decay, is it the fault of the dentist? Should we remove the dentist's license to practice because of the patient's failure?" **eSN**



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Can GPS tracking devices help lower truancy rates?

Tracking systems offer insight into students' locations—but not all parents are fans of the technology

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

Schools in the Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD) in California are the latest to try a novel way to improve attendance: monitoring students' whereabouts with global positioning satellite (GPS) tracking devices.

Attendance Improvement Management (AIM) Truancy Solutions has developed a walkie-talkie-sized GPS tracking device that is able to follow students' locations.

"The program was initially started to give counselors of chronic truants a means of verifying students' attendance and to create more accountability for the students," said Andy Wilson of AIM Truancy Solutions.

For teens with a history of skipping class, the GPS tracking devices are a final attempt to change their behavior before they are sent to juvenile detention centers. But some find the program to be too similar to a penal punishment system.

"I feel like they come at us too hard, and making kids carry around something that tracks them seems extreme," AUHSD parent Raphael Garcia told the *Orange County Register*.

"It's a criminalization of kids who have trouble getting to class every day," Belinda Escobosa Helzer, director of the Orange County office of the ACLU of Southern California, told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Wilson said the program is supportive, not punitive.

"Parents and students volunteer for our program because they would like additional help and support to get their student back in school," he said. "Also, the GPS device is a handheld mobile device no different than the cell phone most students currently carry. This device is just a tool that we use for a short period of time at the beginning of our program that gets students into a steady routine, a positive behavior change."

The program is completely voluntary, and parents have to give permission for their children to be tracked before students are outfitted with the devices.

School safety expert Patrick Fiel said the use of GPS tracking devices to curb truancy could help improve school safety.

"This is just one more way that technology ... can help schools handle serious problems such as truancy, bullying, vandalism, and gang activity," said Fiel, who is a public safety advisor for ADT Security Services and the former executive director of school security for the Washington, D.C., Public Schools.

"Truancy can cause many problems. Kids who willingly choose to ditch school are more likely to become involved in gangs and crimes such as vandalism, theft, drug dealing, and other activities that can cost cities thousands, even millions, of dollars to police or repair," Fiel continued.

He also said that schools lose state funding when students miss class, and teaching students better attendance habits could prove to be a financial boon for schools.

Dale Junior High School and South Junior High School, both in AUHSD, are two of the newest schools to enroll in AIM's program. Together, the schools have entered 32 seventh and eighth grade students into the program, said Elizabeth Novack, AUHSD superintendent. The students check in with an adult mentor, referred to as a coach, several times a week.

AUHSD is piloting the program in response to a wave of truancy. Novack said the schools have seen a 95- to 98-percent improvement in student attendance since they've implemented the program.

The mobile GPS units are handheld devices, and students are required to enter an identification code several times a day: when they wake up, when they arrive at school, after lunch, and at 8 p.m. If the students are not where they are supposed to be at these times, the GPS device provides a way for them to be located.

Wilson said the technology allows students to take responsibility for their education and whereabouts.

"[It] gets students into a steady routine, a positive behavior change," said Wilson, who added that the devices give students an excuse to "opt out" of situations where they might feel pressured by their peers. **eSN**

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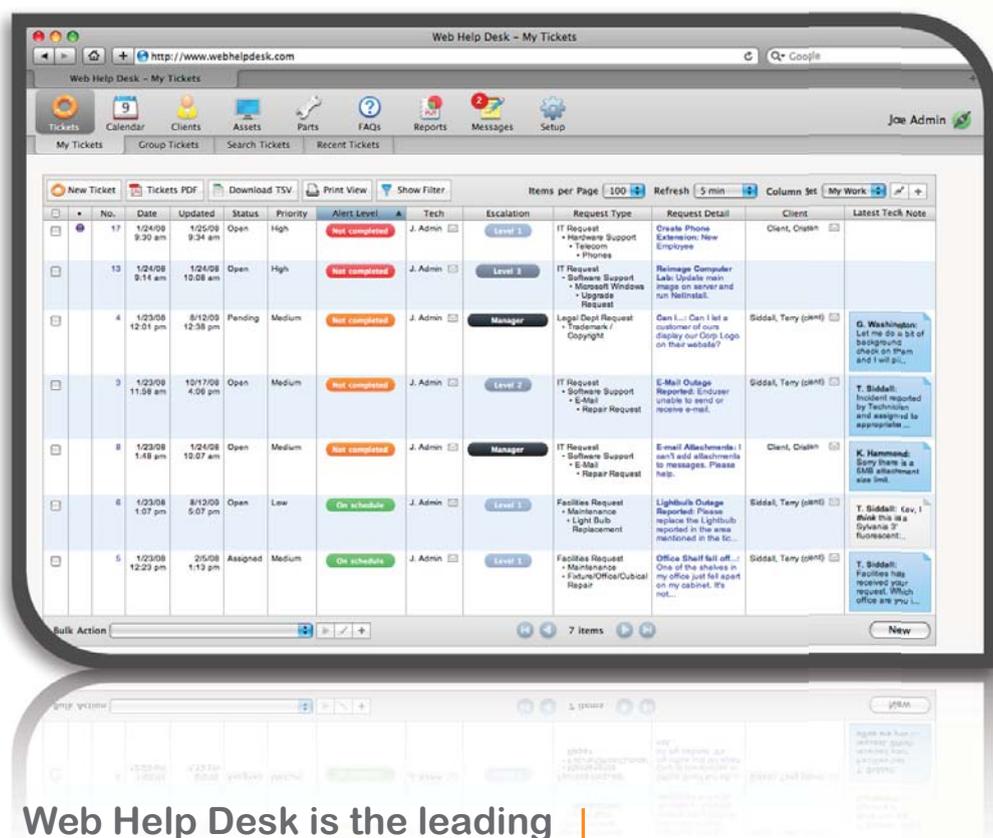
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Jobs breaks from medical leave to unveil iPad 2

New version of Apple's tablet computer is thinner and more powerful—for the same price

From staff and wire reports

Apple is back with a second-generation tablet computer that squeezes more power into a thinner shell while keeping prices in check. Underscoring the tablet's importance to Apple, CEO Steve Jobs briefly emerged from a medical leave on March 2 and made a surprising appearance to unveil the iPad 2 himself.

Except for Jobs' appearance, little about the iPad 2 came as a surprise after months

of speculation about features and upgrades. The tablet has two cameras built in for taking photos, recording video, and video chatting. The battery life will be the same as the original—about 10 hours of usage or a month on standby.

The iPad 2 is faster than its predecessor. Ross Rubin, an analyst for the market researchers NPD Group, said that should make the iPad better for creating music, video, and other content, rather than just consuming it.

The iPad 2 is also thinner: 8.8 millimeters, or about a third of an inch, instead of the current 13.4 millimeters. It weighs just a bit less: 1.3 pounds, compared with the original 1.5 pounds.

With a \$39 accessory, people can connect the tablet to televisions, so they can watch high-definition videos on the bigger screen.

The next-generation iPads will cost the same as the originals—\$499 to \$829, depending on storage space and whether they

can connect to the internet over a cellular network. Apple also will add a white model to the current black.

Apple's online store has begun selling the original iPad models for \$100 off, starting at \$399. Refurbished versions were even lower, starting at \$349.

Given its size, the iPad 2 appeared impractical for taking lots of photos, but both cameras will help with video chats—the front one to show the caller, and the back one to show what the caller is seeing.

The iPad 2 shared the spotlight with the man who presented it—Jobs, who announced in January that he would take a third leave of absence to focus on his health. In the last decade, Jobs, 56, has survived a rare but curable form of pancreatic cancer and undergone a liver transplant.

Jobs, looking frail in his signature black mock turtleneck and blue jeans, was greeted with a standing ovation. He did not address his health or say if and when he would return.

Tablet computers existed long before the iPad, but it took Apple to build a device that made sense to consumers. Apple simplified the software, designed a sleek, shiny shell, and sold 15 million of the iPads in nine months.

Competitors, including Dell Inc. and Samsung Electronics Co., have been trying since last year to lure consumers with smaller tablets, without much success. In February, Motorola Mobility Inc.'s Xoom went on sale with a new version of Google Inc.'s Android software that was designed for tablets, not smart phones.

The Xoom looks promising, with a comparably sized screen, a faster processor, and a few other bells and whistles the original iPad didn't have. But the iPad 2 catches up again with dual cameras and a faster chip inside, as well as a slimmer profile and an ever-expanding number of tablet-specific apps.

Apple also introduced updates to the software that runs on the iPad, iPhone, and iPod Touch. The company said the update, iOS 4.3, will work on iPhone 3GS and iPhone 4 models, except the new version for Verizon Wireless.

Among other things, the new system turns iPhones and iPads with 3G cellular connections into personal Wi-Fi hotspots, so you can share the connection with computers or other devices—if your wireless carrier allows it. Many charge additional fees for this service.

Apple also announced new software designed for the iPad, including a \$4.99 version of iMovie for video editing and a \$4.99 version of GarageBand, its music recording and editing software. GarageBand includes instruments that can be played by touching the iPad 2's screen, and it can even sense whether you're tapping quietly or banging on the "keys." 



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Federal broadband map shows need for connectivity

From staff and wire reports

The National Broadband Map, released by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) on Feb. 17, reveals that while the majority of schools are connected to the internet, those connection speeds are not meeting the needs of students and teachers.

NTIA created the National Broadband Map in collaboration with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), using data that each state, territory, and the District of Columbia (or their designees)

collected from broadband service providers or other data sources.

“The National Broadband Map shows there are still too many people and community institutions lacking the level of broadband service needed to fully participate in the internet economy. We are pleased to see the increase in broadband adoption last year, particularly in light of the difficult economic environment, but a digital divide remains,” said Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information and NTIA Administrator Lawrence E. Strickling. “Through NTIA’s

Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, digital literacy activities, and other initiatives, including the tools we are releasing today, the Obama administration is working to address these challenges.”

The website resulting from this federal-state partnership includes more than 25 million searchable records showing where broadband service is available, the technology used to provide the service, the maximum advertised speeds of the broadband service, and the names of the service providers. Users can search by address to find the broadband providers and services

available in the corresponding census block or road segment, view the data on a map, or use other interactive tools to compare broadband service across various geographies, such as states, counties, or congressional districts.

The map shows that between 5 and 10 percent of Americans lack access to broadband at speeds that support a basic set of applications, including downloading web pages, photos, and video and using simple video conferencing. The FCC last July set a benchmark of 4 Mbps actual speed downstream and 1 Mbps upstream to support these applications.

NTIA collected data in ranges between 3-6 Mbps and 6-10 Mbps of maximum advertised download speeds, which are the closest measurements to the speed benchmark for broadband that the FCC set.

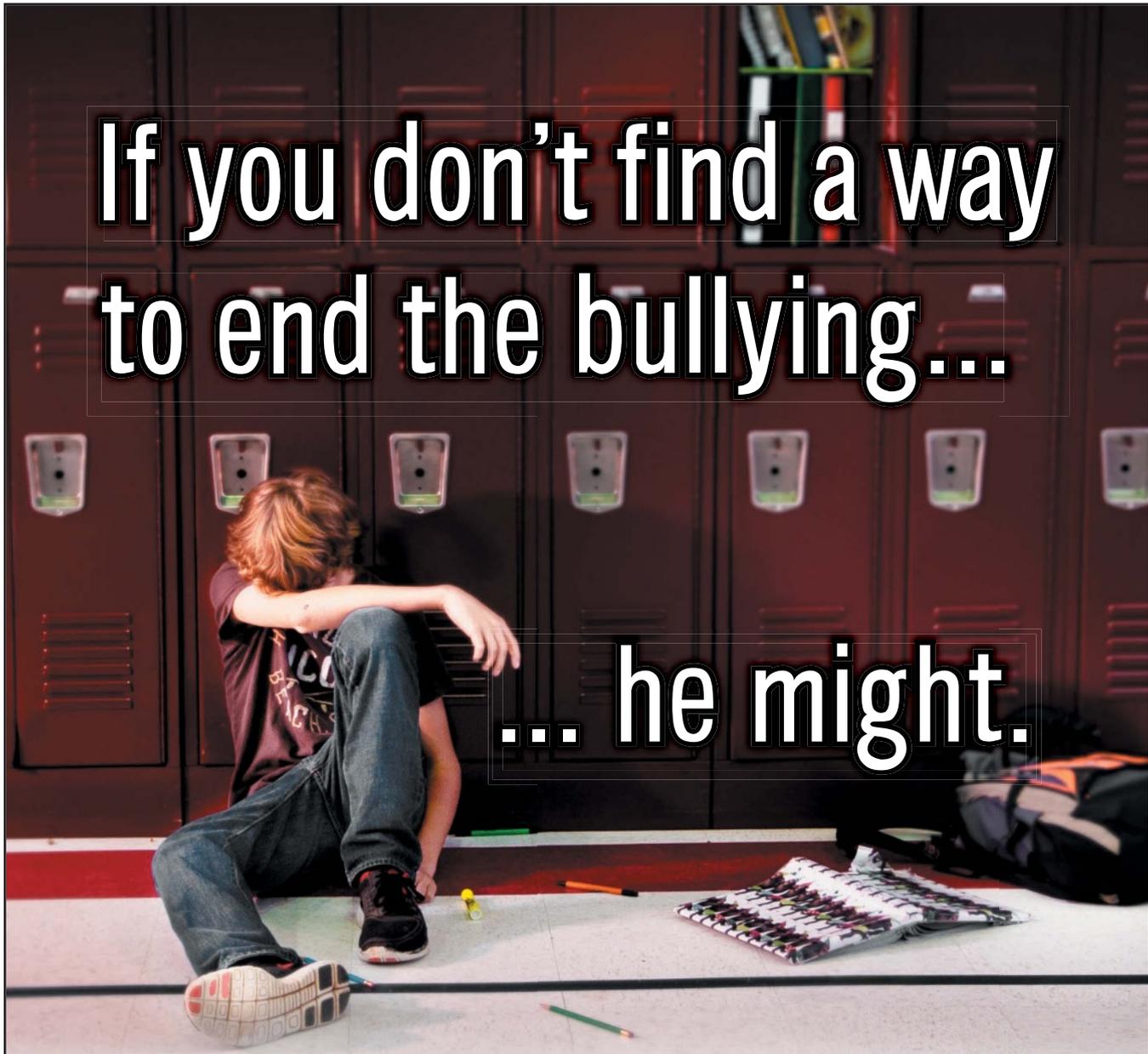
The data show that community anchor institutions are largely underserved. For example, based on studies by state ed-tech directors, most schools need a connection of 50 to 100 Mbps per 1,000 students. The data show that two-thirds of surveyed schools subscribe to speeds lower than 25 Mbps, however. In addition, only four percent of libraries reported subscribing to speeds greater than 25 Mbps.

“Ensuring high-speed broadband access for all students is a critical national issue and foundational to realizing our education reform and improvement goals,” said Douglas Levin, executive director of the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA). SETDA research contributed to NTIA data about school connectivity.

High-speed access is especially important in areas where learning opportunities are limited, such as rural areas where students might not have access to higher-level courses.

“Students everywhere need access to rich educational tools and resources, teachers need access for professional development and to engage in professional learning communities, [and] administrators need high-speed broadband access to conduct online assessments and to access data for effective decision-making,” Levin said. “Simply put, without continued and direct investment in broadband and educational technologies, education reformers are asking schools to improve, innovate, and compete with one hand tied behind their back.”

About 36 percent of Americans have access to wireless internet service at maximum advertised download speeds of 6 Mbps or greater, which some consider the minimum speed associated with “4G” wireless broadband service. Ninety-five percent of Americans have access to wireless internet service speeds of at least 768 kbps, which corresponds roughly to “3G” wireless service. 



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States make gains in building data systems

Annual analysis notes a positive trend ... but states still are not using the data effectively

From staff and wire reports

States have made unprecedented progress in collecting longitudinal data in education, but they have not taken action to ensure the data are used to improve student achievement, according to the Data Quality Campaign's sixth annual state analysis, *Data for Action 2010*, which tracks states' progress toward a set of goals that will help states use educational data to the fullest effect.

When the DQC launched in 2005, no state met all 10 of the group's Essential Elements of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems. Now, 24 states report they have implemented all 10 elements, and every state has committed to implement them by September. States that implement the 10 elements have the necessary information to understand what works in education and can allocate scarce resources to improve student achievement, the DQC says.

Those 10 elements are (1) a unique

statewide student identifier that connects student data across key databases across years; (2) student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation information; (3) the ability to match individual students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth; (4) information on untested students and the reasons they were not tested; (5) a teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to specific students; (6) student-level transcript information, including information

on courses completed and grades earned; (7) student-level college readiness test scores; (8) student-level graduation and dropout data; (9) the ability to match student records between the preK-12 and higher-education systems; and (10) a state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability.

In spite of this progress, the elements on educational data that lag behind are also those that are most critical to current policy discussions, the DQC says.

Seventeen states cannot link teacher and student data, 15 states do not collect course-taking information, and 11 states report the inability to link K-12 and post-secondary data. These states cannot inform critical policy questions about teacher effectiveness and college and career readiness, despite the growing demand for answers, the DQC says.

The results show that the barriers to implementing the 10 elements are not technical, but instead require leadership and political will. This is evidenced by Idaho's dramatic growth from three to 10 essential elements in just one year.

"Last year, we were the last state in the nation to implement a longitudinal data system. Now, we are on par with some of the most advanced systems across the United States," said Tom Luna, Idaho's superintendent of public instruction and Council of Chief State School Officers president-elect. "In Idaho, we now will have current, accurate data to make better-informed decisions at all levels and to give classroom teachers the data they need to guide instruction every day."

Besides tracking states' progress toward implementing the 10 essential elements, the DQC also tracks their progress toward adopting 10 "State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use."

No state has taken all 10 of these actions, the group says. These actions include linking state K-12 educational data systems with early learning, postsecondary education, workforce, social services, and other critical agencies; developing governance structures to guide data collection, sharing, and use; and implement policies and practices—including professional development and credentialing—to ensure that educators know how to access, analyze, and use data appropriately.

"There are no more excuses," said Aimee Guidera, the DQC's executive director. "We are at a critical juncture in education, and state policy makers must take action to ensure data are not only collected but used by education stakeholders to improve student achievement." **eSN**

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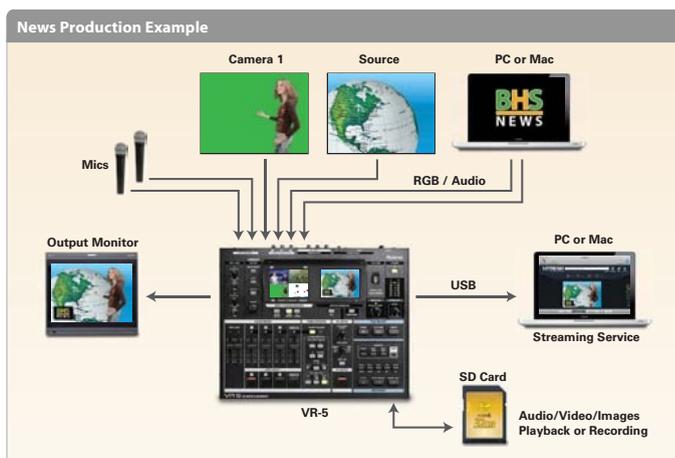
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A call for curriculum to support common standards

From staff and wire reports

A diverse group of educators and stakeholders is calling for clear curricular guidance to complement the new Common Core State Standards that most states have adopted, including examples of curriculum strategies that educators can use in their own classrooms.

The statement, released by the nonpartisan Albert Shanker Institute and signed by dozens of educators, policy makers, researchers, and scholars representing viewpoints from across the educational and po-

litical spectrum, recommends the creation of voluntary model curricula that can be taught in the nation's classrooms.

"Standards are merely road maps—but they don't tell us much about what kids really need," said Susan B. Neuman, a professor in the University of Michigan's School of Education and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, urged broad support and dissemination for the statement, titled "A Call for Common Content."

"We are arguing for the tools and materials that teachers need," she said. "With rich, sequential common curricula, amplified by state and local content—and with teacher preparation, classroom materials, student assessments, teacher development, and teacher evaluation all aimed at the mastery of that content—we can finally build the kind of coherent system that supports the achievement of all learners; the kind of system enjoyed by the world's highest performing nations."

The statement's release comes at a time when, after decades of debate, the nation is

on its way to having common, voluntary standards in mathematics and English/language arts.

Although this recent state-led effort is an important first step, Common Core supporters say proper curriculum and support must accompany the effort.

"The implementation doesn't get translated often to the people who are doing the work in the classroom," said Barbara Byrd Bennett, chief academic and accountability officer in the Detroit Public Schools. "They need the resources, directions, development guides, materials, and sample lessons."

The statement makes clear that its signers are not urging states to use a single or a national curriculum. Rather, a number of curricula could be developed—all aligned to the common standards and all of high quality. States could choose among curricula created by others, create their own, or work with other states to develop shared curriculum. States and districts then could fit additional content they might choose into their overall educational program.

The statement says that states also must develop, or have access to, curricula that:

- Lay out a clear and practical design for learning the disciplines that teachers can use to help students acquire the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn in core academic subjects;
- Illuminate grade-level expectations and learning progressions for teaching and learning in a coherent and substantive manner;
- Involve teachers and other learning experts in their development;
- Fit available instructional time, as well as leave adequate time for the inclusion of local content; and
- Include sample lessons, examples of student work, and assessments that help teachers focus instruction and measure student outcomes.

With help from the U.S. Department of Education, many states have begun to work together to design new assessment systems aligned with the common standards, said Eugenia Kemble, executive director of the Albert Shanker Institute.

"But the assessments they end up using should measure domains of knowledge recommended to them by professional content experts and practitioners through some publicly accountable process," she said.

Added Weingarten: "The common standards give us a much clearer vision of what all students should learn and be able to do at every level of schooling. But in order for teachers to teach, and for us to measure our progress towards achieving these lofty goals, we need to provide educators, schools, districts, and states with the missing pieces—specific curricula, materials they can use, and the training to get it done." 

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Schools to get \$9M for off-campus wireless access

20 projects chosen to test new e-Rate rules permitting use of wireless service outside of school

From staff and wire reports

Government officials are handing out \$9 million for projects that will help schools extend wireless internet connections beyond the classroom.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on March 9 announced 20 pilot projects that will receive federal e-Rate funding to pay for wireless broadband connections for laptops, smart phones, and other mobile devices, which students will be able to take with them after the school day ends.

The program is intended to give students—including those from low-income families who might have no other internet service at home—access to homework assignments, study guides, digital textbooks, and other educational resources outside of regular school hours.

Called Learning On-the-Go, the program will reach nearly 35,000 students across 14 states in the 2011-12 school year, FCC officials said. It will be paid for through the government's e-Rate program, which funds internet access in schools and libraries but until now has never been used to pay for off-campus connections.

The e-Rate is one of four programs that make up the Universal Service Fund, the federal program that subsidizes telephone service in poor and rural areas through fees collected from long-distance carriers. These carriers subsequently pass along a surcharge on their long-distance phone bills.

The projects that will be funded include programs that will pay for laptop connections for elementary and secondary school students in New Orleans, wireless cards for high school boys from low-income households in Philadelphia, and smart-phone access for students with Attention Deficit Disorder or Asperger's syndrome in Canton, Ohio.

The FCC will evaluate the effectiveness of these pilot projects to determine whether, and how, off-premises wireless services should be eligible for continued e-Rate support. The agency said it would reveal its criteria for evaluating the projects' success in a forthcoming order, but the criteria will include how frequently and effectively students use resources outside of school for educational and research purposes.

The 20 pilot projects were chosen from among nearly 100 applications from school districts and libraries nationwide. Through these pilot projects, wireless connectivity will be provided to 10 netbook or laptop programs, two virtual online schools, three handheld-device programs, and five programs that combine various technologies, the FCC said.

"If we want our kids to be able to compete in the digital economy, we need to equip them with the latest digital tools and the skills to use them," FCC Chairman Julius

Genachowski said in announcing the pilot projects. "With mobile broadband, students who now carry 50 pounds of textbooks in their backpacks can instead have digital textbooks with up-to-date materials and cutting-edge interactive learning tools."

He added: "Education doesn't stop at the schoolyard gate or the library door, so support of broadband for education shouldn't stop there, either."

Alabama's Piedmont City Schools, one of the pilot districts, will use its e-Rate funding to provide wireless internet access in students' homes through a mesh network

that encompasses the city limits. The network will enable students in grades 4-12 to use the laptop computers they've been given by the district at home as well as school.

"Our long-term plans include high school students taking a variety of online and at-school classes that are all being delivered by our teachers," said Superintendent Matt Akin, a winner of the 2011 Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards from *eSchool News* (see page 26). "Imagine the possibilities—flexible schedules that allow students to work, take university or community college classes, and even complete their high school

credits early to allow them to attend a local university during their senior year."

Because about 65 percent of Piedmont's students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, the district could not implement its plans without providing internet access at home. "I truly believe that ... we could be a model for instruction that could be used throughout the country," Akin said.

The money will go to projects in Colorado, Pennsylvania, New York, Florida, Ohio, Georgia, Texas, Michigan, North Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, California, New Mexico, and Iowa. **eSN**



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National AASA conference focuses on collaboration

From staff reports

Nothing makes people come together in good spirits like unexpected warm weather in a terribly cold season, and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) took advantage of this by focusing on the importance of teamwork and collaboration during its 143rd annual National Conference on Education in balmy Denver, Colo., Feb. 17-19.

Amid sunny skies and a temperature of 55 degrees, attendees gathered to discuss, among other things, how AASA's mission statement has changed to reflect the modern superintendency.

Instead of focusing on professional development, which the organization says is still important, the statement now reads: "The mission of [AASA] is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children."

"To support and develop system leaders, you have to emphasize that seeking a better understanding of how we can all work together is the key to success," said Ed Hatrick, president of AASA and superintendent of Virginia's Loudoun County Public Schools. Hatrick said this understanding was on display during the Education Department's first-ever conference on Labor-Management Collaboration, held in Denver two days before the AASA conference began (see story, page 1).

Keynote speaker Michael Fullan, professor emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, said a love of employees and of building relationships are



District leaders attend AASA's event.

two components that have created the most influential leaders.

Fullan also revealed his "secrets of change," which include loving your employees, connecting peers with purpose, and maintaining transparency.

"There are also three keys to becoming a great leader that have to do with actual implementation," said Fullan, "and those are: Focus on a small number of core priorities, attend to relationships, and go light on judgment."

He added: "It's what I like to call 'simplicity.' The simple part is that there are a small number of things you have to get right, and the complex part is that you have to get them right in connection with people."

Fullan described what can be detrimental to effective leadership: "Don't look too

far in the future, especially with no strategy [that can withstand scrutiny] in place." There are ways to make sure this doesn't happen, he said: "First, know your current stage of performance before you make goals for the future. Then, compare this performance year to year—not in chunks, such as 2005 compared to 2011, but 2005 compared to 2006, to 2007, to 2008, et cetera. And finally, have a concrete strategy, not just ideas, to get there."

AASA, NSBA to combine national conferences

AASA and the National School Boards Association will combine their annual conferences into a single event beginning in 2013, the two organizations announced during AASA's 2011 event.

The move is expected to save money for the organizations and also for school systems, which won't have two separate events for district leaders to attend.

With the hostile economy, it just wasn't economically feasible for these shows to exist as standalone conferences any more, organizers said. Last fall, NSBA announced that its long-running Technology + Learning (T+L) conference no longer would exist, either.

Through their new partnership, AASA and NSBA will combine forces to create a larger, more cost-efficient national conference that will continue to serve their members' interests, while also featuring some overlapping content, officials said.

"A joint conference will realize significant savings for both organizations. Our intentions are to pursue separate tracks for

superintendents and [school] board members, but a track common to both in areas like board/superintendent relations," said Dan Domenech, executive director of AASA.

AASA still plans to hold its National Conference on Education in Houston next year, and it hopes to hold the first joint NSBA-AASA conference in San Diego in spring 2013.

Upon hearing the news, some administrators told *eSchool News* they were worried about a combined meeting, which might blur the images and reduce the autonomy of the two organizations, they said. One administrator claimed many superintendents dislike attending conferences with board members. "The superintendent can get roped into acting as a babysitter for the board members," the administrator explained.

On the other hand, the vendors who spoke with *eSchool News* generally were pleased with the announcement. Consolidating the conferences will cut costs, ease logistical demands, and reduce the strain on staff resources, they said. **eSN**

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TCEA seeks to remove barriers from tech access

Laura Devaney
Managing Editor

Technology's potential to improve education knows no limits: This was the resounding message during the Texas Computer Education Association's annual conference Feb. 7-11.

In fact, the conference theme was "no limits," a reference both to technology's potential and the role that information technology plays in the lives of people everywhere and at each stage of education.

"School extends beyond the four walls of our classrooms," said Karla Burkholder, vice president of conventions on the TCEA board, noting that distance learning enables students to view sights from across the world and access learning opportunities they otherwise might not be able to.

TCEA Board President Elect Lacey Gosch said today's students expect classrooms that use digital tools in every step of the learning process. "Only through the use of technology can we make their expectations a reality," she said.

Texas, like many other states, is suffering from strained school budgets, sharp declines in property tax revenues, and fears that education funding hasn't hit its lowest point. "Our children's future is in our legislators' hands," Gosch said.

Texas Rep. Rob Eissler, chair of the Texas House of Representatives' education committee, encouraged attendees to help their students find relevance in education.

"Relevance is what keeps kids in school," he said, adding that if a child sees that his or her time is worth spending in school, that child will become more engaged in learning.

Eissler acknowledged educators' funding fears, but he predicted that more money will be funneled to content delivery solutions designed to reach all children.

"Kids will pick Google or Bing over the World Book [Encyclopedia]," he said, adding: "We need economical solutions to reach more kids effectively."

Free tech tools for teachers

Although the conference urged educators to explore how limitless technology can transform education, presenters also acknowledged the tough budget situation that schools across the nation are facing.

Doing more with less has become a mantra in education, and in turn, free resources are more popular than ever. On Feb. 10, technology integration specialists Jenni Keith and Sarah Daugherty from the Coppell, Texas, Independent School District presented a roundup of free web tools to a packed room.

WebList (www.weblist.me) is a tool that aggregates different resources under one URL. Users can collect websites, images, documents, and videos in an editable list. Each resource gets its own URL, but users can send the main URL to colleagues and share all the resources in one place.

TypeWith.Me (<http://typewith.me>) lets users collaborate in real time in a chat-like format. One user creates a document and sends the URL to others, and each user types in a different color. Users can import and export text files, websites, and documents for collaborative learning, brainstorming, and editing. Students can collaborate with one another on projects or group study sessions, and revisions are saved. A time slider function lets users and teachers view the chat progression.

My StoryMaker (www.carnegielibrary.org/kids/storymaker), from the Carnegie Libraries of Pittsburgh, lets students create their own stories that are archived for 30 days. Once created, a story is saved as a PDF and can be exported to a computer for permanent access. Students can play with characters, shapes, colors, movement, and sentences. Because users can't edit a story after it is created, Daugherty recommended asking students to map out their stories before creating them online. It's particularly popular with first and second grade students in the district, she said.

Glogster EDU (<http://edu.glogster.com>) lets educators and students create online multimedia posters with text, photos, videos, graphics, sounds, drawings, data attachments, and more. Once projects are complete, a teacher can share students' work in a variety of educational settings. Glogs can be embedded in a blog, wiki, or website, or shared with others using

Glogster EDU's presentation capabilities.

Tagxedo (www.tagxedo.com) turns words, including speeches, news articles, and student research papers, into a tag cloud. Students and teachers can choose the shape of their tag cloud, and they can import a picture if desired. The most frequently used words appear the largest in the cloud. The site also features a list of 101 ways to use the resource.

ViewPure (<http://viewpure.com>) gives educators the ability to show students YouTube videos without advertising, links to suggested videos that might be inappropriate, or user comments. Users can copy the video's "pure" URL for future reference. In addition, teachers can opt to install a "Purify" button on their browser's toolbar. Instead of pasting a YouTube video's URL into the ViewPure URL field, a user can simply click on the "Purify" button while viewing the YouTube video to instantly clear it of questionable content. **eSN**

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News from the FETC and TCEA conference exhibit halls

New software for managing mobile devices as they connect to a school's network, a digital workspace where students can synthesize the information they find through online search engines, and the first fully washable headphones for students were among the many products introduced during the Florida Educational Technology Conference (FETC) and the Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA) conference in February.

Here are some of the highlights from these conference exhibitors...

Aspen Learning showcased OpenClassroom, a safe communication tool that lets students collaborate through wikis, blogs, and forums; allows for messaging and polling; offers quizzes, assignments, grading, and a calendar for learning management; and supplies file storage.

<http://www.aspenlearning.com>

AVRover demonstrated its turnkey solution for delivering stereoscopic 3D video from a single system. The solution combines a 3D projector and cart, active shutter glasses, and 3D math and science content from providers such as DesignMate, Cyberanatomy, and Amazing Interactive. AVRover also sells its own 3D glasses that operate on rechargeable batteries and cost \$59 per pair, much less than those from other manufacturers. An added benefit of the company's glasses is that they fold up for easy storage and contain an on/off button to save on battery life.

<http://www.avrover.com>

Califone unveiled what it called the industry's only fully washable headphones, which it demonstrated by submerging the headphones under water. The devices also are the first to limit the maximum volume output to 85 decibels, which is the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's recommended maximum volume for safe listening, Califone says.

<http://www.califone.com>

CDW-G and the Austin Independent School District (AISD) announced the installation of 2,000 "Innovation Stations" throughout the district's 120 schools to give teachers and students technology-enabled lessons. AISD's ed-tech staff, with help from CDW-G, designed the Innovation Station—a central podium with a touch-screen pad that enables teachers to control instructional technologies, including a mounted projector, screen, document camera, and classroom audio system with microphones, amplifiers, and speakers. The technology is supported with ongoing professional development for faculty.

<http://www.cdwg.com>

CIPAFilter showed a new Network Access Control feature as part of its filtering and security offerings. This new feature gives school leaders the ability to easily manage and control mobile devices that connect to their school's network, including iPads, iPhones, laptops, and other devices.

<http://www.cipafilter.com>

Epson America introduced the PowerLite X9, delivering bright and powerful projection to education for roughly \$599. This new projector offers 2,500 lumens of light output and XGA resolution for detailed, bright presentations in classrooms, as well as small to medium-sized conference rooms. It features easy USB setup, closed captioning, extended lamp life, and 3LCD technology.



<http://www.epson.com>

Extron Electronics announced that its video controller and networking products have been added to the Eligible Services List (ESL) for the federal e-Rate program, which provides telecommunications discounts to eligible schools and libraries. The master controller and switches in Extron's PoleVault System are listed as eligible for e-Rate support under the "Video Products" category in the program's latest ESL, Extron said—although the system's speakers and mounting brackets are not e-Rate eligible.

<http://www.extron.com>

Hitachi introduced the iPJ-AW250N Interactive Projector, which has all the functionality of an interactive whiteboard built into it, eliminating the need for additional hardware. Any suitable wall or surface can be converted into an interactive display using the projector, Hitachi said. The iPJ-AW250N features a touch screen, as well as an ultra-short-throw lens that enables it to be mounted close to a wall or projection surface. This prevents obstructed images and shadows, with no light shining in the presenter's eyes. The user can annotate, manipulate, and resize projected images by using Hitachi's pen-sized Interactive Control; a remote control also is included.

<http://www.hitachi.com>

Inspiration Software's Webspiration Classroom is a new online thinking and collaborating tool that takes the company's software into the cloud. Developed to keep students from falling behind in English and language arts, Webspiration Classroom offers visual tools to help students plan their essays and improve their writing skills online, from any internet-connected computer, Inspiration said.

<http://www.inspiration.com>

netTrekker launched igotta, a personalized online workspace for students to organize, analyze, and use the information they find from netTrekker's kid-friendly search engine or from other online sources to create reports, writing assignments, presentations, and projects. The product combines note-taking features, citation tools, and outlining tools in a single cloud-based environment, netTrekker says. It will be sold as a separate product according to a subscription-based model.

<http://www.nettrekker.com>

Peoples Education demonstrated Practice Path, an online, standards-based practice and skill-building tool that lets students practice their reading and math skills, while showing their progress toward mastery of these skills. New to the product as of January is the ability for educators to toggle back and forth between reports showing students' progress toward state standards and toward the Common Core standards in reading and math that many states have adopted.

<http://www.peopleseducation.com>

RM Education displayed its VerTable, a height-adjustable project table that can be used horizontally, vertically, as a dry-erase board, or as a projection screen. When used with an eBeam projection kit from Luidia and an ultra short-throw projector, the VerTable becomes a fully collaborative surface. RM also introduced the RM Slate, a handheld tablet designed for K-12 students and educators. It uses Windows 7 and features a multi-touch screen, pen stylus, and handwriting recognition.

<http://www.rmeducation.com>

SAFARI Montage introduced the Digital Curriculum Presenter, a new way to deliver digital content that combines video management and distribution with the functionality of a learning management system (LMS). The system resides on a school's network between its student information system and its LMS software, and it allows teachers to create "playlists" and schedule the delivery of classroom video and related content to certain groups of students. It works with any IMS-compatible software, such as Blackboard or Moodle, and it "leverages the work that teachers do in [these systems] to drive digital instruction through a single interface," said company CEO Andrew Schlessinger.

<http://www.safarimontage.com>

The Software and Information Industry Association's Education Division announced the release of "Don't Copy That 2, School Version," which is part of SIIA's ongoing effort to help K-12 teachers educate their students about the ethical and legal use of copyrighted materials such as software, books, articles, music, and movies. The video addresses the dangers of piracy and the importance of respecting the creative output of others.

<http://www.sii.net>

Texas Instruments introduced the new color-display TI-Nspire CX handheld. The TI-Nspire CX offers a set of fully integrated tools that allow dynamic links among multiple representations of a problem. Its color display enables students to better observe patterns and make connections between math and science concepts and real-world learning, TI says. With the TI-Nspire CX and TI-Nspire CAS handhelds' new 3D graphing capabilities, students can explore concepts from multiple points of view to develop deeper conceptual understanding.

<http://education.ti.com>

VizZle announced the launch of the VizZleGram, a new service that teachers, speech therapists, and occupational therapists working with students in the autism spectrum can use to share interactive lessons with parents, after-school programs, and tutors. Educators can send a VizZleGram to anyone with an eMail address, and the recipient can play the shared lesson.

<http://www.monarchteachtech.com/vizzle>



Harmony ...

continued from page 1

country to explore how all sides can successfully navigate what are often quite contentious, politically charged issues surrounding school reform ... and ultimately act in the best interest of students.

In opening remarks, Education Secretary Arne Duncan said raising student achievement won't be possible without school district labor and management teams working together.

"I know it takes courage and conviction to publicly commit to working together with groups that are sometimes portrayed as adversaries, rather than as allies," Duncan said.

He added: "School boards, administrators, and teacher leaders face different challenges—from setting policy and approving budgets to hiring staff, negotiating agreements, and ensuring due process. Yet all stand or fall together on the quality of student learning."

The conference was held at a particularly apt time, as a growing wave of anti-labor sentiment has fueled tension between teachers' unions and other education stakeholders.

State legislatures in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee are among those considering new bills that would eliminate or severely curtail teachers' collective bargaining rights in negotiating contracts. Wyoming lawmakers are entertaining a



ED's first-of-its-kind event drew participants from 150 school districts.

measure to end teacher tenure, which would allow the immediate suspension or firing of teachers for any reason not expressly prohibited by law. And New Jersey is one of many cash-strapped states looking to cut public employees' pensions to help balance their budgets.

Despite the potential for new conflicts these developments have created, "President Obama and I are convinced that labor and management can collaborate to solve many of our nation's enduring educational challenges," Duncan said. "And we believe that progress more often follows tough-minded collaboration than tough-minded confrontation."

Teachers and school district leaders share two common perspectives that make

such collaboration possible, conference presenters noted: (1) They both got into the education field because, at their core, they want what is best for students; and (2) Both sides are under heavy pressure from the public to produce better results.

"Everyone in this room was drawn to education for similar reasons. You wanted to make a difference in the lives of children," Duncan said. "It makes sense that if we began with these shared goals and aspirations, a shared agenda for achieving them would naturally follow."

Still, this kind of collaboration between labor and management isn't easy, participants acknowledged—especially if each side blames the other for the problems facing U.S. education.

Laura Rico, union president for the ABC Unified School District in southern California and national vice president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), said fostering a good working relationship between labor and management is "hard work"—but "I'd do it again in a heartbeat," she added.

Rico meets with her superintendent, Gary Smuts, once a week for about two hours each session. During these meetings, they discuss any problems and issues that might have arisen, with an eye toward how they can solve those problems together.

The goal should be to "quit trying to win arguments, and instead seek solutions," Rico said.

Despite serving a population in which 92 percent of its 20,000 students are minorities and 22 percent are English-language learners, the district has had remarkable success since labor and management began working together more closely. ABC's score on California's Academic Performance Index has increased every year since the partnership began more than a decade ago, and the district's average scores in reading and math far exceed the state average. (For more information about ABC Unified's unique labor-management partnership, see below.)

ABC Unified was one of 12 presenting districts whose members shared their secrets to successful labor-management collaboration during the conference.

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How one district has raised student achievement through better labor-management collaboration

Laura Rico, union president for southern California's ABC Unified School District and national vice president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), said the idea of collaboration between labor and management was "very risky—even political suicide" when union leaders began working more closely with district leaders in the late 1990s. But the partnership has paid off in a big way, she said—demonstrating that when both sides come together in the interest of students, better achievement can follow.

For ABC Unified, the timing was right to take such a risk. In 1993, the district's teachers went on strike over cuts to their pay and benefits. The strike lasted eight days, and it taught Rico and her colleagues that "it's better to be in a labor-management partnership than it is to be out on the street," she said—better for the students and for everyone involved.

The hiring of a new superintendent in 1999, coupled with the election of three new board members that same year, opened the door for greater collaboration between teachers and district leaders.

Around that time, Rico received information from the AFT promoting a week-long seminar at Harvard University on better labor-management relations in public schools. She attended the seminar along with other district leaders, and they learned how to listen and talk to each other. When they returned to the district, the new superintendent, Ron Barnes, was receptive to the idea. He and Rico began meeting once a week to discuss new problems or chal-

lenges that might have arisen during the week—a practice that continues with the current superintendent, Gary Smuts.

The district also created a set of guiding principles that formed the basis of its new labor-management partnership. These are:

- All students can succeed; we will not accept any excuses and will work together to promote student achievement.
- All necessary support will be made available to schools to make sure every child succeeds—and we will work together to make sure that happens.
- All employees contribute to a student's success, including support staff such as nurses, counselors, janitors, and office personnel.
- All negotiations support conditions that sustain successful teaching and learning.
- We won't let each other fail.
- We will work hard to understand the core of each other's job.
- We will respect each other, be honest with each other, and maintain confidentiality.
- We will not "sugar coat" difficult issues, but we will disagree without being disagreeable.
- We will reflect on each other's comments, suggestions, and concerns, seeking clarification until we understand.
- We will both "own the contract."
- We will aim to solve problems rather than win arguments.
- We will laugh at ourselves and with each other.

ABC Unified has fostered a sense of

"we're all in this together" among its labor and management teams, and the results are hard to argue with: Despite a student population in which 92 percent are minorities and 22 percent are English-language learners, the district's average scores in reading and math far exceed the state average. In fact, ABC Unified has exceeded the student achievement goals set by the state of California and continues to improve every year.

Rico said it has taken "hard work" to keep the labor-management partnership going—but "I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

It has helped that both sides recognize the value each other brings to the enterprise and want each other to be successful.

"Only a strong superintendent and school board can succeed," Rico said, "so we want to support each other." Says Smuts: "I am a better superintendent because I have a strong union president."

Shared decision-making also is key—district and union leaders worked together for three years to come up with a teacher evaluation system that both sides considered fair—as is sharing in the inevitable sacrifices that must be made. For example, the district's union bears some of the cost of training in labor-management relations (with help from AFT Innovation Grants), and to help staff members agree to a recent furlough, administrators accepted a 2-percent pay cut for themselves.

Transparency in all labor-management discussions also is important. "I don't know anything more about the budget than Laura knows," Smuts said.

To help other districts form strong labor-management partnerships of their own, ABC Unified offered the following suggestions:

- Commit to taking a risk.
- Start regular meetings between the superintendent and union president (and between the human resources director and the union president).
- Develop a set of guiding principles and behaviors that will define the partnership.
- Start small; pick a project to work on together.

For ABC Unified, the first project that union and district leaders worked on together was a partnership to improve the reading skills of students in the district's South Side, where a higher percentage of students came from economically disadvantaged families.

Union and district leaders teamed up to create the South Side Reading Collaborative, through which they jointly sponsored professional development conferences to improve reading instruction. They also stepped up their recruiting of teachers to work in South Side schools by offering \$5,000 signing bonuses and funding the last year of college for student teachers who agreed to work in the schools for at least two years.

As a result of the partnership, the reading skills of South Side students have shown steady gains since 2002.

"We found out, 'My gosh, look what happens when you work together,'" Rico said. eSN

Educators' collective bargaining rights at stake in many states

From staff and wire reports

Officials at public schools and colleges across the country are watching as battles over the rights of public employees to collectively bargain play out in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and other states.

Republicans who swept into power in state capitols this year with promises to cut spending and bolster the business climate now are beginning to usher in a new era of labor relations that could result in the largest reduction of power in decades for public employee unions.

"The consequences will be rolling forth for many, many years," said James Gregory, director of Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington. "The battle lines have been drawn and will be replicated around the country."

In Wisconsin, at least two dozen protesters spent the night just outside the state Assembly chamber in anticipation of a March 10 vote on explosive legislation that passed the state Senate after Republicans outmaneuvered their missing Democratic counterparts and pushed through the bill.

The extraordinary turn of events on March 9 set up a perfunctory vote on Republican Gov. Scott Walker's measure that would strip nearly all collective bargaining rights from most public workers.

Within hours of the Senate passing the bill, a crowd of hundreds of protesters grew to about 7,000 in the Capitol, a crowd as large as any seen inside the building in three weeks of demonstrations.

"The whole world is watching!" protesters shouted as they pressed up against the heavily guarded entrance to the Senate chamber.

The bill had been stymied after all 14 Senate Democrats fled to Illinois in February, preventing the chamber from having enough members present to pass it. Walker introduced it to plug a \$137 million budget shortfall.

The Senate requires a quorum of 20 to take up any measures that spend money. But a special committee of lawmakers from the Senate and Assembly voted late on March 9 to take all the spending measures out of the legislation, and the Senate approved it minutes later, 18-1.

Republican Sen. Dale Schultz cast the lone no vote.

"I voted my conscience, which I feel reflects the core beliefs of the majority of voters who sent me here to represent them," Schultz said in a statement.

Before the March 9 vote, it appeared the standoff would persist until Democrats returned to Madison from their self-imposed exile. But in a matter of minutes, it was over.

"In 30 minutes, 18 state senators undid 50 years of civil rights in Wisconsin. Their disrespect for the people of Wisconsin and their rights is an outrage that will never be forgotten," said Democratic Senate Minority Leader Mark Miller. "Tonight, 18 Senate Republicans conspired to take government away from the people."

In an interview with the Associated Press, Miller said there is nothing Democrats can do now to stop the bill: "It's a done deal."

Walker had repeatedly argued that collective bargaining is a budget issue, because his proposed changes would give local governments the flexibility to confront the budget cuts needed to close the state's \$3.6 billion deficit. He has said that without the changes, he might have needed to lay off 1,500 state workers and make other cuts to balance the budget.

Walker had rejected every offer of compromise floated by unions, Democrats, and even Schultz. All of the alternative proposals would have balanced the budget without permanently eliminating collective bargaining rights.

The measure forbids most government workers from collectively bargaining for wage increases beyond the rate of inflation unless approved by referendum. It also re-

quires public workers to pay more toward their pensions and double their health insurance contribution, a combination equivalent to an 8-percent pay cut for the average worker. Police and firefighters are exempt.

Walker's proposal touched off a national debate over union rights for public employees and prompted tens of thousands of demonstrators to converge on Wisconsin's capital city for weeks of protests. Similar protests were held in other cities as union supporters organized rallies from New York to Los Angeles in a show of solidarity.

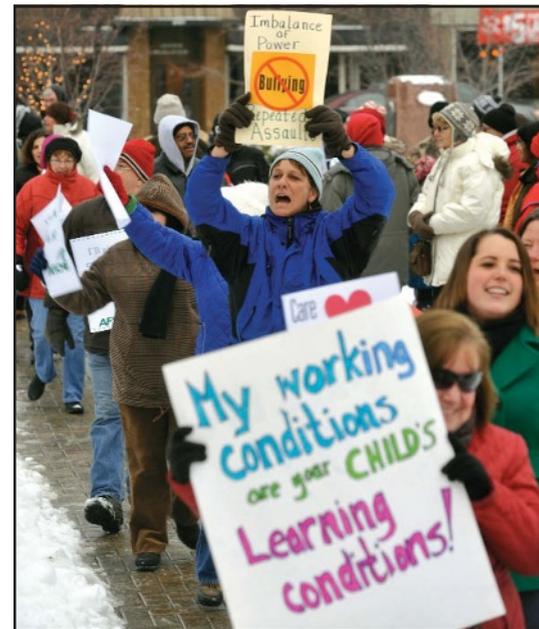
"Wisconsin is opening up people's eyes a little bit," said Jay Van Loenen, a teacher who attended a rally in Denver that attracted about 1,000 people. "The move is to try to get people more involved in their unions and create a stronger front, so that if something happens here, we are prepared."

Several thousand people gathered for a rally in Columbus, Ohio, where lawmakers are considering a bill similar to Wisconsin's. Indiana Democrats successfully blocked a Republican bill in late February that would have prohibited union membership from being a condition of employment.

"The right to collectively bargain is an American right," Eliot Seide, a local union leader, told a crowd in St. Paul on Feb. 26. "You can't have American democracy if you don't have a strong trade union movement."

Thousands of teachers have joined the Wisconsin protests by calling in sick, forcing local school districts—including the state's largest, in Milwaukee—to cancel classes.

"The get-tough-with-teachers policy that many politicians are pursuing is counterproductive and will only anger educators and hurt children," said Joseph DePierro, dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University.



Educators rally in Wisconsin.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Wisconsin was the first battleground. But it is unlikely to be the last.

Similar proposals to strip public employees of collective bargaining rights have drawn protesters in Ohio, Tennessee, and Indiana, and governors from Nevada to Florida have been touting the need to weaken union powers and extract more money from government employees to help balance budgets.

"Plans are being put into place to silence workers, lower their wages, cut their benefits, and increase the likelihood that they will suffer injuries and fatalities at work," said Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. "It is happening at a breakneck pace and too little attention is being paid."

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Besides meeting frequently to solve problems, other strategies for success discussed at the conference included establishing trust by making communication more transparent, and sharing in the decision-making process together—something that Montgomery County, Md., Public Schools Superintendent Jerry Weast called "distributed leadership."

In building a more collaborative labor-management relationship in his own district, "we found out we didn't even speak a common language," Weast said. Union and district leaders had to establish this common language before they could move forward.

Both Weast and Rico recommended that union and district leaders attend joint training on labor-management collaboration. "During training, you develop this common language" and get to know where each side is coming from, Rico said. She added: "Successful partnerships take time, and they evolve over time."

AFT offers this training for its member districts, and districts also can request help from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, an agency within the

U.S. government that handles arbitration and mediation of labor disputes and contract negotiations.

"I'm one of the few government employees who can say truthfully, 'We're here from the government, and we're here to help you,'" quipped George Cohen, the agency's director. He added that his agency's services are provided to school systems free of charge.

Potentially divisive school reform issues, such as how to measure teacher quality and respond to ineffective teachers, can challenge even the best labor-management partnerships—and a key to overcoming these challenges is giving teachers a voice in these difficult decisions, participants said.

At ABC Unified, teachers and district leaders worked together for three years to come up with what both sides agreed was a fair system for evaluating teachers. Although student assessment data are used to help guide instruction, these results are not part of the district's teacher evaluation system.

"You want teachers looking at data, re-teaching, reassessing, and doing intervention," Smuts said, explaining that teachers might not be as receptive to collecting and using student data to improve their teaching if they thought the results might be used

against them. He added: "Teachers are the toughest people on teachers that I know."

ABC Unified's teacher evaluation system has a strong support structure in place for helping teachers who are struggling to succeed. Called PASS (for Peer Assistance, Support, and Service), the system pairs new or struggling teachers with a veteran teaching mentor to give them assistance.

If a teacher is still ineffective after a year of support in the PASS program, "I'll make sure you have due process," Rico said, "but if you're not cutting it, then we're going to counsel you out of the profession."

Montgomery County does use student achievement data as one of several indicators of teacher quality, thanks to an agreement signed last April by district and union leaders.

Like ABC Unified, Montgomery County has a mentoring and support system in place for teachers who are struggling, and it offers a similar service for administrators. But the differences in how the two districts define and measure teacher quality demonstrate that every situation is unique, and districts will have to find their own solutions that everyone can agree on.

Conference participants seemed genuinely excited to apply what they'd learned

about improving labor-management relations in their own districts. But organizers of the event identified a key challenge: How to take the momentum this conference generated and translate it into a national movement instead of a one-time affair.

Toward that end, several national education groups pledged to support the idea of better labor-management collaboration in the nation's schools.

ED officials, meanwhile, said they would create a website that would build online communities of practice around this effort, to give districts that couldn't participate some models and ideas to follow.

"We're in this for the long haul," Duncan said. "This is an extraordinary first step—but it's only the first step." eSN

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Blended...

continued from page 1

delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace.”

According to the report, online learning has grown exponentially over the past decade. For example, in 2000 roughly 45,000 K-12 students took an online course. In 2009, more than 3 million K-12 students did. One analysis the report mentions reveals that 50 percent of all high school courses will be delivered online by 2019.

“What was originally a distance-learning phenomenon no longer is,” explains the report. “Most of the growth is occurring in blended learning environments. ... As this happens, online learning has the potential to transform America’s education system by serving as the backbone of a system that offers more personalized learning approaches for all students.”

However, the report also notes that policy makers and education leaders must adopt the right policies for this to happen.

“There is a significant risk that the existing education system will co-opt online learning as it blends it into its current flawed model—and just as is the case now, too few students will receive an excellent education,” the report states.

“Today’s education system is a monolithic one that was built to be like a factory system,” Horn explained to *eSchool News*. “Rather than measure learning and move individual students along to new concepts as they master previous ones, it measures seat time and moves students along when they hit certain dates on a calendar.”

He added: “Time is fixed, and the learning is variable. This system worked really well in the past. But now that we are asking it to educate every student to his or her highest potential, it was never built to do this job.”

The big danger with integrating technology into education, said Horn, is “that we do what we’ve always done, which is to implement it as a sustaining innovation rather than a disruptive one—that we simply layer technology over the traditional system, which would then co-opt it.”



Author Horn warns against ‘layer[ing] technology over the traditional system.’

The report states that as policy makers open the gates for innovation by “creating zones with increased autonomy, they must simultaneously hold providers accountable for results so that the adoption of online learning leads to radically better outcomes for students.”

Apples to apples

To help policy makers and blended-learning operators (districts or other organizations that operate schools that use blended-learning models) know how to provide the best blended learning model for their unique students, the report describes six “distinct clusters,” or models, of blended learning:

- 1. Face-to-Face Driver:** A face-to-face teacher delivers most of the curricula. The teacher deploys online learning on a case-by-case basis to supplement or remediate a student’s education, often in the back of the classroom or in a technology lab.
- 2. Rotation:** Within a given course, students rotate on a fixed schedule between learning online in a one-to-one, self-paced environment and sitting in a classroom with a traditional face-to-face teacher.
- 3. Flex:** Uses an online platform that delivers most of the curricula. Teachers

provide on-site support on a flexible and adaptive, as-needed basis through in-person tutoring sessions and small group sessions.

4. Online Lab: Relies on an online platform to deliver the entire course, but in a brick-and-mortar lab environment. These usually provide online teachers, and paraprofessionals supervise. Often students in an online lab program also take traditional courses and have typical block schedules.

5. Self-Blend: Students choose to take one or more courses online to supplement their traditional school’s catalog.

6. Online Driver: Uses an online platform and teacher to deliver all curricula. Students work remotely and face-to-face check-ins are sometimes optional and sometimes required.

The report also notes that just because it’s blended learning doesn’t mean it’s always right.

“Just as a hybrid car can be either efficient or a clunker but still be a hybrid car, blended learning can be both good and bad. Some programs save money; others are more expensive. Some produce stellar results; others do not,” the report says.

When a program is good, and meets the needs of all students, blended learning’s potential is significant and allows for a fundamental redesign of the educational model, the report says—including a more consistent and personalized pedagogy that allows each student to work at his or her own pace and helps each child feel and be successful at school, and productive new school models that require fewer, more specialized teachers and use space more efficiently.

The report gives detailed examples of two schools that use blended learning in revolutionary ways to achieve positive student outcomes, which include closing the achievement gap for English-language learners.

“To do this in its most thoughtful and transformational way and really tap the potential of blended learning, models should allow for innovation across curriculum, culture, teaching, intervention, professional development, leadership development, and so forth—and that’s exactly what [these schools] have done,” said Horn.

Horn said that a larger study by the Innosight Institute, to be released in the spring, will profile a number of district efforts around blended learning.

What’s missing?

While some innovative schools are making the blended learning model work in incredible ways, there are still obstacles that are preventing this model from reaching its full potential, the report says.

“...The raw functionality [blended

learning operators] need from online products is still lacking. Even more problematic is that the available offerings and different systems are not well integrated; as a result, the different products don’t ‘talk to’ and sync well with each other,” says the report.

The report theorizes that the “historically inhospitable” climate of the public K-12 education system for start-up companies has scared away private investment capital.

Also, “long, complicated, and political” district sales cycles make it hard to create a profitable education start-up, which has held back the evolution of the industry.

The report calls for:

- Integrated systems that support the seamless assimilation of online content from different sources into the student experience, while allowing student achievement data to flow easily across the school in real time. School operators also should have a data dashboard that integrates academic progress, attendance, behavioral data, college planning, and more, all in one place in an actionable and simple format;
- Hundreds of hours of high-quality, dynamic content aligned to standards;
- Analytics;
- Automation; and
- Enhanced student motivation through applications that engage and incentivize students in their own learning through social networks, games, and rewards.

But it’s not just the technology and content that is needed to support blended learning; policy also must come into play—policy that allows for “autonomous spaces where schools can deploy innovative models in the right regulatory context,” says the report.

“If the regulatory structure demands affordable quality focused around each individual student, then education technology companies and school operators will chase the right goals,” it continues. “Policy makers must seek to create a better framework for blended learning models in every realm of public education—from charter to traditional districts—that, broadly speaking, escapes the current input-focused rules, in exchange for higher accountability around outcomes.”

The report says strong charter laws that already do some of this—by allowing exemptions from class-size restrictions and certification requirements, for example, in exchange for tough accountability requirements—make new charter schools ripe for this kind of innovation.

It also describes specific policy points that states must “get right,” based on “Digital Learning Now!” a policy framework for states to use digital learning to transform the education system, headed by former governors Jeb Bush of Florida and Bob Wise of West Virginia.

“If states climb on board with policies that incentivize outcomes and free up operators to create new schools with more flexibility,” concludes the report, “the transformation [to a more productive education system] could be breathtaking.” 



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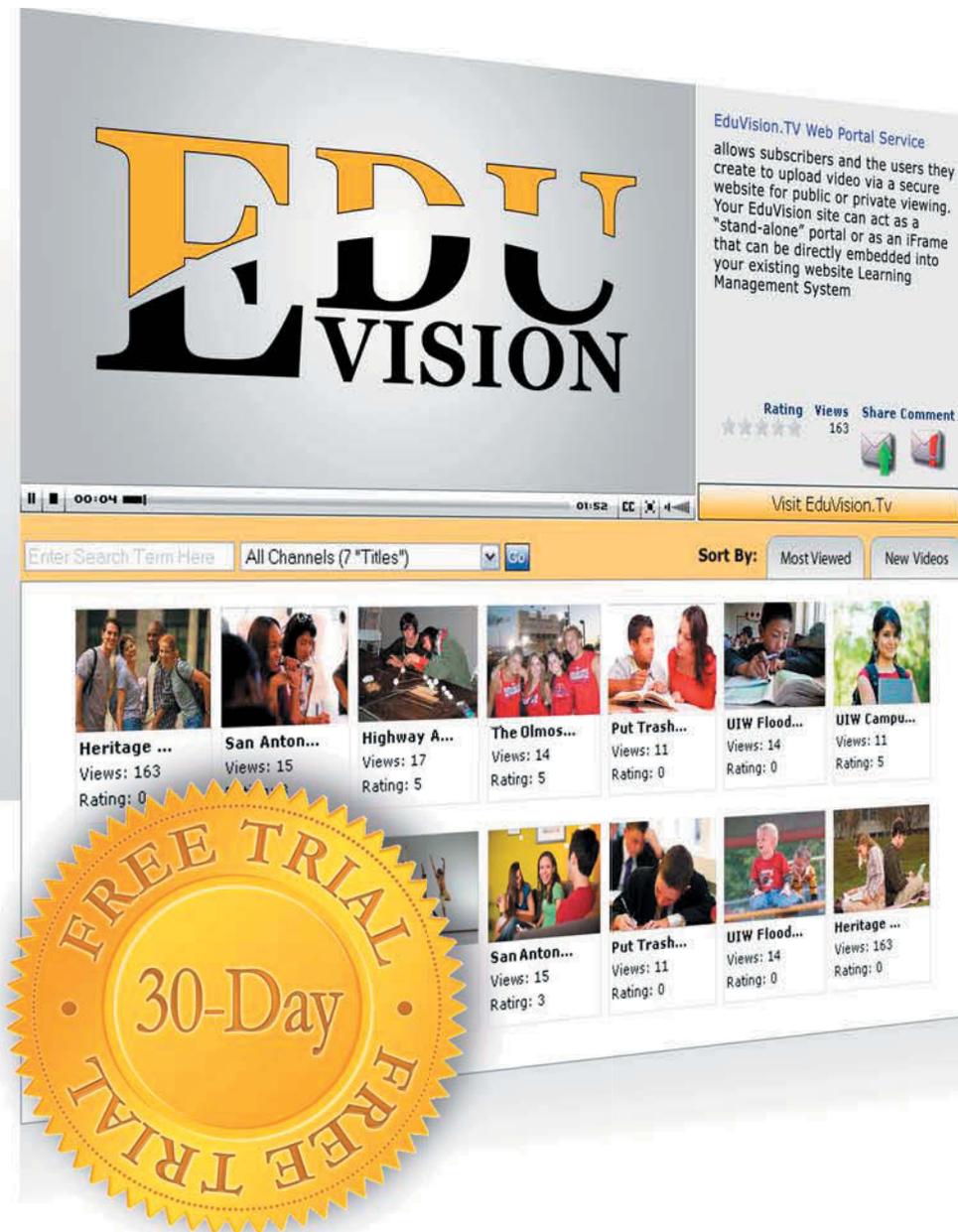
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Budget ...

continued from page 1

grants to states, alternative certification, minority teacher recruiting programs, and scholarships for high-achieving students to work in high-need schools;

- \$300 million for the Investing in Innovation program;
- A \$200 million increase for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
- A \$300 million increase for Title I;
- \$900 million for the Race to the Top (RttT) program; and
- \$150 million for the Promise Neighborhoods program, which gives children and families comprehensive support services to increase children's chances for academic success.

RttT, which previously funded projects at the state level, would focus on the district level in the new fiscal year, which begins on Oct. 1.

The program would include a funding component for rural schools, but a dollar amount has not yet been specified.

"Obviously we're seeing extraordinary reform at the state level," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "We would love to see that kind of innovation continue at the district level."

Duncan said that a \$900 million funding level would permit only one or two winners if RttT focused on states, but it could reach more innovative programs and ideas at the district level. The funding boost also would extend the program to districts that supported RttT but were located within states that opted not to apply for a share of the funding last year.

"We need to invest in education ... in a responsible way that keeps our country on a path to financial stability," Duncan said during a conference call with reporters. "We must cut where we can to invest where we must."

"We are pleased that the budget pro-

poses a modest increase for IDEA. It also seeks to broaden eligibility for Race to the Top grants by driving resources directly to local school districts instead of states."



Obama requested \$2B more for ed.

posed by Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers. "In these difficult times, when districts are wrestling with the prospect of cutting art, music, and vital services for kids, we must be careful to maintain those priorities. Funding determined by competition sometimes allows those districts who can most afford it to have an edge, and that is troubling when all students—particularly disadvantaged children—need help."

Duncan said ED will strive to recruit future teachers into hard-to-serve schools, along with funding recruitment and development of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teachers.

Obama says his budget proposal reflects a need to start reducing deficits, but not at the expense of programs that he says deserve more money.

Appearing in Maryland, Obama declared: "We can't sacrifice our future." He said the country has a responsibility to

commit money to areas that will help it compete against other nations, and he emphasized education as one such area.

The president spoke at Parkville Middle School near Baltimore, an institution that focuses on STEM education.

Duncan noted that STEM teacher training programs are "critically important" to the president.

"We've had a shortage of STEM teachers in this country for a couple decades now," Duncan said, adding that it is important that children of all ages, and not just those in high school, receive instruction from someone who is passionate about STEM.

"We think if we can do this well, the benefits for our children, and ultimately for our country and our country's economy, are huge," he said. "It's no coincidence that the president unveiled his budget at a STEM middle school in Baltimore."

Obama also requested \$90 billion for the creation of a new educational technology agency called Advanced Research Projects Agency – Education, which would "support research on breakthrough technologies to enhance learning" (see side story, below).

The president pledged to work with lawmakers of both parties to come up with a budget that shows better fiscal discipline.

The proposed budget comes at a time when the No Child Left Behind Act is up for reauthorization. Democrats and Republicans alike have voiced a desire to revamp the law.

The president's budget proposal will face stiff opposition from Republicans who now control the House of Representatives and who have pledged to reduce federal spending on all domestic programs, including education.

A Republican bill introduced on Feb. 11 proposes extensive cuts to education for the remaining fiscal year.

House Education and Labor Committee chairman John Kline, a Republican from Minnesota, derided the proposal, saying increases in education spending over the last 45 years have not yielded improvements in student achievement.

"Throwing more money at our nation's broken education system ignores reality and does a disservice to students and taxpayers," Kline said in a statement. "It is time we asked why increasing the federal government's role in education has failed to improve student achievement."

Ed-tech advocacy groups also were disappointed with Obama's budget proposal, but for different reasons.

"We applaud the president for stating his commitment to technology and innovation in education, but we urge the administration to back up that commitment with serious investments in classroom technology and professional development for educators," read a joint statement issued by the Consortium for School Networking and the International Society for Technology in Education. "One key way to do this is to restore adequate funding for the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) program, which was zeroed out last year and is once again not included in the budget request."

As in his 2011 budget plan, Obama wants to shift funding from EETT to a new grant program focused on improving teaching and learning. 

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President pushes for new ed-tech agency

Administration hopes to create a 'quantum leap' in ed tech; some educators remain skeptical

From staff and wire reports

President Obama has requested \$90 million in fiscal year 2012 funding for a new educational technology agency within the federal Education Department (ED) that would bring resources and funding to schools and colleges, while some ed-tech advocates warn that the government's support might not reach teachers and professors.

The White House announced Feb. 7 that its 2012 budget request would include funding to create an agency called Advanced Research Projects Agency – Education (ARPA-ED), which would "support research on breakthrough technologies to enhance learning." ARPA-ED's goal would be to transform educational technology just as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has transformed military technology.

The educational technology push came just a few weeks after Obama said in his State of the Union address that America would "need to out-innovate,

out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world" to keep pace with the global economy.

ARPA-ED would further catalyze the ed-tech industry by sponsoring the synthesis and vetting of public and private research and development efforts; identifying breakthrough development opportunities, shaping the next wave of research and development; investing in the development of new educational technology, learning systems, and digital learning materials; and identifying and transitioning the best and most relevant research and development from other federal agencies.

The effort to create the ed-tech agency, along with a \$2 billion grant program funding sharable web-based educational tools, has grabbed the attention of online education advocates.

But there remains skepticism that funding provided by a new ED agency would find its way to educators who can design workable ways to make high-quality educational technology available for students.

"Any time there is a lot of money with the intent to go in a new direction, far too often, the only experts available are the old guard," said Charles Severance, a faculty member at the University of Michigan's School of Information and a developer network coordinator for the IMS Global Learning Consortium, which produces technology standards for education. "And they quickly line up to gain control of the new funds before innovators even know that there is an opportunity."

Severance said federal officials in charge of the ed-tech agency would have to make a concerted effort to include K-12 and college educators, who "work like dogs from September to June" with little or no free time to apply for federal funding for special projects.

"There is a massive disconnect between education experts and people who actually educate," he said. "If you look at a lot of the emerging educational technology trends conferences, all the speakers and leadership are non-teachers." He added: "I would hope that this new agency would

realize these problems and do something about them. But it is not likely."

Melora Sundt, associate dean at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education, who tracks trends in distance education, said a federal agency focusing on educational technology could get more educators involved in creating online learning materials, because startup costs for program development can be steep.

"These kinds of innovations can be expensive in the early stages, and those costs can cut out participation by schools," she said. "Some of the innovation will happen with or without government support, but the research about how well these things work won't happen without the support, nor will wider adoption."

Despite his reservations about a new ED agency, Severance said Obama's budget proposal would have played an important role in the early-to-mid 2000s, when online learning was gaining traction.

"At some level ... this agency is a tremendous development and way overdue," he said. 

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Tech-savvy superintendent winners honored in Denver

eSN recognizes 10 senior school district executives for their outstanding ed-tech leadership

From staff reports

Partnerships with local businesses to provide free Wi-Fi for students ... a virtualization project that reportedly has saved \$1.5 million in energy costs ... an instructional content repository so teachers can share lessons, activities, and assessments: These are among the many impressive accomplishments of *eSchool News*' 2011 Tech-Savvy Superintendent Award winners, who were recognized during an awards ceremony Feb. 11.

Sponsored by SMART Technologies Inc., RM Educational Software, JDL Horizons, and K12 Inc., the 11th annual Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards recognized senior school district executives from around the nation who demonstrate outstanding leadership and vision in using technology to advance their district's goals.

The winners were honored at a private ceremony held in conjunction with the Century Club 100's annual meeting during the American Association of School Administrators' National Conference on Education in Denver.

Winners were nominated by the school field and then chosen by the editors of *eSchool News* with the help of Tech-Savvy Superintendent laureates from prior years.

This year's winners are:

- Matt Akin, Piedmont City Schools, Alabama
- Jim Cain, Klein Independent School District, Texas
- Alberto M. Calvalho, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Florida



- Camille Casteel, Chandler Unified School District No. 80, Arizona
- Michael A. Davino, Springfield Public Schools, New Jersey
- Deb Henton, North Branch Area Public Schools, Minnesota
- David F. Larson, Birmingham Public Schools, Michigan

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

• Kathy Spencer, Onslow County Schools, North Carolina

• Eric Williams, York County School Division, Virginia

The awards ceremony was shown online via live streaming video. An archived version is available for viewing at www.eschoolnews.com/video.

The ceremony feature a keynote speech from Tom Carroll, a former Education Department official during the Clinton administration who is now president of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Carroll talked about the importance of transforming schools from teaching organizations into learning organizations—work that is already happening in the winning superintendents' districts.

"We ... have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvent American education," Carroll said, noting there are three converging forces that necessitate this change.

The first is the current budget crisis. "Our school staffing model is no longer financially viable," Carroll said. "We can keep retrenching and cutting back ... and we will end up with a public education system that is in tatters. Or, we can rein-

vent our way to a more powerful education system."

The second factor that is driving the need for change is that our education workforce is in the midst of a profound demographic shift, Carroll said—from older and more experienced to younger and less experienced. The third factor, he said, is that "we have a model for learning that was well designed for its time ... but doesn't meet the needs of 21st-century learners."

We are living in an age when learning is no longer preparation for a job, Carroll said—"it is the job." As a result, we need to remake our schools into organizations that support deeper, more collaborative learning opportunities, as well as high-impact community engagement.

In this new age of learning, "school is no longer the place to learn," Carroll said. "It is just one place to learn in a rich network of learning spaces." He added: "Every technology that you adopt should go further toward plugging your schools into this wider learning ecosystem, so that you can take advantage of all those resources that are out there."

The Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards recognize excellence in ed-tech leadership from the very top level of school district administration, and they hold these exemplary leaders up as models for others to follow. A list of the awards criteria appears in the sidebar at right.

The 2012 Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards ceremony will be held in Houston next February. To nominate a superintendent for these awards, go to <http://www.eschoolnews.com/resources/superintendents-center/tssa/nominate>.

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

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

What it means to be a 'tech savvy' superintendent

Award winners discuss why ed tech is important—and reveal their secrets to success

From staff reports

At our 11th annual Tech-Savvy Superintendent Awards ceremony in February, we asked the winners what ed-tech initiatives they were most proud of having led in their districts—and what they think it means to be a "tech-savvy" school leader. Here's what they had to say.

"Schools have always been designed for linear thinkers—everyone sits in rows—but what we've seen with technology is that it's giving kids a new way to express what they know. ... When you have a kid create a movie of what they've learned, as opposed to having to write an essay, all this creativity comes out—and different learning styles are being met."

—Matt Akin, Piedmont City Schools, Alabama



"I don't believe ... that pulling students out to provide accelerated [instruction] or remediation is the best strategy. I believe in pushing in new technologies, new opportunities, new ideas, new choices. This is about reinventing public education environments that are created with the student at the center of our attention. ... Students today live in communication era, in a knowledge-based era—and unless we change ourselves, we will fail. This is as much a revolution of learning for us as it is a revolution of learning for them."

—Alberto M. Calvalho, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Florida



"Sometimes it's scary for superintendents and building leadership to think about technology, because it comes and goes so quickly—and maintaining what you have

is already a challenge, let alone thinking about all the new devices that are coming out. But I believe it is a national imperative that we do stay current with what is happening in the world of technology, so that we can introduce it to our students and ... use it as a tool to help us improve student learning."

—Deb Henton, North Branch Area Public Schools, Minnesota



"One of the key components of moving technology into schools is to make sure you have the support of all of those involved. And that hinges from the board room through district-level staff who are critical in bringing those new technologies and that professional development into the school buildings, to school leaders, school teachers, and ultimately to our students."

—Kathy Spencer, Onslow County Schools, North Carolina



"Tapping into students' interest in digital tools is absolutely crucial for us, because we want to engage students in truly rigorous work in order to boost student achievement. ... We want to help teachers understand the connection between technology and our emphasis on student engagement and rigor. And so this past summer, when we convened ... what we call our Leadership Academy, we included teacher leaders in that, and had discussions relating to technology ... because teacher leadership is critical."

—Eric Williams, York County School Division, Virginia





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Education in Focus

Signs of the times: Digital displays go to school

Gregg W. Downey
Editorial Director

From revenue-generating message boards at concession stands and athletic venues, to point-of-sale displays at campus bookstores and alumni gift shops, to distance-learning applications and asset-reservation panels outside lecture halls and conference rooms, to giant video walls in football stadiums and basketball arenas—digital displays are becoming ubiquitous at colleges, universities, and even in some K-12 facilities.

Nearly 20 percent of U.S. colleges and universities now use digital signage in some form, according to industry veterans attending the 2011 Digital Signage Expo (DSE) at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, Feb. 22-25. DSE is the official show of the Digital Signage Federation.

These electronic displays come in virtually all sizes and shapes. Some are stand-alone, self-contained units. Others are linked to the internet or a university network and can transmit news and entertainment programming, commercials and announcements, and emergency messaging instantly throughout a campus. Some feature 3-D images—viewed with and, sometimes, without special glasses. Some offer touch-screen functionality.

Intel provides much more information about video analytics, but here's how a company website briefly describes the technology and its potential benefits:

"Imagine the possibilities as a person approaches a digital sign equipped with Intel AIM Suite capabilities. This software can—totally anonymously—gather basic viewer demographics such as age range, gender, and the amount of time a person spends looking at the sign. By analyzing the data in real time, the software can change the content of signs to align with the viewer's demographics, meaning consumers can see more targeted, relevant advertising—and advertisers can gather more accurate data for tracking return on investment."

In the near future, digital signage experts predict, signs will be able to receive data from mobile devices using the open-source software stack called Android. This will allow cell phone owners, for example, to authorize a virtually unlimited volume of data to be projected about themselves.

A student carrying an Android cell phone, for instance, might approach a smart sign in a campus bookstore. Information transmitted from the cell phone might let the sign present a discount coupon now for an eTextbook the student will need later. The discount offer might be based on knowing the student's



Texas State Technical College offers an online program in digital signage.

gan as a small specialty gathering at Chicago's Navy Pier in 2004 and has grown nearly every year since. This year saw records fall in attendance (nearly 5,200), exhibit booths (195), and exhibit floor space (60,000 square feet).

Education applications both here and abroad won recognition at a DSE awards program, too. The annual DSE Apex Awards honor innovation in the develop-

coolers across hundreds of schools in the country, according to a report by Scala, the industry partner for TENQ. "Currently, nearly 400 TENQ coolers are found in middle schools and vocational schools around the Netherlands, offering students the option to fill up their own bottle with sparkling or regular water. Each cooler features a 19-inch LCD screen that plays educational programming, advertising, and user-generated content. Schools have the option to install larger LCD screens near the TENQ unit for increased visibility," a Scala whitepaper explained.

Texas State Technical College, a state-supported system, won for its online degree program, reportedly one of the only digital-signage degree programs in the U.S.

"The degree includes courses on digital content creation with animation using Adobe Photoshop and Flash, as well as other animation and video software," a college website promotion explained. "You will learn system design and scheduling using well-known industry products. Many of your courses will be taught using simulations in the virtual environment, Second Life."

West Texas A&M won with an entry that highlighted the university's new digital signage system. "The system provided the solution to the university's need for next-generation communication and integrates well with the existing network infrastructure and academic learning environment," according to a university website. "The digital system is user-friendly and bridges the gap between academics and information technology, allowing departments to manage, control, and deliver timely digital content to today's generation of technology-focused students."

Although DSE began in Chicago, it is now held annually in Las Vegas. The next expo is scheduled for March 6-9, 2012, at the Las Vegas Convention Center. **eSN**



Education facilities were a central focus at the Digital Signage Expo 2011, now in its eighth year. According to DSE spokeswoman Geri D. Wolff, this year's event saw record attendance (nearly 5,200) exhibit booths (195), and exhibit hall space.

Newer digital signs even contain cameras and tracking software to capture viewer characteristics and behavior with an emerging technology known as video analytics.

At the moment, except at research facilities in settings such as Carnegie Mellon, few universities are using video analytics, but as digital signage increasingly becomes a source of advertising revenue for schools and colleges, advertisers are sure to demand information about who is seeing the messaging and how they're reacting to it. And that's where smart signs come in.

Intel is a leader in the development of video analytics. A whitepaper sponsored by

major and anticipating what materials that student will need next semester.

Intel representatives, as well as other exhibitors at DSE, were acutely aware of the privacy issues such scenarios raise. Almost universally, they expressed their commitment to respecting individual rights and accessing only that information made available voluntarily. The possibilities of these emerging technologies nonetheless seemed likely to have an increasing impact on the operations of schools and colleges.

For that reason, education facilities were a central focus at the DSE 2011, now in its eighth year. According to DSE spokeswoman Geri D. Wolff, the conference be-

ment and deployment of digital signage. Chosen by an independent panel of five journalists from digital signage publications, the winners were named from a field of 78 entrants vying in 10 major digital signage categories.

Winners included a program initiated by schools in the Netherlands, which snagged a gold award; Texas State Technical College, which received a silver award; and West Texas A&M, which took a bronze award.

The top education award honored an initiative called TENQ (pronounced "tank"). Local water companies and health organizations in the Netherlands are working together to install multimedia-enabled water

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Software helps personalize math instruction

Programs that are hands-on and adaptive deliver impressive results

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

Strong math skills are important if students hope to succeed in high school and beyond—and many school leaders are finding that software that delivers hands-on, personalized instruction can help.

K-12 math instruction is undergoing fundamental changes as individualized adaptive learning programs combine with lessons meant to keep students of all ages engaged and interested.

For example, DreamBox Learning provides more than 500 elementary-level lessons to help students develop computational fluency, conceptual understanding, and problem-solving skills through an online gaming platform. Students can choose a game character and theme, and they progress through different levels of the experience, earning rewards for their progress.

Meanwhile, teachers are able to review the advancement of each student, receiving detailed reports that indicate when a student needs extra attention or when a student successfully passes the lessons.

When companies describe their software as “adaptive,” they typically mean that students progress through the same levels of instruction in the same sequence, albeit at a different pace, said DreamBox President Jessie Woolley-Wilson. But with DreamBox, it’s truly adaptive learning that is taking place; although students start at the same point in the assessment, their experience with the software will be completely different based on their individual abilities and interests.

“Technology allows for mass customization in a way that teachers don’t have time to do,” Woolley-Wilson said. “This is exciting, because it’s going to change the velocity of learning.”

“We can blend great teachers and great technology and create an individualized adaptive educational environment to meet the needs of kids [in a way] that hasn’t been done before,” said Mickelle Weary, director of instructional design.

Formerly a teacher, Weary said the program responds to a child’s struggles or successes as a teacher would.

“When we actually sit down and plan the way lessons are going to behave, we take into consideration, ‘What would I be doing if I was sitting next to that child and [he or she was] struggling?’” Weary said. “In sitting shoulder to shoulder with our developers, we would talk to them about how we teach, how we would react to students in the classroom, and they would take that knowledge and they would build our platform.”

West Seattle Elementary special-education teacher Elizabeth Raymond said DreamBox offers huge benefits to instructors.

“What I like about it is it gives me immediate feedback. ... I can go into the teacher reports and really see what specific concepts certain students are struggling with,” Raymond said.

DreamBox is unique in its ability to appeal to students, she said, adding: “I really think it can reach those students who have been resistant to traditional teaching styles. It’s a format they’re already familiar with from playing so many video games and things like that at home.”

Raymond said she has trouble keeping



DreamBox Learning’s adaptive software helps personalize math instruction.

her students away from DreamBox.

“This is a program that I don’t have to coax students onto; they actually pester me during the day, [asking:] ‘When is it my turn to go on DreamBox?’ I only wish that I had more computers in the classroom, so I could have more [students] on at a time,” she said.

The results of consistent play on the software are staggering.

“We took a fall test before I began using DreamBox ... and then we tested again at the end of December,” Raymond said. “My students averaged a 40-point gain in mathematics on this test. And I really think that’s a testament to the efficacy of the program.” She noted that for special-needs students, these numbers are even more impressive.

With the success of the program for grades K-3, DreamBox is planning to expand its content to grades four and five, while increasing the content available for third graders.

Cooperative, hands-on learning

While DreamBox Learning focuses on students in the youngest grades, Pitsco Education has seen remarkable success with a math program of its own, this one specializing in algebra instruction for grades 7-10.

With diagnostic assessments, targeted remediation, individualized lesson plans, and one-to-one computer-based instruction, Pitsco’s Algebra Academy has produced some incredible results in one South Carolina high school.

The Algebra Academy has computer-based elements, but it functions as a multipart program. It combines individualized curriculum; small-group activities; cooperative, hands-on learning projects; and diagnostic assessments to deliver its progressive, three-phase system.

Students in Phase I work their way through a series of Individualized Prescriptive Lessons (IPLs) after completing diagnostic assessments. Based on their test results, they are prescribed lessons in math concepts for which they need remediation, each of which begins with a practice test and concludes with a mastery test. After demonstrating a mastery of basic math concepts in Phase I, students then progress to a project-based curriculum in Phases II and III.

“We ... realize the need for individual-

ization, because [students are] going to be all over the board in terms of their range of current abilities—so we utilize individualized software instruction as one of the first interventions for students,” said Pitsco’s director of education, Matt Frankenbery.

Pitsco follows up these individualized, computer-based lessons with cooperative, hands-on learning projects to help keep students engaged.

Students “spend time doing a lot of [work] with actual materials in their hands, versus just experiencing something on the screen,” Frankenbery said.

Phase II involves teacher-led, small-group activities, and in Phase III, students work in pairs to solve challenges. In a module called “Unsolved Mysteries,” for example, teams of students are tasked with solving a crime, and in the process they learn algebra concepts and how to apply them.

In one of the mysteries, a cup of coffee is found at the crime scene. By determining how long it takes a similar-size cup of coffee to cool, the students can estimate when the crime took place. So, students take part in a lab experiment in which they periodically measure the temperature of a cup of coffee as it cools to room temperature, then plot the data on a graph. In the process, they learn about scatter plots and linear regression.

The three-phase system distinguishes Pitsco’s Algebra Academy from other products.

“We’ve utilized three different methodologies in the overall solution, so we’re really meeting the needs of pretty much every student,” said Frankenbery. “We feel like it’s this blend ... of methodology that’s really what is connecting the students” to the lessons.

At Carolina High School and Academy in Greenville, S.C., 71 percent of the students passed the most recent state math exam—but among students who took algebra using Pitsco’s curriculum, that figure was 94 percent, said Assistant Principal Michael Delaney.

What’s more, at least 40 percent of the students who experienced Algebra Academy made some kind of jump to the next level of math instruction in the following school year, Delaney said—and 19 percent moved from the lowest level to honors-level math.

Applying math to real-world challenges

While Pitsco and DreamBox have developed new ways to teach math fundamentals, the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics and The Moody’s Foundation have joined forces to demonstrate to older students how these skills can be applied in the real world.

“We really hope to shed light on a lot of the exciting careers and applications of mathematics,” said M? Challenge project director Michelle Montgomery.

The M? Challenge, which took place March 5-6 this year, provides thousands of dollars in incentives to encourage high school students on the East Coast to participate. This year, 717 teams from more than 5,000 high schools registered for the M? Challenge, which is designed to pique high schoolers’ interest in real-world applications of mathematics.

“There’s a lot of data, statistics, projections, graphing—all kinds of math stuff, but it also involves a real issue,” said Montgomery of the contest.

The M3 Challenge, which is in its sixth year, has always been built around a newsworthy issue. This year, the problem was based on the drought in the Colorado River Basin, and it involved making projections and a hypothetical report to the Department of the Interior.

The web-based challenge gives participants 14 hours to solve a legitimate real-world problem. Teams gather data, develop assumptions, and establish mathematical models. The teams then upload their solutions, which consist of papers that can be up to 20 pages long, and are judged by more than 80 Ph.D.-level mathematicians.

Judging occurs in three stages. The first pares down the field to 100 teams, while the second round of judging identifies the top 40 and the final round chooses the top six. The top 40 teams are recognized as honorable mentions or finalists and receive prizes of \$1,000 or \$1,500, respectively, while the winners receive scholarship prizes totaling \$100,000.

“If you’re going to high school and you’re taking math and you’re saying, like lots of kids say, ‘When am I ever going to use this? What am I ever going to do with this?’—we’re trying to show through these math modeling programs, these applied math problems, that there’s tons of stuff you can do with this, and lot of it is really exciting and current,” Montgomery said. “I think we’re really illustrating how math, applied math, and STEM fields can contribute to a better society for the world.”

This year’s winners will be announced April 28; for more information, go to <http://m3challenge.siam.org>. 

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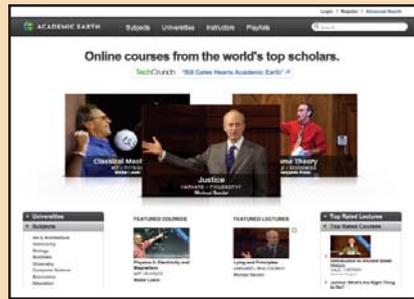
This month's very best web sites—exceptional instructional resources, special events, and state-of-the-art research and management tools—for the K-20 decision maker

Ten great sites with free teacher resources

With cuts to school budgets, teachers are often left searching for ways to innovate without breaking the bank. In fact, a recent national survey revealed that educators are incorporating more internet-related resources into their lessons, but shrinking school budgets have prompted many educators to look for free resources to enhance their lessons. There are numerous sites that can help, but we've picked 10 that our among our favorites.

Academic Earth offers video lectures from elite universities, and it allows viewers to grade the professors. Academic Earth also offers a "Playlists" feature based around themes such as "Laws of Nature," "Wars Throughout History," or "You Are What You Eat."

<http://academicearth.org/>



Curriki helps connect educators, parents, and students in the development of curriculum and other educational materials. With its open-source curriculum format, Curriki allows anyone to post their teaching ideas for others to view, download, use, reformat, and reshare.

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



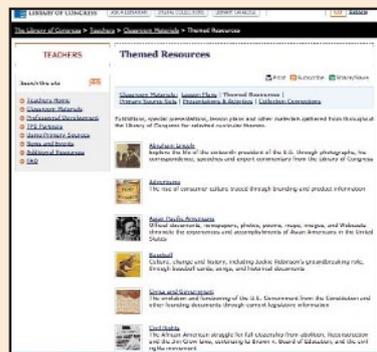
FREE, or Federal Resources for Educational Excellence, is a U.S. Department of Education website that compiles free teacher resources available from dozens of federal agencies. Educators can sign up for the FREE RSS feed, which notifies users when new resources are added. Otherwise, they can browse by topic, from music history to life sciences.

<http://free.ed.gov/>



The **Library of Congress'** "For Teachers" page highlights ready-to-use classroom materials that are aligned with state standards and take advantage of the Library's primary sources. It includes access to primary source sets around topics such as U.S. presidents; short facts or activities for class starters, such as "Today in History" and everyday science mysteries; themed lesson plans for dozens of topics; and even professional development curriculum.

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/>



The **NASA for Educators** page includes information about NASA's various missions, as well as NASA careers, internships, and scholarships; image galleries and multimedia materials; and more. An Education Materials Finder will help teachers locate NASA resources that can be used in the classroom; users can search by keyword, grade level, and subject.

<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/index.html>



The **National Science Digital Library** is the nation's online library for education and research in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. It provides free math lessons and activities aligned with the Math Common Core Standards, as well as STEM-related blogs and other free teacher resources and lesson plan ideas. Targeted for K-12 teachers, higher-education professionals, and librarians, NSDL also provides science literary maps and iTunes multimedia files.

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



Online professional development, TV programming and multimedia web content, lesson plan ideas, and ways to connect with other educators are all things featured on the **PBS Teachers** page. The website also features news and webinars for teachers to view.

<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/>



Teachers' Domain offers free digital media from public TV broadcasters for educational use. Users can search for materials via individual state standards, Common Core State Standards, or national standards from different organizations. Website users can create online profiles in order to share the resources they have learned for a particular lesson with others.

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



Thinkfinity is a free digital learning platform from the Verizon Foundation that offers resources created by content partners such as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, International Reading Association, National Museum of American History, National Geographic Society, and more. Its content includes interactive student games, lesson plans focused on various themes, education blogs, online discussions, and more.

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



WatchKnow, created by Wikipedia co-founder Larry Sanger, gathers and organizes educational videos for students ages 3 to 18. The site features more than 20,000 videos across 3,000 categories, and it uses software that allows wiki-style collaboration among users. "Think of it as YouTube meets Wikipedia, filtering out everything but quality educational videos," Sanger said.

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



View point **By Seth Rosenblatt**



Seth Rosenblatt

Why education is not like business

Much of the recent political chatter has claimed that government is inefficient, inept, and wasteful, and the oft-cited remedy for such failures is to make government—including public education—act more like business. After all, isn't it capitalism—the

enterprising spirit, the competition, and the focus on the bottom line—that has made this country great?

As someone who studied economics and worked in business for 20 years, I am very much a capitalist, so on the surface this point of view has appeal. But even a cursory review will demonstrate that these arguments miss the point: Government institutions exist for a different purpose than businesses, and they should operate by a different set of rules. These distinctions are not trivial and are not just based on a mindset, but rather by specific design and for specific purposes. I have grouped these distinctions into four specific areas to consider when we evaluate the effectiveness of our governing institutions and our elected leaders. These areas are (a) mission and focus, (b) risk profile, (c) decision-making, and (d) measuring value.

Mission and focus

In business, the mission of the organization is to deliver return to shareholders (i.e., make money). Of course, “mission statements” are often presented as the way in which that organization will create value (e.g., Google’s mission is to “Organize the World’s Information”), but these mission statements are a means to an end—the end being to maximize shareholder value. This profit motive is the driving force behind capitalism and the catalyst for innovation, efficiency, and competition.

Government agencies, on the other hand, are not motivated by profit, but rather by a “mission” in the more literal sense of the word, e.g. to educate children, to fight fires, etc. In this way, government agencies are more like nonprofits than for-profit corporations. This very purpose shapes the goals set by the organization, the types of people it hires, and the context in which those employees work.

Fundamental to a profit-maximizing business is the axiom that businesses choose what business they want to be in. In order to maximize return for shareholders, businesses must find what unique value they bring (versus their competitors) to what unique segment of the market. Business strategy is about focus and positioning—what product/service will I deliver, how will I deliver it uniquely compared to alternatives, and to whom will I deliver it. This last piece is crucial—businesses get to pick their customers! Even though it serves a huge market, Apple doesn't make computers for everyone—it makes them for customers with a certain profile, and then markets those products with messages that resonate to those customer segments.

When an organization picks its customers, it is also implicitly picking the customers it will not target or even serve at all. This holds true for General Motors, Time Warner, or your local Italian restaurant. Businesses need to deliver something uniquely valuable to a targeted market. (This is not to say the businesses actively refuse to sell to certain people—it's just that the very nature of their messaging and product focus, by definition, will appeal to only a subset of the market that they choose.)

Contrast this to public institutions, which don't

have the luxury of picking their customers. By design, government agencies have to serve everyone in their domain, and the likelihood that such constituents are homogenous is very slim. Take public schools, for example. A private school, by definition, gets to choose what students it serves, and by doing so, it should excel. It can effectively become a specialist in delivering a certain type of education to a certain sub-population of students. Economists refer to this phenomenon as “cherry picking.” Public schools, on the other hand, must serve all children that live within that population, and of course the needs, abilities, and respective support structures for these children will be very different. The very requirement to serve a broad, heterogeneous population inherently makes a government agency less “efficient” as compared to its private-entity counterpart. However, being less efficient does not mean it is not fulfilling its mission and purpose.

This is true because “efficiency” (in its narrowest sense) and “efficacy” are not necessarily the same thing. Particularly with government services whose missions likely involve some sort of universal delivery model, efficacy is achieved by something other than the strategy taken by an “efficient” business. For a local fire department, the most “efficient” model would be to staff the firehouse with enough firefighters so that they are deployed close to 100 percent of the time. However, because fires don't occur in regular intervals, such efficiency would result in the fire department not getting to certain fires. No citizen wants it to be their house that is missed by the firefighters, so fire stations staff up to ensure capacity for close to the maximum perceived need, not the average forecasted need. Of course, this means that firefighters will be sitting around doing nothing for a good part of the day. But we should be OK with that, as it is much better than the alternative! So in this case, the firehouse is “efficient” with respect to accomplishing its mission, but not “efficient” in terms of a traditional business paradigm of output per person hour.

In business, is it competition that keeps organizations in check in terms of the prices they charge and the quality they deliver. With few exceptions (such as natural monopolies), this competition is fundamental to a capitalistic system. But competition often means that some entity wins and some entity loses. Losing could mean having the smaller market share, but it also could mean going out of business. In fact, businesses go out of business and others start up every day. Government agencies, on the other hand, don't “compete” in the same sense, and it's unrealistic to ask them to. Do you want to have two police forces fighting to get to the same crime scene first? Do we want government agencies to go out of business and others start up on a regular basis? Of course not.

Consistency of delivery is a hallmark of a public service. If my TV manufacturer goes out of business, well, no big deal—I'll buy my TV from someone else. But for our armed forces, do we want a different organization managing the country's defense every year?

Risk profile

Inherent in the capitalistic notions of profit maximization and competition is risk. Businesses take risk. By and large, it is the businesses that take the most risk (and then in turn succeed) that deliver the greatest return to their shareholders. However, for every company that succeeds, many more fail. This is totally acceptable in a capitalistic system, because it is this risk-taking that fuels innovation and growth.

However, no one in business would be willing to take these risks unless they had a system that protected their “downside.” The corporation was invented to do exactly that—it shields the individual owners, directors, officers, and other employees from individual liability. They are protected from financial loss (shareholders can only lose the money they put in, but not more) as well as legal liability in the case where the company causes harm to others. This is known as the corporate “shield.”

The ultimate manifestation of this shield is the bankruptcy process. When a company goes bankrupt, it restructures or eliminates its liabilities. The corporation can be re-formed and start again, or it can be dissolved. In any case, the individuals within the company have no downside other than the money they invested themselves. In fact, the bankruptcy process in this country has been crucial to its economic growth. Without a bankruptcy system, companies would not have taken nearly the risks that they have, and without the risk taking, there would be little innovation or growth.

With very limited exceptions, government agencies don't go bankrupt. The risk of their not being able to deliver on their services is just too great. Again, we're OK with a restaurant going under, but what happens if my police force goes bankrupt? Do I not have police protection for a while? Therefore, government agencies by design will be more risk averse. The consistency of delivery of those services trumps the potential to optimize them.

In a government setting, risk is also measured in more than just financial terms. For example, no one argues that public schools are doing everything possible they can for all students—we know there can be improvements. Even though most school districts are constantly trying to improve curriculum and instruction and learn new “best practices,” schools will inherently move slowly and cautiously in making changes. The reason is simple: In a corporate setting, the risk of experimenting on a new product is limited (the risk is the loss of the investment made in that product), but do we really want to seriously experiment with our children's future? The price for being “wrong” is often just too high in delivering a public service. Of course, schools and government agencies should always look to improve, but it's hard to fault them for being cautious.

Decision making

Otto Von Bismarck allegedly remarked: “Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made.”

The work of government is like sausage-making—slow, sloppy, and ugly at times. Why is that? I would argue there are two main reasons. The first is that it is the inevitable outcome of the government's need to serve a broad constituency, as well as the need to reduce risk as described above. Serving a heterogeneous constituency and being more risk averse will always make things a little slower. However, the other reason lies in another fundamental tenet of government—openness. We see the sausage-making because we're allowed to! As someone who has worked for many companies over the last couple of decades, there were countless very painful decision-making processes; however, none of them were visible to the public.

Business interactions are, by and large, secret. Compensation levels of most employees are secret; strategic plans are secret; computer code is secret, and the discussion at board of directors meetings is mostly secret. This secrecy—or at a minimum, the

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View point

ability to choose what information is made public and what is not—is another cornerstone of capitalism. It allows companies to compete with each other, to shape their overall message to the market, and to manage their employees in the most flexible way. So, in most companies there is plenty of sausage-making, it's just not visible to most of us.

Contrast this to public agencies, which by most measures are an open book. Board meetings of all elected bodies are held in public. All contracts are made public. All salaries are made public. The process to get bids on large projects is a public and inclusive process. From a businessperson's perspective, these are all anathematic requirements—it would be viewed as impossible to run a real business that way. But this seeming lack of efficiency and flexibility is the price for openness. And after all, because these are public institutions funded with tax dollars, would we expect our citizens to want something less than transparency? (Obviously there are areas of government that are secret—which include things such as national war plans all the way to the identity of kids expelled from school—but in aggregate, the level of secrecy is miniscule compared to that in business. And that is how it's supposed to be.) Even though governments are often accused of “waste, fraud, and abuse,” that is hardly limited to public institutions—it's just that in the corporate setting, we don't often hear about it.

Therefore, the very nature of the decision-making process of a public institution requires the input and participation of the public. Could you imagine a scenario where any Apple shareholder can get three minutes to address the board of directors of Apple at every board meeting (not just the quarterly shareholder meetings)? But the public process not only requires this, it benefits from it. The nature of bringing such a broad and diverse group of constituents into your decision-making process necessarily makes it slower and more complex.

It's also important to note that in a corporation, most decision makers generally agree on the goal (i.e., making a profit). They might disagree on how to get there, but at least the end game is rarely in dispute. That is not true for government institutions—in any sizable group of citizens, there will be honest disagreements on the goal. Even within a small city, some citizens will favor high growth and more development, while others will want the opposite. Again, the institutions are designed to best serve the interests of the broadest group of people.

Measuring value

One makes decisions to affect value. The hope is that every decision we make enhances value somewhere, or why would we be making that decision? In business, every decision is about furthering the company's mission. Fortunately, business has a common currency to measure that value—money. Profits are relatively easy to measure.

How does government measure the value it delivers? Certainly it takes money into account, and often this is subject to healthy debate among the citizenry as to the level of its spending. However, the real problem is that it is extremely difficult to measure the value of government output. This is driven by two distinct problems:

- The fundamental difficulty in measuring the value (and agreeing on the value) of areas such as security, education, happiness, community, convenience, and recreation. Everyone values each of those things, but try to get people to tell you how much they are worth. They are fundamentally difficult to measure, and impossible to get agreement on.
- Government services affect an extremely long time horizon. Although businesses might do three- to five-year strategic plans, government services



Even though most school districts are constantly trying to improve curriculum and instruction and learn new “best practices,” schools will inherently move slowly and cautiously in making changes. The reason is simple: In a corporate setting, the risk of experimenting on a new product is limited (the risk is the loss of the investment made in that product), but do we really want to seriously experiment with our children's future? The price for being “wrong” is often just too high in delivering a public service.

can affect people's lives decades after they are delivered. How does the education I provide a kindergartener today affect his or her life 20 years from now? And how does it affect other people's lives, in terms of economic growth, crime, and in other areas? Although few would argue that there isn't such a long-term connection, it is daunting to try to measure that connection and nearly impossible for the citizenry to take that into account when asking governments to make decisions today that affect theirs and others' lives decades from now.

I believe capitalism is a beautiful thing. But it is clearly not perfect. Capitalism is conditioned upon the free flow of information, capital, and resources (the last being the most difficult), and it fails in certain areas like externalities and natural monopolies. And, because they are run by fallible people, businesses are also fallible. Whether it be oil spills, unsafe toys, or financial market manipulation, capitalism does not, in and of itself, protect the citizenry from unscrupulous or manipulative behavior. Therefore, government is in the odd position of both being a promoter of capitalism (providing the regulatory environment to promote business and innovation) but also acting as the check on its potential excesses. Only the most orthodox of Libertarians would suggest that we shouldn't have a Food and Drug Administration with at least some regulation on the safety of our food.

All of this analysis is not to suggest that government can't learn from business. Quite the contrary. Many innovations and methodologies developed in private enterprise have been and should be adopted by many government agencies. But we must recognize that government will always be a laggard by design.

One also should not conclude that public agencies are beyond criticism—of course not. There are legitimate differences in what we all value, and it's reasonable to debate the role of our government agencies and the decisions made by our elected leaders. It's also very reasonable to debate whether we should even have a certain government service, and if so, how much we should spend on it. However, in having this debate, we should remember the role of government and how it is distinct from many of our own experiences in business. It is unfair (and unproductive) to criticize our public agencies for doing what they are designed to do; instead, we should focus the debate on those things that are within their design—what do we value as a community, and what are the long-term effects of government decisions made today. eSN

Seth Rosenblatt is a school board member in San Carlos, Calif., and he also serves on the board of the San Mateo County School Boards Association. For his day job, he is a strategy and marketing consultant for technology companies.



Grants & Funding

How to disseminate the results of a grant-funded project

By Deborah Ward

Seasoned grant writers might notice that some funders, especially for major grant programs, ask for a dissemination plan in their request for proposals. That is, applicants are asked to describe how the results of their project will be shared after the grant period ends. Funders ask for a dissemination plan so that others can learn from the results of grant-funded projects and can replicate successful projects in their own institutions.

Developing a dissemination plan is not very difficult, but it might involve researching some potential avenues to distribute the information if you are unfamiliar with doing this. Look at dissemination as a circle that starts small and then widens out more broadly. In other words, think at a local level, a state level, a national level, and possibly even an international level for ways to disseminate the results of your grant-funded project.

Here are a few general suggestions to help guide the creation of a dissemination plan:

(1) What local avenues are available for dissemination of project results? The first logical step is to educate your stakeholders, such as school board members and parents. You can publicize the results of your project in the district newsletter, on the district website, and on your local cable TV channel. Other possibilities include doing a presentation at a school board meeting or having a special evening presentation for parents. To inform the community at large, send press releases to your local newspapers and television stations.

(2) To disseminate project information at the state level, look for newsletters your state education department might publish, or research state-level organizations related to the project's area of focus (math or science, for example) and see if they publish a newsletter. State agencies and organizations also might have a "best practices" section of their website, where you can submit information about your project. Also, consider doing a workshop presentation or poster session at a state conference. Keep

in mind, however, that some conferences request speaker information at least nine to 12 months in advance of the conference.

(3) At the national level, consider the What Works Clearinghouse of the federal Education Department's Institution of Education Sciences. You can submit studies for review by going to www.ies.ed.gov. If you can secure permission to present at a national conference, consider answering a Call for Proposals to organizations that have a direct link to your project topic, such as the American Association of School Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the U.S. Distance Learning Association, or the American Library Association.

(4) Consider holding a webinar, perhaps in conjunction with one or more collaborative partners in your project. For example, a technology vendor might be willing to include a webinar about the results of your project in its program of already existing webinars that are presented to the education community.

When you describe your dissemination plan in your proposal, you don't have to indicate that you've already been accepted to present at a conference, have a webinar scheduled, or have received confirmation that that an article will be published. However, you should show that you are aware of the various opportunities that are available for dissemination and outline what your steps will be to disseminate the project results to a broad audience. And, of course, if you receive funding, be prepared to follow through on your plan!

(Editor's note: eSchool News accepts article submissions from educators in the field, and this is another way you can disseminate the results of a grant-funded project to a national audience. For submission guidelines, go to www.eschoolnews.com/submissions or eMail Managing Editor Laura Devaney at ldevaney@eschoolnews.com.) 

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

Grant Deadlines

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 this year 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>

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

The Toshiba America Foundation is a nonprofit grant-making organization dedicated to supporting science and math education in the United States. The foundation invests in innovative projects designed by classroom teachers. It awards grants of up to \$5,000 on a rolling basis for projects aimed at students in grades 6-12. For grants of more than \$5,000, applications are due Feb. 1. The foundation also makes grants of up to \$1,000 for projects targeting students in grades K-5; applications for these grants are due every Oct. 1.

<http://www.toshiba.com/taf>

Free classroom AV solutions from Extron Electronics

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

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



Stakeholder & Community Relations

How to fight back against devastating budget cuts

By Nora Carr, APR, Fellow PRSA

With 34 states making yet another wave of cuts in K-12 education, school children and their families are increasingly vulnerable as the Great Recession leaves the social safety net in tatters.

Soon, even more public school employees will likely join the ranks of the unemployed. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 44 states plus the District of Columbia are eliminating, freezing, or cutting their workforces.

States and school districts are also mandating time off without pay, increasing insurance co-pays, and enacting a host of other stringent cost-cutting measures.

Sadly, some elected officials are using state budget crises as political cover to push agendas that have little or nothing to do with educating children well, particularly schools that serve higher percentages of students who are poor, disabled, or English language learners.

In North Carolina, for example, the state legislature is expected to adopt Senate Bill 8, which shifts funding from public to charter schools for services like transportation

Regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum, this much is clear: Educators need to tell their stories and make their voices heard over the pundit-driven media din.

and child nutrition that charter schools aren't required by law to provide.

Tying layoff notices to passage of a bill gutting teacher tenure laws, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker has ignited massive protests and a national debate regarding the efficacy of teacher unions and public employees' collective bargaining rights.

Increasingly, teachers and other public employees are being blamed for every social ill, from poor student health to massive state budget deficits. Meanwhile, films like the pro-charter school *Waiting for Superman* paint all educators with the broad brush of incompetence and indifference.

When 70 percent of American voters no longer have school-aged children, educators no longer can rely on happy parents and thriving students to spread the word about the great things happening in their classrooms and schools.

Unfortunately, the information vacuum created by changing demographics and a radically altered media landscape has been filled by naysayers and critics. As a result, many educators don't recognize their own experiences when public schools are discussed in the media and online, or portrayed in film.

Regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum, this much is clear: Educators need to tell their stories and make

their voices heard over the pundit-driven media din.

Social media networks like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn are a good place to start. Free and easy to use, with micro blogs typically limited to 140-character messages, social media networks can be updated on the go from smart phones, iPads, and other mobile devices.

While social media networks won't replace grassroots advocacy, the blogosphere is a powerful tool for informing and mobilizing constituents.

From President Obama's success in galvanizing the youth vote to the recent toppling of a 40-year dictatorship in Egypt, social media networks have become the new public square. To make sure their voices are heard, educators need to learn how to negotiate this new medium successfully.

According to a 2010 study of social media use, 23 percent of corporations listed on the Fortune 500 have blogs, 60 percent have Twitter accounts, and 56 percent have Facebook sites geared toward public consumption. These efforts are characterized by frequent postings, quick replies to consumer questions, online discussions, and subscription options via eMail or RSS feeds.

"These large and leading companies drive the American economy and, to a large extent, the world economy," writes Nora Ganim Barnes, the study's author. "Their willingness to interact more transparently via these new technologies with stakeholders is clear. It will be interesting to watch as they expand their adoption of social media tools and connect with their constituents in dramatically new ways."

Few industries shape the future more than public schools, yet unlike their corporate brethren, school leaders have largely been slow to adopt these new tools.

If educators are going to win back the hearts and minds of the public in support of public schools, they need to learn how to engage social media networks successfully.

Eric Sheninger, principal of New Milford High School in New Milford, N.J., is using social media networks extensively to keep teachers, parents, and students informed and build pride in the school.

From emergency weather alerts and athletic score updates to news about student honors, staff accomplishments, and school events, Sheninger posts information daily.

"Many people in education are reluctant to get involved with social media. I know, because I was one of them," says Sheninger, citing frequent postings and transparency as social media fundamentals. "However, using social media to communicate has made me more efficient and effective as a high school principal."

Sheninger might be on to something. NorthSocial, which offers a customized Facebook application, estimates the value of every "fan" at \$137, while Syncapse, a social media management firm, pegs it at \$136. For a comprehensive school like New Milford, 500 fans would represent roughly \$68,000—a pretty healthy rate of return on a minimal investment of time. For a

school district like North Carolina's Guilford County Schools, which—with more than 4,100 fans—has outpaced the local daily newspaper's blog, the value rises to nearly \$570,000.

More importantly, according to Syncapse research, 28 percent of consumers are more likely to use a product or service if the company has a Facebook site, and 68 percent of fans are very likely to give a favorable recommendation. Fans are also more likely to feel connected to a brand, as compared to only 39 percent of non-fans.

As massive state budget cuts loom, social media networks can help make sure parents, elected officials, reporters, and other stakeholders understand the possible impact on local schools.

Consider uploading budget documents and videos on Facebook, or using RSS feeds and tweets to apprise parents about important votes in the state legislature. LinkedIn makes it easy to upload PowerPoint presentations, extending the audience for face-to-face sessions at PTA nights or faculty meetings.

The key is to focus on news of interest to the end user and provide solid information in a more personal, conversational manner. Stuffy memos written in bureau-

cratic jargon will fall flat in the informal and highly interactive world of social media.

Rather than inundate stakeholders with budget facts and figures, use social media networks to show stacks of outdated and worn-out textbooks that schools can't afford to replace, or highlight stories about award-winning teachers who donate their time and dollars to tutor students on weekends or purchase clothing, lunches, and school supplies for young people who otherwise would do without.

Interview cafeteria workers, custodians, and school bus drivers, and upload the audio or video files online to put faces on position cuts. Invite student journalists and the media into schools to see teachers and students working in overcrowded classrooms with inadequate supplies and materials.

When it comes to public opinion and shaping public policy, if educators don't tell their story, someone else will—and the end result likely won't benefit the nation's school children, at least not those served in public schools. 

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

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Product Spotlight



Behavior management platform targets general-education community

Psychological Software Solutions (PSS) has released a software program called Review360 GenEd, which serves as a foundation for behavior improvement in the classroom and a more positive school climate.

“Review360 GenEd draws on the experience and success with our flagship product,

Review360. It has many of the same features that make Review360 highly effective in managing the behavior of students with behavioral disorders; however, we have added new features to make it relevant for school leaders, educators, and support staff working across all levels of intervention,” said PSS Co-Founder Stewart Pisecco.

The first component of Review360 GenEd, for classroom teachers, provides professional development modules for effective classroom management, with content from evidence-based, teacher-led practices. The second component, for use by school leaders, aggregates classroom and school-wide data and tracks specific behavioral trends in the overall student population, as well as with individual students. This provides the framework for implementing school-wide activities to promote positive behavior, resulting in a more constructive school climate and increased academic performance, PSS says.

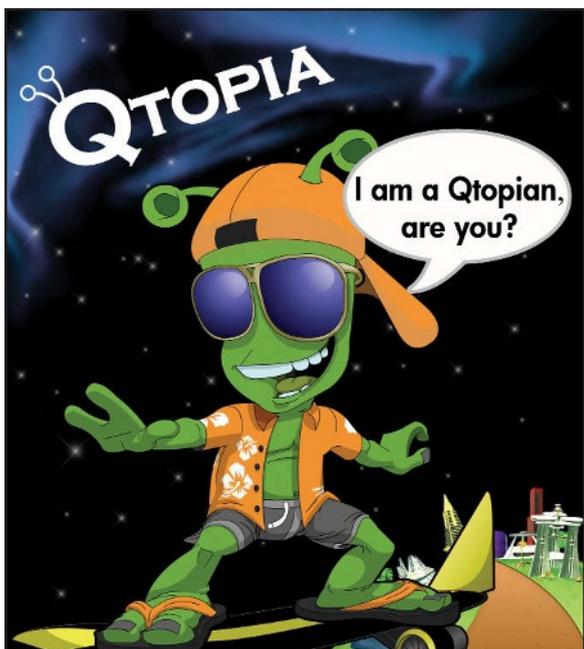
<http://psiwareolutions.com>

Qwizdom launches game-based platform for learning and practicing K-8 skills

Qwizdom has developed a free online learning platform for students in grades K-8, called Qtopia, with thousands of ready-to-use practice materials—including educational activities, games, and homework—that are accessible from any internet-connected computer.

“What we have created is an online community for students and teachers that makes learning successful, measurable, and fun,” said Darin Beamish, CEO of Qwizdom.

Students can personalize their own account with customizable avatars, called Qtopians, who grow with



each student as they overcome challenges and earn rewards. The site’s activities feature automatic grading, instant feedback, and data tracking, allowing educators to save time and paper when assigning homework, and online messaging and reporting tools make it easy for teachers to keep parents informed on their student’s progress and assignments.

Qtopia was piloted in January by a variety of instructors, including technology teacher Marty Harrington at Gray Elementary School in Georgia. “With Qtopia, I have seen students [who] are typically unmotivated perform better while having fun and enjoying it,” she noted.

While access to Qtopia is free of charge for educators and students, an extended version, Qtopia Plus, is in development and will feature more customization, access to state standards-aligned curriculum, animated avatars, supplementary lesson and answer explanations, and district-wide reporting capabilities, the company said.

<http://www.qtopia.com>

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The Web Help Desk software suite is the leading cross-platform service desk management solution for K-12 help desks and facilities departments that seek to simplify and control their increasingly complex service environments.

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Highlights

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Leigh Anne Tuohy Interview at TCEA 2011

Tuohy, keynoter at TCEA and famous as being Michael Oher's adoptive mother and the movie *The Blind Side*, talks about how important it is to be involved with every child's education.



War on Working Families

Supporters of union workers say Gov. Walker's proposals hurt the working class and put money into large corporations.

AASA

Alan Blankstein Interview

Alan Blankstein, Founder and President of the HOPE Foundation, and author of multiple award-winning books, describes how HOPE supports leadership teams to transform education.

Daniel Domenech Interview

Daniel Domenech, Executive Director of AASA, reveals some of the highlights of the organization's National Conference on Education, including a big announcement.

TCEA

David Pogue Interview

Pogue, columnist for the *New York Times*, discusses how technology is impacting the culture of the next generation.

Candace Threadgill Interview

Candace Threadgill, TCEA President, TCEA 2011, and IT director for Klein ISD in Houston, discusses the conference's theme of 'No Limitations' and how technology is making this possible in the classroom.

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