



Headlines

7.11.08 – 7.18.08

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1	7.11.08	<p><a href="#"><u>Obama dismisses conservative criticism</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> Democrat Barack Obama batted away conservative criticism Friday over a comment he made about Americans' lack of foreign language skills.</p>	The Plain Dealer (OH)	Liz Sidoti
2	7.11.08	<p><a href="#"><u>Hot for the wrong teachers. Why are public schools so bad at hiring good teachers?</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> PS 49 in Queens used to be an average school in New York City's decidedly below-average school system. That was before Anthony Lombardi moved into the principal's office.</p>	Slate (Washington Post/ Newsweek Interactive)	Ray Fisman
3	7.11.08	<p><a href="#"><u>Better marks, more money</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> Bad schools, the left insists, are bad because they do not have enough money. The nation's capital somewhat undermines this theory.</p>	The Economist	The Economist Staff
4	7.11.08	<p><a href="#"><u>Kindergarteners learning 'critical' languages</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> The first-graders in Grace Yuan's class are playing "Jeopardy," eagerly responding to clues about animals and their habitats, diet and movements.</p>	USA Today	Carole Feldman

5	7.11.08	<a href="#"><u>As funding disappears, is small still beautiful?</u></a>	Voice of San Diego	Emily Alpert
		<b>Excerpt:</b> Four years ago, San Diego Unified decided to test whether size matters when it comes to high schools. With outside help, it split three big high schools into 14 small ones, each with 500 students or fewer.		
6	7.11.08	<a href="#"><u>New program allows Illinois to modify how it meets No Child Left Behind</u></a>	Rockford Register Star (IL)	Katie Backman
		<b>Excerpt:</b> Illinois is one of six states that will participate in a pilot program aimed at helping schools meet the progress requirements set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.		
7	7.12.08	<a href="#"><u>Summer school program aiming at putting students at grade levels</u></a>	Greeley Tribune (CO)	Christopher Ortiz
		<b>Excerpt:</b> Inside a classroom at Jefferson Elementary on Thursday, students are sitting at their desks, pencils in hand, listening to their teacher talk about a magic pot that doubles anything put inside.		
8	7.12.08	<a href="#"><u>The wrong education fix</u></a>	The Wall Street Journal	Editorial Board
		<b>Excerpt:</b> President Bush has often spoken about education reform as a civil rights issue. So we're not entirely surprised to see civil rights groups now defending the No Child Left Behind law against attempts to gut its most effective provisions.		
9	7.12.08	<a href="#"><u>Clinton talks to teachers ready to endorse Obama</u></a>	CBS 2 Chicago	Pamela Jones
		<b>Excerpt:</b> The LA Times is reporting Barack Obama told a potential donor that Hillary Clinton is on his list of possible running mates.		
10	7.13.08	<a href="#"><u>Ad campaign presses candidates on education</u></a>	Associated Press	Stephanie S. Garlow

**Excerpt:** An education-advocacy group will begin airing ads this week seeking to nudge Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama on ways to improve the standing of U.S. schools compared with other industrialized nations.

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|----|---------|--|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 11 | 7.13.08 | <a href="#"><u>Obama courts teachers</u></a>   | MSNBC                   | Athena Jones    |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> In his speech via satellite to a meeting of the American Federation of Teachers, Barack Obama spoke about strengthening the country's education system by providing more support for teachers and working with them on ways to reward success.   |                         |                 |
| 12 | 7.13.08 | <a href="#"><u>Too much school choice can create chaos</u></a>   | San Francisco Chronicle | C.W. Nevius     |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> A new report by a San Francisco grand jury looks into admission process for the city's public schools. It found that parents aren't happy.   |                         |                 |
| 13 | 7.14.08 | <a href="#"><u>New vision for schools proposes broad role</u></a>  | The New York Times      | Sam Dillon      |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> Randi Weingarten, the New Yorker who is rising to become president of the American Federation of Teachers, says she wants to replace President Bush's focus on standardized testing with a vision of public schools as community centers that help poor students succeed by offering not only solid classroom lessons but also medical and other services. |                         |                 |
| 14 | 7.14.08 | <a href="#"><u>Obama tells teachers union he opposes vouchers</u></a>  | The New York Sun        | Elizabeth Green |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> Senator Obama is saying decisively that he does not support private school vouchers, while sticking with his support for incentive pay for teachers based on their students' performance.  |                         |                 |
| 15 | 7.14.08 | <a href="#"><u>Time is ripe to fix education, experts assess</u></a>   | Denver Post             | Allison Sherry  |

		<p><b>Excerpt:</b> Fixing the nation's schools is the civil-rights priority of this century because so many of them particularly those serving poor kids are not delivering high-quality service, a group of prominent city, civil-rights and education leaders said Sunday.</p>		
16	7.14.08	<p><a href="#"><u>Working with hands helps develop kids' brains</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> British children's brain development is being threatened by their failure to work with their hands in school and at home, said a report released on Monday.</p>	MSNBC/Reuters	Reuters Staff
17	7.14.08	<p><a href="#"><u>Obama correct on foreign language</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> Maybe it' the nature of politics that candidates words and views get twisted beyond recognition. Maybe it's this country's sensitivity to illegal immigration.</p>	The Greenwood Commonwealth (MS)	Editorial Board
18	7.14.08	<p><a href="#"><u>The limits of public education</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> Cumberland Mayor Daniel J. McKee and those who support his plans for a new-fangled Charter School they say will revolutionize education may have hurdled a major obstacle last month, but the school is still far from a being a done deal.</p>	Providence Business News	William Hamilton
19	7.15.08	<p><a href="#"><u>Passive learning imprints on the brain just like active learning</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> It's conventional wisdom that practice makes perfect. But if practicing only consists of watching, rather than doing, does that advance proficiency? Yes, according to a study by Dartmouth researchers.</p>	ScienceDaily	ScienceDaily Staff
20	7.15.08	<p><a href="#"><u>These toys can stimulate young minds. Educational games, microscopes, dolls can help kids learn over the summer</u></a></p> <p><b>Excerpt:</b> There's roughly a month before summer's dog days become</p>	The Atlanta Journal-Constitution	Jon Waterhouse

back-to-school days, and, for parents concerned that their kids' brains are turning to mush due to TV and Game Boy overdoses, there may be hope.

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|----|---------|---|-------------------------|--|
| 21 | 7.15.08 | <a href="#"><u>McCain's school choice opportunity</u></a>   | The Wall Street Journal | Clint Bolick<br>(Op Ed)                            |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> Education is slipping in priority among many voters but not among Hispanics, many of whom see school choice as a deciding factor in whom to vote for this fall. This has implications for the presidential election.  |                         |  |
| 22 | 7.15.08 | <a href="#"><u>Crucial data on graduates elusive</u></a>  | The New York Times      | Elissa Gootman                                     |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> The Class of 2008 has already tossed aside caps and gowns for swimsuits and tank tops. The Class of 2009 has begun dreaming of proms, diplomas and exit strategies.   |                         |  |
| 23 | 7.15.08 | <a href="#"><u>Class struggle — Forget about the achievement gap</u></a>  | The Washington Post     | Jay Mathews<br>(Op Ed)                             |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> I don't like talking about the achievement gap. The term has several meanings, none very useful to my mind. There is often a strained silence when I bring this up, since it sounds like I am on some crotchety rant against political correctness.                                   |                         |  |
| 24 | 7.15.08 | <a href="#"><u>New methods needed to revolution schooling</u></a>   | USA Today               | Clayton M. Christensen and Michael B. Horn (Op Ed) |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> USA TODAY's article "Reading First program could be on its last legs" chronicled how Congress is cutting a federally funded, research-based program despite the fact that local school districts, where schooling actually occurs, tend to want it to remain in place (Life, July 2). |                         |  |
| 25 | 7.15.08 | <a href="#"><u>Schools chancellor reaches into presidential contest</u></a>   | The New York Sun        | Elizabeth Green                                    |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> As the city teachers union head, Randi Weingarten, enters the   |                         |  |

national scene by marking her first full day as president of the American Federation of Teachers, the city's schools chancellor is also reaching out beyond New York.

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| 26 | 7.15.08 | <a href="#"><u>New national chief of teachers union calls for full-service schools</u></a>   | Chicago Tribune       | Carlos Sadovi         |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> The newly elected head of the nation's largest teachers union on Monday called on school districts nationwide to create community schools that would offer services to students and their families ranging from health care to recreation. |                       |                       |
| 27 | 7.16.08 | <a href="#"><u>State schools superintendent candidates must be wooed, headhunter says</u></a>  | The Plain Dealer (OH) | Scott Stephens        |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> The person who has the qualities to be the next state schools superintendent may not know it yet.  |                       |                       |
| 28 | 7.16.08 | <a href="#"><u>Trying to bridge the grade divide in L.A. schools</u></a>   | Los Angeles Times     | Hector Becerra        |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> The eight students walked into a room at Lincoln High School prepared to discuss an issue many people, including some of their teachers, considered taboo.   |                       |                       |
| 29 | 7.16.08 | <a href="#"><u>A new tool for comparing schools</u></a>  | San Jose Mercury News | Edwin Garcia          |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> The state of California will give parents one-stop shopping starting today to compare neighborhood schools' performance on everything from test scores to graduation rates to student demographics.  |                       |                       |
| 30 | 7.16.08 | <a href="#"><u>McCain pledging NAACP more education options</u></a>  | Associated Press      | Devlin Barrett        |
|    |         | <b>Excerpt:</b> John McCain is telling the NAACP he will expand education opportunities for children in failing schools.   |                       |                       |
| 31 | 7.16.08 | <a href="#"><u>Sharpen your...Laptops? The new school supplies</u></a>   | ABC News/AP           | Melissa Rayworth (AP) |

		<b>Excerpt:</b> Hand sanitizer. USB flash drive. Magenta Sharpie. Clean socks. Quick — what do they have in common?		
32	7.16.08	<b><u>Challenges steep in rural settings</u></b>	Education Week	Linda Jacobson
		<b>Excerpt:</b> Rural areas face particular challenges that stand in the way of successful after-school programs.		
33	7.17.08	<b><u>24% of high-schoolers likely to drop out</u></b>	San Francisco Chronicle	Nanette Asimov
		<b>Excerpt:</b> Nearly 1 in 4 California students will drop out during high school, state educators said Wednesday, basing their prediction on what they said is the most accurate information about student attendance they've ever collected.		
34	7.17.08	<b><u>A school where one size doesn't fit all</u></b>	The Washington Post	Jay Mathews
		<b>Excerpt:</b> Growing up in Montgomery County, graduating summa cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania and getting a law degree from Harvard, Alan M. Shusterman had been called brilliant but didn't feel that great. He got a job in corporate law with a large Boston firm, but that didn't work for him, either.		
35	7.17.08	<b><u>Education reformers tackle NCLB flaws</u></b>	U.S. News & World Report – On Education (Blog)	Eddy Ramirez
		<b>Excerpt:</b> Several urban education leaders testified during a congressional hearing in Washington this week about key reforms that are helping their troubled school systems narrow the achievement gap.		
36	7.17.08	<b><u>McCain supports vouchers</u></b>	Baltimore Sun	Kelly Brewington
		<b>Excerpt:</b> Appearing before some of his presidential rival's most ardent supporters, Sen. John McCain urged delegates to the NAACP convention yesterday to support school vouchers as a way to improve education in largely black, underperforming school systems.		

37	7.17.08	<a href="#"><u>Quality after-school plan could help solve district's ills</u></a>	The Tennessean	Editorial Board
		<b>Excerpt:</b> No single program in a revamped Metro school system is going to make the difference in turning a district from its troubled state into a top-notch district.		
38	7.18.08	<a href="#"><u>High dropout rate puts California's future in peril</u></a>	Sacramento Bee	Betty T. Yee
		<b>Excerpt:</b> California is failing our next generation as the doors shut for our young people to have a shot at a good quality of life.		
39	7.18.08	<a href="#"><u>Learning their lesson</u></a>	The Economist	The Economist Staff
		<b>Excerpt:</b> The election on July 14th of Randi Weingarten as president marks a new era for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), or so the union says.		
40	8.08	<a href="#"><u>Caution: Political connections can be fatal</u></a>	Youth Today	Erika Fitzpatrick
		<b>Excerpt:</b> For most of its 10 years, Philadelphia Safe and Sound (PSS) seemed as secure as a youth-focused nonprofit could be: It was locked into city funding and, maybe more importantly, it had political support from the highest levels of City Hall.		

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**The Plain Dealer (OH)  
Obama dismisses conservative criticism  
7.11.08**

Liz Sidoti

DAYTON, Ohio (AP) — Democrat Barack Obama batted away conservative criticism Friday over a comment he made about Americans' lack of foreign language skills.

"The Republicans jumped on this. I said, absolutely immigrants need to learn English, but we also need to learn foreign languages," the likely Democratic nominee said as the 1,000-plus crowd in a school gymnasium cheered. It's a position he long has held.

"This is an example of some of the problems we get into when somebody attacks you for saying the truth, which is: We should want our children with more knowledge. We should want our children to have more skills. There's nothing wrong with that. That's a good thing. I know, because I don't speak a foreign language. It's embarrassing," Obama said chuckling as his audience did the same.

At issue was a remark the Illinois senator made Tuesday in Powder Springs, Ga., that drew laughter from the crowd — but disdain from conservatives and groups advocating English as the official U.S. language. His remark has caused buzz on the Internet and talk radio.

The Americans for Legal Immigration PAC said in a statement, "Barack Obama has stepped on a political land mine by stating Americans should be forced to learn to speak Spanish." But that's not what Obama said.

Obama was answering a question on education when he said he doesn't understand people who say "we need English only."

"I agree that immigrants should learn English," Obama said. "But instead of worrying about whether immigrants can learn English — they'll learn English — you need to make sure your child can speak Spanish. You should be thinking about how can your child become bilingual. We should have every child speaking more than one language."

He argued that the country should be emphasizing foreign language study in classrooms.

"You know, it's embarrassing when Europeans come over here, they all speak English, they speak French, they speak German. And then we go over to Europe and all we can say is 'merci beaucoup!'" Obama said, laughing.

The Obama campaign on Friday also shot back at McCain and Republican Party assertions that Obama voted to raise income taxes even on individuals who earn \$32,000. In a radio ad airing in northern Virginia and in Dayton, Ohio, the Obama campaign accuses McCain of "just makin' stuff up."

At issue is Obama's vote on a non-binding budget resolution in March that called for President Bush's tax cuts to expire. Such a step would have allowed tax rates to return to pre-2001 levels, meaning that an individual with taxable income of about \$32,000 would have faced a tax increase. Taxable income is what's left after taxpayers account for deductions.

Democrats have routinely called for an end to Bush's tax cuts, but many, including Obama, have proposed to replace them with tax cuts aimed at lower- and middle-income taxpayers.

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**Slate (Washington Post/Newsweek Interactive)**  
**Hot for the wrong teachers. Why are public schools so bad at hiring good teachers?**  
**7.11.08**

Ray Fisman

PS 49 in Queens used to be an average school in New York City's decidedly below-average school system. That was before Anthony Lombardi moved into the principal's office. When Lombardi took charge in 1997, 37 percent of fourth graders read at grade level, compared with nearly 90 percent today; there have also been double-digit improvements in math scores. By 2002, PS 49 made the state's list of most improved schools. If you ask Lombardi how it happened, he'll launch into a well-practiced monologue on the many changes that he brought to PS 49 (an arts program, a new curriculum from Columbia's Teachers College). But he keeps coming back to one highly controversial element of the school's turnaround: getting rid of incompetent teachers.

Firing bad teachers may seem like a rather obvious solution, but it requires some gumption to take on a teachers union. And cleaning house isn't necessarily the only answer. There are three basic ways to improve a school's faculty: take greater care in selecting good teachers upfront, throw out the bad ones who are already teaching, and provide training to make current teachers better. In theory, the first two should have more or less the same effect, and it might seem preferable to focus on never hiring unpromising instructors—once entrenched, it's nearly impossible in most places to remove teachers from their union-protected jobs. But that's assuming we're good at predicting who will teach well in the first place.

It turns out we aren't. For instance, in 1997, Los Angeles tripled its hiring of elementary-school teachers following a state-mandated reduction in class size. If L.A. schools had been doing a good job of picking the best teachers among their applicants, then the average quality of new recruits should have gone down when they expanded their ranks—they were hiring from the same pool of applicants, but accepting candidates who would have been rejected in prior years. But as researchers Thomas Kane and Douglas Staiger found, the crop of new teachers didn't perform any worse than the teachers the school had hired in more selective years. This unexpected result is consistent with the findings from dozens of studies analyzing the predictors of teacher quality. Researchers have looked at just about every possible determinant of teaching success, and it seems there's nothing on a prospective teacher's résumé that indicates how he or she will do in the classroom. While some qualifications boost performance a little bit—National Board certification seems to help, though a master's degree in education does not—they just don't improve it very much.

It's worth keeping in mind that economists study changes in test scores, not love of learning or comprehension of course material—it's possible that some of the teachers who look good to researchers are just good at teaching to the test. Needing some measure of success in the classroom, economists mostly rely on "value added" in test scores—that is, how much students' scores improve as a result of a year in a teacher's classroom. Since researchers study entire school systems over many years, they're able to separate out how much of an individual student's improvement is due to personal circumstance and how much is the result of inspirational teachers. If a student's test scores increase year after year, then no teacher gets any credit for it; similarly, no one's on the hook for a bad student's repeated failure to progress. What economists have found is that only one thing tells us how much a teacher will boost his students' test scores next year: the amount he raised test scores in previous years. A good teacher this year will very likely be a good teacher next year.

Unfortunately, when making hiring decisions, principals rarely have that information at their fingertips. Most hiring decisions are made before applicants have a teaching record. And an individual school has neither the necessary data nor the ability to run

the complicated regression analyses needed to discern whether an experienced teacher has had a positive effect on his students in the past.

Which leaves school officials in the position of having to find a way to get rid of the inevitable bad hires. Anthony Lombardi's approach at PS 49 put him at the top of the teachers-union hit list. (The union head refers to Lombardi as a "tyrant.") Lombardi placed higher demands on his teachers, requiring, for example, detailed and cogent lesson plans. (He recalls that some teachers had one-word class outlines before the new rules were put in place.) He also started showing up in class to keep tabs on what was going on. While he may not have been able to discern teaching quality from a résumé, he knew effective teaching when he saw it in the classroom.

Teachers who either couldn't or wouldn't perform up to his standards were given an ultimatum: Request a transfer or get saddled with an unsatisfactory rating, leading to an onerous (for all concerned) two-year review. Since his arrival, a third of PS 49's teachers have been squeezed out through Lombardi's efforts.

Of course, this just meant they were moved to another classroom in another school, lowering the test scores of someone else's children. So while this might be a way of cleaning up PS 49, it's not much use in reforming an entire school system. New York's school chancellor, Joel Klein, has gotten rid of some teachers through a program that effectively gives them a golden parachute out of teaching—they aren't allowed into the classroom, though they stay on the payroll. But this is a very expensive Band-Aid.

What if there *were* a way to screen out the bad teachers before they get entrenched? Currently, New York City teachers get their union cards their first day on the job. In theory they're on probation for three years after that, but in practice very few are forced out. Lombardi suggests replacing this system with an apprenticeship program. Rather than requiring teaching degrees (which don't seem to improve value-added all that much), new recruits would have a couple of years of in-school training. There would then come a day of reckoning, when teachers-to-be would face a serious evaluation before securing union membership and a job for life.

Lombardi's proposal isn't without its problems and complications: What would the effect be on the morale of older teachers? Would the teachers unions ever agree to such a system? But none seems insurmountable. Researchers Kane and Staiger, together with coauthor Robert Gordon, have also suggested an apprenticeship system and have put forth a detailed proposal on how to implement it.

We live in an age of increasing inequality. While it's not fair to park the problem of global inequities at the doorstep of teachers unions, the continued floundering of public education in America is at least partly to blame: Education is an awfully good predictor of future earnings, and keeping bad teachers in classrooms filled with kids from poor families certainly helps to reinforce the cycle of poverty. The difference between a teacher in the 25th percentile (a very good teacher) and one at the 75th percentile (a not very good teacher) translates into a 10 percentile point difference in their students' test scores. (As a frame of reference, on the SAT, 10 percentile points translates into an 80 or so point difference in raw test score.) After a string of good teachers or bad teachers, it's easy to see how you can end up with very wide gaps in student achievement. And this is all the more tragic since at least part of the answer—doing a better job of evaluating and selecting teachers—is readily at hand.

*Ray Fisman is the Lambert Family Professor of Social Enterprise and research director of the Social Enterprise Program at the Columbia Business School. His book with Ted Miguel, Economic Gangsters, is forthcoming in October 2008.*

## Article 3

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### **The Economist Better marks, more money 7.11.08**

The Economist Staff

Bad schools, the left insists, are bad because they do not have enough money. The nation's capital somewhat undermines this theory. Spending per pupil in Washington, DC, is a whopping 50% higher than the national average, yet the city's public schools are atrocious. If it were a state, its pupils' test scores would rank dead last.

Some schools struggle with the basics, such as discipline. Until last year, for example, the Johnson Middle School "had a nightclub on every floor", says Clarence Burrell, a youth adviser at the school. There would be dozens of kids hanging out on each corridor during classes, schoolboys "with their shirts off getting massages" from female classmates and fights "all the time", he says.

Mr Burrell, a tough-looking reformed convict, was hired by LifeSTARTS, a local charity, to help restore order. With his four colleagues, he pays attention to the most disruptive kids. He listens to them. He nudges them to pipe down and study. He offers his own "hectic" life as a cautionary tale. "Jail is ten times worse than school," he warns young troublemakers. "It's a long time, just you in that cell with a bunch of dudes."

Programmes such as LifeSTARTS are a first step. But what the system needs is fundamental reform. Teachers are virtually unsackable and paid by seniority. Such incentives attract the lazy and mediocre and repel the talented or diligent. Michelle Rhee, the city's dynamic new schools chancellor, is trying to change them.

Ms Rhee is thrashing out a deal with union leaders that would raise teachers' wages dramatically. Starting salaries would leap from about \$40,000 to \$78,000, and wages for the best performers would double to about \$130,000 a year. In return, teachers would lose tenure and be paid according to merit, measured in part by their students' results. Current teachers would have a choice: they could join the new system or stay in the old one. New hires would have to join the new system. Over time, the quality and morale of teachers in Washington should soar. "Imagine the kind of talent the hard-pressed system could attract," drools the Washington Post.

But wouldn't all this require a huge expansion of the school budget? Perhaps not. The current system is staggeringly inefficient. The city employs an army of educational bureaucrats and has twice as many schools as it needs. It pays to heat and air-condition some schools that are only a quarter full. Insiders reckon that, within a few years, the new pay deal could be wholly financed by cutting waste. And in the short term private donors are willing to shoulder much of the cost.

The plan's boosters call it revolutionary, in that it applies to public schools a principle—reward good work and you get more of it—that every other employer has known for centuries. But it will be still-born if the Washington teachers' union does

not agree to it. Local union leaders rather like the idea of higher pay, but the big national unions are appalled at the notion that any teachers might give up tenure. Fearing an unwelcome precedent, they are leaning on the local union to kill the deal.

Washington may be extreme, but it is symptomatic of a wider malaise. America's best universities are still the world's best and many of its public schools are excellent, too. But far too many are awful. Overall, the high-school graduation rate is slipping. And the generation now entering the workforce is less well educated, on average, than the generation about to retire—a fact that bodes ill for the nation's prosperity. Any idea that might stop this slide is welcome.

## Article 4

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### **USA Today** **Kindergarteners learning 'critical' languages** **7.11.08**

Carole Feldman

The first-graders in Grace Yuan's class are playing "Jeopardy," eagerly responding to clues about animals and their habitats, diet and movements.

Sound routine for a group of 7-year-olds? Well, look again. These clues are in Chinese.

One girl, a bit uncertain, pondered the Chinese characters and pictures of animals. "Believe in yourself, Rachel," a classmate yelled. Applause rang out when she gave the correct response.

The class is a result of the National Security Language Initiative, introduced by President Bush in 2006 to teach the youngest students Chinese and other foreign languages considered critical to the nation's future security.

"We're going to teach our kids how to speak important languages," he said. One goal, he added, was "to advance America's interests around the world, and defeat this notion about our — you know our bullying concept of freedom by letting people see what we're about."

At Providence Elementary School here in Fairfax, principal Joy Hanbury believes that learning Chinese will stand today's children in good stead.

"We are looking at how global our world is," she said.

The federal program is based on the premise that you can engage foreign governments and their citizens more effectively when you speak their language. The emphasis is on "critical needs" languages, including Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Hindi and Farsi.

The Education Department, one of four federal agencies involved in the program, has awarded 88 grants totaling about \$26 million to communities around the country to expand instruction in these languages beginning in kindergarten.

Chinese, thus far, has been the most popular.

"People understand in a competitive world, you've got to be fluent in the languages

where business is booming, and China is one of those places," said Holly Kuzmich, the Education Department's deputy chief of staff.

Studies have shown that young children are much quicker than adults to pick up foreign languages. Other research suggests that elementary school students performed better in other subjects if they also took a foreign language.

"We do have pretty compelling data that show there are really good reasons to put in good programs at the elementary level," said Marty Abbott of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Fairfax County, Va., now offers Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Latin and Italian, in addition to the more traditional Spanish and French. Arabic and Chinese were selected by parents, primarily to give their kids a future economic edge, said Paula Patrick, foreign language coordinator for the county schools.

The county is using the nearly \$622,000 grant it received through the National Security Language Initiative in part to train teachers in those two languages.

Grace Belyea, 7, is a first-grader at Providence Elementary and a student of Chinese. "I like counting and I like doing activities on the smart board," she said.

She and classmate Suzanna Kirchman demonstrated their counting skills, up to 31 — the maximum number of days in a month. Every day the children review the day, date, month and year, said teacher Yuan.

Yuan demonstrates on a computer the individual strokes needed to write Chinese characters. She creates computer games, like the animal "Jeopardy" that the children were playing this recent day.

"Games are a good teaching tool," she said. "It lets them feel Chinese is not like a boring language."

The children clearly enjoyed their version of "Jeopardy," displayed on a smart board. Hands flew up when it was time to pick players.

Later, Suzanna, 7, explained why she likes learning Chinese. "Maybe you can learn about China, because it's very far away," she said.

Yuan, a Taiwan native, intersperses language instruction with lessons about Chinese culture. And she works with the classroom teacher to support regular lessons: When the children learned about the food pyramid in regular class, for example, they also studied fruits in Chinese.

The Providence first-graders have two 30-minute Chinese classes each week. Language instruction will continue through sixth grade. At that point, they can choose to continue Chinese or pursue another language.

The county school board aims to have each student competent in at least two languages by the time they graduate from high school.

The Education Department believes there's room for foreign language instruction even as schools work to meet the math and reading requirements in the No Child Left Behind law.

"There are ways to integrate subjects into one another," Kuzmich said.

The 6-year-old education law also requires that teachers be highly qualified — generally that they have at least a bachelor's degree in the subject they teach or pass a subject-matter test. But many people fluent in critical languages don't meet the requirements.

Under the Bush initiative, grants are provided to help people with those language skills get training and certification. The goal is to add 1,000 new foreign language teachers by the end of the decade.

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### **Voice of San Diego** **As funding disappears, is small still beautiful?** **7.11.08**

Emily Alpert

Four years ago, San Diego Unified decided to test whether size matters when it comes to high schools. With outside help, it split three big high schools into 14 small ones, each with 500 students or fewer. Billed as the antidote to huge, anonymous high schools, the new schools have been credited with reducing dropouts and building closer relationships between students and staff.

But going small has a price. San Diego Unified has estimated that running the smaller high schools costs 16 percent more per student than their larger counterparts. For four years, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation bankrolled some of the expense, pouring \$11.5 million into converting Kearny, Crawford and San Diego High into complexes of multiple small schools, each with their own principal, theme, and section of campus.

As that extra funding disappears, San Diego Unified is left to decide whether going small is worth that price. The bulk of the Gates funding marked for the converted schools has expired. The staffer charged with overseeing the small schools project, H.J. Green, has left the school district. Another small school complex in San Diego Unified, unfunded by Gates, was abandoned earlier this year. And a major question overshadows the small high schools that remain.

"Did it work?" asked Camille Zombro, president of the teachers union. "Is it economically viable? Do teachers like it?"

That answer is unclear. Test scores have risen at many small high schools -- but so have scores at many large schools. Attendance rates vary widely among the individual schools, with some reporting stellar numbers and others at the bottom of the heap. Small high schools are among the school district's most exemplary schools, and among its most challenged.

"The goal is to try and sustain the program," said Nellie Meyer, assistant superintendent of high schools. "The beauty of the small school is that we can attack issues quickly, because of the small size."

Principals say the smaller schools are more intimate and personalized, and keep kids from falling through the cracks. Student surveys show that students are more engaged and connected to adults on campus, principals said. And a 2006 study

showed that dropouts decreased at two of the small school complexes.

"It's been like night and day," said Diego Gutiérrez, principal of the Multimedia and Visual Arts school in the Crawford complex, who knows every face and every transcript, and notices every absence. "Academically, we still have a ways to go. But the ground is better prepared for academics."

Yet as San Diego Unified tries to measure the success of small schools, a crucial set of reports that track their success aren't yet available to the public. Annual reports conducted by the American Institutes for Research for the Gates Foundation haven't been made public.

When the schools divided, "immediately we could observe major changes in [school] culture," said AIR senior fellow Libia Gil. "What we didn't see was any dramatic achievement outcomes for students. We're starting to see that trajectory growing."

But the school district must gauge whether those gains are worth the cost. Small schools are typically more expensive than large ones because a smaller group of students is afforded its own principal. Financial staff estimated that small high schools cost \$768 more per student than large high schools last year. And a task force charged with weighing costs and salaries in San Diego Unified eyed the small high schools, saying they needed to be analyzed and made more efficient.

Dividing up schools is expensive and misses the point, said Rich Gibson, professor emeritus of education at San Diego State University.

"It doesn't address the social and economic crises in communities," he said. "It adds relatively large numbers of duplicated administrators and secretaries and required technology and machinery that may or may not meet the needs of children."

Cost isn't the only concern. Divvying up schools often makes it more difficult to offer a wide range of electives, because it's tough to muster enough students to take an unusual class. Each of the Crawford small schools offers between 40 and 70 electives; bigger schools such as Hoover High and Henry High offer between 120 and 160. And splitting up schools may inadvertently segregate students of different backgrounds who gravitate toward different programs.

The starkest example is the San Diego High School complex, which includes two radically different schools: the School of International Studies, which draws high-achieving students from across the school district, and Communication Investigations in a Multicultural Atmosphere, where roughly two-thirds of students are learning English. International Studies was ranked in the top 100 public schools nationwide by Newsweek magazine; CIMA's test scores and attendance rate are among the lowest in San Diego high schools.

Originally created as an academy for English-learning students, CIMA was criticized by the school board for segregating those students, former principal César Alcantár said. To attract a wider range of students, Alcantár redesigned CIMA as a communications school that teaches video production and graphic design. But the school remained largely Latino and English-learning.

"The problem is, we did an awfully good job making our students feel loved," Alcantár said. "They all came back."

Dividing schools may also avoid the federal push to boost test scores among all

groups of students, by splitting minority groups into numbers too small to be counted separately.

Under the No Child Left Behind law, schools must show that all categories of students are improving their scores. If even one category of students falters, such as English learners, a school can be tagged as failing.

But if there are too few students in a particular group, their scores don't need to be tracked separately for improvement. When San Diego High split up in 2004, its populations of African-American and white students were divided among multiple schools, almost all of them too small to count separately for testing. As a result, smaller schools may have an easier time meeting No Child Left Behind requirements, Meyer said.

San Diego Unified has also tried the small school approach at Lincoln High School, which was demolished in 2003 and reopened four years later as four small schools on one vast new campus.

Over a three-year period, the Gates Foundation is providing roughly \$2.7 million to Lincoln, roughly \$1.2 million to keep supporting the small schools at Kearny, Crawford and San Diego High, and about \$720,000 for the central office that oversees all small schools in San Diego Unified. Another small school division was tried and later scrapped at Mann Middle School, which did not receive Gates funding.

Gutiérrez is loath to see the same happen to Crawford High. Before the schools split, teens would avoid teachers' gaze in the hallways, he said. Now they greet their teachers and Gutiérrez, and Gutiérrez can respond to each by name.

"If people think going back to [a large school] will do any better, they're absolutely wrong," Gutiérrez said. "If there's a chance to educate kids, this is the way."

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### **Rockford Register Star (IL) New program allows Illinois to modify how it meets No Child Left Behind 7.11.08**

Katie Backman

Illinois is one of six states that will participate in a pilot program aimed at helping schools meet the progress requirements set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The new program, approved by the U.S. Department of Education, will allow the state to vary the "intensity and type of interventions" used to improve schools.

Andrea Preston, spokeswoman for the Illinois State Board of Education, said "Differentiated Accountability" could help tailor the needs of low-performing schools in Illinois so they can succeed and boost their progress scores. Potentially, all the schools in the state will be affected by this program, Preston said, but schools most in need of improvement will be first.

"No Child Left Behind is a one-size-fits-all requirement, which doesn't work," Preston said. "So this will let us think outside the box."

Under No Child Left Behind, school districts use standardized tests to track the

progress of schools from year to year. Schools that do not make adequate progress must implement corrective actions, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance. The main goal of NCLB is for all students to meet or exceed standards in reading and math by 2014.

Under the pilot program, the time period schools or districts have to improve and meet requirements will be extended. Also, schools will continue to move through the process of improvement each year that they don't meet the Adequate Yearly Progress measures, but they now will be classified as "focused" or "comprehensive" schools instead of those in "need of improvement."

Preston said portions of the pilot program will be implemented for the 2008-09 school year, and full implementation will be the following academic year. Preston said the program was announced in March and states applied for the program in May. Because of the short notice to apply, Illinois' exact plans still will be adjusted, she said.

Michael Williams, vice president of the Rockford School Board, said some Illinois schools have struggled to meet the federal goals and the state setting its own bar would be a positive change.

"It will allow the state to do what's best for the students and set goals that match the students," he said.

But Rockford Education Association President Molly Phalen said the only way to work with NCLB requirements would be to get rid of them.

NCLB hasn't worked because it hasn't received adequate funding and the standards are set too high, she said. Each year, the bar gets raised and students keep falling more behind, she said.

Although under the new program Illinois will begin offering additional tutoring earlier to students in low-performing schools, Phalen said students already receive tutoring — which might not be the best solution to the problem.

NCLB needs to be overhauled, Phalen said, then maybe students will be able to improve.

"It's too little, too late," Phalen said. "This program will just be tweaking at best."

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### **Greeley Tribune (CO) Summer school program aiming at putting student at grade levels 7.12.08**

Christopher Ortiz

Inside a classroom at Jefferson Elementary on Thursday, students are sitting at their desks, pencils in hand, listening to their teacher talk about a magic pot that doubles anything put inside.

The students at Jefferson, 1315 4th Ave., just started classes but no one is confused about what month it is.

During this summer, about 722 students in Greeley-Evans School District 6 will spend part of their summer break in school.

The students are participating in a summer program that works with students who have been identified as behind their peers in school. Educators hope that some extra time will help them catch up. For half a day, students go through three or four academic classes along with some physical education and enrichment time, such as art class, but the focus is on reading, writing and math.

District 6 is taking part in 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a federal education program, designed to provide academic enrichment opportunities to students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools.

"The program adds additional time, primarily after school but some before and this summer component," said Kathi Van Soest, director of priority schools for District 6. "There are enrichment opportunities plus extra time for academics. It's giving schools with high needs extra accommodations to provide meaningful activities."

The program targets students who are behind in their grade in Title 1 schools. The district has made getting elementary students to read at their grade level a top priority. Third-grade reading CSAP scores earlier this year showed 65 percent of District 6 students tested at proficient or advanced. The state average was 70 percent.

"The kids (in the program) are identified as having a need to have additional time and support academically or having other additional needs as well," Van Soest said.

Title 1 schools are schools where a large percentage of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

The summer program is funded by the federal grant, and its costs do not come out of District 6 coffers, Van Soest said. District 6 is in the middle of a five-year federal Title 1 grant.

Teacher Lorraine Montoya was teaching her third-grade class, about 12 students, the notion of doubling.

"If I have two pairs of shoes, and I double them, how many will I have?" Montoya said to her class.

"Four," said her students.

Montoya has taught summer sessions before and said it works.

"What it does is give us a foundation so when they start school in August, they are starting right where they left off," she said. "They restore the knowledge."

Giniel Burke, the facilitator at Jefferson Elementary said the progress a lot of students make over the course of a school year can be lost during the summer.

"Kids that don't read constantly show a lot of regression when school starts," Burke said. "We want to keep them where they are so they don't regress over the summer."

Van Soest said that is exactly what this summer program is aimed at accomplishing.

"The research shows all kids regress over the summer," said Van Soest. "So this helps just to keep their skills. We want all kids to accelerate and become advanced learners. This helps us give extra time to them."

To measure the success of the program, the district uses assessment data, the students' tests scores at the end and beginning of the regular school year. The program recently was audited by the Colorado Department of Education and while not perfect, it received high marks, Van Soest said.

"We are one of the districts in the state with this high of quality of program," she said. "We got some notice from the state that it will use District 6 for (future) professional development."

The program is completely optional but educators said a overwhelming majority of parents say yes to the program when their student is selected.

"Most parents want this additional support for their students," Van Soest said.

Parent Rachell Parker agreed.

Parker has two of her children, Alexis, 9, and Sophia, 6, going to school at Jefferson for part of the summer.

She said she is glad her daughters have the opportunity to get a little bit more help.

"I think it's a really good program," she said. "It helps them keep up with what they learn in school. It helps them retain what they learn and helps them with the transition" in the fall.

Like Van Soest and others, Parker doesn't think another month of school is too much for youngsters.

"These kids are having a blast," Burke said. "We are making it fun."

Contrary to what some might think, the kids in these summer classes agree.

Joey Rodriguez, one of the students in Montoya's class, said not only does he not mind coming to school when the calendar says July but he looks forward to it.

"Yeah, I like it because it's short and it's fun," Joey said.

Another of Montoya's student, Brisa Camorano, said coming to school over the summer was not a chore.

"I like coming because we get to learn more," said Brisa, who added her favorite subject was science.

WHAT'S TITLE I: Title I, part of the No Child Left Behind legislation, is the largest federal program that supports both elementary and secondary education. Resources are based on poverty rates of students enrolled in schools and districts. There are 619 Title I schools in Colorado.

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**The Wall Street Journal**  
**The wrong education fix**  
**7.12.08**

Editorial Board

President Bush has often spoken about education reform as a civil rights issue. So we're not entirely surprised to see civil rights groups now defending the No Child Left Behind law against attempts to gut its most effective provisions.

Last month, Representative Sam Graves, a Missouri Republican, introduced the NCLB Recess Until Reauthorization Act, which would essentially suspend the law's accountability provisions but not the funding. Under Mr. Graves's bill, schools would no longer have to file progress reports that expose achievement gaps between kids of different races, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Since NCLB passed in 2002, minority parents in particular have come to rely on this information to find out if a school is serving the needs of their children. But apparently Mr. Graves and his co-sponsor, Democrat Timothy Waltz of Minnesota, believe that the problem with public education today is too much accountability. Not surprisingly, teachers unions like the National Education Association are supporting their efforts.

What's heartening about this story is who has lined up to block this nonsense. The coalition includes the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights, the NAACP, the National Council of La Raza, the National Urban League, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and more than a dozen other liberal outfits.

In a letter to House Members, the coalition said it opposed the proposal because "it would allow states, districts, and schools to receive federal funding under the No Child Left Behind Act with no accountability for complying with key provision of the law."

None of these groups supports NCLB in toto. But they do realize that, whatever the law's problems, the accountability provisions are not among them. NCLB has forced schools to pay attention to the learning gap, and the result has been that poor and minority children are doing better. We are nowhere near closing that gap, but it is undeniable that the lowest-performing students have made significant gains on standardized tests in the NCLB era. Easing up on accountability would be a big step backward.

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**CBS 2 Chicago**  
**Clinton talks to teachers ready to endorse Obama**  
**7.12.08**

Pamela Jones

CHICAGO (CBS) — The LA Times is reporting Barack Obama told a potential donor that Hillary Clinton is on his list of possible running mates.

This weekend, the two senators are appealing to almost two million educators from

across the country. They gathered Saturday in Chicago for the American Federation of Teachers Convention. CBS 2's Pamela Jones reports.

Cheers came from some 3,000 convention delegates. Sen. Hillary Clinton thanked them for their support during her bid for the Democratic Presidential Campaign Nomination. Now, she's pledging to continue to work to revamp the country's public schools under an Obama Presidency.

"You care about an education system that works for all of our kids," Clinton said. "A higher education system that once again is open to the children of middle class and low income families."

They are views shared just before Clinton's 20-minute talk by Richard Daley.

"I really believe that if you want to send a person to the moon, you first have to educate people in math and science and technology," Daley said.

It's an issue taking center stage as teachers decide who'll take their vote in November.

"We have teachers constantly bringing money out of their pockets to have to fund what they're trying to do in the classroom and in today's society that's wrong," said Sharon Teefey, a member of the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

"You've got a kid that's coming hungry. Or, no pencils, no pens, and I provide those things, but I also think it's that stability at home," said Minnesota teacher Christine Barthel.

While Sen. Clinton's speech focused on education and the economy, she didn't pass up the chance to take a few jabs at the Republican party.

"The Republicans should hold a press conference tomorrow and apologize to the country and say they're just not going to run anybody for President this time," Clinton said. "It is, I think, beyond the realm of imagination to be embarrassed still by our President."

Clinton says the only way the United States can start solving its problems and be respected in the world is to elect Barack Obama president.

Clinton thanked the teachers union for its earlier support before she suspended her campaign last month and asked the group to help make November "the watershed election it deserves to be."

The former first lady jabbed President Bush and the Republican party, calling Bush's time in office "an aberration."

Obama is scheduled to speak to the teachers via satellite Sunday. That's when the union is expected to endorse him.

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**Associated Press**  
**Ad campaign presses candidates on education**  
**7.13.08**  
Stephanie S. Garlow

An education-advocacy group will begin airing ads this week seeking to nudge Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama on ways to improve the standing of U.S. schools compared with other industrialized nations.

Strong American Schools, a nonpartisan group supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, wants the presidential candidates to focus on the condition of U.S. education at a time that the economy and gas prices are attracting the most public attention.

The \$5 million in television, radio, print and online ads in seven states begin Monday. They feature a boy who hoists a line of international flags up a flagpole with the stars and stripes at the bottom.

"If jobs move to countries like Finland and South Korea," the narrator says, "our children's opportunities dry up and so does our economy."

The ads will air in Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin. Ads will also run in Minnesota closer to the Republican convention.

"This campaign is trying to stoke interest and create intensity in key battleground states," said Marc Lampkin, executive director of the advocacy group Strong American Schools. "What we want people to do is realize that American schools, both individually and collectively, are failing to provide our children with the skills they need to be successful."

Many other industrial nations have more stringent education standards than those in the U.S. On some recent international tests, U.S. students have posted flat scores and landed in the middle to bottom of the pack when compared with other nation's children.

McCain supports changes but not a scrapping of President Bush's signature No Child Left Behind education law. It was enacted in 2002 with the stated goal of getting all students reading and doing math at their proper grade levels by 2013-2014. Schools must test kids in those subjects and face consequences such as replacing staff for scores that fall short of state goals.

Obama is calling for increasing the roughly \$23 billion the federal government now spends to implement the law. Much of that goes toward educating poor children.

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**MSNBC**

**Obama courts teachers**

**7.13.08**

Athena Jones

In his speech via satellite to a meeting of the American Federation of Teachers, Barack Obama spoke about strengthening the country's education system by providing more support for teachers and working with them on ways to reward success.

The group announced it was endorsing Obama just before he began speaking and he said "thank you, thank you," adding, "I am honored to have your endorsement", according to the print pool report.

"It's time to start treating our teachers properly," Obama said, according to his prepared remarks.

The senator laid out his plans for residency programs that supply strong teachers to high-need schools, mentoring programs that pair experienced, successful teachers with new ones and service scholarships that will pay for a person's college education if they commit their life to teaching.

He went on to talk about how best to reward teachers.

"When our educators succeed, I won't just talk about how great they are; I will reward them for it," he said. "Under my plan, districts will be able to give teachers who mentor, or teach in underserved areas, or take on added responsibilities, or learn new skills to serve students better, or consistently excel in the classroom, the salary increase they deserve. And whether it's the plans AFT helped create in Cincinnati or Chicago, you've shown that it is possible to find new ways to increase teacher pay that are developed with teachers, not imposed on them."

The Illinois senator's language on the subject was likely to please teachers unions like AFT and NEA because he spoke about working "with" teachers to find ways to reward them rather than imposing a system "on" them.

Obama hit his Republican rival John McCain for not having a "slim record" on education and for voting against increased funding for No Child Left Behind "to preserve billions in tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans" and against increasing funds for Head Start, Pell Grants, and the hiring of 100,000 new teachers.

He said McCain's "only proposal seems to be recycling tired rhetoric about vouchers and school choice" and he argued for "well-designed public charter schools" but against using public money for private school vouchers, which he equated with throwing our hands up and walking away.

His criticisms were in line with one of his campaign's themes that McCain is out of touch with the concerns of ordinary Americans.

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### **San Francisco Chronicle** **Too much school choice can create chaos** **7.13.08**

C.W. Nevius

A new report by a San Francisco grand jury looks into admission process for the city's public schools. It found that parents aren't happy.  
Duh.

The hard part would be finding someone who is happy with it. For example, Lorraine Woodruff-Long, past president of Parents for Public Schools, an advocacy group that is generally a friend to the school district, may have some issues with the report, but she doesn't dispute the premise.

"The system is archaic," she said. "I will absolutely agree that it is time to revisit it. We need to have a real hard conversation about this."

What the city has now is free choice. Any student can apply to any school in the district.

While choice is a good thing, too much choice can create chaos. Supervisor Carmen Chu, whose Sunset District is ground zero for complaints about the system, has taken the lead in giving voice to the concerns, introducing a resolution last week before the Board of Supervisors that would encourage the district to take neighborhood interests into account.

Because if you want a formula that makes parents unhappy, suspicious, angry, disenfranchised, and ready to pack up and leave, it would be hard to do better than this.

And no wonder. For example, in January of each year parents are asked to list their seven top school preferences. Sounds simple, right? But there's a catch. If a student has a sibling already in a school, he or she is automatically in, which is why the SFUSD says that 81 percent of all families get one of their seven choices. But when the grand jury drilled into the numbers, it found a problem.

A member of the Educational Placement Center told the grand jury that when siblings who receive automatic school admission are deleted from the process, the report said, "the real acceptance rate drops from 81 percent to 55 percent." So 45 percent, nearly half of the applicants, not only don't get their first choice; they don't get any of their first seven choices (although some families do not put down seven choices). These are people like Helene and Mark Hilleary, who spent six months trying to get their son, Max, into a kindergarten near their Sunset home. "We spent hours looking at the numbers and going through the lists," Helene Hilleary says. "We visited schools. We questioned principals. We followed instructions. They said as long as you do that, are honest, and complete the application on time, you will get what you want. We did all that, and we were still denied all seven. It was ridiculous."

There are lots of people like the Hillearys. They live in the Sunset District, where there a ton of really good schools. They're well-educated, motivated, middle-class folks with time to spend advocating for themselves.

The issue isn't just about kindergartners. The problem also affects students entering middle and high school.

Take Luc Ha. He is an auto mechanic. His wife works in a convalescent care home. English is not his first language. He says he and his wife work until 8 o'clock almost every night, and daughter Perri, 13, is in charge of her younger brother and sister. They're low-income, ethnically diverse, and Perri - by the way - has a 4.0 grade point average at A.P. Giannini Middle School. So what high school did she get assigned to? John O'Connell in the Mission District, 5 miles away.

"I don't want my kids to turn out bad," Ha says. "They go far away, I don't know what they are doing. That's why I am so mad about this. My daughter, every day she is crying. Twenty years ago, they send you to neighborhood schools. It was easier for the parents. Now they send you far away."

The usual response to this is that there are a vocal few parents, most in the Richmond and Sunset districts, who are unhappy. Woodruff-Long says that their group found that "most people were pretty happy with where they ended up." Maybe so, but how to explain the jury's point that 30 percent of school-age kids in San Francisco are not enrolled in public schools - four times the state average? The assumption is that those kids are being homeschooled or are attending private schools.

The hard part, of course, is finding a solution. The grand jury gets high marks for raising the issues, but its recommendation "to strengthen the role of neighborhood schools" isn't so popular. Woodruff-Long calls it "simplistic and incomplete. Neighborhood schools are not a silver bullet."

The grand jury was more likely to ask the district to look at systems like Sacramento or Seattle. In those cities, parents were assured that they'd get a school in a neighborhood "region," if they wished, but there is also a provision for the many families who would rather choose a school with alternative programs. "I think that's a great idea," Woodruff-Long said. "I can name 10 districts that do something like that."

And how many can you name that have a chaotic, everybody-into-the pool system like San Francisco's?

"The jury can find no other urban districts anywhere else with the 'school choice' enrollment process," the report said.

It's probably not a coincidence no other school district has followed the San Francisco model. It doesn't work.

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### **The New York Times New vision for schools proposes broad role 7.14.08**

Sam Dillon

Randi Weingarten, the New Yorker who is rising to become president of the American Federation of Teachers, says she wants to replace President Bush's focus on standardized testing with a vision of public schools as community centers that help poor students succeed by offering not only solid classroom lessons but also medical and other services.

Ms. Weingarten, 50, is running unopposed for the presidency of the national teachers union, whose delegates at an annual convention in Chicago are expected to elect her Monday. In a speech prepared for delivery after the vote, Ms. Weingarten criticizes No Child Left Behind, President Bush's signature domestic initiative, which is defended staunchly by Margaret Spellings, the secretary of education. Ms. Weingarten, saying the law "is too badly broken to be fixed," lays out a "new vision of schools for the 21st century."

"Can you imagine a federal law that promoted community schools — schools that serve the neediest children by bringing together under one roof all the services and activities they and their families need?" Ms. Weingarten is expected to ask in the speech, a copy of which was provided by the union to The New York Times.

"Imagine schools that are open all day and offer after-school and evening recreational activities, child care and preschool, tutoring and homework assistance," the speech reads. "Schools that include dental, medical and counseling clinics." By laying out that expansive vision of government's role in the public schools, Ms. Weingarten wades into a fierce debate among Democrats seeking to influence the educational program of Senator Barack Obama, their party's presumptive presidential nominee. In an interview last week, she said the ideas in the speech amounted to "what I'd like to see in a new federal education law."

In her 10-year tenure as president of the United Federation of Teachers, which represents New York City teachers, Ms. Weingarten has defended teachers' economic interests, raising her members' salaries by 43 percent in the last five years. But she has also proved willing to accommodate the city's ideas on improving schools. She has embraced charter schools, and last year — even as teachers unions elsewhere were opposing performance pay plans — negotiated an arrangement in New York that gives bonuses to teachers in schools whose poor children show broad gains in test scores.

With her move to the presidency of the national union, with 1.4 million members, Ms. Weingarten will have a broader platform from which to influence the nation's education debates. Although the federation is smaller than the country's other teachers union, the National Education Association, with its 3.2 million members, A.F.T. presidents have had an equal or larger political profile because presidential tenures in the bigger union are restricted by term limits.

Two previous presidents of the United Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker and Sandra Feldman, also rose to lead the A.F.T.

"My sense is that Randi Weingarten is continuing Al Shanker's tradition, clearly standing up for the interests of teachers but also trying to engage in thoughtful education reform that will be good for students," said Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation whose biography of Mr. Shanker, "Tough Liberal," was published this year.

On Sunday, Mr. Obama spoke to the convention by satellite feed from California, and he mixed criticism of the No Child law with praise for teachers' contributions and an exhortation to Americans to meet the nation's responsibility to educate all children. He quoted a young Chicago teacher as telling him that she had been annoyed by a tendency "to explain away the shortcomings and failures of our education system by saying, 'These kids can't learn.' "

"These children are our children," Mr. Obama said. "It's time we understood that their education is our responsibility.

"I am running for president to guarantee that all of our children have the best possible chance in life," he said, "and I am tired of hearing you, the teachers who work so hard, blamed for our problems."

Convention delegates gave Mr. Obama a standing ovation.

Ms. Weingarten takes national office with robust support of the rank and file. "The last eight years of the Republican presidency have really been a threat to the middle class and to public education," said William Gallagher, a high school social studies teacher in Philadelphia for 33 years. Ms Weingarten, he said, would "work hard to

make sure the new president, whoever he is, puts education on the forefront of issues in this country.”

In the speech Ms. Weingarten is to deliver Monday, she praises the ideas of a group of Democrats led by Tom Payzant, the former schools superintendent in Boston, who have argued that schools alone cannot close achievement gaps rooted in larger economic inequalities, and that “broader, bolder” measures are needed, like publicly financed early childhood education and health services for the poor.

Another group, headed by the Rev. Al Sharpton and Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein of New York, issued a manifesto last month urging the nation to redouble its efforts to close the achievement gap separating poor students from affluent ones and blaming “teachers’ contracts” for keeping ineffective teachers in classrooms. Of the vision of Mr. Payzant’s group, Ms. Weingarten’s speech says, “Sisters and brothers, this is an idea whose time has come.

“Imagine if schools had the educational resources children need to thrive, like smaller classes and individualized instruction, plentiful, up-to-date materials and technology anchored to that rich curriculum, decent facilities, an early start for toddlers and a nurturing atmosphere,” she says.

Ms. Weingarten, whose mother was a teacher in Nyack, N.Y., is a lawyer who was union counsel during the 1980s and 1990s. In the last decade, Ms. Weingarten taught high school history for six years in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn.

In the interview, she said: “We all have to work tenaciously to eliminate the achievement gap and to turn around low-performing schools. But the folks who believe that this can all be done on teachers’ shoulders, which is what No Child tries to do, are doing a huge disservice to America.”

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**The New York Sun**  
**Obama tells teachers union he opposes vouchers**  
**7.14.08**

Elizabeth Green

Senator Obama is saying decisively that he does not support private school vouchers, while sticking with his support for incentive pay for teachers based on their students' performance.

Mr. Obama made the remarks yesterday in a telecast speech to the American Federation of Teachers' national convention in Chicago after the union voted overwhelmingly to endorse his presidential bid.

The convention will also be the site today of the long-anticipated accession of the New York City union president, Randi Weingarten, to the presidency of the AFT, the national branch of the local United Federation of Teachers. Ms. Weingarten, who was the only candidate nominated for the national job after the former president announced he would retire, is planning to hold on to her position as UFT president while she steers the national union.

Today will mark her first day as president of both unions. It will be closely watched,

both for any sign that Ms. Weingarten might be taking her eye off the ball in New York, where she is a formidable figure both on education policy and in state and city politics, and for signals of what role Ms. Weingarten will play on the national stage.

Ms. Weingarten's parents have traveled to Chicago to watch the speech she will deliver this morning.

Both Mr. Obama and Ms. Weingarten have aroused a mix of excitement from those who push for extensive change in public schools and skepticism from traditional union members who oppose the so-called reform policies, such as charter schools and plans to tie teacher pay to student test scores.

In February, Mr. Obama set off concern among some union members when he told a Milwaukee newspaper's editorial board that he was open to supporting private school vouchers if research showed they work.

His campaign quickly issued a statement that said, "Senator Obama has always been a critic of vouchers," and Mr. Obama echoed that sentiment yesterday, saying that while he supports charter schools, he opposes private school vouchers.

"We need to focus on fixing and improving our public schools; not throwing our hands up and walking away from them," he said.

Mr. Obama also raised concerns when he endorsed the idea of "merit pay" at a convention last year for the other national teachers union, the National Education Association.

In his address to the NEA this year, he acknowledged that the idea "wasn't necessarily the most popular part of my speech last year," but vowed to stand by it, eliciting some boos.

He also stood by the idea in his speech to the AFT convention yesterday, which he made via satellite from San Diego.

"When our educators succeed, I won't just talk about how great they are; I will reward them for it," Mr. Obama said. He listed several cases in which districts could give teachers a salary increase, including if they serve as mentors; if they learn new skills, and if they "consistently excel in the classroom."

Those at the AFT convention said that no boos followed the remarks, though some union members later said they were concerned by them.

"That was the one statement that raised our eyebrows," the president of the AFT's Los Angeles chapter, A.J. Duffy, said yesterday. "Our question is what does that mean, 'who consistently do well in classrooms,' and based upon whose guidelines? Is it a principal, a test score? We're going to continue to have dialogue with him."

Other AFT members said they were offended that Mr. Obama did not make his speech live in Chicago, his hometown. In a change from the practice of some previous Democratic presidential candidates, Mr. Obama also delivered his remarks to the NEA via satellite.

The executive director of the lobbying group Democrats for Education Reform, Joseph Williams, characterized that decision as a "Velvet Snub" indicative of Mr. Obama's willingness not to become owned by special interest groups, addressing

them as if across a protective velvet rope.

In her tenure as New York City union president, Ms. Weingarten's work starting two charter schools and her collaboration with the Bloomberg administration on a performance-based pay plan have won her a similar mix of skeptics and boosters.

Mr. Duffy said some Los Angeles teachers are concerned about Ms. Weingarten, though he supports her.

A New York City teacher who is attending the Chicago convention and is a member of a group that has opposed some of Ms. Weingarten's ideas, Lisa North, said that in Chicago she is hearing from many union members across the country who are skeptical about policies such as charter schools.

"There are AFT members that would like to see the AFT helping organize teachers to fight the privatization, the high-stakes testing, and No Child Left Behind," Ms. North said.

Reg Weaver, the president of the NEA, which is seen as more stringent than the AFT in its opposition to such policies, would not say whether there are any differences between his positions and Ms. Weingarten's.

He added: "I think she's good, has been good, and will be great."

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### Denver Post

#### Time is ripe to fix education, experts assert

7.14.08

Allison Sherry

Fixing the nation's schools is the civil-rights priority of this century because so many of them particularly those serving poor kids are not delivering high-quality service, a group of prominent city, civil-rights and education leaders said Sunday.

In the lobby of one of Denver's sterling charter schools, New York City schools chief Joel Klein, Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, state Senate President Peter Groff and Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien, among others, said they would do whatever it takes to push education onto the crowded political agenda this fall. 'It's hard to imagine another environment or another endeavor where so many people invest so many resources ... with so little success,' Hickenlooper said at a media briefing at the Denver School for Science and Technology. 'We've been so slow.' In Denver, a little more than half of the students who start school finish with a high-school diploma. Statewide, about one in five ninth-graders will graduate from college within six years of enrolling.

The national movement, called the Education Equality Project, began a little more than a month ago with Klein and civil-rights leader Rev. Al Sharpton. In a short time, it has attracted an odd cast of bedfellows such as former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, former Colorado Gov. Roy Romer and a handful of urban superintendents and pastors across the country.

The group's message: In the last generation and a half, education has become too much about serving adults. 'It's children we need to worry about,' Klein said. 'Even if

they graduate, they're woefully unprepared. ... Every kid should get a shot at the American dream. It's not about politics.' By that, Klein and others generally mean the long-standing chasm in the Democratic Party on education reform, which creates tension with national teachers unions.

Several of the solutions Klein and others are pushing for more autonomous charter schools, paying teachers on merit and on which jobs they take rather than seniority, and holding them directly accountable for how well kids do in class draw sharp rebuke from city teachers unions.

Of the long list of supporters of the advocacy project, no one from the American Federation of Teachers or the National Education Association has signed on in support. 'If this means tackling union politics, we're willing to do that,' Klein said. 'I applaud Sen. (Barack) Obama saying to unions we need to do things better,' he said. The Colorado Education Association had no comment about Sunday's briefing.

The year is ripe for a debate about changing the nation's education systems, education advocates say, because there are so many examples nationally of schools working well.

Experts working on seemingly intractable problems of high dropout rates and chronic underachievement among poor students can point to schools in cities all over including Denver where these kids are excelling. 'In every sector of the education-reform movement, there are examples of success,' said Michael Johnston, a prominent high school principal in Mapleton Public Schools, and an education adviser to presidential hopeful Obama.

Generally, that means intense accountability on principals and teachers for student success, and a sharp emphasis on teacher quality.

The Education Equality Project will circle back to Denver for a bigger rally at the . It also will go to Minneapolis for the Republican National Convention.

The group is not endorsing one candidate, Klein said. 'I want the candidates to endorse us.' Jennifer Gonzalez, who has four kids in some of the poorest schools in Denver, said Sunday that none of them aspires to work in fast food or as a janitor. 'Our kids want more,' she said. 'And they deserve it.' John McCain- ' If we are to provide every child the opportunity to be inspired to their potential, we must invest in strong classroom leaders, we must empower parents with knowledge about student and school performance and the ability to act on this knowledge through education choice in all its forms, and we must reward excellent teachers.' Barack Obama- 'As he said in his address in Thornton recently, the status quo is morally unacceptable and economically untenable. That is why last fall he introduced a comprehensive plan to provide a world-class education to every child from the day he or she is born, to the day he or she graduates from college.'

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**MSNBC/Reuters**  
**Working with hands helps develop kids' brains**  
**7.14.08**

Reuters Staff

LONDON - British children's brain development is being threatened by their failure to work with their hands in school and at home, said a report released on Monday. With woodwork, metalwork, craft, music or car mechanic classes dropped by many schools and children wanting to play computer games at home, the UK is becoming a "software instead of a screwdriver society," said the report, commissioned by the Ruskin Mill Educational Trust.

"Working with one's own hands in a real-world 3-D environment is imperative for full cognitive and intellectual development," said the report's author Dr. Aric Sigman. "Research is showing that increasing time spent in the virtual world of computers is displacing hands-on play and hands-on learning.

"That allows young people to experience how the world works in practice, to gain an understanding of materials and processes and to make informed judgments about abstract concepts."

The report cited examples of 11-year-olds with deficits in certain areas of their cognitive development and a decline in the ability of young engineers and apprentices to conceptualize straightforward mechanical problems.

"The findings of this report clearly point to strengthening the role of '3-D' learning and crafts in educational policy-making today," said Sigman.

"The implications for the economy are significant and will actually improve the workforce's ability to use computers in research, design and development.

"But parents too have a responsibility to ensure their children have more of a 'hands-on' upbringing."

Sigman also warned class-obsessed Britons needed to drop their snobbish attitude to hands-on vocational training within schools.

"Working with your hands is considered *declassé* and the sciences are often seen as 'trade,'" said Dr. Sigman.

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### **The Greenwood Commonwealth (MS) Obama correct on foreign language 7.14.08**

Editorial Board

Maybe it's the nature of politics that candidates words and views get twisted beyond recognition. Maybe it's this country's sensitivity to illegal immigration.

Whatever it is, Barack Obama, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, was being absurdly criticized last week for suggesting that American schoolchildren have their language horizons broadened.

Obama is absolutely correct.

Americans are woefully deficient in learning other languages. Except in the most accelerated schools, foreign language instruction is an afterthought, taught often by underqualified instructors, by satellite or by some other ineffective remote feed.

Schools go through the motions of teaching a foreign language, but most students pick up nothing other than a few of the most common vocabulary words.

Meanwhile, their counterparts in Europe and Asia are mastering English and other non-native languages to better prepare them for the global economy.

English may be the most dominant language in business, but it's arrogant and foolish of Americans to think it's the only one. Those U.S. kids who learn other languages -- at an age when their brains are most equipped to pick them up -- will have higher future earning power. That is a good thing.

Just look at Mississippi. Soon we will have our second Japanese automaker building vehicles in this state. Competence in Japanese would certainly be a feather in the cap of any Mississippi-bred executive hoping to get hired and rise in the ranks of either of these companies.

Yet, Obama's opponents pounced on his words, claiming that the Democrat was suggesting that the U.S. needs to accommodate foreign-speaking immigrants, rather than pushing them to learn English. That is not what Obama said.

He recognizes a gap in his otherwise impressive academic resume. He never learned another language. That he hopes fewer American kids will have that same deficiency is admirable.

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### **Providence Business News** **The limits of public education** **7.14.08**

William Hamilton

Cumberland Mayor Daniel J. McKee and those who support his plans for a new-fangled Charter School they say will revolutionize education may have hurdled a major obstacle last month, but the school is still far from a being a done deal. McKee's controversial idea for a so-called "mayoral academy" garnered the blessing of the General Assembly when it was made part of the 2009 state budget. But while the plan approved by legislators would free the academy from having to pay prevailing wages or offer standard benefits to teachers and support personnel, the lawmakers did not commit any tax dollars to the proposal.

Now McKee and supporters such as social service agency Progreso Latino must raise the startup money, assemble a board of directors, hire a nonprofit educational organization to operate the school and find a location. Then there's the process of hiring staff and developing curriculum and obtaining R.I. Department of Education approval.

On top of that, the proposal has drawn opposition from teachers' unions. Marcia Reback, president of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP), criticized the plan to allow the school operators to pay teachers far less than their unionized counterparts.

"Bottom line, this is privatizing public education, and it's distasteful," Reback said.

McKee wants to open the regional elementary school in the Valley Falls section of Cumberland by September 2009, but, acknowledging that there's much difficult work ahead, he said it may have to wait until fall 2010.

And that's just the first school.

McKee envisions mayoral academies opening throughout the state. He said eight mayors already have signed on to the idea, including Providence Mayor David N. Cicilline and Johnston Mayor Joseph M. Polisena. But it's apparent everyone is waiting to see how the initial school fares.

Pawtucket Mayor James E. Doyle, Central Falls Mayor Charles D. Moreau and Lincoln Town Administrator T. Joseph Almond all have endorsed the academy model, agreeing to send students to the Cumberland school when it opens. "We need to get the model off the ground," McKee said last week. "This is a watershed moment."

As planned, the mayoral academies would be a variation of a charter school, which is an autonomous, publicly funded school that isn't required to follow some of the rules and regulations that apply to conventional public schools, although they are required to pay prevailing wages to teachers and staff. Typically, charter schools are financed with a mix of state and local dollars.

In addition to those exceptions to public schools, the mayoral academies would differ in that the schools would not be required to pay teachers and administrators prevailing wages and would be free of the tenure system, allowing for flexibility in teaching methods and time. Teachers also would not participate in the state pension system.

Another difference: Mayors would take a leadership role in operating the academy, serving as chairperson to the school's governing board. The thinking is that mayors are more accountable to the public, McKee said, and they have better access to municipal resources to assist the school.

"This has opened up options that weren't on the table before," McKee said. Longer school days, longer school years, possibly Saturday educational activities – McKee said it's all under consideration since the academy will be unrestricted by labor contracts.

"We'll extend the learning opportunities," he said, noting that the school could develop solutions to the "learning loss" students experience during summer vacation. But he added that he has nothing specific in mind yet. "I'm not filling in the clean slate we're starting with," he said.

McKee has been working on the academies project with Bryan Hassel, director of Public Impact, a Chapel Hill, N.C.-based education research and consulting firm that drafted an initial policy report on mayoral academies for McKee in January. Also helping has been Martin West, a Brown University professor.

One of the first orders of business will be to assemble an interim board of directors in the coming weeks, McKee said.

In the meantime, McKee is focusing on raising the several thousand dollars he figures it will take to open each academy to cover the initial costs of books, desks and supplies, and to pay for leases.

McKee was scheduled to meet with representatives of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation in Quincy, Mass., last week. He already has met with the Los Angeles-based Broad Foundation and planned to fly to California for more extensive discussions.

Although he has also contacted The Rhode Island Foundation and The Champlin Foundations, McKee said he would prefer to attract money from a national source. "Our main focus will be outside dollars, rather than the same dollars that will get spread thinner," he said.

In a preliminary search for the right organization to run the school, McKee has talked with nonprofit agencies that operate innovative schools in other communities, including one that runs the Brooklyn Democracy Academy in New York City. But hiring an outside organization is a part of McKee's plan that upsets Marcia Reback, who complained that tax dollars would likely be going to an out-of-state group. "The amount of money the public is going to be paying will be the same, it's just going to be leaving the state," she said.

Reback said the RIFTHP has supported the creation of charter schools in the past but most pay their teachers prevailing wages. The fact that the mayoral academy won't have to pay those rates may lead to high turnover rates among the teachers. "These folks are going to be waiting for openings in public schools [where salaries are higher], then they will just leave," Reback said. "But if [government leaders] can get cheaper labor, why not do it?"

McKee has heard the complaints and brushes them off. He is running for re-election this year and has heard that the teachers union may assist his challenger. "[The complaints] are from those who are representing special interests: the teachers," he said. "They say, 'You're anti-union,' but it has nothing to do with that. It has to do with lifting up the education system, lifting up our community."

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### ScienceDaily

#### Passive learning imprints on the brain just like active learning

7.15.08

ScienceDaily Staff

It's conventional wisdom that practice makes perfect. But if practicing only consists of watching, rather than doing, does that advance proficiency? Yes, according to a study by Dartmouth researchers. They determined that people can acquire motor skills through the "seeing" as well as the "doing" form of learning.

"It's been established in previous research that there are correlations in behavioral performance between active and passive learning, but in this study we were surprised by the remarkable similarity in brain activation when our research participants observed dance sequences that were actively or passively experienced," says Emily Cross, the principal investigator and PhD student at Dartmouth. Cross, who earned her degree in June, is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, Germany.

Cross and her collaborators used a video game where players have to move in a particular sequence to match the position of arrows on the screen, similar to the

popular Dance Dance Revolution game. The researchers measured the skill level of participants for sequences that were actively rehearsed daily, and a different set of sequences that were passively observed for an equivalent amount of time. Brain activity when watching both kinds of sequences (as well as a third set of sequences that were entirely unfamiliar) was captured using fMRI, functional magnetic resonance imaging. The study focused on the Action Observance Network (AON) in the brain, a group of neural regions found mostly in the inferior parietal and premotor cortices of the brain (near the top of the head) responsible for motor skills and some memory functions.

"We collected fMRI data before and after five days of both visual and physical training," says Cross, "and there was common AON activity when watching the practiced and observed dance sequences."

This research contributes to a growing body of study about how people learn and how best to help people with brain injuries. Cross explains that future studies might consider how such overlap between physical and observational learning at the brain level can improve upon rehabilitation therapies for individuals affected by physical or neurological injury.

Cross's co-authors on the paper were David J. M. Kraemer, Antonia F. de C. Hamilton, William M. Kelley, and Scott T. Grafton, all currently or formerly associated with Dartmouth's Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. Kraemer is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, Hamilton is now on the faculty of the University of Nottingham's School of Psychology, Kelley is associate professor of psychological and brain sciences at Dartmouth, and Grafton is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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### **The Atlanta Journal-Constitution**

**These toys can stimulate young minds. Educational games, microscopes, dolls can help kids learn over the summer**

**7.15.08**

Jon Waterhouse

There's roughly a month before summer's dog days become back-to-school days, and, for parents concerned that their kids' brains are turning to mush due to TV and Game Boy overdoses, there may be hope.

And it comes from an unexpected source: toys — specifically educational ones, a growing niche amid the aisles of Bratz and Batman.

"We try to develop products with play aspects that are very apparent, and the education is an imbedded component in the play," says Mark Mallardi of toy manufacturer Educational Insights.

That's sneaky, but well-timed.

The Center for Summer Learning at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education cites research showing that most students fall more than two months behind in math over the summer.

Integrating a subject such as science into summer play time opens the door to both educational benefits and creativity, says Lisa Bradberry, science specialist at Fort Daniel Elementary in Dacula.

Bradberry suggests her students "do hands-on, minds-on [science] activities," at home, especially during summer. This could consist of simply going on a nature walk with a parent, fiddling with a magnifying glass or playing with a science-themed toy.

The science and discovery-related toys highlighted here are available at major toy retailers and on Web sites such as Amazon.com, except where noted.

- **Matchbox Mega Rig Shuttle Mission (Mattel, \$44.99):** Wannabe astronauts get a dose of building play, physics and sci-fi fun all in one. The Shuttle Mission set starts as one titanic space shuttle. Kids can break it down into 30 separate vehicles and create their own imaginative combinations. A pair of astronaut and space alien figures enhance things. The smaller Mega Rig Rover Mission (\$16) has a motorized feature. And interactive fun gets a boost — when a child stomps his or her foot on the plastic launcher, it fires a rocket into the air.
- **Monopoly: Planet Earth Edition (USAopoly, \$35.99):** This version of the classic real estate game, designed for ages 8 and older, is more concerned with Mother Nature than Mr. Monopoly. After all, it hit stores just before Earth Day. Based on the well-received BBC nature documentary "Planet Earth," the game blends dice-rolling entertainment with educational nuggets about environmental wonders. Forget the shoe and wheelbarrow — a polar bear, penguin and four other custom pewter pieces in the form of animals serve as replacements. And instead of Boardwalk and Park Place, you have the Gobi desert and the Himalayas. As a bonus, it includes a geography game. Appropriately, this edition's packaging is completely recyclable, a first for the manufacturer. Available at specialty retailers and online at [www.bbcamericashop.com](http://www.bbcamericashop.com) (search for item 14753).
- **3D Sidewalk Chalk (Crayola, \$4.99):** Science and art merge in this outdoor activity. Kits include five sticks of colored chalk and a pair of 3D glasses. Each hunk of chalk has a warmer color on one side, a cooler color on the other. Kids ages 4 and older draw the contrasting colors side-by-side on a paved surface, then slip on the glasses. The glasses cause the warm colors to float and the cool colors to recede, giving a 3D effect. Deluxe Activity Sets (\$9.99 each) come with eight pieces of chalk, a 7-ounce bottle of sidewalk paint, a brush and four stencils. Wild animal stencils come in the Jungle Safari set; fish, crabs and sealife in the Underwater Adventure set.
- **EyeClops BioniCam (Jakks Pacific, \$79.99):** The EyeClops Bionic Eye, a microscope that plugs into most TVs, was one of last year's hottest holiday toys. It's trying to top itself with the EyeClops BioniCam, a portable version with three levels of magnification, an LCD screen on the toy itself, and a built-in digital camera and flash drive allowing children to snap pictures and video of magnifications. Arriving in August; recommended for ages 8 and older.
- **GeoSafari Tyrannosaurus rex (Educational Insights, \$99.99):** Dinosaur lovers can create their own museum-quality version of the infamous T. rex. Snap together 30 parts and pose the dino in mid-stride on a faux rock base. The completed model stands more than 3 feet long from head to tail and 1 1/2 feet tall. Includes a color poster with blips of T. rex trivia. Available at specialty retailers and online at [www.educationalinsights.com](http://www.educationalinsights.com).

COMING THIS FALL

- Bindi Irwin dolls (Wild Republic, \$15-\$20): Bindi Irwin, the daughter of the late Steve "Crocodile Hunter" Irwin and star of the Discovery Kids series "Bindi the Jungle Girl," gets her own likeness in toy form. The toys tie in with the world Bindi shares with her family at the Australia Zoo. The 4-inch action figure sets feature wildlife locales such as underwater and in the Australian Outback. Each includes a figure, vehicle and accessories. The 10-inch talking dolls spout Earth-conscious sayings like "Crikey! Let's go help wildlife," in Bindi's voice.
- Discovery Channel toys (Jakks Pacific, \$4.99-\$69.99): The Discovery Kids Smart Animals line teaches tots about creatures. Each 3-inch animal figure has a covert barcode for kids to scan using the Discovery Kids Smart Animal Scanopedia (\$29.99). The scanner unlocks sound effects and animal trivia and questions. These can be placed in Smart Animal Green Scenes (\$17.99 each), mini gardenlike play sets with seeds that transform into grass and plants, some within three days of planting. Deluxe Smart Animals are larger animal figures (5 inches to 10 inches tall) with push-button sound effects and barcodes. Smart Animal figure packs cost \$4.99-\$12.99 each. The science and technology line includes a 2-in-1 Microscope (\$29.99), a plug-in-and-play TV Microscope and a Binotech Telescope (\$69.99) for bird-watching and landscape exploration.

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**The Wall Street Journal**  
**McCain's school choice opportunity**  
**7.15.08**

Clint Bolick (Op Ed)

Education is slipping in priority among many voters but not among Hispanics, many of whom see school choice as a deciding factor in whom to vote for this fall. This has implications for the presidential election.

A new poll shows that 82% of Hispanics consider education as one of three most important issues facing this country. The survey also shows that, even while Hispanics trust Democrats over Republicans on education by more than a two-to-one margin, that ratio could change if Republicans heavily promote school choice while Democrats oppose it.

The poll was conducted last year among more than 800 registered Hispanic voters for the Alliance for School Choice and the Hispanic Coalition for Reform and Educational Options, but never publicly released. It was conducted by two polling firms, The Polling Company (which works primarily for Republicans) and the Ampersand Agency, (which polls mostly for Democrats).

This survey found that although Hispanic voters generally consider public schools to be effective, they also favor, by a wide margin, school choice (defined as allowing parents a choice in whether to spend their children's education dollars in public or private schools).

Fifty-two percent of Hispanic voters have a favorable view of school choice, according to the poll, while only 7% had an unfavorable view. When asked about vouchers specifically, 32% expressed a favorable opinion compared to 13% unfavorable.

But where the poll really gets interesting is on school choice as an electoral issue: 65% of those surveyed reported that they would be more likely to support a candidate for office who supports school choice, including 35% who said they would be "much more likely." Only 19% said they would be less likely to vote for a pro-school choice candidate.

These numbers were high regardless of whether the person was of Mexican, Puerto Rican or Cuban descent. They also transcended party affiliation: 67% of Republicans, 70% of independents and 63% of Democrats preferring pro-school choice candidates. And 70% of those who prefer pro-school choice candidates -- including 66% of Democrats -- said they would cross party lines to vote for a candidate who supports school choice over one who opposes it.

Barack Obama has hinted at being open to serious education reform. Before the Wisconsin primary in February, he praised Milwaukee's highly successful school-voucher program. But, facing furious criticism from the establishment, which is disproportionately influential in Democratic politics, he backtracked.

John McCain has been a consistent supporter of school choice and passionately endorsed it during one of the Republican debates, although the issue is far from a mainstay of his campaign. His appointment of pro-school choice former Arizona Superintendent Lisa Graham Keegan as his campaign's top education adviser may signal a new emphasis.

Sen. Obama will count heavily on teachers' unions for support. The unions, though, have nowhere else to go. Hispanics do. If Mr. Obama opposes school choice, he will cede to his opponent a huge opportunity to make inroads among Hispanic voters -- if Sen. McCain seizes it.

Hispanic votes will be crucial in key battleground states, including Florida, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico. George W. Bush won 40% of Hispanic votes in 2004, but support slipped to 30% for GOP congressional candidates in 2006. Mr. Obama fared poorly among Hispanics in the presidential primaries, while Mr. McCain carried 74% of Hispanic votes when he won re-election to the Senate in 2004. All that adds up to this: Hispanics voting on school choice could tip the balance of the election.

Hispanic voters are overwhelmingly young and have exhibited a propensity toward political independence -- and no issue is more tangible for them than educational opportunity. If Hispanics align their voting with the educational interests of their children, it could alter the electoral landscape -- not merely for this election, but permanently.

Mr. Bolick is director of the Goldwater Institute Center for Constitutional Litigation and a research fellow with Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

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**The New York Times**  
**Crucial data on graduates is elusive**  
**7.15.08**

Elisa Gootman

The Class of 2008 has already tossed aside caps and gowns for swimsuits and tank tops. The Class of 2009 has begun dreaming of proms, diplomas and exit strategies.

But the public has yet to learn what percentage of New York State's Class of 2007 actually graduated from high school.

Blame the state's new data system, which is expected to cost \$39.4 million over six years. Tom Dunn, a spokesman for the state's Education Department, acknowledged that the system had been "not completely successful" in uploading and processing information from New York's 695 school districts. He said the move to a single data repository had "caused a number of problems."

"Those problems are being corrected now," Mr. Dunn said, adding that the state was in the process of verifying numbers with school districts and expected to release 2007 graduation rates by the end of the month. (Rates for 2008, he said, would be released in February.)

Of all the statistics that increasingly figure into public debate about schools, graduation rates are widely considered among the most crucial indicators of whether a system is working. They are watched with particular urgency in New York City, where the low but slowly climbing graduation rate was a contentious topic during the 2005 re-election campaign of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

For years, the city and state have used different criteria to calculate the graduation rate, and the discrepancy has caused tension among city and state officials and confusion among parents. In 2006, the state said that 50 percent of the city's seniors had graduated, while the city said 59 percent.

(The state announced 2006 graduation rates in April 2007 — just as the Class of 2007 was suffering late-stage senioritis.)

The new data system was supposed to resolve those differences, with officials in Albany and New York City agreeing to release a single number. Or, as it has turned out, to not release it for a long time.

"Asking the public to be patient here is simply not an answer," said Meryll H. Tisch, a member of the State Board of Regents, who described the delay as "frustrating and intolerable."

"I think the public should frankly demand more timely testing results and more timely graduation data," she said, "because, after all, they're being asked to invest an enormous amount of money in the system."

Ms. Tisch said she faulted the state's Education Department, some local school districts that failed to properly report their data, and McGraw-Hill, whose Grow Network subsidiary is responsible for part of the new data system and is expected to receive \$13.3 million over six years for that work.

Kelley Carpenter, a McGraw-Hill spokeswoman, said in a statement that the Grow Network was primarily responsible for the "reporting part of this system" but was "not involved in data entry and collection."

"We will continue to work with the state to generate reports as data is made available," she said.

David Cantor, a spokesman for the city's Department of Education, said the city had given the state the required information in a timely fashion. "Obviously, we'd have liked the numbers sooner," he said of the graduation rates, adding, "It's very tough

to run a data system of this size smoothly the first time.”

New York, which began creating the new data system several years ago, is among a number of states that have invested millions recently to computerize school information, to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind law and, more broadly, as part of an increased focus on educational accountability.

New York’s new system assigns every student in the state an identification number so they can be tracked throughout their educational careers, even if they switch schools or districts. The system keeps track of test scores and attendance as well as graduation numbers.

Mr. Dunn, the State Education Department spokesman, said that the problems leading to the late release of the graduation rates were not specific to McGraw-Hill’s Grow Network, but that the company had “a share” of responsibility.

“There’s just an enormous amount of new information that’s moving through here at all areas,” Mr. Dunn said. “The new volume has created challenges, from people having to fill out different forms to different verifications and all of the multiple steps involved.”

In an e-mail message to school superintendents this month, Jean C. Stevens, an associate state education commissioner, pointed a finger at school districts, saying that while calculating graduation rates, the state had identified many districts with possible data-reporting problems. “Many districts may have misreported graduates,” she wrote. “In some cases no graduates were reported.”

Betsy Gotbaum, the New York City public advocate, noted that the city Department of Education’s own \$80 million data system, developed by I.B.M. and called ARIS, has been criticized by principals and teachers as cumbersome and difficult to use, even as parents have questioned its hefty price tag.

“We have already seen with ARIS here in the city how expensive and flashy computer systems are turning out to be clunky and flawed,” Ms. Gotbaum said in a statement. “The longer we have to wait for these data systems to produce results, the more skeptical people become.”

Mr. Cantor said the city was improving ARIS. “While it did not come out of the box perfect,” he said, “we got an awful lot of information to a large number of people.”

Jane Hirschmann, the founder and a co-chairwoman of Time Out From Testing, an antitest group, said the information delay was “just typical” of how the city and state education departments “are spending our taxpayer money with absolutely no results.”

“It would be much better to put money in the classroom and keep track of what’s really important,” Ms. Hirschmann said. “This is the administration of testing and data collection. As far as parents are concerned, we don’t buy it. We don’t think our children are better because of it.”

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**The Washington Post**  
**Class struggle — Forget about the achievement gap**  
**7.15.08**

Jay Mathews (Op Ed)

I don't like talking about the achievement gap. The term has several meanings, none very useful to my mind. There is often a strained silence when I bring this up, since it sounds like I am on some crotchety rant against political correctness. But that is not what I mean. Thankfully, a new study is making my point for me, courtesy of Brookings Institution scholar Tom Loveless.

The achievement gap is usually defined as the difference in average test scores between students from affluent families and those from low-income families. Scholars also refer to achievement gaps between white and black students, or between Asian and white students on one side and black and Hispanic students on the other. But the data indicate family income and culture are more influential than ethnicity. Children born into poverty generally achieve much less in school than children born into the middle or upper classes.

Why don't I like talking about the achievement gap? Because we use the term in a way that suggests narrowing the gap is always a good thing, when that is not so. Here are some ways the gap could narrow: Low-income scores improve but high-income scores don't; low-income scores don't change but high-income scores drop; low-income scores drop but high-income scores drop even more. In each of those cases of gap-narrowing, something bad is happening.

In his analysis of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Loveless finds that a gap is narrowing because the scores of low-performing students are rising significantly but the scores of high-performing students are either flat or not rising much.

His findings are included in a new report, "High-Achieving Students in the Era of No Child Left Behind," by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Loveless and the Fordham experts focus more on the relatively slow progress of those high achievers than the wrong-headedness of the achievement gap concept, but they seem to acknowledge the two issues are related.

"The narrowing of test score gaps, although an important accomplishment," Loveless writes, should not "overshadow the languid performance trends of high-achieving students." He adds: "Their test scores are not being harmed during the NCLB era, but they are not flourishing either. Gaps are narrowing because the gains of low-achieving students are outstripping those of high achievers by a factor of two or three to one. The nation has a strong interest in developing the talents of its best students to their fullest to foster the kind of growth at the top end of the achievement distribution that has been occurring at the bottom end."

My theory is that we have unconsciously taken our concern about the income gap -- a lively issue in the last several years -- and adopted the same vocabulary when we worry about how our children are doing in school, even though making money and learning to read, write and do math are different enterprises. I can understand distaste for people who build 50-room mansions with gold bathroom fixtures. But can anyone learn too much? Wisdom tends to help everyone who comes in contact with it. Ski chalets in Aspen are less useful to those of us who can't afford them.

As usual, Loveless exposes intriguing relationships in the data that suggest better ways to treat the learning gap. He looks closely at high achievers and finds those who are black, Hispanic or low-income have different characteristics from their white,

high-income peers. Their schools are less likely to have the algebra courses that they are ready to take. But interestingly, their math teachers "appear as qualified to teach advanced courses as the teachers of high achievers as a whole," Loveless writes.

How can the high achievers rise as rapidly as the low achievers? Loveless suggests that Congress fund an experiment, as part of the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, to follow these students more carefully and create new opportunities, particularly for those who are disadvantaged. Rewards could be offered for improving the performance of those in already-high-achieving groups. Data could be collected and analyzed.

While we are at it, why not curtail all this achievement-gap talk? Let's focus instead on the progress of every child, no matter if she or he starts the year two grades behind classmates or two grades ahead. All children deserve a chance to climb as high as they can.

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**USA Today**  
**New Methods needed to revolution schooling**  
**7.15.08**

Clayton M. Christensen and Michael B. Horn

USA TODAY's article "Reading First program could be on its last legs" chronicled how Congress is cutting a federally funded, research-based program despite the fact that local school districts, where schooling actually occurs, tend to want it to remain in place (Life, July 2)

One might expect this to raise the profile of education in the presidential race, but we've heard little outcry from the candidates one way or the other.

A major poll by the Public Education Network came out recently and said education is slipping behind other concerns as an important issue to the public, even though more Americans believe that the nation's schools are getting worse. Where is the outrage?

Perhaps it's not there because people are concluding that although the problem is worsening, none of the traditional solutions bandied about really holds the answer. And how could we fault them? We've seen various fads, incremental solutions and bickering all before — and every time not much seems to change.

We need to break the mold. We need disruptive innovations to enter the education market and revolutionize the actual process of schooling.

Online learning is one such innovation that can alter the delivery of education to customize learning for each child.

Online learning is in the beginning stages of doing just this. But too few parents know about it, and they haven't seen a vision for how revolutionary it could be. Without this awareness, it's no wonder they aren't demanding true change for the nation's children.

**The New York Times**  
**Schools chancellor reaches into presidential contest**  
**7.15.08**

Elizabeth Green

As the city teachers union head, Randi Weingarten, enters the national scene by marking her first full day as president of the American Federation of Teachers, the city's schools chancellor is also reaching out beyond New York.

The Chancellor of the New York City schools, Joel Klein, at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Foundation 2008 scholarship winners' ceremony at New York on June 24. As part of Joel Klein's new Education Equality Project, the effort he kicked off last month with the Rev. Al Sharpton, the chancellor has been spending the summer break promoting to the presidential candidates his philosophy of how to improve public education.

He and Rev. Sharpton were in Chicago yesterday meeting with campaign staffers for Senator Obama.

Education Equality Project members have also met with Senator McCain's campaign, and Mr. McCain has told the group he is considering signing onto the project, a source with the group said.

A spokesman for Mr. McCain, Peter Feldman, did not say whether Mr. McCain would sign onto the project, but he did praise it: "Senator McCain applauds the efforts of the Education Equality Project and the commitment of New York's education officials to this effort. What these outstanding individuals understand and embody is the critical importance of strong leadership in education, not just at the administration level, but at the classroom level."

If Mr. McCain signs onto the project, he could do so as soon as tomorrow, when he is set to unveil a full education plan in a speech to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The Education Equality Project is a nonpartisan effort, and it would not endorse a candidate. But Mr. McCain's support would deliver a big boost to the project, which aims to promote certain kinds of education policies, such as the ability to fire ineffective teachers, accountability plans, and charter schools.

The pairing could be a natural next step for Mr. McCain, who has lately been sounding some notes in synch with Rev. Sharpton and Mr. Klein. In a speech to the National Council of La Raza's convention in California yesterday, Mr. McCain said he supports charter schools, efforts to "weed out" incompetent teachers, and plans to "hold schools accountable" for their results. He also called improving schools attended by poor students "the civil rights challenge of our time" — the same phrasing Mr. Klein often uses.

The New York Post yesterday reported that Mr. McCain built his education plan after consulting with Mr. Klein.

A signatory of the project, Jeb Bush, a former Florida governor, would not say whether Mr. McCain is signing onto the project for sure, but he did praise his stance on education.

"Senator McCain believes our schools should compete to be the most innovative, flexible and student-centered. He believes we should let them compete for the most effective, character-building teachers, hire them, and reward them," Mr. Bush said in a statement prepared for The New York Sun. "Under Senator McCain's leadership, I am confident we will build the world-class learning institutions needed to ensure our students will be competitive in the 21st century global economy."

A spokesman for Mr. Obama, Hari Sevugan, confirmed that the senator's staff met with Mr. Klein and Rev. Sharpton yesterday, saying Mr. Obama's staff also has met with "a large number of education thinkers."

A deputy chancellor to Mr. Klein who attended yesterday's meeting with Mr. Obama's staff, Christopher Cerf, said the project's effort to recruit political supporters is nonpartisan. "People are very interested in New York's successes, and we will talk to anybody about them," Mr. Cerf said. "The rest of the country understands all that we've done and is very impressed by it, and we share our philosophies and policies on a nonpartisan basis."

Ms. Weingarten was also in Chicago yesterday — being elected president of the national American Federation of Teachers, a title she will hold along with her position as president of the city union, the United Federation of Teachers.

Speaking at the union's national convention in Chicago, Ms. Weingarten yesterday laid out a vision for a revamped federal education law that would promote "community schools."

She said such schools would serve needy children by incorporating many government services into one building, services that do not just include schooling but medical care, child care, and homework assistance.

Speaking to reporters, Ms. Weingarten said she will begin her work lobbying for an overhauled education law as soon as tomorrow, when she expects to be in Washington, D.C.

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**Chicago Tribune**  
**New national chief of teachers union calls for full-service schools**  
**7.15.08**

Carlos Sadovi

The newly elected head of the nation's largest teachers union on Monday called on school districts nationwide to create community schools that would offer services to students and their families ranging from health care to recreation.

Speaking to about 3,300 conventioners at Navy Pier, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said minority students need the help to bridge the achievement gap between them and their white counterparts.

Weingarten, who was picked Monday to head the 1.4 million member union, called

on federal officials to draft legislation that would create schools that could offer "dental, medical and counseling clinics," along with other services.

"Can you imagine a federal law that promoted community schools: schools that serve the neediest children by bringing together under one roof all the services and activities they and their families need?" Weingarten said. Weingarten acknowledged she has not determined the cost of such schools or how many the nation needs.

She pointed, however, to Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., where the mayors control the local schools and she said they could get the money to pay for social services.

"We are trying to propose a new way of looking at schooling."

Chicago Public Schools officials said they support the idea.

They have been working to transform the district's schools into community centers that open beyond the traditional school day and offer services to neighborhoods, city schools spokesman Michael Vaughn said.

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### **The Plain Dealer (OH)**

#### **State schools superintendent candidates must be wooed, headhunter says 7.16.08**

Scott Stephens

The person who has the qualities to be the next state schools superintendent may not know it yet.

"The best person for the job may not know they want the job," headhunter Gary Hudepohl told members of the State Board of Education on Tuesday during a report on the search for Ohio's top education official. "They have to be wooed."

Hudepohl said his firm, the Worthington-based Hudepohl & Associates, soon will begin recruiting people it identifies as possible replacements for Susan Tave Zelman. Now in her 10th year, Zelman announced in May that she would be stepping down by year's end.

Candidates who apply for the job won't be ruled out, Hudepohl said, but the firm is also interested in shaking the bushes for qualified candidates not actively seeking the post.

"A lot of people feel that having experience as a superintendent is helpful, but we want to keep the window open for nontraditional people from business and elsewhere," said board President Jennifer Sheets of Pomeroy.

Serious candidates will have to meet a set of prerequisites. So far, the search firm has interviewed 54 people - Gov. Ted Strickland, legislative and business leaders, education groups, teachers union representatives and others - to help fashion a final list of those prerequisites.

Board members have expressed a desire to hire someone with strong Ohio ties who understands how the state - and Columbus - work.

They want someone with a strong vision of education, yet with good enough administrative skills to lead a department with 650 employees and an \$11 billion budget.

'We're looking for a visionary leader who can bring all the stakeholders together,' Sheets said. 'I'm very happy with the search firm so far. I'm impressed with their work.'

The board's search committee will meet at the end of next week to approve the wording of the official posting for the position. The position will be advertised in education trade journals.

Hudepohl told the board he'll know the level of interest in the position in four or five weeks.

He acknowledged that the person hired will have to have the ability to carry out a "shared vision" between the state board and Strickland.

Candidates interested in applying for the state superintendent's job can contact Hudepohl at 614-854-7300, or visit the firm's Web site at [hudepohl.com](http://hudepohl.com).

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**Los Angeles Times**  
**Trying to bridge the grade divide in L.A. schools**  
**7.16.08**

Hector Becerra

The eight students walked into a room at Lincoln High School prepared to discuss an issue many people, including some of their teachers, considered taboo.

They were blunt. Carlos Garcia, 17, an A student with a knack for math, said, "My friends, most of them say, 'You're more Asian than Hispanic.' "

"I think Carlos is Asian at heart," said Julie Loc, 17, causing Carlos to laugh good-naturedly. Asian students who get middling grades often get another response, she said.

"They say, 'Are you really Asian?' " Julie said.

"It's sad but true," said Eliseo Garcia, a 17-year-old with long rocker hair, an easy manner and good grades. "I had an Asian friend, but he didn't necessarily get that great a grades. We used to say, 'He's Mexican at heart.' "

What accounts for such self-deprecating humor? Or the uneven academic performance that prompts it?

The state's top education official, Supt. Jack O'Connell, called for that kind of discussion last fall when he decried the "racial achievement gap" separating Asian and non-Latino white students from Latinos and blacks.

At The Times' request, the Eastside students gathered to talk about this touchy subject.

Lincoln Heights is mostly a working-class Mexican American area, but it's also a first stop for Asian immigrants, many of them ethnic Chinese who fled Vietnam.

With about 2,500 students, Lincoln High draws from parts of Boyle Heights, El Sereno and Chinatown.

Both the neighborhood and student body are about 15% Asian. And yet Asians make up 50% of students taking Advanced Placement classes. Staffers can't remember the last time a Latino was valedictorian.

"A lot of my friends say the achievement gap is directly attributable to the socioeconomic status of students, and that is not completely accurate," O'Connell said. "It is more than that."

But what is it? O'Connell called a summit in Sacramento that drew 4,000 educators, policymakers and experts to tackle the issue. Some teachers stomped out in frustration and anger.

No Lincoln students stomped out of their discussion. Neither did any teachers in a similar Lincoln meeting. But the observations were frank, and they clearly made some uncomfortable.

To begin with, the eight students agreed on a few generalities: Latino and Asian students came mostly from poor and working-class families.

According to a study of census data, 84% of the Asian and Latino families in the neighborhoods around Lincoln High have median annual household incomes below \$50,000. And yet the Science Bowl team is 90% Asian, as is the Academic Decathlon team.

"Look at the statistics. It's true," said George De La Paz, 17, whose single mother works as a house cleaner.

Asian parents are more likely to pressure their children to excel academically, the students agreed.

"They only start paying attention if I don't do well," said Karen Chu, 15, whose parents emigrated from Vietnam. "They don't reward me for getting straight A's. I don't get anything for that. But if I get a B, they're like, 'What's this?'"

If her grades slipped, she said, her parents laid on the guilt extra thick. "My parents are always like, 'If you don't do well in school, then it's all going to be worth nothing,'" Karen said, laughing nervously.

Julie Loc, the daughter of a seamstress and a produce-truck driver, said that if she gets a B, her parents ask whether she needs tutoring. She said her father used to compare her to other people's children, noting their hard course loads or saying, "They have a 4.3 [grade-point average]. Why do you only have a 4.0?"

Julie said her mother, Kin Ho, finally told her father to stop making comparisons. Ho, in an interview, said with a slightly embarrassed smile, "My daughter has embraced American culture, where she expects my reassurance and approval. Our children, if

they did something well, they would ask us if we were proud of them, if they did good. They ask if we love them."

George said his mother, a Mexican immigrant, has high expectations for him too, but she is not so white-knuckled when it comes to school. She wants him to do well -- he's now thinking of college -- but the field of endeavor is up to him.

"She said, 'I came here to do better for you,' " he said. "But that's about it. Being happy and getting by, that's what she wants."

For Carlos Garcia, the one with the knack for math, the message from his parents was to focus on school. Neither got to finish grade school in their native countries.

His mother, Maribel, from El Salvador, is a homemaker; his father, Santos, a Mexican immigrant, is a drywall finisher who once took Carlos and his older brother to work with him -- to scare them away from manual labor. Two of their children have college degrees, one is still in college and Carlos, the only Latino on Lincoln's Academic Decathlon team, wants to attend Caltech.

Ericka Saracho, 16, an A student, said her Latino family did not push her to do well in school. When she got a rare B, "they're like, 'Oh, wow, Ericka finally got a B! How do you feel about that?'" she said. She is one of the few Latina students on Lincoln's Science Bowl team.

The students talked not just about parental expectations, but also about those of peers. Karen drew laughter when she said of other students, "They expect me to be smart. Even if, like, I do everything wrong on purpose, they still copy off of me -- as if I'm right just because I'm Asian."

She said expectations came into play in an even odder way in Lincoln High's hallways.

"In our school we have tardy sweeps, and normally the staff members let the Asians go," Karen said. "They don't really care if we're late."

The group, nodding, erupted into laughter. "They don't even ask them for a pass sometimes," George added.

"Generally speaking -- like it's stereotypical that Asians all do better -- I also think there's a stereotypical view that Asians are usually late," Julie said. "They'll come to school late, but they'll get to class and do their work."

This drew more laughter.

Many factors influence academic performance: class size, poverty, and school and neighborhood resources. But as the discussions at Lincoln show, expectations loom large.

Fidel Nava, a coordinator for English learners at Lincoln, said some Latino students say that Asians get higher grades simply because, well, they're Asian.

"In a sense, they have come to believe that it's OK for Asians to be smart and not for Hispanics," said Nava, who immigrated from Mexico at 14.

Nava, the only one of six siblings to go to college, said he was once like many of his

students. His parents wanted the children to finish high school, but there also was an expectation that they get jobs and help the family.

"A lot of my relatives don't see my job as a stressful job at all," Nava said. "If I tell them I'm tired, they say, 'Why? You're not doing any labor. You're not doing anything.' "

Rocio Chavez, 18, said that even though her older sister graduated from high school, their mother didn't really expect her to go to college.

"I guess she didn't expect that from me, either," Rocio said. "And now that I'm going to move on to college, she's kind of scared. She gets kind of sad I'm leaving. She's like, 'You're supposed to graduate from high school, go to work and help me out.' "

Frank D. Bean, a professor of sociology at UC Irvine's Center for Research on Immigration, Population and Public Policy, has studied the Mexican work ethic and found that work and education occupy the same pedestal, and in some cases, work is even more valued.

Bean said his research shows that children of Latino immigrants, if they drop out of school, are more likely to be working than most other students who leave school.

"In Latino families, being able to work to provide defines your manhood, your worthiness," said Min Zhou, a UCLA sociology professor who has studied working-class Korean and Chinese communities.

Latino and Asian families in Lincoln Heights were essentially in the same socioeconomic boat, she said, but Asian immigrants were more likely to have been more affluent and had better education opportunities in their native countries.

Of course, there are exceptions to stereotypes at Lincoln. "My mom just wants me to pass," said Thin Lam, 17.

But Thin said counselors assumed he wanted to take a slew of AP classes, and a counselor urged him to take AP calculus.

"I said, 'Yeah, sure, I want to take it,' " he said. "In the end, I dropped it."

A few hours after the eight students concluded their discussion, some teachers gathered in Principal James Molina's office.

"I feel a little bit uncomfortable talking about racial and ethnic generalizations," said Cynthia High, a 20-year teaching veteran now in charge of teachers' aides and other programs.

"In some situations, it sparks a good conversation. In others, it's more taboo-ish to talk about it," said William Olmedo, who teaches AP physics.

Barbara Paulson, who coordinates Lincoln's magnet program and teaches AP biology, said it had been understood for a long time that teachers needed to try harder to recruit Latino students for AP classes because "the Asian kids come on in droves."

Gilbert Martinez, who teaches AP government, said he didn't think the school did as good a job as it could to raise expectations among Latino students and to get them into AP classes.

"But I do," Paulson said.

"I'm not saying you, Barbara. I'm saying all over."

Olmedo said many capable Latino students refused to take AP classes or join other academically rigorous activities.

Teachers said they were saddened by self-defeating attitudes.

"I think the thing I always hear from the Latino kids is, 'Oh, well, Miss, he's Asian, she's Asian. Of course they do well,' " said Alli Lauer, who teaches English. "It's frustrating to hear them do it to each other."

But as one student said in a separate interview, many Latino students are responding to cues. Johana Najera, 17, said the Academic Decathlon offers a not-so-subtle cue about who belongs.

"We already know that it's Asian, and they kind of market it more for Asians," Najera said. She noted that the shirts for the Academic Decathlon team have a logo done in the style of anime, Japanese animation. "It appeals more to Asian students," she said.

Martinez turned the conversation toward parents' attitudes, summarizing a discussion from one of his Chicano studies classes.

"Let's say a Latino student is studying and an Asian student is studying," Martinez said. "The Latino parent will often say, 'Hey, come help me out real quick, then you can go back to your studying.' Where the Asian parent will say, 'Oh, you're doing your homework. OK, you finish, and then after you're done, you come help me.' "

High recalled a good Latino student she had a few years ago. He also was a gang member.

"He would wear baggy pants, and he would load up his pants with books," she said. "He looked around to make sure no one was seeing him so he could look like the baddest kid in the block."

The teachers were then asked about tardy sweeps, the topic the students had found so amusing. Was it true that Asians could wander outside class without a hall pass?

"My Asian kids laugh at that," Olmedo said. "I say, 'Take the pass.' They say, 'I'm Asian. Who's going to ask an Asian student for a pass?' "

"Oh, you're kidding!" High said with a gasp.

"I'll send one of my [Latino] boys out just to get water, and here comes the security, 'Please make sure you send him out with a pass,' and I'll say I will," Olmedo continued. "And the Asian kid will walk around the whole campus, the whole day, the whole week, for a whole month!"

Don Brewer, an English teacher, said some Latino students were allowed to slide by without hall passes, including athletes and others involved in school activities.

"But you know," Brewer said, "when you're looking down the hall and you see that

one kid pop out, you go, 'OK, he's Asian. I can go back in.' You know, I think that happens. It's obvious it happens."

High shook her head. "But I must say I don't feel comfortable with that. And if we're doing that, that's not OK. That's just not OK."

"Oh, it's happening," Olmedo said. "It's happening."

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**San Jose Mercury News**  
**A new tool for comparing schools**  
**7.16.08**

Edwin Garcia

SACRAMENTO - The state of California will give parents one-stop shopping starting today to compare neighborhood schools' performance on everything from test scores to graduation rates to student demographics.

The Department of Education's new Web site, [www.schoolfinder.ca.gov](http://www.schoolfinder.ca.gov), will gather at least 18 comparisons between schools that the state had only made available until now through a variety of pages and links. 'You can view a school's academic rating, graduation and dropout rates, teacher-to-student ratio, and how much money each school receives per student,' Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger says in a video message on the site. 'It is an important tool in improving transparency and accountability in our education system.' Schwarzenegger will unveil the site at a news conference this morning with Education Secretary David Long and Chief Information Officer Teri Takai.

The site's main page allows users to look up categories of schools - from elementary schools to juvenile hall - by city, address or ZIP code.

Information from up to three schools can be compared, side by side. 'It's something we're getting used to doing on commercial sites, where we can compare vacuum cleaners and toasters, but I don't know where government has utilized that approach,' said Takai, who is leading an effort to modernize the state's use of mapping technology.

Long expects the site will be a useful tool for families moving from one district to another, 'so Advertisement they can make sound decisions for their children and grandchildren.' A number of private companies offer a similar service, including Redwood City-based Education.com, which hosts an advertising-supported school finder for all 50 states.

That firm's chief executive, Ronald Fortune, said his company's Web site even permits parents to rate schools. Fortune said his firm's research found that 4 million parents a month are moving, or in transition, and looking for information about neighborhood schools.

The state site, which is free of advertising, was built through a partnership involving Google and Microsoft.

**Associated Press**  
**McCain pledging NAACP more education options**  
**7.16.08**

Devlin Barrett

CINCINNATI (AP) — John McCain is telling the NAACP he will expand education opportunities for children in failing schools.

McCain, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, on Wednesday is addressing the annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the nation's oldest civil rights organization.

In excerpts released in advance of the speech, McCain says that the worst educational problems in the country are often found in schools in black communities and that as president he will provide greater school choices and scholarships for such students.

McCain also asks the group to excuse his absence from their convention last year, saying he was "a bit distracted" dealing with his then-faltering presidential campaign.

"If I am elected president, school choice for all who want it, an expansion of opportunity scholarships and alternative certification for teachers will all be part of a serious agenda of education reform," McCain said in the excerpts.

"After decades of hearing the same big promises from the public education establishment, and seeing the same poor results, it is surely time to shake off old ways and to demand new reforms," he said. "That isn't just my opinion. It is the conviction of parents in poor neighborhoods across this nation who want better lives for their children."

Ahead of the speech, campaign aides expected the Arizona senator to touch on his support for expanding merit-pay programs for teachers who improve students' performance and more money for tutoring poor kids.

The national teachers' unions oppose linking student test scores to teacher pay. McCain's rival for the presidency, Democrat Barack Obama, supports the idea when teachers help negotiate and craft the merit-pay plans.

Last week, aides to McCain said he would increase the choices kids have when they are in schools that are failing to meet academic benchmarks and that he would support a school voucher program for poor children in failing schools under some circumstances.

Such vouchers are generally supported by conservatives and opposed by many Democrats.

Republicans have had a tough time winning the votes of African-Americans, and it is only getting tougher this year with Obama trying to become the first black president of the United States.

Obama spoke to the NAACP on Monday, saying he would push the government to provide more education and economic assistance, but he also urged blacks to demand more of themselves.

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**ABC News/AP**  
**Sharpen your...laptops? The new school supplies**  
**7.16.08**

Melissa Rayworth (AP)

*New glue review: The lowly school supply gets 21st-century makeover with high tech and design*

Hand sanitizer. USB flash drive. Magenta Sharpie. Clean socks. Quick — what do they have in common?

Answer: They're probably going to be in your kid's pencil case when fall comes around.

Long home to an unchanging bunch of yellow No. 2 pencils and thick pink erasers, the pencil case has gotten a makeover. Thanks to the onslaught of kid-focused marketing and the growing presence of technology in children's lives, those perennial favorites have become so last semester.

School-supply basics face competition from a growing array of products tricked out in bright colors and camo prints or plastered with the likeness of everyone from Spider-Man to those ubiquitous kids from "High School Musical."

The function of these supplies hasn't changed. Kids need to write and have things to write upon. They need to transport work to and from home. And they need tools for creative projects. But where the pencil case itself was once the canvas for self-expression and coolness, today the tools inside play that same fetish-object role. "It's fair to say there will always be room for a No. 2 pencil," says Target spokesman Joshua Thomas. "But what's happening is that these classic back-to-school supplies are evolving.

In addition, the list of supplies considered vital has grown, says Barb Kapinus, senior policy analyst for the National Education Association. Items that didn't exist when most of today's parents were climbing aboard school buses — tiny, portable hard drives and scented hand sanitizer — now make the list in many places. Whether teachers send home exhaustive wish lists or ask only for simple supplies, shopping lists have grown in school districts around the country, says Jennifer Olsen, assistant professor of education at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C., and mother of two school-agers. Retailers add further fuel by offering their own exhaustive back-to-school shopping lists, broken down by age group from preschool through college. Here are some items that will probably be tucked inside pencil cases (which now come in an eco-friendly variety made from recycled juice boxes) across the country this fall:

- —Writing tools: Pens and No. 2 pencils come in a mind-numbing variety of styles aimed at school-age kids (think pencils emblazoned with motivational phrases like "Great Job!" and pens topped with tiny screens that scroll through images of Hannah Montana). They may also need washable crayons,

colored pencils, washable markers, highlighters, dry erase markers and permanent markers. (Even those utilitarian Sharpies, long used by moms to write kids' names in their gym shorts, have become cool — now endorsed by soccer god David Beckham, Sharpies in shades such as lime or magenta can be personalized with a student's name, catchphrase or clip art.)

- Cut and paste: Classic bottles of Elmer's Glue are still popular, but glue sticks are also in demand. Scissors (the ones you weren't supposed to run with) are still a must, but they've gotten a facelift, too. Now, says Olsen, "they have left handed or other special scissors to help kids master cutting."
- Doing the numbers: Calculators, restricted by some schools, come in a huge range of styles and capabilities, from cute pink ones for basic math to graphing calculators for trigonometry. Compasses, protractors and rulers are still around. But even those have been tweaked — Office Depot offers a flexible ruler and protractors come in vivid hues.
- Data devices: Spiral notebooks and loose-leaf paper aren't the only methods for recording information and transporting work to and from school anymore. Flash drives (also known as jump drives) and CDs can be a necessity for older students. Index cards and post-it notes also make many must-have lists.
- Germ battling: Are schools more germier than they were a generation ago? Parents seem to think so — or marketers have convinced them it's better to be safe than sorry. Hand sanitizer, hand wipes and packages of tissues are now standard issue.
- Unusual elements like clean socks (for erasing white boards) and zip-top plastic bags (for bringing things home) make many lists as well.

It's hard to know whether the trendiest school supplies will help kids focus on their work or serve as a distraction. Some districts advise against anything but the plainest supplies. But the NEA's Kapinus believes in using "this whole celebration of starting a new school year" with new school supplies to reinforce the importance of learning.

What is clear is that the pressure on parents to buy a slew of slickly designed supplies shows no sign of lagging, despite difficult economic times nationwide. In the back-to-school area at Target, says Thomas, "literally, it seems limitless what you can find, what you can do with a pencil box."

Bill Jackson, president of the nonprofit parents' advisory group GreatSchools.net, says parents struggling with lengthy lists "shouldn't feel the pressure to have to keep up with the Joneses with this stuff. ... Whether they bring the brand name pencil or crayon is less important than whether they bring their kid generally prepared for school."

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**Education Week**  
**Challenges steep in rural settings**  
**7.16.08**

Linda Jacobson

**Brief Summary:** This *Education Week* article highlights the release of "Strategies for Improving Out-of-School Programs in Rural Communities" by Washington-based research organization Child Trends. According to the article, the research brief highlights the realities facing rural programs as well as provides recommendations

for improving them. To view the Child Trends research brief, visit:  
[http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2008\\_05\\_05\\_RB\\_RuralOST.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2008_05_05_RB_RuralOST.pdf)

Education Week *is a paid subscription publication. Please visit [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org) to access the article.*

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### **San Francisco Chronicle** **24% of high-schoolers likely to drop out** **7.17.08**

Nanette Asimov

Nearly 1 in 4 California students will drop out during high school, state educators said Wednesday, basing their prediction on what they said is the most accurate information about student attendance they've ever collected.

Using a new student-tracking system, state educators found that 127,292 high school students in ninth through 12th grade quit school during the 2006-07 school year. That means 24 percent of incoming freshmen won't stay in school long enough to graduate, researchers said, assuming that pace remains steady.

"The dropout rate is a crisis," state schools chief Jack O'Connell said as he released the new data, which show tens of thousands of African American and Latino students abandoning school at far higher rates than other ethnic groups. "Schools will now be held publicly accountable for finding out what happened to students."

The new dropout rate is far higher than the 13 percent educators had earlier estimated using less-sophisticated counting methods they had relied on for years. "I was quite shocked at how many students are falling through the cracks," said O'Connell. "The dropout crisis is a statewide crisis."

Using its new "Statewide Student Identifier System," the state Education Department has given every student a unique and anonymous identification number. With that, schools can track the whereabouts of missing students for the first time and learn whether students are truly absent without leave or whether they are somewhere legitimate.

Did they leave the state? Join a homeschool? Die? The new system recognizes 29 kinds of student invisibility, 10 of which are counted as dropouts, including "expelled."

One stunning fact learned from the new system was that 53,600 students who said they were transferring to a new school last year never actually showed up.

Another is that the state now knows for the first time that there were 4,609 dropouts who completed all graduation requirements but one: the mandatory exit exam. "Today, we have the tools for the first time to report the rates with a much greater degree of accuracy than in the past," O'Connell said.

The superintendent said that having a more accurate picture of the fate of the missing students will help the state target its anti-dropout expenditures more wisely. Many African American and Latino students could use that help.

Earlier estimates suggested that 10,000 black students would quit. But the expected number is nearly twice as high: 19,440.

For Latinos, the estimate was 37,716 dropouts. The actual number is estimated at 69,035.

These figures translate into astronomical dropout predictions over the next four years: 42 percent for black students and 30 percent for Latinos.

"It's high time we started telling the truth about these numbers," said Russlynn Ali, executive director for Education Trust West, an Oakland group working to raise achievement for students of color. "Federal and state accountability systems don't ask us to do much about changing these numbers. We need to set ambitious targets for all students to increase graduation rates."

California's dropouts cost the state \$50 billion per year, said incoming state Senate leader Darrell Steinberg, a Sacramento Democrat who quoted studies showing that over their lifetimes those who quit are more likely to be unemployed, turn to crime, need state-funded medical care, get welfare and pay no taxes.

Fixing the problem "is our most important economic strategy in California," he said. Bay Area dropout rates vary widely by school district, but three have rates far higher than the 24 percent state average: Oakland Unified (37 percent), West Contra Costa Unified (40 percent), and Vallejo City Unified (42 percent).

"Clearly, a 42-percent dropout rate is unacceptable for an educational institution," said Vallejo schools spokesman Jason Hodge.

In San Francisco, 1,052 high school students quit last year. Based on that, researchers believe that 21 percent of entering freshmen will quit before earning a diploma.

Superintendent Carlos Garcia pointed to numerous existing programs intended to reduce dropouts, but several appeared scant: The district has but 15 "outreach consultants" and seven "attendance liaisons" who make home visits, and just one "stay-in-school coordinator" for high-needs students.

However, the district has a "transition program" to help students who are changing schools and programs. State Superintendent O'Connell said the data show that students in transition are most at risk for dropping out.

The new statewide report shows that 351,035 students in the class of 2007 earned a diploma, or 68 percent.

But what happened to everyone else? That's always been the "million-dollar question," said Russ Rumberger, a professor at UC Santa Barbara who has tracked dropouts as director of the privately funded California Dropout Research Project. Rumberger said he is pleased that the new student ID system gives educators a better spyglass than ever on the whereabouts of missing students.

Not all are dropouts. About 8 percent are "completers" who neither dropped out nor earned a diploma.

Included in that 8 percent are 770 students who died. Nearly 5,000 graduated - but because they were disabled and used modifications to help them pass the exit exam

or were exempted from taking it, they earned a certificate of completion rather than a diploma. Nearly 62,000 students moved out of state. And many others entered a medical facility or took a high school equivalency test.

### Projected number of S.F. dropouts

A new student ID system let school officials see for the first time how many students in the 2006-07 school year quit school without enrolling anywhere else or having another legitimate reason for not showing up. Based on those numbers, state education officials calculated what percent of incoming freshmen would drop out before completing high school. Here are figures for San Francisco high schools (alternative schools are excluded because enrollment is transient by design):

School	Enrollment	% dropouts
Leadership High	331	46%
International Studies Academy	421	30
Mission High	864	25
John O'Connell Alternative High	819	23
Balboa High	1,098	23
Thurgood Marshall High	642	19
Raoul Wallenberg Traditional H	647	19
Galileo High	2,224	18
Phillip and Sala Burton Academy	1,338	17
Abraham Lincoln High	2,343	15
June Jordan School for Equity	371	13
George Washington High	2,306	13
School of the Arts	806	11
Gateway High	453	4
Lowell High	2,671	1

### Bay Area school districts

Based on actual dropout figures for 2006-2007, state education officials calculated the percent of incoming freshmen expected to drop out before completing high school. Here are the dropout rates for selected Bay Area school districts:

County	District	% dropouts
Solano	Vallejo City Unified	42.1%
Contra Costa	West Contra Costa Unified	40
Alameda	Oakland Unified	37
Contra Costa	Mt. Diablo Unified	22
San Francisco	San Francisco Unified	21
Alameda	Hayward Unified	19
Santa Clara	San Jose Unified	13
San Mateo	Jefferson HSD	12
Marin	Novato Unified	9

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**The Washington Post**  
**A school where one size doesn't fit all**  
**7.17.08**

Jay Mathews

Growing up in Montgomery County, graduating summa cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania and getting a law degree from Harvard, Alan M. Shusterman had been called brilliant but didn't feel that great. He got a job in corporate law with a large Boston firm, but that didn't work for him, either.

Gradually, he realized he wanted to teach children. After three years introducing middle-schoolers at Sandy Spring Friends School to social studies, he decided on his life's work: starting a school like none the Washington area has ever seen.

Shusterman, 43, has assembled a board of advisers, found 15,000 square feet of commercial space a mile southeast of the White Flint Metro station and begun to recruit students for the private School for Tomorrow, scheduled to open in September 2009.

Shusterman plans to start with about 50 students in sixth through ninth grades and expand through 12th grade. He said he expects to charge about \$25,000 a year in tuition, the typical amount for independent schools in the Washington area, but the schedules and lessons will be radically different.

"The model is inspired by the success of home-schoolers," he said. Students will set their class schedules, enabling them to learn at their pace and in their styles. Teachers will act as advisers, not taskmasters.

As for homework, "the one-size-fits-all [model] mandated in today's schools is largely counterproductive," Shusterman says in a slide presentation he uses to sell his idea. School for Tomorrow will have a home reading requirement and "encourage and support individualized, student-initiated homework."

Much of Shusterman's plan is inspired by John Dewey, a 20th-century educational philosopher whose devotees have called for teachers to be "guides on the side, not sages on the stage." Dewey led a movement called progressive education in which, he said, children learn best when pursuing individual projects that allow them to explore their world.

Many teachers, in both private and public schools, use project-based learning to a degree. But at School for Tomorrow, Shusterman said, every course and project will be linked to this question: What does a high school graduate need to know and need to be able to do to thrive in college, the workplace and life in the 21st century?

Old divisions are to be discarded, he said. Students will ally with teachers to decide what and how to study. Subjects such as math and science might be studied together when it makes sense. Class periods won't necessarily adhere to strict time frames as students take large chunks of time for individual or group projects. Students of different ages will work together and learn from each other.

Shusterman said he developed his ideas for the student-centered system during four years of research, which included home-schooling his daughter when she was in fourth grade in 2006-07. She and his two sons are looking forward to "going to Dad's school," he said.

Shusterman said that he has found some teachers who share his view of educators as coaches and that he is looking for more. He said he is recruiting students mostly in Montgomery County and the District but is welcoming applications from elsewhere.

The school plan says there will be "widespread use of parents and community members" who will be trained to volunteer as mentors and sources of expertise.

Like all private school founders, Shusterman is spending a lot of time raising money. Many teachers with his ambitions start charter schools, because, as public institutions, they receive tax dollars for support. But Shusterman said he wants to avoid the limitations and red tape that taking government money would put on his ability to do what he wants.

Launching an independent, private school is something few in the region have done in recent years. Elizabeth Downes, executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington, said that 11 schools have joined her private group in the past eight years, two of which were recent start-ups.

Shusterman said he hopes his school will set an example. It is important, he said, to serve "as a model for others with the long-term goal of causing widespread change in American secondary education, both private and, more importantly, public."

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### **U.S. News & World Report – On Education (Blog) Education reformers tackle NCLB flaws 7.17.08**

Eddy Ramirez

Several urban education leaders testified during a congressional hearing in Washington this week about key reforms that are helping their troubled school systems narrow the achievement gap. The panel included New York City schools Chancellor Joel Klein and D.C. public schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee, two mayor-appointed leaders whose work turning around failing inner-city schools is being closely watched by educators around the country. They were joined by their bosses and the mayors of their respective cities, Michael Bloomberg and Adrian Fenty, as well as the leaders of the Atlanta and Chicago public school systems.

There were few, if any, surprises during the testimony phase. But when the discussion turned to what can be done to improve the No Child Left Behind law, Klein and Arne Duncan, the chief executive officer of Chicago public schools, ripped on one of the unintended consequences of the law: the dumbing down of state curriculum standards. "I know this is hard for you to hear Chairman [George] Miller, but we need national standards and national assessments," Klein said. He pointed out that the country needs an accurate and uniform way to measure how students are doing across states and against students from other developed and emerging economies. For every state to have its own set of standards, Duncan added, "just doesn't make any sense." Miller, who has called for more rigorous standards but resisted federal intervention, didn't respond to Klein's challenge.

Rhee offered another idea to improve NCLB that has also been highly contentious: tying teacher pay to student outcomes. As the head of the only school district in the nation that has fallen into "high-risk" status with the federal government for its dismal performance, Rhee is trying to narrow the achievement gap by getting rid of ineffective teachers and using bonuses to encourage the best ones to work in challenging schools. Ultimately, she wants to evaluate teachers based on test scores and other measures of student performance. Teacher unions have traditionally resisted using test scores to compensate teachers. Again, the response from lawmakers was silence. But they promised to take their advice into consideration when a revised version of NCLB comes for a vote. Klein injected a sense of urgency toward the end of the discussion when he said, "The clock is ticking."

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**Baltimore Sun**  
**McCain supports vouchers**  
**7.17.08**

Kelly Brewington

Appearing before some of his presidential rival's most ardent supporters, Sen. John McCain urged delegates to the NAACP convention yesterday to support school vouchers as a way to improve education in largely black, underperforming school systems.

McCain acknowledged that he will have difficulty making inroads among black voters. But he used his speech to the Baltimore-based civil rights organization to criticize the education views of his Democratic opponent, Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, and to argue that the country needs to move away from "conventional thinking" with regard to public schools.

"Senator Obama dismissed public support for private school vouchers for low-income Americans as 'tired rhetoric about vouchers and school choice,'" said McCain, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. "All of that went over well with the teachers union, but where does it leave families and their children who are stuck in failing schools?"

The Arizona senator pledged to offer bonuses to teachers working in the most troubled schools and expand scholarship opportunities for low-income students in struggling areas.

"For all the best efforts of teachers and administrators, the worst problems of our public school system are often found in black communities," he told nearly 3,000 members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People gathered at its 99th annual convention.

McCain received a polite, somewhat sedate reception - with only a smattering of applause for his education plan. It was in sharp contrast to the frenzied welcome that Obama, the first black to win a major-party nomination for president, received here Monday evening.

Before McCain took the stage, no giant lines snaked out of the convention center. No giddy supporters in McCain T-shirts, buttons or placards could be seen, and no "amens" were uttered from the crowd.

By coming to the NAACP, McCain was not expecting to change the minds of many black voters, experts said.

Rather, he was shifting his message to the center.

"It might help him with moderate white voters," said Merle Black, a political science professor from Emory University. "McCain is not showing up there to increase significantly African-American support for his campaign; it's more a sign of respect for the organization."

"This was the first time there has ever been an African-American major party nominee for president - that is the story," said David Bositis, senior research associate for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. "There is only one candidate this year. And John McCain isn't that candidate."

Nevertheless, McCain praised Obama as "an impressive fellow in many ways" who has inspired many Americans.

"His success should make Americans, all Americans, proud," McCain said.

McCain noted that while past civil rights battles focused on "equal protection under law," the challenge now is to increase educational opportunities for blacks.

"After decades of hearing the same big promises from the public education establishment and seeing the same poor results, it is surely time to shake off old ways and to demand new reforms," he said. "That isn't just my opinion; it is the conviction of parents in poor neighborhoods across this nation who want better lives for their children."

The NAACP has taken a strong stance against school vouchers, arguing that they take vital resources from public schools and abandon minority students.

Nat LaCour, an NAACP member from Greenbelt, said McCain's education plan was "completely off-base."

"We all want to improve public schools, but we don't think that the way he wants to address it is the way to go," said LaCour, who retired this week as secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers.

Other NAACP members said they appreciated parts of McCain's message.

"I agree with him that there is a huge disparity when it comes to education," said Marsha Lathion, of Ypsilanti, Mich. "I'm not for school vouchers, but I agree that teachers really need more support. ... Frankly, I was surprised at the crowd in the room. I didn't expect to see as many people."

McCain said that even if he does not gain the support of most NAACP members, he will need the organization's "good will and counsel."

He also did something Obama didn't: answer questions from the audience.

He appeared relaxed and conversational during a 12-minute exchange.

McCain received huge applause for his response to a question about how he would

reform the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is widely blamed for its response to flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina.

"The tragedy and injustice of New Orleans can never happen again," McCain said. "It will remain a national disgrace until the American people have the confidence that it will never happen again."

After the question-and-answer period, he stepped into the audience, shaking hands and posing for photos with a swarm of NAACP members.

Evelyn Foxx of Gainesville, Fla., was one of them.

She was eager to meet the candidate and called McCain's Q&A "awesome."

But, she said, it wasn't enough to change her vote.

"I have no faith in the Republican Party," said Foxx, wearing an Obama button on her shirt. "America is in its worst state in my 57 years. The economy is terrible, banks are failing. The Republicans made a mess of things."

Willis Edwards, an NAACP board member from Los Angeles, said of McCain: "We invited him to be our guest, and we want to hear what he has to say. We are happy that he came."

At the NAACP's convention last year in Detroit, Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado was the only Republican candidate to show.

President Bush has had a rocky relationship with the NAACP through much of his administration, addressing the NAACP only during his 2000 campaign and at the group's 2006 convention.

McCain apologized for skipping the NAACP's convention last year, noting campaign troubles.

But he thanked the organization for its invitation this year and praised civil rights veterans.

He recalled that he was a prisoner of war in Vietnam when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968, feeling "perhaps even more uncertain and alarmed for my country" in captivity.

In April, on the 40th anniversary of King's death, McCain said he had made a mistake in opposing a federal holiday to mark King's birthday, but he noted that he realized his mistake and later backed a state holiday in Arizona to honor King.

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## **The Tennessean**

### **Quality after-school plan could help solve district's ills**

**7.17.08**

Editorial Board

Our View

No single program in a revamped Metro school system is going to make the difference in turning a district from its troubled state into a top-notch district. But an after-school proposal may become one of the key links to getting Metro schools on track.

As the city weighs options for its public school system, it cannot escape the current chaotic atmosphere brought on by a vote on a rezoning plan from a divisive school board meeting last week. That vote, 5-4, was to approve a plan heavily designed to create more neighborhood schools. The situation might normally suggest the vote is over, the decision made, no turning back, and now it's time to move ahead, considering proposals like an after-school program such as the one Mayor Karl Dean's task force on graduation has offered.

But the simple fact is that the recent school board vote has left open wounds in the community. Many honorable Nashvillians fear the ramifications of that rezoning vote and believe it will result in resegregated schools. The vote might have sealed a neighborhood school plan, but it also left a bitter taste that city leaders cannot ignore. On top of all that, any new proposals now meant to deal with graduation rates have to be viewed through the prism that includes state oversight of Metro schools under the No Child Left Behind law; the fact an Aug. 7 election will change the makeup of the school board; and the fact that Metro is in the process of hiring a new schools director. To say that matters are unsettled in Metro schools is an understatement.

School leaders must come to terms with the objections to the rezoning plan, because the concerns are too deep and too relevant to ignore. But if somehow along the way Metro can manage to implement and demonstrate some promising programs that can genuinely help Metro students, the city should proceed with those plans when possible. The after-school proposal is a good example.

The task force working on graduation points out that many youth programs exist but are often independent and disconnected. It has determined that middle schools are where the greatest impact of after-school programs can be realized. It calls for a comprehensive database to be developed on after-school programs and that an organized system of activities be created. The concept is rooted in the valid principle that keeping kids occupied in positive activities after school is an effective way of preventing them from dropping out. To the extent it can, Metro should be trying to establish such programs as soon as possible.

One of the most telling observations of student interests came recently from Hal Cato, executive director of the not-for-profit Oasis Center and a member of the graduation task force, who noted how many students hang out at a library after school, surfing the Internet. That's a strong indication that students will respond in positive ways if opportunities are provided for them. The potential is unlimited for what quality after-school programs can do. After-school activity doesn't have to mean just playing basketball.

It is also notable that the task force calls for the school system to develop a transportation system that would assist students who are interested in after-school programs. That would seem to bring the issue full circle to the discussion of neighborhood schools. Transportation is a vital element. But at the same time, it does not mean students' choices should be locked in to a specific activity at a specific location. As multifaceted as every family's life has become, Metro can find ways to make after-school programs work in ways that might not follow conventional thinking. All it takes is the strong will to make good ideas work.

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**Sacramento Bee**  
**High dropout rate puts California's future in peril**  
**7.18.08**

Betty T. Yee

California is failing our next generation as the doors shut for our young people to have a shot at a good quality of life.

Few would disagree with the notion that the state's competitive edge depends on a highly educated, highly skilled work force. However, California's investment in public education is woefully inadequate to meet this challenge, failing to provide the necessary support to reduce the high school dropout rate and to fulfill the promise of college for every eligible student.

This week, state educators predicted 24 percent of California students will drop out during high school. The dropout rates are alarming for African American and Latino students – 42 percent and 30 percent, respectively. While these figures are based on the most accurate student attendance data collected by the Department of Education, they certainly are not the first indication that California's public education system is in crisis.

According to the California Dropout Research Project in its August 2007 study, one out of every four adults in 2005 had not graduated from high school. Approximately 120,000 students do not attain a diploma by age 20 each year. And with each annual cohort of dropouts, California taxpayers foot the exorbitant bill for these young people – to the tune of \$46 billion, or 2.9 percent of the annual gross state product, over their lifetimes – because they are more likely to be unemployed and pay no taxes, resort to criminal activity and rely on publicly funded programs for basic subsistence and health care.

On average, high school graduates earn more than high school dropouts, about \$290,000 more over a lifetime; they also pay \$100,000 more in federal, state and local taxes. High school graduation also contributes to a reduction in crime: by 20 percent for violent crimes, 11 percent for property crimes and 12 percent for drug-related crimes. A high school graduate is 68 percent less likely to be on any public assistance program than a high school dropout.

It's a no-brainer – not investing in strategies to reduce the number of high school dropouts does not save us money, but in fact costs California taxpayers exponentially more to address the consequences of low educational attainment.

The picture gets bleaker when one looks at public education in our urban core. In the America's Promise Alliance report released last month, almost half of all public high school students in the United States fail to graduate and are eight times more likely to land in prison. The report cites only 57.1 percent of public high school students in the city of Los Angeles graduate.

Our investment in public education has also failed on the commitment in the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education to provide college access to every eligible student. The race is on: According to the California Business Roundtable and the Campaign for College Opportunity in its April 2006 study, one in three new California jobs by

2022 will require an associate degree, bachelor's degree or higher, up from one in four jobs today. Coupled with the retiring college-educated baby boomers, the number of new jobs that will require college degrees is equal to the population of San Francisco, San Diego and San Jose combined.

California's economy is heavily focused in specialized, knowledge-based occupations and industries, with technical services, education and health care topping the industries in need of the largest number of highly educated workers. Small increases in the number of highly educated workers yield significant economic benefits: a 1 percent increase in the share of population with a bachelor's degree and a 2 percent increase with an associate degree or some college result in the creation of 174,000 new jobs and \$1.2 billion more in annual state and local tax revenues.

The data are clear: College access is key to producing the large numbers of engineers, teachers and nurses to meet California's work force demands, generate additional much-needed tax revenue and keep the state's competitive edge. We already have seen the hemorrhaging of manufacturing and information sector jobs to other states and countries, and can ill afford any further high-paying job losses. Additionally, we must not forget the need for vocational educational programs to address the ongoing needs for highly skilled trade and craft workers, technicians and service workers.

The studies cited above should serve as a wake-up call for state policymakers about the critical need to increase our investment in public education in California. Moreover, policymakers should compel every single Californian to shoulder the responsibility for averting this statewide economic crisis by fairly spreading the burden for contributing to the cost of public education and other government services based on income.

Our global economy is changing rapidly. We are running out of time to save our state.

If California is to maintain its place among the world's top 10 economies, we must increase our investment in public education now: Our industries demand it, our tax system depends on it, and our children deserve it.

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### **The Economist Learning their lesson 7.18.08**

The Economist Staff

The election on July 14th of Randi Weingarten as president marks a new era for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), or so the union says. For years teachers' unions have been demonised as the main obstacles to school reform, often with good reason. Now the AFT is billing Ms Weingarten as a "reform-minded advocate". With American students lagging, Ms Weingarten insists that "the union is the solution." She has some convincing to do.

If any teachers' union were to promote reform, it would be the AFT, America's second-biggest. While the larger National Education Association has historically been less nimble, the AFT's president from 1974 to 1997, Al Shanker, supported accountability and even some pay-for-performance schemes. ("I used to shy away

from bribery,” he reportedly said, “but I’ve come to the conclusion that it has a place.”) Today the AFT supports such bonuses, if negotiated with a local union. It also represents teachers in more than 70 charter (publicly funded but self-governing) schools, in ten states.

As for Ms Weingarten, her outspoken reign as union president in New York City provides a mixed picture. Michael Bloomberg, the mayor, has pursued radical reform. Ms Weingarten has said she favours “sustainable and incremental change”. As others applauded Mr Bloomberg, Ms Weingarten was a loud heckler. A former lawyer and history teacher, she even filed a lawsuit against the city.

Still, faced with a mayor intent on turning the system on its head, Ms Weingarten proved a skilful acrobat. She agreed to a longer school day in exchange for better pay. After originally fighting the mayor’s plans for charter schools, she has launched two of her own. (A third unionised charter will open in New York in September.) Last autumn she agreed to a plan that awards schools lump bonuses for teachers if scores improve.

Despite such signs, Mike Petrilli of the conservative Fordham Foundation eyes the AFT’s foray into charter schools with caution, contending that one of the most important traits of a charter is that it is not unionised. Thanks in part to Ms Weingarten, New York now requires that if a charter has more than 250 students before its third year, its teachers must unionise.

Eva Moskowitz, who runs four charter schools in Harlem and is a former city councillor, doubts Ms Weingarten’s commitment to accountability. Ms Weingarten insists that tests are important, but that George Bush’s landmark law, No Child Left Behind, is “too badly broken to be fixed”. In New York, she has proposed a system that values not just test scores but also factors such as curriculum, building maintenance and support from the central district. This would provide a broader look at a school, but also a cloudier one.

Joseph Walker, a Chicago teacher, surveyed the throngs at the AFT’s convention on July 12th. “You can’t stay the same,” he explained, “you’ve got to modernise.” Two days later Ms Weingarten outlined her vision, which includes making schools community centres with a full range of services, and encouraging districts and locals to develop new salary models. Ms Weingarten’s era at the AFT may not be revolutionary, but it will be interesting.

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### Youth Today

#### Caution: Political connections can be fatal

8.08

Erika Fitzpatrick

*How a cornerstone of Philadelphia’s youth work rose to dominance, then suddenly closed.*

For most of its 10 years, Philadelphia Safe and Sound (PSS) seemed as secure as a youth-focused nonprofit could be: It was locked into city funding and, maybe more importantly, it had political support from the highest levels of City Hall.

So it was stunning when PSS, which each year delivers roughly \$50 million in public

funds to more than 200 after-school, summer and youth development programs, decided to shut down last month – a victim of being seen as too close to those in power.

“The lesson I think I take from all of this is that ... if you want to survive beyond the current [political] administration, that you establish and maintain a certain degree of independence from city administration,” said PSS Board Chairman Ernest E. Jones. “The difficulty with being so closely aligned with city government is that when you get a new administration in,” it is likely “to want to change things.”

PSS was established in the late 1990s with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Urban Health Initiative, which funneled the money through the city to PSS. It later spun off into a nonprofit and enhanced its collaboration with the city. It grew in the early part of the next decade during the administration of Mayor John Street (D), serving as an intermediary between the city and youth-serving agencies, making grants to nonprofits, overseeing the management of those grants and providing support. Its role was similar to that of nonprofit intermediaries in other cities, such as The After-School Corp. in New York.

#### Fast Growth

In the eyes of many local observers, PSS was hurt early on by the perception that it served as a political patronage operation for Street, whose wife, Naomi Post, was appointed by former Mayor Ed Rendell as its first executive director. Post’s tenure ended in 2002, but that “aura” was “cast in stone,” said Anne L. Shenberger, the nonprofit’s CEO.

Still, PSS hummed along. Its funding skyrocketed from \$2 million in 2002 to around \$60 million for the last year with the vast majority coming from the city of Philadelphia and the state of Pennsylvania. The staff grew as well, from 16 in 2003 to 81 by the end of 2007.

Among other things, the organization developed annual Community Report Cards that graded youth health, safety and academic achievement on the neighborhood level, and it created a geographic information system that maps block-by-block needs in order to help agencies plan, raise money and develop programs.

On the other hand, PSS drew the kind of complaints that are often directed at big nonprofits that get a lot of government money. Jones, the board chairman, heard that some service providers saw PSS as an “800-pound gorilla” that was insensitive to funding other needy grantees, and that others thought PSS was “shrouded in secrecy.”

Even the board was concerned that all that money made PSS too beholden to the city. So when the city offered PSS an additional \$30 million in 2003 to administer after-school programs – which at that time increased PSS’s budget 10-fold – the board considered “whether or not we should have said ‘no’ to that,” Jones said. “Since we get 95 percent of our funding from the city, that’s risky. If you don’t do what they want you to do, they can say, ‘Fine, we don’t need you at all.’ ”

Jones said the increased funding was distributed to providers for specific uses. “We just took over administration of those funds,” he said. “It’s a lot more work.”

Ironically, the real trouble began last year with what seemed like good news: Street, leaving the mayor’s office because of term limits, submitted a final budget plan that would increase PSS’ city funding for 2008 by another \$21 million, to \$75 million.

## **Trouble**

That didn't sit well with the incoming mayor, Michael Nutter, a Democratic city councilman who had feuded with Street for years. After taking office in January, Nutter rejected the increase. PSS had spent some of the proposed extra funds, so PSS grantees' allocations had to be cut to absorb the loss.

The Nutter administration also instituted a cost-saving plan for after-school programs that involved moving many after-school and summer programs from schools to recreation centers. That sparked a debate about whether those centers could handle the load and protests from those who had been providing the services in schools.

Cheryl Weiss, executive director of Diversified Community Services, a PSS grantee, said her after-school and summer programs will be cut by \$40,000, to around \$380,000, over the next 12 months. "I don't necessarily disagree with" the Nutter administration's desire to try to serve more high-risk youth with its money, she said, but the sudden shift without consulting providers caused "enormous upset."

Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare launched an audit of PSS in concert with the Nutter administration.

The audit, released in April, found that the organization was overwhelmed by extraordinary growth; lacked a sufficiently developed corporate governance structure; had an innovative but complex organizational structure; and was "vulnerable" to breakdowns in administrative and fiscal controls.

"As a result," the audit said, "there is significant risk that a portion of Philadelphia's prevention programs are not currently serving the populations most at risk of delinquency or dependency while the overall service needs of such at-risk populations remain high."

Shenberger, the CEO, said PSS took issue with "all" of the negative conclusions in the audit. PSS produced a point-by-point refutation more than 40 pages long.

In the same month the audit was released, the Nutter administration put the intermediary contract up for competitive bidding.

"Given all of the negativity surrounding Safe and Sound, there was no way that I thought we could successfully bid on that contract and get it back," Jones said.

So in late April, the PSS board voted unanimously to shut down operations as of June 30.

## **Now What?**

There are "a lot of lessons learned," said Margaret Zukoski, associate director of the Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth & Family Services, a statewide organization of 140 private direct services agencies. Most important, she says, is the need for "ongoing communication about the status of services and funding," and for efforts to bring "everyone along so we can anticipate what issues may arise."

Announcing with little warning that PSS funds would be cut off caused "unneeded stress and uncertainty" in the provider community, Zukoski said, and as a result, "some trust has been lost in the public sector."

The city announced last month that the Philadelphia Health Management Corp. (PHMC) would serve as the new fiscal and management intermediary, taking over

operation of all PSS-operated summer programs on July 1. PHMC, Nutter said in a statement, was chosen in a “timely and transparent manner” from six organizations that responded to the request for proposals.

The organization has no time to waste: It will have to run the summer program funding competition under newly established program rules, including the move to recreation centers.