



Editor's Note

Feature

- Key Resources
- Correction

What's New ?

- From the U.S. Department of Education American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
- From the Institute of Education Sciences Raising Student Achievement
- STEM
- Teacher Quality and Development

Innovations in the News

- Raising Student Achievement
- School Improvement
- STEM
- Teacher Quality and Development
- Technology in Education

Purpose

Contributors

Disclaimer

Editor's Note

The Education Innovator will take a brief summer break in July. Look for the back-to-school edition in late August when we resume publication.

Feature

A New Era of Family Engagement

One evening last November, 59 students at Avondale West Elementary School in Topeka, Kansas, with 68 parents accompanying them watched “The Tale of Despereaux,” but not just for its entertainment value. Joining them that evening were Avondale West teachers in grades three to five who worked with their students leading up to the movie night. In place of the regular Title I Parent Reading and Math Nights, they used the story of a small mouse with big dreams that discovers reading as a way to achieve those dreams. Students and parents estimated the number of spools of thread in a large container to win a personal copy of the movie. Teachers used portions of “The Tale of Despereaux” to develop math projects that students and their parents completed. A large word wall in the school’s front lobby greeted the participants with vocabulary from the movie.

This and similar creative strategies for engaging students, parents, and families are supported throughout Kansas and other states by the [Parental Information and Resource Centers](#) (PIRC) network funded by the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education. The network, first established in 1995, is committed to building the capacity of schools and districts to use statewide delivery models to develop school, community, and family partnerships that contribute to student success.

Setting Priorities for a New Era of Engagement

Research studies point to the need for many more comprehensive, strategic approaches to bringing parents and families into partnerships with schools, with the ultimate outcome of these efforts being increased student achievement. According to the [National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group](#) (Working Group), a leadership collaborative that informs the development and implementation of federal policy related to family, school, and community engagement, there is strong research evidence that “parental beliefs, attitudes, values, and childrearing practices, as well as home-school communication, are linked to student success.”

The [Harvard Family Research Project](#), under the direction of its founder and director, [Heather B. Weiss](#), convened a group of key stakeholders in parent and family engagement – including the [PTA National Office](#), the [Annenberg Institute for School Reform](#), the [New York Community Trust](#) – to create the Working Group. The group tasked itself with assessing the quality of available research in order to inform the emerging policy discussions about education reform under the Obama Administration. “There is a skyscraper full of research showing how parent, family, and community engagement is crucial to children’s learning and school success from birth on,” according to Weiss. Leaders in the field are using this available research, she further notes, to “redefine what effective engagement is and to guide the development of the policies and practices that will achieve better learning results.”

“There is a skyscraper full of research showing how parent, family, and community engagement is crucial to children’s learning and school success from birth on.”

— Heather B. Weiss, National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group

With the Department of Education and others “expanding their commitments and investments and thereby creating opportunities to build and integrate effective engagement,” Weiss and her Working Group colleagues wanted to ensure that family engagement is viewed as a core innovation and reform strategy.

The Working Group began by enumerating a set of priorities to build a strong foundation for family, school, and community engagement, including: the need for a coherent and comprehensive strategy to guide family, school, and community partnerships; a consciously designed infrastructure to elevate the essential nature of engagement as a reform strategy; and improvement of data systems – in terms of timeliness, relevance to parents and families, and accountability for outcomes – that strengthen the quality of family engagement.

From their deliberations, a new definition of family engagement emerged – one intended to catalyze innovative national policies and programs to help ensure the highest quality of educational opportunities from birth through young adulthood. Realizing that those opportunities will require partnerships among families, schools, and communities to promote kindergarten readiness, improve schools, and increase student achievement, the definition calls for:

- shared responsibility on the part of schools and other community agencies and organizations that commit themselves to engaging families in meaningful and culturally respectful ways;
- a continuum of engagement across a child’s life, from Early Head Start programs to readiness for college by high school graduation; and
- reinforcement of learning in multiple settings – at home, in pre-kindergarten programs, in school and extended learning programs, in faith-based institutions, and in community programs.

This spring, the Working Group released “[*Taking Leadership. Innovating Change: Profiles in Family, School, and Community Engagement*](#),” a compendium of 12 innovations in family involvement that are advancing student learning. As a group, the innovations “engage families along a continuum, drawing in hard-to-engage parents, ... supporting and reinforcing involved families, ... and empowering parent leaders to transform schools.” Taken together, the examples represent a vision of family, school, and community engagement as a shared responsibility and a continuous process that takes into account the multiple settings in which learning occurs as well as the process that goes from cradle to career.

The Working Group, according to Weiss, will continue its work, possibly increase its members, and stay focused on emerging policy changes, preparing to inform the implementation phase of such major actions as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Information to Empower Parents and Families

School districts, with support from the Department of Education and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, have spent more than \$1 billion to build and implement data systems. With an expected infusion of another \$1 billion by 2015, all states should be better prepared to provide transparent information about student achievement and make it readily available.

According to the Harvard Family Research Project, this historic investment must be strategic – accessible, understandable, and actionable – towards the major outcomes of achieving national education reform goals. In 2008, [*New Visions for Public Schools*](#) launched “[*Good to Go*](#),” a college- and career-readiness campaign with three interdependent components: increasing parental engagement, developing community resources to speed up progress towards the goal of college preparation, and an innovative set of tools to track student progress at the high school and post-secondary levels. The [*Student Tracker*](#) electronically depicts college readiness benchmarks and provides information about a student’s progress in terms of attendance, grades, and state-testing results. Color-coding makes the information readily understandable for parents, teachers, and students, and the “tracker” serves as the basis for discussions among the three groups during parent-teacher-student conferences. The New Visions family engagement model is in 32 high schools this year, and plans call for it to be adapted for middle school in the near future, in order to provide a continuous pathway for family engagement in service to the goal of career readiness.

In Indiana, the [State PIRC](#) believes that parents need both information and opportunities to become leaders in order to work effectively with their school and community partners. The [Indiana Academy for Parent and School Leadership](#) (Academy) annually brings together 10 school-based teams for focused, shared learning experiences designed to increase participants' knowledge and skills. They return to their schools and communities prepared to engage in conversations with school leaders, conduct surveys, recruit and enroll parents in workshops and other informative activities, and initiate parent projects that support student learning as part of local School Improvement Plans. The Academy is "crucial in preparing leaders to go home and empower other parents," according to Dee Jones, an Academy graduate and former Indiana State PTA president. In turn, that empowerment, she adds, allows "parent[s] to help children become successful in school and in life."

Voices in Action, an outgrowth of the Academy, reaches out to Latino immigrant families in Indiana, providing them with information on policies such as Title I and connecting them to community resources. The immigrant parents and families also learn the differences between the expectations for parent engagement in the U.S. compared with their former homelands.

Building School and District Infrastructure

Informed and empowered parents and families are only half of the equation, according to the Working Group. There also must be receptive and capable institutions, most importantly schools, but also community providers of extended learning such as after-school programs, faith-based organizations, and, in the case of early childhood, Head Start and other early care providers. Building that commitment and capacity takes strategic and sustained efforts. Iowa's Sustaining Parent Involvement Network (iSPIN), administered by the [Iowa State PIRC](#), is featured in "*Taking Leadership, Innovating Change: Profiles in Family, School, and Community Engagement*" because of the progress it is making on this important front. At the state level, the Iowa PIRC works closely with the State Association of School Boards and the School Administrators of Iowa to see that parent engagement is in alignment with standards for teachers and administrators as well as in the assessment of school leaders.

With that state-level effort as a backdrop, iSPIN endeavors to create a structure for family engagement that can lead to better outcomes for all the local team members – schools, families, and students. The basis of the structure is a required set of school-level commitments to parent engagement; the commitments are in-depth in nature and dependent on systemic actions in professional development, access to information and materials, local coaching on building and sustaining partnerships, and opportunities for iSPIN schools to network with one another.

iSPIN's systemic approach, according to the Working Group, has "helped schools change their culture around parent engagement," and has made parent engagement efforts "a part of the basic fabric of the school." Even "involved" parents, such as Michele Clayton of West Des Moines, praise iSPIN for the ways in which it deepens their involvement. In just a few months, Clayton said she began to "think differently about all the ways I can help to keep my own children more engaged in school."

Over the next two years, the Iowa State PIRC plans to conduct a quasi-experimental study of iSPIN sites, building on a 2004 evaluation of the Solid Foundation program, a precursor to iSPIN.

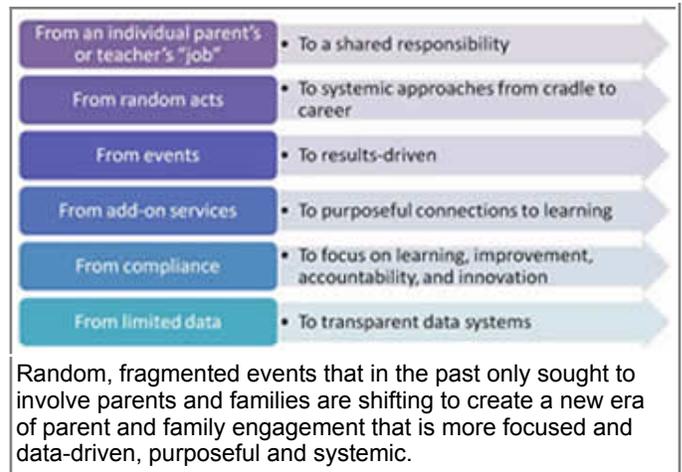
An empowering culture in schools to support effective instruction is also a key component of the [Multi-Tier System of Supports](#) (MTSS), a part of the [Kansas State PIRC](#) (KPIRC) that calls for schools to make a concerted effort to engage families. The six [PTA National Standards](#) for Family-School Partnerships are at the heart of MTSS, along with the acknowledgement that local intentions to adhere to the PTA standards require partnerships between families, schools, and communities, along with strong, coherent school-by-school plans to achieve student success. Within those plans must be creative, engaging, and student-outcome-driven actions like the movie night at Avondale Elementary School, which received one of five annual Family and Parent Partnership Projects grants from the KPIRC. The grants require the participating schools to plan, strategize, implement, and evaluate family engagement efforts.

The Federal Role in Supporting Parent Engagement

As research has informed the role of parents in education, the Department of Education's strategies concerning parents and families have evolved, particularly in regards to the PIRC network. When the network was created 15 years ago, parent *involvement* was the end. Success was defined by involvement appearing as a goal in local school improvement plans. In 2002, *capacity building* – at the state and local levels – became the operative strategy for PIRCs. Now, parent *engagement* has replaced involvement, not as a goal, but rather as a key strategy at the state and local levels to increase student achievement.

Speaking to the [Mom Congress](#) recently, Secretary Duncan affirmed the critical role parents play in their children's success in school. "It is well documented – and plain common sense – that parental involvement ... boosts student learning and improves both behavior and attendance," he said. That fact and others concerning the role of parents led the Obama Administration to propose a doubling of funding for parent engagement – from one to two percent of Title I dollars, which will total \$270 million.

OII's Office of Parental Options and Information, in partnership with United Way Worldwide, the National PTA, the Southwest Education Development Lab, and the Harvard Family Research Project, is sponsoring Achieving Excellence and Innovation in Family, School, and Community Engagement, a four-part [webinar series](#) for stakeholders from national, regional, and local levels. The goal of the series is to inform these stakeholders about research on family, school, and community engagement, best practices, and innovations in school improvement and student learning. The series began on April 29 with [Transforming Schools Through Family, School, and Community Engagement: Webinar 2, A New Day: Family, School, and Community Engagement in Education Reform](#), is scheduled for June 30, at 1:30 p.m. EDT.



Key Resources

"*Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*," available from the [Consortium on Chicago School Research](#) at the University of Chicago

"*The Turnaround Challenge: Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools*," available from [Mass Insight Education and Research Institute](#)

State Strategies for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools and Districts: A Study Guide for Policymakers Based on a Symposium for State Board Chairs and Chief State School Officers, available from the [National Association of State Boards of Education](#)

"*A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*," available from the [Southwest Education Development Lab](#)

"*National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group: Recommendations for Federal Policy*," the National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group

Correction

In the May *Innovator* feature, it was indicated that Teaching Ambassador Fellow Michelle Bissonnette participated in the negotiation of teacher contract agreements. That portion of the article should have read: ... Bissonnette has looked closely at progressive labor and management relationships as well as negotiated agreements that have been critical to dramatic reform in districts across the country. We regret this error and any confusion it may have caused.

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

President Obama and Secretary Duncan delivered commencement addresses at several high schools. The Secretary addressed the 85 graduates of Washington, D.C.'s [Benjamin Banneker High School](#). His address, "Finding Your Passion," challenged graduates to strive for excellence, pursue their dreams, persist and achieve college and career success, and use their great talents to make a positive contribution to their community and the nation. The President addressed the 290 graduates at Michigan's [Kalamazoo Central High School](#), the winners of the President's inaugural [Race to the Top High School Commencement Challenge](#). "Together, as a community, you've embraced the motto of this district – 'every child, every opportunity, every time' – because you believe, like I do, that every child, regardless of what they look like, where they come from, or how much money their parents have, deserves a quality education," he said. (June 2010)



President Barack Obama delivers the commencement address to the graduates of Kalamazoo Central High School at the University Arena at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, June 7, 2010. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

The Secretary has [appointed](#) 15 members to serve on the Committee on Measures of Student Success. Created under the *Higher Education Opportunity Act*, the committee will develop recommendations for two-year institutions of higher education to comply with the law's completion and graduation rate disclosure requirements. It will also develop recommendations regarding additional measures of student success that are comparable alternatives to the completion or graduation rates, taking into account the mission and role of such institutions. (June 2010)



First Lady Michelle Obama and Secretary Duncan joined three other Cabinet secretaries and Patrick Covington, chief executive officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), to launch "[United We Serve: Let's Read. Let's Move.](#)" This new initiative – an Administration-wide effort spearheaded by CNCS – seeks to combat summer reading loss and childhood obesity by engaging youth in summer reading and physical activity, as well as by providing full access to healthy, affordable food. Specifically, the initiative aims to increase access to volunteer projects around reading, exercise, and healthy eating; provide toolkits and other key resources to help Americans develop high-impact service projects; and build new partnerships to reach youth in large cities and rural communities. (June 2010)

More than 250 parents, grandparents, caregivers, and community members from 17 states gathered at the Department for a [dialogue](#) with Department officials. The 90-minute discussion touched on meaningful ways to support family engagement in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), supporting children with special needs, and the allocation of Title I funding in schools. (May 2010)

The [Center on Innovation and Improvement](#) (CII) offers a number of resources, including *Strengthening Partnerships and Building Public Will for Out-of-School Time Programs*, a [guide](#) by the National League of Cities that describes three strategies that municipal leaders have used successfully to advance after-school

programming. For charter schools, The [National Center on School Choice](#) at Vanderbilt University conducts scientific, comprehensive, and timely investigations on the individual and systemic effects of school choice and competition. The Center exercises national leadership in school choice research, including charter and magnet schools, private school vouchers, teacher recruitment, school management, and state policymaking. CII supports regional centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with opportunities, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students. (May 2010)

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia submitted applications to be considered for [Phase 2 of the Race to the Top](#) competition. Race to the Top is the Department of Education's \$4.35 billion fund to dramatically reshape America's educational system to better engage and prepare students for success in the 21st century global economy and workplace. The Department will select the Phase 2 winners over the summer, using the same process as Phase 1. Finalists will be selected and invited to Washington, D.C. to make in-person presentations to RTT review panels. Each reviewer will then submit final scores, and the Secretary will select awardees. Depending on the size of the winning states, 10 to 15 states could win Race to the Top grants. (June 2010)

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) [awarded grants](#) to 20 state education departments for the design and implementation of statewide longitudinal data systems. These grants, funded through ARRA, are intended to support states with the development and implementation of systems that promote the linking of data across time and databases, from early childhood into career, including matching teachers to students, while protecting student privacy and confidentiality consistent with applicable privacy protection laws. The total value of the three-year grants will range from \$5.1 million to \$19.7 million. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands applied. (June 2010)

From the Institute of Education Sciences

A new report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), presents [findings](#) associated with public high school graduation and dropout rates, for the 2007-08 school year. Nationwide, 75% of public high school students who started as freshmen in the fall of 2004 graduated high school in 2008 – up from 74% who graduated on time in 2007. Commenting on the new figures, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said the report “confirms that our nation faces a dropout crisis. When 25 percent of our students – and almost 40 percent of our black and Hispanic students – fail to graduate high school on time, we know that too many of our schools are failing to offer their students a world-class education.” (June 2010)

The [Condition of Education 2010](#) summarizes important developments and trends in education using the latest available data. The report presents 49 indicators on the status and condition of education, in addition to a special section on high-poverty schools. The indicators represent a consensus of professional judgment on the most significant national measures of the condition and progress of education for which accurate data are available. The 2009 print edition includes 49 indicators in five main areas: (1) participation in education; (2) learner outcomes; (3) student effort and educational progress; (4) the contexts of elementary and secondary education; and (5) the contexts of postsecondary education. (May 2010)

The National Center for Special Education Research and the National Center for Education Research within IES will host a [series of webinars](#) related to research funding opportunities between May and August. Topics in the series include the application process and grant writing for a number of different types of research projects. (May 2010)

Raising Student Achievement

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released a set of state-led education standards, the [Common Core State Standards](#), at Peachtree Ridge High School in Suwanee, Ga. The English-language arts and mathematics standards for grades K-12 were developed in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders including content experts, states, teachers, school administrators, and parents. The release of the standards marks the conclusion of the development of the Common Core State Standards and signals the start of the adoption and implementation process by the states. (June 2010)

STEM

Intel Corporation and Society for Science & the Public announced the top [winners](#) of the world's largest pre-college science competition: the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair. This year's competition consisted of 1,611 young scientists from 59 countries, regions and territories. In addition to the three top prizes, the Intel Foundation awarded \$8,000 to each of 19 "Best of Category" winners and also provided \$1,000 grants to the winners' schools and the affiliated fairs they represent. More than 600 additional awards and prizes were provided by dozens of other corporate, academic, government, and science-focused sponsors for their groundbreaking work. (May 2010)

Teacher Quality and Development

You learned about the Department's Teaching Ambassador Fellows in last month's *Innovator*, now read their [latest blog installment](#) about schools that have successfully turned around low-performance. Join the discussion as the Fellows ask for input on ways teachers have been a part of effective reform efforts at the turnaround schools, and for examples of teacher-led reforms that have been models of collaborative stakeholder engagement. (June 2010)

Innovations in the News

Raising Student Achievement

When the new school year begins in Hillsborough County, Fla., students in 21 of the district's elementary schools will be placed in classrooms using an experimental approach that strategically clusters students based on several achievement levels. The effort, based on a 1999 research study from the Gifted Education Resource Institute at Purdue University, is supported by a five-year grant from the federal Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program that involves more than 50 schools in eight states. [More—The [St. Petersburg Times](#)] (June 4)

In Kentucky, the 2008-2009 school year marked an historic low in the drop-out rate, with the biggest decrease in drop-outs among Hispanic and African-American students – from 6 percent for each of the groups in 2008 to 4.1 percent for Hispanics and 4.9 percent for African-Americans in 2009. In addition, 2009 marked another increase – the number of high school graduates entering college increased from 55.2 to 56.4 percent. [More—Kentucky's [Courier-Journal](#)] (June 2)

In Philadelphia, the Diplomas Now program is targeting the middle grades to pay attention to the “red flags” that often spell trouble later on, resulting in high drop-out rates, particularly in large urban centers. “Early warning” spreadsheets, built from data on attendance, behavior, and grades in English and math, are used to target students potentially at risk, along with “a second shift of adults” who help teachers to give extra tutoring and other services and attention to the students, often as early as in sixth grade. The program has shown signs of progress during its pilot year in Philadelphia last year, which prompted other cities – Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and San Antonio – to adopt the approach with help from a three-year, \$5 million grant from the PepsiCo Foundation. [More—[USA Today](#)] (May 20)

School Improvement

A spending cut of \$97 million for the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland will be eased in part by at least \$2.25 million from an unusual business deal with a major education publisher, one in which an elementary curriculum developed by county educators will be marketed worldwide. “I tend to look at it from the standpoint that we are broke,” is how Montgomery County Superintendent Jerry D. Weast characterized the business arrangement that will pay the district royalties of up to 3 percent on the curriculum’s sales as well as the \$2.25 million as a guaranteed advance on royalties. The county also gains the ability to ramp up its efforts already underway to develop an innovative curriculum that integrates subjects like the arts and social studies with math, reading, and writing. [More—The [Washington Post](#)] (June 9)

While research is scant regarding a four-day school week, educators in rural Peach County in Georgia are in favor of it based on the results of this year’s experiment to pare a day from the former five-days-a-week schedule, which was done to fill a \$1 million budget shortfall. To the surprise of some, test scores increased as did attendance – of both students and teachers – and costs of substitute teachers went down by a third. For the students who needed a place to spend a day each week out of school, area churches and the local Boys & Girls Club sponsored “Monday care,” that offered tutors to help with homework. Georgia is one of a handful of states that permit districts to count the school year by hours rather than days. [More—The [AP](#)] (June 6)

The Julius Corsini Elementary School, once one of the lowest-achieving schools in the Desert Hot Springs, Calif., school district, is one of only six schools nationwide to receive this year’s Panasonic National School Change Award. The principal and staff of Corsini Elementary attribute the achievement to a transformation in the school’s culture, which is guided by the belief that all students can learn. Among the distinguishing characteristics of the school is the fact that 100 percent of its teachers underwent the rigorous process of National Board Certification. [More—The [Desert \(CA\) Sun](#)] (June 4)

The Martin Luther King Jr. Early College school in Denver has undergone a five-year transformation with flying colors. Last month, the sixth through twelfth grade school graduated 100 percent of its 73 seniors, its first graduating class since undergoing an overhaul. Moreover, all of the graduating seniors are going to college, with 87 percent having been accepted into four-year colleges. Nearly \$1 million in scholarships will help make sure college is financially possible for the graduates. [More—The [Denver Post](#)] (May 24)

In Central Falls, R.I., 87 teachers who were to be fired this summer will retain their positions after meeting several requirements that include writing an essay and interviewing with the school’s leadership team. A 17-point agreement between the local teacher union and Central Falls district called for all teachers and support staff to reapply for their jobs as a first step, and once rehired, to agree to a longer school day, more rigorous evaluations, and 90 minutes weekly of professional development as well as summer training. The school will open with a new set of administrators; the four who were terminated will be assigned to other positions in the district. [More—The [Providence Journal](#)] (May 26)

STEM

A collaboration among the Rochester (Minn.) Public Schools, the Mayo Clinic, and Winona State University is turning students into excited scientists who are learning through hands-on lessons designed by Mayo researchers, teachers, parents, and students, some of which involve the study of the life cycle of Zebra Fish, a species that happens to share 75 percent of the genetic code with humans. Called InSciEd Out, a goal of the collaborative program is to elevate student performance in science and build a new generation of scientists. Technology plays a role by allowing Mayo researchers to consult with students on projects via Skype, and pre-service teachers from Winona State gain invaluable experience that will make them more science-minded when they reach their first classrooms. [More—The [Winona \(MN\) Post](#)] (June 9)

In Northwest Minnesota, another group of elementary and middle school students are gaining experience as

space scientists through “Reach for the Sky,” a summer program on the White Earth Indian Reservation. The students launch helium-filled weather balloons to “near-space” altitudes. Data is transmitted by radio to computers or downloaded after the balloons return to earth. University of Minnesota students with the High Altitude Balloon Team are helping their younger counterparts in the program to interpret the data. Funding for the program comes in part from a National Science Foundation grant. [More—[MinnPost.com](#)] (June 8)

Some STEM projects have their ups and downs, literally. For their project in the Independent Study and Mentorship (ISM) class at Liberty High School in the Frisco Independent School District, Nathan Rubin and Ian Mair built a roller coaster in Nathan’s backyard. Called the Predator, the 60-foot-long wooden structure is 10-feet high and contains more than 4,000 screws. “We figured anything is possible with this program,” said 18-year-old Mair. Juniors and seniors can apply to enroll in ISM, which, in addition to roller coaster construction, can involve neuroscience, corporate law, or drama therapy. Both Rubin and Mair are seniors and credit ISM for their acceptances into University of Texas at Austin and University of California-Berkeley, respectively. [More—The [Dallas Morning News](#)] (May 27)

In Patton Township, Penn., students from Park Forest Middle School were recently atop their school to install a wind turbine as part of a STEM program involving educators from Penn State University. The turbines will help power a charging station for laptop computers. The middle school students learned about electricity, including how it affects the school, as well as skills like welding. Besides the wind turbine, Park Forest students have worked on a solar water heating system. “It teaches students how to use what they’ve learned and sort of apply it in a more real life situation,” is how Chris, an eighth-grader who is considering a career in engineering, describes the STEM efforts at Park Forest. [More—Pennsylvania’s [Centre Daily Times](#)] (May 24)

Teacher Quality and Development

School officials in Hillsborough, Fla., may look to the Value-Added Research Center at the University of Wisconsin to help them design a teacher evaluation system that is expected to include peer and principal evaluations as well as test scores to determine teachers’ tenure, promotions, and dismissals. The effort is part of a \$202 million partnership between Hillsborough County Schools and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and is likely to draw national attention for its scope. In addition to using testing data from math and reading, the planned system is expected to include end-of-course exams in most school subjects, and is also expected to filter out such variables as students’ family income and background. [More—The [St. Petersburg Times](#)] (June 10)] (May 26)

School districts in state of Washington are eligible for grants from the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to test new ways of measuring the performance of teachers and principals. The \$100,000 to \$200,000 grants that will be awarded to eight districts will give them a jump start on meeting a new state policy that will require all Washington districts to have robust evaluation systems in place by the 2013-2014 school year. [More—The [Seattle Times](#)] May 26)

Technology in Education

Nearly 100 third-grade teachers in the Bakersfield City School District (BSCD) believe it takes a village to educate children, but for them, it’s a virtual village that is helping them to learn from one another and teach to district and state standards. BSCD subscribed to Learning Village this year, and became the only California district to use it districtwide. While they await test scores and other empirical data to judge the effects of the system that relies on digitized textbooks and SMART boards, teachers and principals say the experiment is working. “It’s the way of the future for professional development,” observed BSCD Assistant Superintendent Marvin Jones. [More—The [Bakersfield Californian](#)] (June 5)

The California Virtual Academy (CAVA) at San Mateo is part of a growing number of California charter schools that conduct some or all of their classes online, using, in some cases, third-party providers such as K12 Incorporated, a publicly-traded corporation that operates virtual schools in 25 states and abroad. CAVA’s costs to serve its 900 students, which include the shared costs of a 10,000-square-foot office and storage space and more than \$642,000 in management fees to K12 Incorporated, are offset by \$5,105 per-student state and federal funds. That figure is \$375 more per student than what the local charter

authorizer, Jefferson Elementary School district, expects to provide its traditional schools, which causes some scholars on charters and school finance, such as Luis Huerta of Teachers College, Columbia University, to question assertions by some that virtual schools provide a comprehensive education at a lower average cost than traditional schools. [More—The [New York Times](#) /Bay Citizen] (June 4)

Purpose

The purpose of the U.S. Department of Education's online newsletter *The Education Innovator* is to promote innovative practices in education; to offer features on promising programs and practices; to provide information on innovative research, schools, policies, and trends; and to keep readers informed of key Department priorities and activities. The Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) is responsible for the newsletter's research, writing, and production.

James H. Shelton III, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of Innovation and Improvement, sponsors *The Education Innovator*, which is published up to 10 months annually.

Contributors

Doug Herbert
Editor

Cynthia Cabell
Senior Production Editor

Dramon Turner
Production Editor

Emily Archer
Copy Editor

Veronica Edwards
Anna Hinton
Rosie E. Kelley
Monique S. Toussaint
Article Contributions

Doug Herbert
Anna Hinton
José Rodríguez
Monique S. Toussaint
Issue Reviewers

Disclaimer

The Education Innovator contains links to Web sites and news articles. We believe these links provide relevant information as part of the continuing discussion of education improvement. These links represent just a few examples of the numerous education reference materials currently available to the public. Some of the news items may require both paid and unpaid subscriptions. The opinions expressed in any of these articles or Web pages do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OII or the Department. The inclusion of resources should not be construed or interpreted as an endorsement by the Department of any private organization or business listed herein.

