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Editor's Note

The Education Innovator will take a brief summer break in July. Look for the next issue in late August when we will resume publication.

Feature

Community Schools: Bringing Together Community Partners to Increase Opportunities for Youth

When U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan spoke a few weeks ago on the *Charlie Rose* show, many people were excited by his words about community schools. "Where schools truly become the centers of the community, great things happen. ... We need the schools open much longer hours, and we don't have to do this all ourselves...you can bring in great nonprofits, mentoring and tutoring groups to co-locate their services and bolster the community from the school," he said.

There are important initiatives that distinguish community schools from other public schools, including how community schools often partner with local agencies, and how they offer school-based health, mental health, and social services programs; extended day before- and after-school programs; parent involvement and support programs; and other methods of delivering community enrichment programs. This "full-service" approach to children's development and education represents partnership and teamwork between community residents, businesses, social service agencies, and public entities – all working to support their local school. In neighborhoods where children do not have a safe haven from gangs and drugs, or are lacking adult supervision outside of school, a full service community school is an innovative approach to educating children during the time when they are most vulnerable.

National-level Resources that Support Community Schools

Many educators believe and recent research studies find that the community schools approach can enhance learning for children and facilitate community engagement that leads to greater student achievement. And, as schools and communities move to create more community schools, resources and information are available to help them. The [Coalition for Community Schools](#) is an alliance of national, state, and local community schools networks, which, among other things, published the 2003 *Making A Difference* research report. The 15 community schools that are featured in the report produced remarkable improvements in efficiency and results by integrating existing community resources with the assets of the school. All of these successful schools link school and community resources as an integral part of their design and operation. According to the report, community schools have three major advantages over traditional public schools: (1) they garner additional resources for the school and reduce demands on school staff; (2) they provide learning opportunities that develop both academic and nonacademic competencies; and (3) they offer young people, their families, and community residents opportunities to build social capital, which connects students to people and information that can help them solve problems and meet their goals. The Coalition's Web site draws attention to the latest information about community schools, and highlights research, resources, and strategies that facilitate networking for individuals and groups who want to become Coalition partners and work together to create and improve community schools. The [Institute for Educational Leadership \(IEL\)](#) staffs the Coalition for Community Schools by working to help individuals and institutions increase their capacity to work together.

Another important resource and model in the community schools arena is [Communities in Schools \(CIS\)](#), operating in thousands of schools across the country, and focusing specifically on dropout prevention. It champions the connection of needed resources with schools to help young people learn, stay in schools, and prepare for life. By bringing resources, services, parents, and volunteers into schools, CIS creates a community of caring adults who work directly with educators. CIS works with communities to assess the needs of their youth. In some schools, particular students are connected with services on a one-time basis (social service referrals) and in other schools, services are made available to all students and their families. CIS also brings services to students and families through after-school programs.

The CIS model includes:

- The presence of a CIS school-based, on-site coordinator.
- A comprehensive school- and student-level needs assessment.
- A community asset assessment and identification of potential partners.
- Annual plans for school-level prevention and individual intervention strategies.
- Appropriate combinations of widely accessible prevention services and resources for the entire school population, coupled with coordinated, targeted and sustained intervention services and resources for individual students with significant risk factors.
- Data collection, monitoring, and adjusting services offered to individual students and/or the entire school population.
- A combination of services provided and/or coordinated by CIS, which commonly include both academic and non-academic interventions, such as tutoring, mentoring, family engagement, health care, community service activities, and life skills development.

Currently, the CIS model is undergoing a national, five-year [evaluation](#) that is designed to reveal the most successful strategies for preventing students from dropping out of school and to identify replicable, evidence-based practices that can be adopted throughout the United States. Initial findings from the evaluation show that compared to other dropout prevention programs: 1) CIS is one of the few models to prove it keeps students in school and increases graduation rates; 2) the CIS model results in a higher percentage of students in participating schools reaching proficiency in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math; and, 3) effective implementation of the CIS model of integrated student services correlates more strongly with positive school-level outcomes than does the uncoordinated provision of services alone.

Support for Community Schools at the Federal Level

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education awarded nearly \$5 million in grants to 10 full service community schools that aim to provide comprehensive academic, social, mental, physical, and vocational programs and services to meet individual, family, and community needs. The program, funded through the Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE), and known as the [Full Service Community Schools Program \(FSCS\)](#), encourages coordination of education, developmental, family, health, and other services through partnerships between public elementary and secondary schools and community-based organizations and public-private ventures.

One such grantee benefiting from the new federal program is the Indianapolis Public Schools system. In an inner-city Indianapolis neighborhood where there are many negative societal factors including homelessness, low parent educational levels, a high number of single parents, a rapidly growing population of English language learners, and a high unemployment and poverty rate, [George Washington Community High School](#) is improving the future for its students. The school, grades 7 – 12, has more than 50 collaborative partners, and through its lead partner, Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center, provides services to help the underserved student population there to achieve goals that culminate in high school graduation, post-secondary learning, and community involvement.

For more than six decades the school was the center of the neighborhood, but by the mid-1990s, economic hardship caused the school to close. The neighborhood was outraged, and the community mobilized to form a task force and find a way to re-open the school. In the fall of 2000, a full service community school opened. Jim Grim, Director of Community Schools for the Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center, said “Before we

reopened the school, we had to make sure we could address the issues that led to closing it. When you talk about learning and poverty, community schools are the answer.” The group reached out to families and businesses to create a center for activity around the school. One goal of the school was to improve graduation rates, and the community sought partners to participate in the process to improve outcomes for its children. The school has a teen health clinic, mental health counseling services for students and families, and after-school initiatives that are sponsored by such places as Goodwill Industries and Indiana University--Purdue University Indianapolis to offer safe and healthy alternatives for students. “The award we are getting from the Department allows us to deepen the process that is already in place. It will let us fill in the gaps – like providing more mental health services for children who have been on a waiting list. It will also allow us to take our model to three other high schools in Indianapolis. We will be a technical assistance center for other school communities.” The school’s work has been to develop a culture that reinforces the benefits of having goals, achieving academic success, and enrolling in post secondary education to achieve that success. This year’s class of 2009 achieved unbelievable results: all 78 students who received diplomas were accepted to college—and of those, 89 percent live in poverty, a fifth are still learning English, and only five percent of adults who live in their community have ever attended college.

At the federal level, the Administration has proposed in the fiscal year 2010 budget for the Education Department another important effort to provide an oasis for children from disadvantaged neighborhoods through community schools. Secretary Duncan, in his testimony before the House 2010 Budget Committee, said he “plans to work very hard at scaling up success in our education system...and our budget would support comprehensive approaches such as Promise Neighborhoods, which would be modeled after the [Harlem Children's Zone \(HCZ\)](#), that aim to improve college-going rates by combining a rigorous K-12 education with a full network of neighborhood-based social services.” The \$10 million Promise Neighborhood Initiative would provide one-year planning grants to non-profit, community-based organizations to develop plans for comprehensive neighborhood programs that provide the necessary support for children and youth from preschool through college so that they can succeed in school and beyond.

Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone is a nationally recognized program that covers 100 blocks in Harlem, NY, and reaches nearly 10,000 children with a variety of social services to ensure that all kids are prepared to get a good education. HCZ prepares students from early childhood to high school and beyond with a “conveyor belt of high quality services” including parenting classes, pre-schools, charter schools, after-school services, and tutoring for college students.

A rigorous evaluation [report](#) in April 2009 from Roland G. Fryer, Jr., a Harvard economist and his colleague, Will Dobbie, revealed that HCZ students made “enormous” gains in student achievement. “We provide the first empirical test of the causal impact of HCZ on educational outcomes, with an eye toward informing the long-standing debate whether schools alone can eliminate the achievement gap or whether the issues that poor children bring to school are too much for educators to overcome,” the researchers say. Students entering Promise Academy, the HCZ charter middle school, tested in the 39th percentile among New York City students in math and English Language Arts (verbal). By eighth grade, the typical student scored in the 74th percentile in math and the 53rd percentile in verbal ability. Few other education policies have shown gains that are so dramatic. In math, Promise Academy eliminated the achievement gap between its black students and the city average for white students.

HCZ is a holistic approach to rebuilding a community, helping its children to stay on track through college and successfully enter the job market. Under the umbrella of the HCZ are the HCZ project, Promise Academy Charter Schools, Beacon Community Centers, and Foster-Care Prevention Services.

The HCZ model focuses on the social and educational development of children, along with programs focused on health. To help support that development, it provides wrap-around programs that improve children’s family and neighborhood environments.



The HCZ Pipeline, or continuum of services, provides children and families with a seamless series of free, coordinated, best-practice programs. Academic excellence is a principal goal of the HCZ Pipeline, but high-quality schools are only one of the means used to achieve it.

The model includes five core principles that aim to:

- Serve an entire neighborhood comprehensively.
- Create a pipeline of support.
- Build community among residents, institutions, and stakeholders, who help to create the environment necessary for children’s healthy development.
- Evaluate program outcomes and create feedback to improve programs.
- Foster a culture of success rooted in passion, accountability, leadership, and teamwork.

More Help to Transform Regular Neighborhood Schools

There are increasing numbers of state-level community schools organizations, such as the [Federation for Community Schools](#) in Illinois, working to bring together individuals and organizations who support community schools throughout the state. The Federation was started by two groups in Chicago that wanted to continue the community schools momentum: the Chicago Campaign to Expand Community Schools (funding ended in 2007) and the Chicago Coalition for Community Schools (a coalition of community schools practitioners engaged directly in community schools work). Recently, Illinois became the first state to pass community schools legislation, which is awaiting the Governor’s signature to make Illinois the first state in the nation to codify community schools into the state school code and create the infrastructure necessary to make use of federal stimulus funds to support community schools.

The Federation provides a number of advocacy tools to help communities and schools such as position papers, talking points, community schools development strategies, access to research papers, and a repository of best practices for community schools that are posted on its [Web site](#).

There are many more examples of people and organizations that are helping schools transform from regular neighborhood schools to schools that are the hub of the community—the Eisenhower Foundation, the Children’s Aid Society, the Harvard Family Research Project—and more. Increasingly, the highest levels of government and the private sector are acknowledging that community schools are an idea whose time has come.

Key Resources

[Children’s Aid Society](#)

[Chicago’s Community Schools Initiative](#)

[Coalition for Community Schools](#)

[Communities in Schools](#)

[Eisenhower Foundation](#)

[Federation for Community Schools](#)

[Harvard Family Research Project](#)

[Institute for Educational Leadership](#)

National Education Association’s [“The Community Agenda](#) for America’s Public Schools”

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan continued his "Listening and Learning: A Conversation About Education Reform" tour with [events](#) in Montana and New Jersey. Duncan has visited five states on his multi-state tour to solicit feedback from a broad group of stakeholders around federal education policy, as well as to gain input on the Obama administration's education agenda, including early childhood, higher standards, teacher quality, workforce development and higher education. Many events will be taped and reports and video summaries will be published on the Department's Web site and on the Secretary's blog. To visit the Listening Tour Online, click [here](#). (June 2009)



As part of his Listening and Learning Tour, Secretary Duncan receives a book from the students at Broadwater Elementary School in Billings, Mont.

In a recent conference call with reporters, Secretary Duncan [emphasized](#) that states must be open to charter schools, and that too much is at stake for states financially and for students academically to restrict choice and innovation. This summer, the Department of Education begins accepting state applications for the federal government's largest one-time investment in K-12 public school reform. By the end of the year, the Department will be distributing grants from the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top Fund that is authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Also, \$1.5 billion in Title I School Improvement Program funds are available to improve teaching and learning for all children. (June 2009)

To date, Secretary Duncan has approved [applications](#) from 31 states for millions of dollars in funding that is available under the ARRA. This funding will lay the foundation for a generation of education reform and help save hundreds of thousands of teaching jobs at risk of state and local budget cuts. The law will provide more than \$100 billion over the next two years to save education jobs, send young people to college, modernize America's classrooms, and advance education reforms. (June 2009)

Secretary Duncan praised a new effort by the National Governors Association's (NGA) Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), partnering with Achieve, ACT, and the College Board, to create a [common core of state standards](#) in language arts and math for grades K-12. Forty-six states and three territories have joined the state-led process. NGA and CCSSO are coordinating the process to develop these standards and will assemble an expert validation committee to provide an independent review of the common core standards, as well as grade-by-grade standards. The common core standards are expected to be completed in July 2009, while the grade-by-grade standards are expected to be finished by December 2009. (May 2009)

The frequency of music and visual arts instruction has remained relatively steady for over a decade, but significant racial/ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic gaps exist in both arts subjects for eighth-graders, according to the 2008 [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) in the arts](#), the first

assessment of student achievement in the arts since 1997. The assessment of nearly 8,000 middle school students found only a small percentage of students could sufficiently render self-portraits and only one-half were able to correctly identify the prominent instrument in the opening of “Rhapsody in Blue.” (June 15)

The federal Departments of Education and Labor have established a new [Web site, www.Opportunity.gov](http://www.Opportunity.gov), to assist individuals who are unemployed and who may be unaware that they could be eligible for Pell Grants and other need-based financial aid to further their education or earn additional credentials and training. The Web site provides information on financial aid, labor tools, and other key resources available for unemployed adults. (June 2009)

To combat the “summer slide”—students scoring lower on reading and math achievement tests at the end of the summer than they did on the same tests before summer break—many high-quality summer programs are keeping students engaged in learning and teaching them new skills and content. The programs allow children to form relationships with caring adults, help them stay fit and active, and engage in activities that foster creativity and innovation. The June edition of *Education News* showcased several award-winning and effective summer learning programs; explored innovative strategies to academically engage and nurture low-income and disadvantaged youth during the summer; profiled foundation, community and library-based initiatives designed to encourage students to read and learn during the break; and spotlighted the efforts of organizations dedicated to providing disadvantaged students with access to books and reading materials in the summer and throughout the year. To watch the archived broadcast, go to <http://www.connectlive.com/events/ednews>.



Spring and early summer means a lot of activity surrounding the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The [National Center for Education Statistics](http://www.nceed.gov) is busy analyzing recently collected data to produce the Nation's Report Card and already preparing for the 2010 assessments in civics, geography, and U.S. history. Schools selected for the 2010 assessments can begin planning for the tests by using information on the [NAEP Web site](http://www.naep.gov). (June 2009)

Across the country, enrollment in elementary and secondary schools has risen to all-time highs, and young students continue to show gains in academic achievement over time, according to [The Condition of Education 2009](http://www.nceed.gov), released last month by the National Center for Education Statistics. Overall achievement levels for secondary school students have not risen over time. However, the report does reveal increases in the percentages of students who enter college after high school and earn postsecondary credentials. (May 28)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

On May 7, the Department of Education [held](#) a major event, “Technologies and Children: Megabytes for Learning,” which examined the impact of educational technology on student achievement. Documents and presentations from the event are now available [online](#). To access the materials at the sign-in page, use the following to log in: enter TEP for last name and 8669 for PIN, and then click on “Technology in Education Programs”, bringing up the list of downloadable documents. (June 2009)

American History

The education team at the [National Archives](http://www.archives.gov) in Washington, D.C., is developing a new Web site specifically for social studies methods instructors and pre-service teachers. The site will feature resources and activities that incorporate and are inspired by primary source materials from the vast collections at the Archives. Additionally, a new online community called “[COLLABORATE](#)” is in development. COLLABORATE will serve as a virtual meeting space where innovative ideas are shared among members of the Archives education team and individuals from schools and organizations outside of government. (June 2009)

Arts in Education

[Adobe Youth Voices](#) and [What Kids Can Do](#) invite youth across the globe to submit photographs based on the theme of "crisis and hope," which express both what is challenging about our current world and what is hopeful. Winning photographs will be showcased online, in a traveling exhibit, and in a book. All young people between the ages of 12 and 19 are eligible to participate. The deadline for submissions is July 31, 2009. More information is available [online](#). (June 2009)

The NAMM Foundation has announced the [results](#) of its 10th annual [Best Communities for Music Education](#) survey, which recognizes schools and districts across the country for their commitment to music education in the classroom. This year's roster of 124 districts spans 21 states, with a record number of "musical communities" in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas. (April 16)

Charter Schools/Choice

An [issue brief](#) from the [National Governors Association](#) details how governors can replicate some of the most high-performing charter school models in the country. The authors assert that there are four main barriers to replicating successful schools: state caps on the number of charter schools allowed to operate; reporting requirements; discrepancies between charter and district school funding; and limited access to facilities. (April 2009)

Bryan C. Hassel, Julie Kowal, and Sarah Crittendon have teamed up to release the 2009 edition of a [report](#) first issued in 2004 for the [Philanthropy Roundtable](#) from [Public Impact](#), *Investing in Charter Schools: A Guide for Donors*. The report maintains four strategic priorities first discussed in the 2004 edition: increasing the number of high-quality schools, reducing operational challenges, setting standards and quality measures, and advocating for policy frameworks that encourage chartering. This year's edition adds a fifth element: improving the quantity and quality of human capital. (2009)

Closing the Achievement Gap

People of Hispanic descent make up the largest and fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in the country, but Hispanic students trail behind their Caucasian and Asian peers at all proficiency levels in mathematics and reading, according to a [report](#) from the [Society for Research in Child Development](#). The authors recommend an increase in the number of elementary-school teachers who are proficient in both English and Spanish and an expansion of high-quality educational opportunities for three- to eight-year-old Hispanic children. (2009)

A few years ago, teachers were leaving, students were fighting in the hallways, and test scores were low at G.W. Carver Middle School in Chester, Va. But now, the school has earned recognition as a [2009 Panasonic National School Change Award](#) winner for undergoing substantial systematic and student-oriented improvements. Carver will receive national recognition, a \$5,000 prize, and the opportunity for staff to tell their success story during a conference in New York this summer. (June 2009)

A collaborative [policy brief](#) from the [Center for American Progress](#), [American Enterprise Institute](#), [New Profit Inc.](#), and [Public Impact](#) offers suggestions for encouraging innovation in education. According to the brief, too often factors such as inflexible bureaucracies, a lack of capital, and a limited supply of talent work together to stifle creation and growth in this sector. Authors of the report recommend varied solutions for these problems, including using better information to create a performance- and accountability-based culture and opening public education to multiple providers. (May 2009)

According to figures from the U.S. Department of Defense, children of military families move eight times on average during their academic careers. Alabama recently joined a group of 19 other states that will work together to help military-dependent students as they face unique academic challenges associated with frequent relocation. Differences in school systems' requirements prompted the creation of an [Interstate](#)

[Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children](#), of which Alabama is the newest member. (May 20)

Higher Education

Prospective college students: beware. A picture featuring questionable behavior posted on Facebook or MySpace could cost you a spot at your dream college. About a quarter of colleges and universities polled in a recent [survey](#) by the [National Association for College Admissions Counseling](#) reported that admissions officers research prospective students' social-networking profiles before making admissions or scholarship decisions. While the legality of denying college entry based on social-networking is untested, employers in the U.S. can decide not to hire an applicant based on photographs, videos, or other postings to the Web, according to the study. (April 29)

Raising Student Achievement

A new national [report](#) from [Education Week](#) and the magazine's [Editorial Projects in Education \(EPE\) Research Center](#) finds that the national graduation rate has improved over the last 10 years, but that a recent one-year downturn—the first significant annual decline during that period—raises cause for concern. The report, *Diplomas Count 2009: Broader Horizons: The Challenge of College Readiness for All Students*, highlights graduation-rate data for the nation, each state, and the 50 largest school districts. The report also maps the landscape of policy and reform in the college-ready area. (June 9)

For students in Harlem, N.Y., squash is not just a vegetable anymore. It is a vehicle that may propel them to college. "[StreetSquash](#)" is an innovative academic and athletic enrichment program based in Harlem that combines tutoring, mentoring, community service, and squash. The program runs year-round. During the school year, students travel to StreetSquash after class and participate in two days of homework help and squash instruction and one day of SAT preparation (for high school students) or literacy instruction (for middle school students). Saturdays are spent on the courts. StreetSquash is part of the [National Urban Squash and Education Association](#). (June 2009)

Kavya Shivashankar, a 13-year-old student from Kansas, has won the [National Spelling Bee](#) along with nearly \$40,000 in cash and prizes. Shivashankar, who wants to become a neurosurgeon, bested nearly 300 competitors and spelled her way through 15 rounds in the nation's largest and longest-running educational promotion, administered by the E.W. Scripps Company. (May 28)

Teacher Quality and Development

Nearly all tenured teachers in many districts receive above-average ratings on formal performance evaluations, according to a new [study](#) from the nonprofit teacher-preparation program, the [New Teacher Project](#). The study examines the results of a survey, which included more than 15,000 teachers and 1,300 administrators in four states and 12 districts. More than nine in 10 tenured teachers in those districts met performance standards in recent evaluations. (June 2009)

Greg Forster and Christian D'Andrea have issued a study for the [Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice](#) entitled, *Free to Teach: What America's Teachers Say About Teaching in Public and Private Schools*. The report examines how public and private school teachers rate their jobs, their schools, and their level of influence on their classrooms. The report draws on data collected by the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey from the U.S. Department of Education, which surveyed approximately 50,000 teachers from across the country. (May 20)

Innovations in the News

Raising Student Achievement

Educators, students, parents, and policymakers in Florida are benefiting from the state's "data warehouse" that is making connections between students' performance in both their K-12 and postsecondary years, as well as workforce information to help students plan for careers after college. Cited by the Data Quality Campaign as one of only a few states to have gone beyond NCLB requirements for capturing data on tests scores and graduation rates, Florida's High School Feedback Report provides information on individual student performance on college admission tests as well as on their freshman English and math courses and GPA throughout their college careers. School-by-school data are available to students and parents in order to see how their school performs compared to others district- and statewide. [More—[Education Week](#)] (June 11)

President of a music-recording studio, custom-clothing designer, entertainment company owner – they're exciting and potentially profitable careers following college. But how about during college, or even while still in high school? Students who are part of Chicago's entrepreneur classes at schools such as the Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy are pursuing their passions with business plans and help from the city's business leaders. The effort, supported in Chicago and elsewhere by the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), is increasing students' interest in attending college, according to research by the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. [More—The [Chicago Tribune](#)] (June 8)

In the middle school years, effective parent involvement should be helping students to understand the links between school performance and future job prospects and providing strategies for studying and reaching academic goals. Researchers examined 50 studies involving more than 50,000 students, which determined that parents' involvement with school events did have an effect when their children reached middle school, and helped them to understand the value of a commitment to education and its potential pay off later in life. Teens, according to Harvard University researcher Nancy E. Hill, "are starting to internalize goals, beliefs, and motivation and use these to make decisions," and they need guidance from parents. [More—[ScienceDaily](#)] (May 19)

Classmates of young children, as well as parents and teachers, play a role in their language development, according to a study of nearly 2,000 preschoolers by researchers at the University of Virginia (UVA) and Ohio State University. "Classmates are an important resource for all children, especially for children who begin preschool with higher language skills," commented Andrew J. Mashburn, a senior research scientist at UVA. The researchers also found that teachers' effective management of children's behavior in the preschool classroom "creates an environment in which children feel comfortable to converse with and learn language from one another." [More—[ScienceDaily](#)] (May 18)

School Improvement

Forty-six states will combine efforts to develop college- and career-readiness standards in math and English language arts, under the leadership of the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The goal is twofold: eliminate the current patchwork of academic standards across the nation, and "devise a more rigorous common set of academic targets, and then internationally benchmark them." The effort is on a fast track, with a draft of a set of overall standards ready for states' review this summer, followed by grade-by-grade, or "learning progression standards," slated for completion by December. A consortium comprised of Achieve, the College Board, and ACT, Inc., will develop the standards. NGA and CCSSO will validate them using a committee of national and international content experts. [More—The [Washington Post](#)] (June 1)

The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has a new "innovation council" to develop a plan for "corrective action" starting with the 2009-2010 school year. The seven-member Innovation and Improvement Advisory Council, which includes both Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett and local school board president Michael Bonds, is charged by Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Elizabeth Burmaster, and Superintendent-elect Tony Evers with devising comprehensive and innovative reforms to

the district's academic and financial problems. [More—[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#)] (May 28)

Indiana high schools that register the greatest graduation rate increases next year may receive up to \$20,000 each, with the funds to be divided among the schools' principals and their staff members "who got the best results." State Superintendent Tony Bennett intends for the new "performance awards" to foster "innovative ways to graduate more students by encouraging would-be dropouts to stick with their studies and get their diplomas." High schools with enrollments of 300 or more students are eligible for \$20,000 awards; those with less than 300 students can receive \$10,000 each. [More—The [AP](#)] (May 18)

A new high school model in New York City that combines innovative technology with project-based learning is so successful in its inaugural year that local education officials are preparing to open another 40 schools like it in the next several years. The iSchool, which opened last fall with 100 ninth graders, is part of a citywide high school choice experiment. More than two-thirds of the iSchool's students are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals and students attend from all five boroughs in the city. The interdisciplinary curriculum employs nine-week learning modules in which student teams tackle real-world issues. The students connect with "client" organizations in the community with the help of iSchool partners such as Cisco Systems. Attendance is at 94 percent and nearly two-thirds of the school's freshmen have passed the Regents Exam this year. [More—[eSchool News](#)] (May 15)

A Brown University gift of 12,000 graphing calculators to the Providence Public Schools is a symbolic first step toward a much deeper commitment by the Ivy League institution to its local schools. Nearly \$1.5 million has been raised to establish the Fund for the Education of the Children of Providence, which is expected to become a permanent \$10-million endowment focused on closing the achievement gap. Grants of \$10,000 each have been made to three local schools to support innovative teaching projects, and Brown's president, Ruth Simmons, has indicated interest in having doctoral students teach in the public schools. [More—[The Providence Journal \(R.I.\)](#)] (free registration) (May 13)

STEM

Robots, built by elementary students and entered into contests of strength and daring-do, have brought new life to math and science for Latino students in Pomona, Calif. Math is too removed from students' real-life experiences, according to Cal Polytechnic Pomona associate professor Cesar Larriva, and so he designed a program in which students designed and built robots from Legos and programmed them using laptops, requiring the use of skills in scientific inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving. A \$140,000 grant helped to launch the program last year. Larriva and his colleagues hope to expand the program to more elementary schools and eventually to middle and high schools in the Pomona district. [More—The [Los Angeles Times](#)] (May 25)

A pilot program in Los Angeles that has doubled and tripled the number of African American and Latino students, respectively, enrolled in AP computer science courses is about to be expanded to 20 more schools. With the help of UCLA and a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Computer Science Equity Alliance targeted schools with underprivileged students of color, changing their attitudes about the role of computer science in their lives. They first needed to see the subject as more than "people in lab coats," according to Joanna Goode of the University of Oregon and a co-leader of the program. Another key component of the pilot was helping the schools to upgrade their curriculum. The Alliance is applying for additional NSF funds to expand the number of schools. [More—The [Los Angeles Times](#)] (May 21)

According to a new report that evaluated student performance in the sciences, middle and high school students are falling behind in the life sciences, to the point of endangering America's competitiveness and students' preparation for college-level science studies. The study, released by the Biotechnology Industry Organization and the Biotechnology Institute, used data from the NAEP science assessment as well as the performance of students on the AP biology exam and the percentage of ACT-tested students prepared for college-level biology, among other data sources. The report also found that one in every eight biology teachers was not certified to teach the subject. [More—The [AP](#)] (May 19)

In Massachusetts, Education Commissioner Mitchell D. Chester is proposing a math-specific test for licensure of elementary classroom teachers. At present, aspiring elementary teachers taking a multiple-subject test “have been able to do poorly on the math,” but still meet the general licensure requirement, according to Chester. The proposal stems from guidelines for elementary teachers’ math preparation passed by the state education board in 2007. Chester proposes a three-year grace period before the new requirement would apply to teachers in grades 1-6, and special educators of children with moderate disabilities. [More—[Education Week](#)] (May 15)

Math apathy and adults who tell students, “I was never good at math either,” remain barriers to increasing math performance of American students, according to Henry Kepner, president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. In a number of places, however, school and corporate leaders are waging public relations offenses to address the problem, including the notion that mathematics ability of is a genetic trait. Their goal is to “immerse more middle school students in algebra and toughen high school requirements so graduates can compete for increasingly technical jobs.” Raytheon is among the corporate players in the effort, providing math and science scholarships and sponsoring school rallies that feature professional football players who promote math as a part of sports. [More—[Washington Post](#)] (May 16)

Teacher Quality and Development

The Troops to Teachers program is a proven source of male teachers and teachers who are members of racial and ethnic minorities for K-12 schools. An estimated 82 percent of the more than 11,000 former members of the U.S. military who have been placed in schools since the program’s beginning in 1994 are men, and almost 40 percent of the Troops to Teachers participants are minorities. Students in Florida classrooms of Troops to Teachers members outperformed their peers in math testing, according to a recent study. Troops to Teachers recruits receive up to \$5,000 for course work and another \$5,000 bonus and agree to teach for at least three years in high-needs schools. The nationwide program is administered by the Department of Defense with support from the Department of Education. [More—The [Washington Post](#)] (June 14)

An eight-teacher “dream team” has been drawn to an innovative charter school that will open in Washington Heights in New York City this September with salaries that would shock most teachers; \$125,000 is nearly twice as much as the average New York City public school teacher earns, and about two and a half times as much as the national average for teacher salaries. The teachers also will be eligible for bonuses, based on school-wide performance, of up to \$25,000 in the second year [More—The [New York Times](#)] (June 4)

Utah is piloting a performance-pay program in five schools that will reward teachers and classroom-related staff based on “quality of instruction, students’ academic progress, and parent, student, and community satisfaction.” The initial amount available to the pilot elementary schools is \$300,000, which will be awarded during the second year of the two-year experiment. A formula will determine how the funds are allocated within the schools, with 80 percent divided equally between student progress and instructional quality, and the other 20 percent based on parent, student or community satisfaction. [More—The [Salt Lake Tribune](#)] (June 3)

The City of Baltimore is hoping to nearly double the number of Teach for America recruits it places in the next two years. The alternative-route program that has already placed up to 700 teachers in Baltimore since it began 17 years ago is “almost an instrument of reform in the district,” according to schools chief Andrés Alonso. More than half of the 700 teachers have stayed in Baltimore, the majority of them remaining in education, either working in the schools or pursuing advanced studies. Twelve have become principals. With the help of local businesses, the City is committed to raising \$3.8 million meet its Teach for America goal. [More—The [Baltimore Sun](#)] (May 26)

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) and the Office of Communications and Outreach (OCO) share the responsibility for the newsletter's research, writing, and production.

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