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Editor's Note

“So much time and so little to do!” As soon as he had said it, Willy Wonka corrected himself, having meant just the opposite. Some school reformers see an analogue where time and learning are concerned, and they have set out to correct it by expanding time for learning, by as much as 300 hours in a school year. This month’s feature explores the efforts of the National Center on Time & Learning and the National Summer Learning Association. In the “Special Report,” learn how the latest support for Ready to Learn will honor its purposes that date back to “Sesame Street” by using the multimedia environment of young children today.

Feature

Time and Learning: Moving from a Longtime Constant to a Needed Variable

Innovations involving variables such as curricula, instructional approaches, and class size, among others, are being advanced to solve persistent problems, most notably the achievement gap between high-need and other students. But one element has remained essentially constant – time. And until that constant becomes a variable, according to the [National Center on Time & Learning](#) (NCTL), progress, much less success, will remain elusive.

When President Barack Obama declared recently, “We can no longer afford an academic calendar designed when America was a nation of farmers ...,” he was echoing a refrain heard as long ago as 1983, when “A Nation at Risk” argued change in the nation’s school calendar as a cornerstone of reform in order to create a rising tide of achievement for American students. Today, the long overdue need to rethink the stereotypical 6½-hour day, 180-day yearly school calendar is essential to not only closing the achievement gap, according to Jennifer Davis, NCTL’s president and CEO, but also to overcoming other major impediments to success with school reform. “High-poverty students in America need more time in quality learning environments,” Ms. Davis contends, “and that means more time for both professional development and for learning in all the subjects that constitute a well-rounded education.”

“High-poverty students in America need more time in quality learning environments.”

— Jennifer Davis, NCTL president and CEO

“So Much Time and So Little to Do!” Not!

Willy Wonka, who realized his mistake as soon as he uttered it, could have been describing what a number of education reformers consider a long-ignored constraint on innovation and improvement in the nation’s schools: They simply have more to do than their current time allows. According to a survey of 300,000 teachers by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), more than half of those surveyed said they did not have adequate time to complete their curriculum; likewise, only 39 percent of those same teachers agreed that they had adequate time to meet the needs of all students. Research by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) indicates that experienced teachers reported the need for 20 percent more hours in the school year to teach the subjects of English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science.

In addition to the typical length of the school day and year in U.S. schools being shorter than many European and Asian countries, there is also a stark contrast between the U.S. and those other countries with respect to how teachers' time is allocated between instruction time and the "behind the scenes" activities that support instruction. According to the NSDC's "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad," instruction takes up less than half of a teacher's working time in most European and Asian countries, with an average of between 15 and 20 hours weekly spent on such tasks as preparing lessons, meeting with parents and students, and collaborating with other teachers. In contrast, U.S. teachers, according to NSDC, spend an average of three to five hours weekly on lesson planning.

The Benefits of Expanding Over Just Adding

Education leaders who have studied and are acting on the research that points to the need for more time agree that just adding hours or days is not the answer – it's an expansion of learning time in which all students in the school benefit from increased time for both academic and enrichment activities, as compared to afterschool programming, for instance, that benefits only selected students. NCTL calls for an average of 300 hours to be added to the typical school year, but is not prescriptive as to how the expansions of schools' schedules allocate those hours. The focus, according to NCTL's Davis, is on strategic redesign of the school schedule.

In keeping with the tenets of Education Resource Strategies (ERS) [see [August 2010 Innovator feature](#)], the objective of adding time is part of a broader approach, one to more effectively align the three key resources – people, time, and money – with a school's vision, learning goals, and students' needs. ERS, in partnership with NCTL, studied six urban school districts with "leading edge" schools that increased instruction to an average of 233 days and 20 percent more time for students than traditional high schools, but did so while expanding core academic expectations and both individual and small group academic support. The resulting report, "[Time and Attention in Urban High Schools: Lessons for School Systems](#)," explores this and several other shared practices of the leading edge schools.

In a more recent report from NCTL, "[Tracking an Emerging Movement: A Report on Expanded-Time Schools in America](#)" the key characteristics of more than 650 Expanded Learning Time (ELT) schools from across 36 states are presented, along with survey data from a subset of 245 of the schools that reveals how their added time is being utilized and funded. A majority of the ELT schools are public charters; a quarter of them are standard district schools. On average, they offer 25 percent more time than the 180-day national norm and their student populations are more heavily minority and poorer than national averages. And, concerning the outcomes of the ELT schools surveyed, the data suggests that "more time is associated with higher academic achievement, as students in schools with an expanded school day were found on average to outperform their district peers," according to NCTL. Behind the report is a public [database](#) that NCTL hopes will generate more research on the expanded time movement. [Note: NCTL's database is temporarily closed for upgrading and will be online again in mid-November.]

Looking in on the ELT Experience

Nineteen of the schools in the NCTL database are in Massachusetts and are part of the state's [Expanded Learning Time Initiative](#), known as Mass 2020, which began in 2005 and is a partnership between the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and [Massachusetts 2020](#), a nonprofit that envisioned ELT. The State education agency sets the criteria for schools to participate, selects them based on the strength and viability of their redesign plans, performs data analysis and evaluation, and agrees on the schools' objectives for expanded learning. The nonprofit partner provides technical assistance to both schools and districts for planning and implementation as well as help with advocacy, research, and dissemination of best practices. As the national affiliate of Mass 2020, NCTL shares its resources with an increasing number of states and districts that are exploring expanded learning time.

Early research on the ELT pioneer schools in Massachusetts shows encouraging results with “several schools (having) demonstrated that expanded time can have a catalytic effect on achievement.” What is clear from the data thus far is that simply adding time to the school day does not guarantee improved outcomes. Across the highest performing expanded time schools, several common characteristics emerge, including: a focus on a small number of key goals; relentless use of data to drive improvement and strengthen core instruction; added core academic time that allows for more individualization support, as well as added time for teacher collaboration; and engaging enrichment programs for all students.

At the [Clarence Edwards Middle School](#) in Boston, a renaissance is underway because of expanded learning time strategies. The school was in the downward spiral so common in urban school systems – the school had the lowest math scores of all middle schools in the city, school enrollment was declining, morale was low among the faculty and staff, and parents and students were choosing other schools despite the fact that Edwards was in their community. With the 2006-07 school year, Edwards joined the Expanded Learning Time Initiative, introducing a wholly changed school day and 300 more hours built into the school year. The intention of the addition of the hours was to achieve three primary purposes. First, the added time allowed for a differentiated, data-driven approach to instruction. Instructional time in the core academic subjects increased but with a structure that provided as many as four extra hours weekly of academic support, known as “Academic Leagues.” The smaller class sizes of the leagues and close monitoring of students’ progress through formative and summative assessments allowed for placements to be adjusted on an individual basis.

“When Edwards Middle School switched to a longer day, I thought, ‘great, I can barely stand six and a half hours. Who wants to go for nine?’ But during the first year I realized that ELT makes school more fun.”

— Leo, former 8th grade student at Edwards Middle School

A second purpose was time for teachers to collaborate by meeting as grade-level teams two to three times each week. Additionally, each Friday, students would leave at 11:45 a.m. while Edwards’ teachers along with staff from a number of community partnering organizations worked on professional development until 2:15 p.m. A major part of the Friday afternoon sessions was devoted to analyzing student data, and one Friday each month, teachers demonstrate model lessons for their colleagues.

The final purpose was to create and sustain an engaging learning culture characterized by a selection of enrichment electives designed to build transferrable skills and nurture talents beyond reading, writing, and math. The choices ranged from fashion design to environmental science and were often co-taught by Edwards teachers and specialists from a cadre of community partner organizations. All sixth graders participated in Citizen Schools, through which they gained leadership and communications skills. At the end of each semester, all students publicly evidenced what they had learned through performances, demonstrations, and exhibits.

Summer Time, and the Learning is Engaging

What if schools could take the kind of engaging learning environment at schools such as Edwards Middle School and have it address the elephant in the room – the well-known factor of summer learning loss? Summer school is another constant that should be a variable in closing the achievement gap, according to the [National Summer Learning Association](#) (NSLA). In their [Education Week commentary](#) this past spring, Ron Fairchild and Jeff Smink, the chief executive officer and vice president for policy of NSLA, respectively, suggested a [new vision](#) for an American educational institution that has been maligned for good reason. “Summer school conjures up many images, few of them positive,” they noted. What if it were not seen as punishment for poor performance, but instead as a “seamless blend of core academic learning and hands-on enrichment activities that shows greater promise for supporting and engaging students as well as educators?”

According to NSLA, nearly 40 research studies affirm the fact that summer learning loss is not only real, but profound and particularly so for low-income students. Among these studies is a [longitudinal investigation](#) of

the issue in Baltimore City by researchers at the Johns Hopkins University, who found that “two-thirds of the ninth-grade academic achievement gap between disadvantaged youngsters and their more advantaged peers can be explained by what happens over the summer during the elementary school years.”

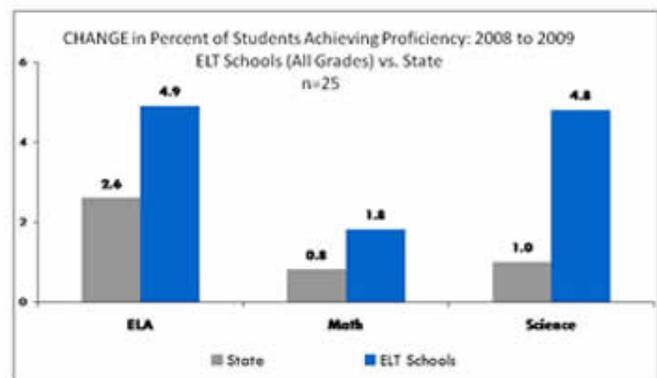
NSLA has mounted a [national campaign](#) to increase public investments in summer programs as an essential component of school reform. Their efforts include spotlighting summer programs that not only survive the current economic climate of cutbacks, but ones that also are making solid investments in year-round strategies for school improvement. One example is the [Summer Dreamers Academy](#) in Pittsburgh, which offers high-interest activities to the district’s more than 5,000 rising 6th, 7th, and 8th graders to prepare them for high school and long-term academic success and college readiness. The marketing approach for the Academy is the opposite of the traditional approach – it’s not something students *have to do*, but rather something they *want to do*.

The district is using federal funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and combining them with privately raised funds to show how a new vision for summer school can be made a reality in an urban setting. With advice from NSLA, the Pittsburgh leaders designed a program that both extends the academic offerings through the summer and introduces students to hobbies and other interests that they can pursue in high school and beyond. And, as is the case with other extended learning programs such as Edwards Middle School, community nonprofits play a significant role as partners of the local district, helping to ensure that the enrichment options are as broad as kayaking, music and dance, and technology.

NSLA’s national campaign goal is to increase the public investment in summer learning programs by \$50 million by 2012, and it’s already more than half way there. According to NSLA’s September campaign update, more than \$37 million has been invested by districts across the U.S., resulting so far in high-quality summer learning opportunities for more than 80,000 students. Next month, NSLA holds its annual [National conference](#) (Nov. 9-10) in Indianapolis, where the local success of Summer Advantage, along with many other summer learning projects, will be featured.

The Results Thus Far and the Challenges Ahead

The results to date of ELT initiatives are promising on multiple fronts. In Massachusetts ELT Schools, gains in English language arts (ELA), math, and science were double the rate of the state in ELA and math and nearly five times the state rate in science across all grades in 2009. In addition, many ELT schools have become schools of choice for families. Edwards Middle School, for instance, went from experiencing a mass exodus of students to having a current waiting list. And teachers in ELT schools report higher satisfaction with the amount of time for instruction, for meeting individual student needs, for preparation and collaboration, and for involvement in school policy.



Gains in proficiency of ELT schools in Massachusetts in comparison to the state rate in English Language Arts (ELA), Math, and Science, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

For both NCTL’s expanded learning model and NSLA’s new vision for summer learning, the sustainability of successful initiatives and their replication or adaptation in more states and districts is Job 1. In some instances, ARRA funds have been instrumental to mounting new efforts, particularly summer learning programs in places like Baltimore, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Rochester, but with that federal funding source winding down, both organizations are looking to innovative uses of federal Title I, SES, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants to sustain and extend the reach of both initiatives.

Advocates of ELT see a disproportionately large payoff for what amounts to a relatively small increase in per-student costs: In Massachusetts, the \$1,300 per-pupil increase from the state legislature – a 13 percent bump in costs – generates an average 25-percent increase in learning time and the kind of results noted above. From its survey of expanded-time schools, NCTL found that of the schools that increased teacher salaries to expand learning, the average increase was 13.6 percent. But depending on how innovative schools and districts are in their ELT approaches, the increased costs can be much lower. The [New Generation School in Brooklyn](#), New York, kept salary increases to a minimum when it went from 180 to 200 days of instruction by creatively restructuring the school calendar, serving students from September to July while still giving its teachers their normal vacation periods staggered throughout the year.

The National Education Commission on Time and Learning some time ago likened time to being “learning’s warden,” fooling us into “believing that schools can educate all of the people all of the time in a school year of 180 six-hour days.” While time alone may not solve pernicious problems such as the achievement gap, moving it from a constant to a variable in school reform could be a promising move in the right direction.

Key Resources

- [National Center on Time & Learning](#)
- [National Summer Learning Association](#)
- [“Expanded Time, Enriching Experiences: Expanded Learning Time Schools and Community Organization Partnerships”](#)
- [“More Time for Learning: Promising Practices and Lessons Learned”](#)
- Education Commission of the States’ resources: [State policies](#) and [International policies](#) on length of the school year; [Issue Site](#) on school calendars and scheduling; and [Issue Site](#) on extended day initiatives.
- [Summer Learning Library](#)
- [NSLA’s Research in Brief series](#)

Special Report

From Sesame Street to Transmediaville: The Future of Ready to Learn

From its beginnings, the [Ready to Learn](#) (RTL) Program in the Office of Innovation and Improvement has both served America’s youngest learners and been a learner itself – of the fast-evolving world of digital communications technology that, in 1995, consisted of television and a nascent World Wide Web. In fact, when initially authorized by Congress 15 years ago, it was named (and still is) the RTL Television Program. Earlier this month, Education Secretary Arne Duncan [announced](#) three awards totaling \$27 million to support RTL activities for the next five years.

From its beginning, RTL has had two purposes: facilitating student academic achievement through the development and distribution of educational video programming for preschool and elementary school-aged children and their parents; and developing and disseminating educational outreach materials and programs that promote school readiness, offer interactivity, and use multiple innovative technologies and digital media platforms.

As a federal R&D program, RTL uses a multi-year grant cycle, and over the past two cycles, OII has called upon the education and telecommunications communities to identify critical areas for RTL grantees to pursue. Prior to the 2005 competition, a national conference was held to showcase the cutting edge of new media. A partnership between the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and Sesame Workshop resulted from that convening, one that provided short segments of Sesame Street on Sprint cell phones to help young children learn the letters of the alphabet. This project, funded through RTL, was carried out with low-income families in three metropolitan communities. The evaluation results found that parents from low-income households used the cell phones with their children more often than middle-income households. A majority of parents from both groups, however, felt that the cell phones were effective learning tools for early

learning.

New competition priorities in 2005 led to requirements for experimentation with new media for low-income children, and between 2005 and 2010, some of the innovations included: the “PBS Island” game site with segments from all of the PBS RTL shows; “Word World in 3-D;” the “Martha Speaks” white boards for classrooms; “Planet 429” premiering on a game platform; “Duck’s Alphabet” webisodes of letter recognition for two-year olds; and “R U There?”

In preparation for the 2010 RTL competition, OII convened a national panel of experts for advice about the new set of program priorities. In addition to recommending that the RTL competition be open to a variety of producers and developers, the recommended priorities included intentional ways of using new media technologies to engage young children in innovative learning experiences.

The result was an invitational priority to highlight transmedia storytelling – conveying content and themes to audiences through the well-planned, connected use of multiple media platforms (e.g., television, websites, cell phones, e-books, electronic games, handheld devices, and other yet to be developed technologies). Simply put, transmedia storytelling transports characters and themes across multiple media. “R U There?,” for instance, was launched earlier this year using transmedia. It begins as a comic book; then the story is expanded through a television special, followed by it moving to a website where students follow the literacy themes and develop their own learning products. By following the characters and learning experience in their own media journey, students fully understand and benefit from the entire literacy message.

The learning experience is enhanced through the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) as part of the new grantees' outreach activities. This year's applicants were also encouraged to partner with university media programs, teacher preparation programs, and low-income schools to produce outreach activities that the entire community of learners would be free to adapt and enhance for their own local purpose.

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

Dr. Jill Biden hosted the first-ever White House [Summit on Community Colleges](#), bringing together community colleges, business, philanthropy, federal and state policymakers, faculty, and students to discuss how community colleges can help meet the education and job training needs of the nation's evolving workforce, as well as the critical role these institutions play in achieving the President's goal of leading the world with the highest proportion of college graduates by 2020. “For years, I have said that community colleges are one of America's best-kept secrets,” Dr. Biden noted in her opening remarks. President Obama emphasized the Administration's commitment to community colleges, noting particularly the passage of reforms in the American Graduation Initiative that are “... helping us modernize community colleges at a critical time, because many of these schools are under pressure to cut costs and cap enrollments and scrap classes, even as the demand has soared.” In his [remarks](#), Education Secretary Duncan laid out “two great challenges ahead” for community colleges: addressing the needs of older adults with limited college experience who are finding it increasingly difficult to find meaningful work in the information age, and systematically reorienting the preK-16 system so that federal, state, district, and postsecondary programs do more to support earning a certificate or degree. Use the summit's [website](#) to download fact sheets and a toolkit, read Dr. Biden's and the President's full speeches, and watch the opening and closing sessions. (October 2010)



During a live broadcast as part of NBC's [Education Nation Summit](#), Secretary Duncan launched a national teacher recruitment campaign. The campaign features a web site – [Teach.gov](#) – dedicated to providing information and resources for students and prospective teachers, including an interactive “pathway to teaching” tool designed to help individuals chart their course to becoming a teacher. The campaign also features public service announcements by celebrities, members of the Administration, and local leaders celebrating our country's teachers and urging today's students to teach. “With more than a million teachers expected to retire within the coming years, we have a historic opportunity to transform

public education in America, by calling on a new generation to join those already in the classroom,” the Secretary emphasized. The Department will be working with Facebook on an interactive application that will connect experienced teachers with young people, and will be collaborating with *Ebony* magazine on a series of teaching roundtables across the nation. To view a video of the Secretary’s session with NBC News’ Tom Brokaw, [click here](#). (September 2010)

In other department efforts to improve teaching, Secretary Duncan announced 62 [Teacher Incentive Fund \(TIF\) grants](#), representing various states, districts, and nonprofit organizations from 27 states. TIF seeks to strengthen the education profession by rewarding excellence, attracting teachers and principals to high-need and hard-to-staff areas, and providing educators with the feedback and support they need to succeed. The Administration is awarding the first two years of funding – \$442 million – with further funding of the five-year grants contingent on Congressional action. (September 2010)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the award of \$100 million in [Magnet School grants](#) to 36 school districts in 15 states. The awards will help school districts increase public school choices for parents and help districts attract a diverse group of students throughout their communities. Magnet School grants provide funding to districts for up to three years. The first-year grants range in size from \$470,000 to \$4 million. The awards will help school districts bring diverse groups of children together through the use of innovative educational programs and will create more school choices for parents. The grants will help school districts establish new magnet schools or expand existing magnet programs that are part of a school district’s voluntary or required desegregation plan. (September 2010)

From the Institute of Education Sciences

The [final report](#) of a study of teacher preparation in early reading instruction describes pre-service teachers’ perceptions about the content of their training programs and summarizes their scores on an assessment of their knowledge of the essential components of reading instruction, as defined in the Reading First legislation. The study uses data collected from 2,237 pre-service teachers in a nationally representative sample of 99 institutions that prepare teachers for initial certification. (September 2010)

The What Works Clearinghouse has issued two [new practice guides](#), with practical recommendations for educators to help them address the challenges they face in their classrooms and schools. “Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through Third-Grade” recommends five specific steps that teachers, reading coaches, and principals can take to improve reading comprehension for young readers. “Developing Effective Fractions Instruction for Kindergarten Through Eighth-Grade” recommends five strategies to help educators improve students’ understanding of fractions. Each practice guide recommendation includes a summary of supporting research, implementation strategies, and potential roadblocks and solutions. (September 2010)

Arts Education

The Department of Education released a [new video](#) on Forest Heights Academy of Excellence in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, an award-winning public magnet school combining the art of learning with the learning of art. Students have the opportunity to study visual arts, instrumental music, vocal music, dance, and drama. Students also learn language, math, science, and social studies through their study of the arts. (October 2010)

The Wolf Trap Foundation, with help from a Department of Education \$1.15 million grant, is launching an innovative [Early Childhood STEM Learning Through the Arts](#) initiative that builds upon its 30-year history developing and delivering early childhood arts education programs. Wolf Trap Education will partner with Fairfax County Public Schools and the American Institute for Research to develop, evaluate, and disseminate arts-based STEM teaching strategies for pre-K and Kindergarten. The research-based content and model programs that result from the new project, made possible by an Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination Grant, can be expanded and replicated throughout the Wolf Trap Institute’s national network of regional partners. (October 2010)

ASCD's "[The Whole Child Newsletter](#)" this month is focused on learning in and through the arts and features a Podcast with recording artist and arts education advocate Peter Yarrow, as well as research on the impact of the arts on the brain, resources for arts integration, and insights from elementary schools in Arizona that are improving student achievement by fusing the arts and academic subjects. (October 2010)

The College Board is accepting applications for the first annual [College Board Award for Excellence and Innovation in the Arts](#). The College Board, acting on a recommendation from its National Task Force on the Arts in Education, established this annual award to recognize and celebrate the achievements of six member institutions that have implemented an arts program that promotes student learning and creativity in exemplary and innovative ways. One school from each of the College Board's six regions will be awarded a grant of \$3,000 to support the continuation and growth of their arts programs. Of these six finalists, one school will be named the national winner and will be awarded an additional \$1,000. Regional winners will be honored at their respective 2011 College Board Regional Forums; the national winner will also be honored at the College Board Forum 2011. (September 2010)

Charter Schools

A new [database](#) from the Education Commission of the States contains information about the state policies for charter schools in each state. From this database, users can generate profiles of the state policies for charter schools in individual states, and view predetermined reports on state policies for charter schools. At the present time, 39 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have enacted charter school laws, so the database contains information only for them. Maintenance of the database is a collective effort between ECS and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (October 2010)

A new report from Ball State University, "[Charter School Funding: Inequity Persists](#)," compares funding for charter schools and public school districts, offering state-by-state breakdowns of allocations, and provides context for the issue of private fundraising by charter schools. Among the report's findings is the conclusion that charter schools overall were significantly underfunded relative to district schools. The analysis was based on data from the 2006-07 school year. The report provides an update to findings last reported by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute in its 2005 report on charter school funding. (October 2010)

A recent [webinar](#) by the Charter School Center featured seven case studies of charter management organization (CMO) turnaround projects under the U.S. Department of Education's "restart" model, indicating the importance and complexity of the local community's influence on success as well as the need for clarity about expectations and responsibilities. Lead presenter Viki Young, a policy analyst for SRI educational, discussed differences in the specific contexts of the CMOs' work, and cautioned that the research was not an evaluation of the restart strategy. According to the U.S. Department of Education, under the restart model, a low-performing district school is "converted or closed and reopened under the management of an effective charter operator, CMO, or education management organization." The SRI study examined projects undertaken by seven CMOs. (September 2010)

College Readiness and Completion

Lumina Foundation for Education released its second annual report, "[A Stronger Nation](#)," which provides a detailed look at the progress the nation and individual states are making towards Lumina's "Big Goal" - 60 percent of Americans holding a postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2025. The report explores what is needed to meet this goal and why reaching the goal is essential. Also included are individual profiles for all 50 states with current education attainment data by county and race/ethnicity, jobs and education requirement projections for the state, and the number of degrees needed for the state to do its part in reaching the "Big Goal." (September 2010)

Focusing on efforts in California, a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education examines how blending academic and career-focused instruction can improve teaching quality. "[The Linked Learning Approach: Building the Capacity of Teachers to Prepare Students for College and Careers](#)" argues that aligning teacher education with high school reform efforts is the best way to ensure students are prepared

for the rigors of postsecondary education. Policy recommendations include: investing in college- and career-focused education for teachers and administrators; adopting school-level strategies equally supportive of college and career instruction; and creating incentives that promote partnerships between school districts, postsecondary institutions, local industry, and policymakers. (September 2010)

The College Board's new report detailing the personal and public benefits of higher education – "[Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society](#)" – argues that despite the expense of tuition and other costs associated with attending college, the investment in postsecondary education pays off extremely well over the course of a lifetime. The report provides policymakers a wealth of data to make the case that investing in higher education improves the quality of life for individuals, makes state economies more efficient, and creates a more equitable and civil society. (September 2010)

Education Data Systems

The National High School Center [released](#) an enhanced version of its early warning system (EWS) tool that identifies students who show early warning signs that they are at risk for dropping out of high school. The EWS Tool v2.0, a free Microsoft Excel-based program, relies on readily available student-level data (attendance, course failures, grade point average [GPA], and credit accumulation) that are entered or imported by schools, districts, or states at regular intervals – as early as the first 20 or 30 days of school and after every grading period thereafter. The tool automatically calculates research-based indicators to identify, or flag, students who are at risk for dropping out of high school. The EWS Tool v2.0 now allows users to import student demographic and performance data from existing data systems; house an inventory of dropout prevention interventions and assign students to them; monitor student response and progress in the interventions over the course of the school year; and create pre-set school-level summary reports, detailed student-level reports, and individual student reports. (October 2010)

Leadership

The U.S. Senate passed [S. Res 607](#), designating October 2010 as National Principals Month. Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) introduced the resolution, which honors elementary, middle, and high school principals for their passion and dedication to students across the country. The resolution encourages U.S. residents to observe National Principals Month with appropriate ceremonies and activities that promote awareness of school leadership in ensuring that every child has access to a high-quality education. In tandem with National Principals Month, NAESP is recognizing the nation's best K-8 principals during its [National Distinguished Principals program](#) in Washington, D.C. (October 2010)

STEM

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The [Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching](#) is the highest honor a K-12 math or science teacher may receive for outstanding teaching in the U.S. The President officially names up to 108 teachers annually. Awards alternate between elementary and secondary teachers – with secondary teachers eligible in 2011 – and are given to teachers from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the outlying territories, and the Department of Defense schools. The deadline for nominations is April 1. (October 2010)

A group of current and former CEOs and former astronaut Sally Ride are committed to dramatically improving education in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and have joined the White House's [Educate to Innovate](#) campaign to launch [Change the Equation](#), which President Obama announced recently. The plan is to replicate successful privately-funded programs in 100 high-need schools and communities. The effort will offer a range of options, from opportunities for more students to engage in robotics competitions to professional development for math and science teachers to increasing the number of students that take and pass rigorous AP math and science courses and exams. One of the initiative's founders, former Intel Chairman and Achieve Board Co-Chair Craig Barrett, was interviewed on CNBC about Change the Equation; watch the interview [here](#). (September 2010)

Teacher Quality and Development

“Teachers define us. In our early years, when we are still being formed, they often see in us more than we see in ourselves, more even than our families see and, as a result, help us to evolve into what we ultimately become.” Those are the words of legendary composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim and the inspiration not for a Broadway musical, but an [award](#) created in honor of Sondheim’s 80th birthday to publicly recognize the contributions of specific teachers and reward them for their dedication and service. Along with the award, the selected teachers will be showcased on the Kennedy Center website and will receive \$10,000 in appreciation for their inspiration to the field of teaching. Teachers of all grade levels and subject areas are eligible. The deadline for nominations is December 15, 2010. (October 2010)

TAP™: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement has launched the [TAP System Training Portal](#), a state-of-the-art, interactive Web tool that provides individualized TAP trainings and support. As part of TAP™’s purpose to attract, retain, develop, and motivate talented people to the teaching profession, the portal provides tiered real-time access to users. It contains the most updated trainings for TAP leaders to download, review, and deliver to teachers in order to improve instruction. (September 2010)

A new study by the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, “[The Effects of Performance-Based Teacher Pay on Student Achievement](#),” examines the impact of TAP on student growth in 151 TAP schools in 10 states. Study researchers evaluated the effects of TAP on state achievement exam scores in mathematics and reading and found that TAP schools outperform non-TAP schools; the difference in achievement in both mathematics and reading was equivalent to between a sixth and a half of a year of student growth, depending on the grade level. In addition to finding that TAP schools outperform similar non-TAP schools, the researchers report that the effects of TAP on student achievement are larger and more cost-effective than other education reforms. (September 2010)

Innovations in the News

Standards and Assessments

The persistent gap in achievement between racial and socio-economic group members who enroll and persist in college could be closed substantially, according to a new study and report from ACT, through a stronger core curriculum in high school and achieving benchmark scores in all four subjects of the ACT college-entrance exam. The study showed that “college-ready” scores on the ACT exam correlate with passing grades in credit courses at the college-entry level. Poor preparation for postsecondary education, according to ACT’s education division president, Cynthia B. Schmeiser, is the primary reason why many students, particularly low-income students, who aspire to college either don’t enroll or make it to their second year. [More—[Education Week](#)] (October 8) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)

School leaders in Denver must have received an advance copy of the ACT study report, since the district was on a “blitz” in October to encourage students to take more rigorous high school courses and to graduate. The effort is to address a current graduation rate of just 52 percent, with only half of the graduates going on to college. By stressing the importance of college and taking demanding, college-level courses to get there, school leaders want to get the graduation percentage to 83 percent by 2012 and the college enrollment rate to 63 percent by 2012. [More—The [Denver Post](#)] (October 5)

The Common Core standards are bringing changes to Utah schools, and ones that will blur the traditional lines between algebra, algebra II, and geometry. The state Board of Education voted in favor of an integrated approach, known as the international model, in which classes progressively integrate all of the concepts across the three math domains. It is a “major paradigm shift,” according to Brenda Hales, state associate superintendent. The approach is a familiar one in other countries and has been endorsed in Utah by the state’s association of school district curriculum directors, the State Mathematics Education Coordinating Committee, and the Utah Council of Teachers of Mathematics. [More—The [Salt Lake Tribune](#)] (October 3)

In the Franklin Lakes, N.J. schools, located about 30 miles from Manhattan, the pace of math lessons will be slowing down as the district adopts the national math system of Singapore. Like more than a dozen othe!

districts from Scarsdale, N.Y. to Lexington, K.Y., the approach, which devotes more time to fewer topics, is seen by proponents in the U.S. as responding more effectively to diverse learners. [More—The [New York Times](#)] (October 1)

Education Data Systems

The effort to build a comprehensive data system on students in California has experienced “unacceptable system performance issues” that may stall the state’s efforts to bring a companion system alongside of it in the near future. The California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System, or CALPADS, is undergoing needed fixes after the state superintendent called a halt to any further changes. The development of the planned companion system, the California Longitudinal Teacher Information Data Education System, or CALTIDES, has been delayed until state officials are sure that the first system is fully and successfully functioning. [More—[Education Week](#)] (October 11) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)

Teachers and Leaders

Countries that outperform the U.S. tend to recruit their teachers from the top third of high school and college graduates, while less than a quarter of U.S. teachers come from the top third, according to a new report from McKinsey & Co. Factors that contribute to this contrast include pay and monetary incentives and the degree of academic prestige given teaching in the U.S. versus countries such as Finland, where getting into teacher training is extremely competitive – only one in 10 applicants is accepted. By contrast, more than half of U.S. teachers are trained in schools with low admissions standards, according to the report. Teacher retention rates are comparatively reported as well, with the U.S. at an annual attrition rate of 14 percent overall and 20 percent in high-poverty schools, compared to rates as low as 3 percent and 1 percent in Singapore and South Korea, respectively. [More—[Education Week](#)] (October 15) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)

In Texas, with help from federal grants, school districts are developing “value-added” teacher evaluation systems. Irving and Plano are factoring students’ test scores into teacher bonuses and not just relying on the longstanding state emphasis on teacher observations. The new efforts have engendered debate concerning the validity of one approach versus the other, but research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in a number of Dallas middle schools may lead to a middle ground. There the Measures of Effectiveness Teaching project, which is in operation in five other cities, is attempting to blend test-driven and classroom assessments of teachers. As the project begins its second year later this fall, Dallas researchers expect to have some preliminary findings. [More—The [Dallas Morning News](#)] (October 12)

Interventions in Low-Performing Schools

Chronic absences – missing more than 20 days in the school year – are especially damaging in the early grades because students fall behind in learning the foundations of math and reading, and states and cities are making concerted efforts to lower the number of unexcused absences. In New York City, for instance, attendance-turnaround experiments are underway in 25 schools to combat the more than 200,000 city students who missed at least 20 days last school year. Baltimore has a similar effort underway, one in which principals are reporting students who miss a string of school days in order for school personnel to contact parents to determine the reasons and find ways to help. Officials are finding that the reason for students missing school could be such necessities as a clean school uniform or a visit to a health clinic. [More—The [Washington Post](#)] (October 18)

Mixing students of varying income levels across several schools or an entire district appears to be a more effective formula for closing the achievement gap than bolstering funding for high-need schools. That’s the basic finding of a new report from the Century Foundation that studied the performance of nearly 900 low-income elementary students in Montgomery County, Md., between 2001 and 2007. About one-half of the students attended schools where less than 20 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, while the rest were in schools that received extra funding based on their higher poverty levels. Students in the lower-poverty schools scored 8 percentage points higher on standardized math exams than the low-income students in the higher-poverty schools. According to a Century Foundation

official, the “research suggests there is a much more effective way to close the achievement gap. ... to give low-income students a chance to attend middle-class schools.” [More—The [Washington Post](#)] (October 15)

In Charlotte, N.C., the “Strategic Staffing Initiative” is turning around low-performing schools by convincing the district’s best principals to leave their successful schools and lead the way to hard-won success in their new assignments. Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Superintendent Peter Gorman wanted an alternative to “reconstituting” the district’s worst-performing schools, finding the results less than satisfactory. The “Gorman prize,” as its locally known, is the offer made to selected principals each year, giving them the “opportunity” to turn around a school in need. Along with 10-percent raise and an increase in decision-making autonomy, principals accepting the challenge get to hand pick a core transformation team. Now in its third year and showing signs of success, no principal asked to serve has turned down the offer. [More—[Newsweek](#)] (October 12)

The principal and teachers at Fairview Elementary School in Denver are also taking a proactive approach to the school’s problem of low parental involvement. Knowing that more affluent schools benefit from the many ways in which their parents are engaged, from volunteering to chauffeuring, educators at Fairview make visits to the homes of all Fairview students during the school year. An annual grant from the National Education Association allows the teachers to receive \$20 per visit. Research on the now 12-year-old effort points to fewer discipline problems, increased attendance, and improved test scores. Denver Superintendent Tom Boasberg is offering \$50,000 to four other elementary schools to replicate Fairview’s home-visit program. [More—The [Denver Post](#)] (September 30)

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.

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