



Headlines

7.25.08 — 8.01.08

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| 1 | 7.24.08* | <p><u>Schools battle rising gas and food prices. In the fall, students might face high lunch prices and four-day school weeks</u></p> <p>Excerpt: Earlier this summer, when gasoline prices topped \$4 a gallon, the Caldwell Parish School Board in Columbia, La., voted to move ahead with a plan that most districts consider a measure of last resort: Beginning this fall, students will attend classes only four days a week.</p> | U.S. News & World Report | Eddy Ramirez |
| 2 | 7.24.08* | <p><u>Building a better motorbike</u></p> <p>Excerpt: They're usually toiling away in a school garage. The student Experimental Vehicle Team has been building stuff from scratch for a decade -- ice racers, solar bikes and ultra high mileage vehicles.</p> | Minnesota Public Radio | Tim Nelson |
| 3 | 7.24.08* | <p><u>Akron super says retirement bittersweet</u></p> <p>Excerpt: When Akron Public Schools (APS) students begin the new school year, Sylvester Small doesn't plan on being in town.</p> | West Side Leader, Akron Leader Publications | Kathleen Folkerth |
| 4 | 7.25.08 | <p><u>Report: Girls are equal to math test. Experts urge teachers to treat kids the same</u></p> <p>Excerpt: Desiree Epps-Davis, 14, says she struggles every day to convince some teachers at her</p> | Chicago Tribune | Amanda Erickson and Carlos Sadovi |

Chicago public school that she is just as good at math as the boys in her class.

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|----|---------|---|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 5 | 7.25.08 | <u>Illinois ranks 43rd for number of black male students graduating from high school, report finds</u> | Chicago Tribune | Carlos Sadovi |
| | | Excerpt: Fewer than half of black male students across the country are graduating from high school, and the number is even lower in Illinois and Chicago, according to a national study released Friday. | | |
| 6 | 7.25.08 | <u>The odd world of e-school teachers</u> | The Washington Post | Ian Shapira |
| | | Excerpt: For Trinity Wilbourn, teaching high school via the Internet offers a heartening and maddening prism into the teenage mind-set. | | |
| 7 | 7.26.08 | <u>Service requirement cut in half. School board: New project takes time</u> | The News & Observer (NC) | Sadia Latifi |
| | | Excerpt: The school board voted Thursday night to reduce mandatory community service for students, halving the graduation requirement from 50 to 25 hours. | | |
| 8 | 7.26.08 | <u>Big change for welfarist Sweden: School choice</u> | Associated Press | Malin Rising |
| | | Excerpt: Schools run by private enterprise? Free iPods and laptop computers to attract students? | | |
| 9 | 7.27.08 | <u>Literacy debate: Online, R U really reading?</u> | The New York Times | Motoko Rich |
| | | Excerpt: Books are not Nadia Konyk's thing. Her mother, hoping to entice her, brings them home from the library, but Nadia rarely shows an interest. | | |
| 10 | 7.27.08 | <u>Schools need role in election debate</u> | The Washington Times | Adrienne T. Washington |
| | | Excerpt: Asya Wilson, with braids as long and thin as she is, is happy that she will enter the eighth grade at a | | |

popular charter school in Decatur, Ga., where her mother, Mei Mei Casswell, was finally able to get her enrolled.

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| 11 | 7.27.08 | <p><u>Governor stops in Akron for a 'conversation on education'</u></p> <p>Excerpt: Funding. Time constraints. Technology. Attracting and keeping quality teachers and school staff. Servicing the needs of a diverse body of students.</p> | Cuyahoga Falls News-Press | April Helms |
| 12 | 7.27.08 | <p><u>Data lend urgency to English-language learning</u></p> <p>Excerpt: It was definitely a clear indication of the changing face of America. The statistics from the letter and policy notes showed that fact.</p> | The Tennessean | Dwight Lewis |
| 13 | 7.28.08 | <p><u>County schools to go wireless. Hariston's plan for Internet access is first in region.</u></p> <p>Excerpt: When Baltimore County schools reopen their classrooms to students in August, the system is expected to be the only one in the region with wireless high-speed Internet access in each of its buildings.</p> | Baltimore Sun | Gina Davis |
| 14 | 7.28.08 | <p><u>Longer year for Fairfax teachers. Extended contract pilot program adds duties and dollars</u></p> <p>Excerpt: The last day of school for most teachers in Fairfax County was June 17, but you wouldn't know it at George Marshall High School.</p> | The Washington Post | Michael Alison Chandler |
| 15 | 7.28.08 | <p><u>The greatest scandal</u></p> <p>Excerpt: The profound failure of inner-city public schools to teach children may be the nation's greatest scandal. The differences between the two Presidential candidates on this could hardly be more stark.</p> | The Wall Street Journal | Editorial Board |

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|----|---------|--|---|-----------------|
| 16 | 7.28.08 | <u>Ohio allowed more flexibility under No Child Left Behind</u> | The Plain Dealer | Scott Stephens |
| | | Excerpt: Ohio is one of just six states that will be allowed a little more flexibility under the federal No Child Left Behind law. | | |
| 17 | 7.28.08 | <u>'Leave No Child Inside' gives city kids chance to embrace the outdoors</u> | Chicago Daily Herald | Jake Griffin |
| | | Excerpt: As a bluegill nibbles on the corn 12-year-old Tammy Stelnicki uses as bait, the youngster yanks too quickly with her rod and loses the fish. | | |
| 18 | 7.28.08 | <u>McCain, Obama offer dueling education plans</u> | NPR | Larry Abramson |
| | | Excerpt: Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama is proposing a laundry list of educational benefits that would reach from birth to college. His rival, Republican John McCain, plans to focus on enabling local educational initiatives and expanding virtual learning. | | |
| 19 | 7.29.08 | <u>A conversation for Steven A. Farber: To teach genetics, zebra fish go to school</u> | The New York Times | Claudia Dreifus |
| | | Excerpt: Steven A. Farber is a biologist who studies how vertebrates digest fats, research that may be useful in combating heart disease. But Dr. Farber, 45, an investigator at the Carnegie Institution for Science in Baltimore, moonlights at a second job. | | |
| 20 | 7.29.08 | <u>Let the funding debate begin!</u> | New American Foundation – Ed Money Blog Watch | Jennifer Cohen |
| | | Excerpt: Now that Republican and Democratic presidential candidates Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama have both released their education agendas, Ed Money Watch has decided to examine the federal education funding implications | | |

of both plans.

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| 21 | 7.29.08 | <u>Congress lays ground for 2009</u> | Time | Jay Newton-Small |
| | | Excerpt: Just because their approval ratings are at all-time lows and they are dismissed as a do-nothing Congress doesn't mean Democrats on Capitol Hill aren't keeping busy. | | |
| 22 | 7.29.08 | <u>Stop dumbing down America: Reform No Child Left Behind Act</u> | The Washington Times | George Allen (Op Ed) |
| | | Excerpt: When I was governor more than 10 years ago, we significantly reformed Virginia's public school system and stopped social promotion. | | |
| 23 | 7.29.08 | <u>The biggest issue</u> | The New York Times | David Brooks (Op Ed) |
| | | Excerpt: Why did the United States become the leading economic power of the 20th century? The best short answer is that a ferocious belief that people have the power to transform their own lives gave Americans an unparalleled commitment to education, hard work and economic freedom. | | |
| 24 | 7.29.08 | <u>Fuel prices force schools to weigh class, staff cuts</u> | USA Today | Greg Toppo |
| | | Excerpt: Fuel and costs are rising so quickly for the USA's public school districts that nearly one in seven is energy considering cutting back to four-day weeks this fall. | | |
| 25 | 7.29.08 | <u>Call for Chicago students to skip 1st school day</u> | Associated Press | Michael Tarm |
| | | Excerpt: Community leaders on Monday called on students from poorer parts of Chicago to protest inequalities in school funding by skipping the first day of classes. | | |
| 26 | 7.29.08 | <u>An education debate?</u> | Campaign K-12 (Education Week Blog) | Alyson Klein (Op Ed) |
| | | Excerpt: Could there be an entire presidential debate focused on education? Maybe, if the Business | | |

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| | | Coalition for Student Achievement gets its way. | | |
| 27 | 7.30.08 | <u>Editorial: Do something about education this time</u> | Mansfield News-Journal (OH) | Editorial Board |
| | | Excerpt: Gov. Ted Strickland starts a series of town meetings to discuss changing Ohio's education system. | | |
| 28 | 7.30.08 | <u>Parents are outraged at SF School District</u> | ABC 7 News (CA) | Lilian Kim |
| | | Excerpt: Some parents in San Francisco have to start searching for a new kindergarten for their kids, months after they thought they were all set. School officials met with parents Tuesday night, to try to explain how a glitch caused all the confusion. | | |
| 29 | 7.31.08 | <u>Costs, concerns push schools to use eco-friendly elements</u> | USA Today | Ledyard King |
| | | Excerpt: Waterless urinals. Geothermal cooling systems. Photovoltaic solar panels. The space shuttle? Try your child's school. | | |
| 30 | 7.31.08 | <u>Voice of the People (Letters): Invest in quality after-school programs</u> | Chicago Tribune | State Rep. Kathy Ryg (D-IL, Vernon Hills) |
| | | Excerpt: As co-chair of the Lake County After School Coalition and sponsor of Illinois House Resolution 384, which established the After-school Funding Policy Task Force, I have followed with interest the recent series by Tribune reporters Stephanie Banchemo and Patricia Callahan regarding the state funding of after-school programs. | | |
| 31 | 7.31.08 | <u>This Recess Is Really From Accountability</u> | The Wall Street Journal | Craig R. Barrett and Edward B. Rust Jr. |
| | | Excerpt: Regarding Reg Weaver's July 24 letter ¹ responding to "Wrong Education Fix ² " (Review & Outlook, July 12): The Business Coalition for Student Achievement (BCSA) could | | |

not disagree more.

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| 32 | 7.31.08 | <u>Get Bolder in effort to lift all children's education</u> | Detroit Free Press | Susan B. Neuman |
| | | <p>Excerpt: Six years after the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind law, there is frustratingly little evidence that it will close the achievement gap between low-income, minority children and their middle-class peers.</p> | | |
| 33 | 8.01.08 | <u>Obama and McCain miss the mark on education</u> | Los Angeles Times | Kate Applebee |
| | | <p>Excerpt: Although Barack Obama and John McCain try to offer solutions to help America break from conventional thinking on educational policy, both senators are missing key pieces to the puzzle of why our public schools are failing.</p> | | |
| 34 | 8.01.08 | <u>Education as a Civil Rights issue</u> | The New York Times | Editorial Board |
| | | <p>Excerpt: Civil rights groups have begun a welcome attack on a House bill that would temporarily exempt the states from the all-important accountability requirements in the No Child Left Behind Act, which was signed into law in 2002.</p> | | |
| 35 | 8.11.08** | <u>Virtual schools, real businesses</u> | Forbes | David K. Randall |
| | | <p>Excerpt: Ron J. Packard, the chief executive of K12, an online education company in Herndon, Va., is adamant that he runs a public school. "We are more public than any other public school in the country," he says.</p> | | |

**While these articles did not appear during the week of 7.25.08 – 8.01.08, they have been included due to the relevant subject matter.*

***While now available online, this article will appear in the print issue of Forbes on newsstands 8.11.08.*

U.S. News & World Report**Schools battle rising gas and food prices. In the fall, students might face high lunch prices and four-day school weeks****7.24.08**

Eddy Ramirez

Earlier this summer, when gasoline prices topped \$4 a gallon, the Caldwell Parish School Board in Columbia, La., voted to move ahead with a plan that most districts consider a measure of last resort: Beginning this fall, students will attend classes only four days a week. "The market experts are now predicting prices as high as \$4.50 a gallon, and who knows what's next?" explains District Superintendent John Sartin. Shortening the school week is expected to save the north-central Louisiana district, which educates 1,800 students, about \$145,000 on fuel, food, and substitute teachers.

Switching to a school week made of four longer days might be a particularly drastic measure, but with prices rocketing and revenue sources drying up, more strapped school systems are reaching the same conclusion: Desperate times call for desperate remedies. Besides cutting a day from the school week, some districts are reducing the number of field trips and shortening bus routes to save on fuel. Nationwide, 75 percent of school systems are expected to raise cafeteria meal prices this fall, and 62 percent have plans to lay off some of their kitchen staff.

Hard-hit school districts might also cut back on nutritious but expensive menu choices, a potential blow to national efforts aimed at improving student eating habits. "We are going to see people hurting," says Katie Wilson, the president of the national School Nutrition Association. Wilson worries that the higher costs of meals will cause children of working-class families who don't qualify for federally subsidized meals to eat less. Her organization also says that nutrition programs across the country could lose about \$3.3 million daily next school year because the federal reimbursement rate for free and reduced-price lunches isn't enough to cover the true cost of preparing a meal. A congressional committee recently heard the group's appeal for more federal aid.

Paying more for meals. In Davidson County, N.C., school officials are trying to get a handle on soaring food costs by raising school meal prices for the second consecutive year. While the average national price of a school lunch is expected to jump 32 cents, to \$1.98, students in Davidson County schools will pay \$2.50 for lunch this fall. This new price represents an increase of 70 cents for elementary-school children and 50 cents for all other students. Meredith Palmer, the district's spokeswoman, says the higher prices are necessary to continue serving healthful meals, which will include one more vegetable or fruit serving this year.

Besides shelling out more for grains, milk, and vegetables, which shot up in price in the past year, the Davidson County district is paying higher fuel prices. If prices hold steady, the district plans to spend \$1.8 million on diesel this year, up from \$1.3 million in the school year that just ended. While school systems in some states can demand payment from families to plug holes in their transportation budgets, Davidson County schools must figure out other ways to make up the difference. "We are having to buy fuel with money for instructional materials," Palmer says. "That hurts, but you have to get students to school."

One concern for districts considering a switch to a four-day school week is that it includes districts in New Mexico, Florida, and South Carolina. How the change will affect students and teachers. In Columbia, La., where classes will run Tuesday through Friday until 4:09 p.m., school officials predict that the change not only will lower food and energy bills but will also lead to better student performance and improve morale.

But critics, including a neighboring district that scrapped a similar plan, have pointed out some risks, such as safety concerns during the winter, when children will be dropped off in the dark. These critics also note that high school students could have trouble getting to part-time jobs and afternoon college classes on time. And some working parents wonder what they will do with their children on that extra day they are not in school. School officials recognize the problem, the district's website says, "but [we] must let each family work out its own solution, just as they are surely tackling the problem of dealing with escalating gas prices in their own lives."

Article 2

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Minnesota Public Radio Building a better motorbike 7.24.08

Tim Nelson

St. Thomas Academy may be well known for its basketball and hockey teams. But there's another team aspiring to make history on campus, too.

Mendota Heights, Minn. — They're usually toiling away in a school garage. The student Experimental Vehicle Team has been building stuff from scratch for a decade -- ice racers, solar bikes and ultra high mileage vehicles. They once got 1,300 miles per gallon in a test.

This year, though, they've built themselves a full-fledged road-ready electric motorcycle. You can plug it in at a standard wall outlet.

Junior Tom Mealey helped build the bike.

"The electrical system allows for a recharge in three hours," he says. "You can go about 40 to 50 miles. Optimal speed is probably around 40 to 50. We're thinking we can get it up to 60, though."

The numbers, though, really don't do this project justice.

It's a big, green fiberglass pod, built around a steel safety frame made bicycle tubing. It's got a full-length upholstered back rest and even a seat belt. Only its wheels, handlebar and front fork bear any real resemblance to a motorcycle.

Imagine mating a mutant soy bean with a Vespa scooter, throw in some lithium phosphate batteries and you get the general idea.

Brenna Loufek goes to nearby Visitation School and helped design the look of the bike.

"I think it's definitely a shock factor," she says. "We get different reviews about the look factor. But I actually think it looks like a Smart Car cut in half."

Still, it was a hit out at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. MIT offers grants to high schools to encourage invention. St. Thomas got \$10,000 for the project and took it out to Boston last month to show off the students work.

Mark Westlake is a physics teacher at St. Thomas. "When they rolled the motorcycle out onto the stage, there was a collective gasp from the audience," he says. "It was the first time anyone had seen it."

Westlake is an advisor to the experimental vehicle team and an amateur welder, too. While he helped with some of the most hazardous work, he says he's also got the pictures to show his students built the bike.

"You know, you always hear comments about, is it possible for high school students to build things like this. And I think its absolutely true that they can, as long as they have the supplies that they need, a little bit of background," Westlake says. "I think that the MIT professors in particular were excited about the project and impressed with our future work force."

But the Minnesota department of public safety -- that's another story.

The St. Thomas students have made a remarkable technological achievement. But it's still not quite ready for rush hour yet.

"We've been working on it since March with the DMV," says student Tom Mealey. "We've been having a little bit of trouble getting it registered and licensed because it's a little bit out of the ordinary. They keep asking for the model and who made it. And we're like, well, we made it ourselves. We don't really have a model name for it. So they're a little bit confused and I think they actually want to come out and see it run and get a little better idea of what it is."

The juniors and sophomores at St. Thomas are already thinking about what they're going to build next, although their advisor, Mark Westlake, says he's encouraging them to keep their feet on the ground. He turned down one donor's offer of a kit aircraft.

"I don't want to lay in bed at night wondering if some guy is flying around in an airplane built by high school kids."

Article 3

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West Side Leader, Akron Leader Publications Akron super says retirement bittersweet 7.24.08

Kathleen Folkerth

DOWNTOWN AKRON — When Akron Public Schools (APS) students begin the new school year, Sylvester Small doesn't plan on being in town.

It's not just because the soon-to-rotate superintendent will be finished with the job he's held since 2001. Small said after 38 years of starting the school year in Akron, it will be tough to not spend the morning of the first day in the schools with students.

"I know I have to be gone when school starts," said Small, a West Akron resident. "The temptation to go to the schools will be too great."

The superintendent's lengthy career with APS comes to a close July 31, when he hands the reins of the district to incoming superintendent David James, who has been the district's director of business affairs.

Small, 61, said the time was right to retire.

"It's time," he said, adding that his wife, Elaine, is a school administrator working in Florida, where the couple maintain a home. The two are the parents of four grown children. "I know there will come a time when I can't give the district what it needs."

But Small said leaving is bittersweet.

"I miss it already," he said.

As a child growing up in an ethnically mixed neighborhood in South Akron, Small said he didn't have dreams of being a teacher. At Hower High School, he took courses in carpentry, which he enjoyed.

"But sawdust and me didn't get along," he said, noting his allergies.

Small was an average student in school, but he did enjoy being in the classroom, he said.

"I was never very academic, but I was determined not to let anything get me down," he said. "I started out low and always overachieved."

Small's father worked at Goodyear and his mother held a job at Akron City Hospital. Both hadn't finished high school, but they insisted their six children — all sons — bring home good grades.

"We didn't have money to go to college," Small said. "Nobody in the neighborhood went to college."

But in his junior year, Small was doing well enough in school to consider higher education. He just had to earn the money to go. A former physical education teacher of his asked him to take on a job helping 20 children build Soap Box Derby cars.

"When I started that, I knew I wanted to teach," he said. "I never looked back."

He graduated from Hower in 1965 and the following January enrolled at The University of Akron. Through his college years he worked to pay the bills. He unloaded box cars, was a porter at a bar and worked at a small rubber factory. Eventually he was hired to work on the Goodyear B squad, where he worked three days a week during the school year and all summer.

He and his younger brother graduated together in May 1970, making the two the first in their family to get a college education.

Small was asked to stay at Goodyear and take on a supervisory job, but he said no.

"I turned down a pretty good job," he said. "I said 'No, I want to teach. And I want to work in the Akron Public Schools.'"

But when he tried to get a job, there weren't any openings in his area of social studies. So he decided to become a substitute teacher.

Small said that first job in the district gave him a good start toward becoming superintendent.

"Being a substitute, you get to see the entire district," he said. "One of the difficult things is knowing you don't have a home. I learned early on to carry my own lesson plans. I did not want to cheat students. Substitutes can be treated rough, but I made sure that wouldn't happen to me."

The next year he got a regular teaching job in the district at Thornton Junior High, where he had attended school. He also taught at West Junior High and Buchtel and Ellet high schools.

Small earned a master's degree in 1976 and a doctorate in 1984, both in school administration from The University of Akron. He decided to make the move into administration.

"My goal was only to be a good classroom teacher," he said. "But what happened is you reach a plateau. I said to myself, I need a fresh challenge. That's why I got out of the classroom."

He said he misses being a teacher.

"That's still the best job in the business," he said. "My job entails a lot of politics and a lot of meetings. Kids keep you fresh."

But the path to an administrative job wasn't easily laid out. Though he applied for jobs in the district, Small was still a teacher. He started to think he should look outside of the district.

After expressing his frustration to then-Superintendent Conrad Ott, the latter told him to sit tight. He soon got a job in Student Services, working with students with discipline problems.

"I think it was a test to see what I was made of," Small said.

From there he became a curriculum specialist in social studies, which required him to observe teachers throughout the district. He loved the job.

After that he returned again to Student Services before making the move into principal jobs at Margaret Park Elementary and then Buchtel High School. In 1995 he became assistant superintendent.

Since beginning his tenure as superintendent, Small has been faced with his share of challenges. He cites finances as the biggest headache.

"It's an ongoing struggle for every superintendent," he said. "I've reduced the budget by I don't know how many millions and by 500 people."

It took three tries in recent years for a levy to pass in the district.

He continues to be frustrated the district cannot be effective for every student.

"As important as education is in the world today, people still do not believe in education," he said. "Other countries are pushing very hard. Education is one of the things that makes America strong."

He is also troubled by enrollment figures that continue to drop but said the problem is one shared by many districts.

"The available pool of students is shrinking," he said. "We're in a choice environment, where students have more choices. We're a mobile society. Even suburban districts are losing students. Very few areas are growing."

The district has conducted surveys to find out why people leave the district.

"People tell me they leave because they live close to other districts, safety and security, customer service," Small said. "Some leave because students get transportation. The quality of education is sometimes last. We are trying to work on our customer service and provide a variety of academics."

He added that magnet schools, such as Miller South School for the Visual and Performing Arts and the planned National Inventor's Hall of Fame School — Center for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Learning are ways the district can retain and attract students.

But the declining enrollment figures have led to the closure of schools in the district. That task is another Small finds difficult.

"Closing schools is always a tough choice," he said. "As superintendent, it is your job to go out to neighborhoods and tell folks, and those are never happy times."

Central-Hower High School closed two years ago and Margaret Park Elementary School closed last year. Essex Elementary in West Akron is slated to close, but district officials said the timeline for that has not been decided.

Small is proud of what has been accomplished in the district during the past few years. On state report cards that measure academic achievement, Akron has ranked highly compared to similar districts. On the most recent report card, for the 2006-07 school year, Akron had the highest Performance Index score when compared to Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Canton, Dayton and Toledo.

"We've made considerable academic progress, and we will continue on that track," he said. "The building project is another great achievement."

The district is in the midst of its \$800 million school-rebuilding project that will, when completed, see the replacement or renovation of all APS school buildings.

He added that community leaders and residents of Akron have been supportive of the district.

"The entire community has come to help and work with APS," he said. "In difficult times, people have passed levies. The business community has been great. The mayor and city have been great partners."

Small said he doesn't have any plans for his retirement yet.

"I am keeping my home here," he said. "But I will be going to Florida more often. There are all kinds of folks offering me all kinds of jobs — foundations, universities. Right now I'm just going to take a break."

His hope is that Akron will remember he cared about the district and the community.

"I've had a lot of opportunities to go other places, but this is my community," he said. "The community was great to me. It's a rare privilege to grow up in a community, go through its school system and come back as superintendent."

Article 4

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Chicago Tribune

Report: Girls are equal to math test. Experts urge teachers to treat kids the same

7.25.08

Amanda Erickson and Carlos Sadovi

Desiree Epps-Davis, 14, says she struggles every day to convince some teachers at her Chicago public school that she is just as good at math as the boys in her class.

Now a major new study has proved her right.

Researchers comparing the math scores of 7 million students nationwide from 2005 to last year found that girls and boys do equally well on math tests taken from the 2nd to 11th grades.

While previous studies have reached a similar conclusion, a new study by five professors at the University of Wisconsin and the University of California, Berkeley is by far the most sweeping, using data from 10 states.

Desiree, who will be a freshman at Noble South College Prep, wasn't surprised. She spends three hours a day solving math problems over summer vacation.

Her mother, LaTonya Epps, said she believes the Chicago school system doesn't spend enough time on math, which she sees as the key to getting into a good college and a successful career.

"Women need math just as much as guys if we are competing for all the same jobs. ... We need to be strong in math also," Epps said.

The study was praised by Chicago Public Schools officials who said such research helps put unfounded stereotypes to rest.

John Loehr, a Chicago school official who helps develop math curriculum, said girls in Chicago public schools score on par with boys in math on the ACT.

He said the school district is working with teachers to coach them to treat students equally.

"Studies like this help debunk these well-entrenched myths that there are certain subjects that are not for boys or certain subjects that are not for girls," Loehr said.

Ellen Estrada, principal of Walter Payton College Prep High School, ranked as one of

the country's top 100 high schools, said girls from her school have scored among the best students in national math competitions.

"In the right setting, girls are going to flourish in any area of academia," she said.

A math gene?

Until 1980, girls took fewer advanced math and science classes and didn't perform as well on standardized tests, according to math educators. Some experts at the time even suggested that there was a math gene in males that gave them an edge.

But by 2000, high school girls and boys were studying calculus at the same rate, the educators said.

The reason is severalfold, they said. Women know they need to study math to attend a good college, and many schools and states are now also increasing their science and math requirements.

"Part of it is an increased awareness that math is important," said Marcia Linn, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley and one of the authors of the study.

Women are now also earning about the same number of math bachelor's degrees as men, the National Science Foundation said.

"A number of us in the older generation have been one of very few, the only one in the class," said Cathy Kessel, the president of the Association of Women in Mathematics and a math education consultant. "Now attitudes are changing."

'Degrading girls'

But Desiree said she has been told constantly by some teachers that boys are better at math and science than girls.

She said that stereotype was difficult to overcome.

"It made me feel like they were degrading girls and I thought it was wrong," Desiree said.

She said some teachers assume that boys will be the ones going on to college, into the work force and heading families, so they focus on them. She asked to move out of a 6th-grade math class because the male teacher focused on the boys so much that she didn't believe she was progressing adequately.

"He would make it seem like the girls didn't need to learn," she said.
In the workplace

Though women are getting an equal number of math bachelor's degrees, fewer go on to get advanced math or engineering degrees.

Women hold just 20 percent of engineering jobs nationwide and about a quarter of computer and math positions.

Experts blame that on a variety of factors, including sexism in the workplace, the challenges of balancing a job and a family, and boy-friendly science and math

classes at the earliest stages of schooling. "Females ... are turned away from these fields by others, whether it be through discrimination or socialization toward 'female-friendly' fields," Christine Min Wotipka, a Stanford University education professor, wrote in an e-mail.

Janet Hyde, a University of Wisconsin professor and one of the authors of the math study, is optimistic because more women are now pursuing advanced math degrees.

"I do think the trend will continue," she said.

Erickson reported from Washington and Sadovi from Chicago

Article 5

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Chicago Tribune

Illinois ranks 43rd for number of black male students graduating from high school, report finds **7.19.08**

Carlos Sadovi

Fewer than half of black male students across the country are graduating from high school, and the number is even lower in Illinois and Chicago, according to a national study released Friday.

The report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, an educational think tank in Cambridge, Mass., culled graduation rates from the 2005-06 school year and found that Illinois ranked 43rd out of 50 states for the number of black male students graduating that year. The report was based on previously reported numbers in Chicago and Illinois.

In the city that year, only 37 percent of the 102,185 black male students graduated, compared with 62 percent of their white male counterparts, a 24 percent gap, according to the report released at a news conference at the UNITY '08 Convention for Journalists of Color at McCormick Place.

Chicago public schools have shown some improvement in more recent numbers. A year later, the number of black male students graduating went up by one percentage point. In 2007, that number climbed to a nearly 9-year-high when 40 percent of black male students graduated.

John Jackson, president and chief executive officer of the Schott Foundation, called the dropout rate a national problem.

"These results are not indicative of the potential and the ability of black males, but evidence of a failure of leadership . . . to insist that black males have access to the educational resources needed to succeed," he said.

Using 2005-06 figures, the report said Illinois' and Chicago's graduation rate for black male students was below the national average of 47 percent. Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana and four other states had among the largest differences in graduation rates for black and white male students.

Jackson said the report signifies the need not only for increased leadership on all levels but on philanthropic communities to help fund programs he and others believe would improve graduation rates. Officials said there should be more funding for early

childhood programs, increased teacher and educational funding and more single-sex schools, among other possibilities.

North Dakota, Arizona and New Jersey, which have more equitable funding for black and white students, have higher than average black male graduation rates, Jackson said.

"These males represent the future fathers and husbands in a community where 70 percent of children are born out of wedlock. They also represent the future teachers, pastors, professors and even presidents," Jackson said.

Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, said educators and leaders as well as presidential candidates need to address the issue. "This is not simply a political issue, it's not simply an educational issue, it's a moral issue for this very nation," he said.

Chicago Public Schools Chief Arne Duncan, who spoke alongside Jackson and Morial at the news conference, said the district has been working to improve the graduation rates of its black students and close the achievement gap between black and white students.

Michigan has the worst record of graduating black male students in the United States -- and Detroit Public Schools has the second-lowest rate for big-city school districts - - according to a national report released Friday.

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The New York Times
The odd world of e-school teachers
7.25.08

Ian Shapira

For Trinity Wilbourn, teaching high school via the Internet offers a heartening and maddening prism into the teenage mind-set.

Sitting one day at her home office overlooking a golf course, the Prince William County teacher received a snarky comment in all capital letters from a devil-may-care summer school student. But the next moment, she marveled at another male student's frank e-mail: "[W]hen I first went to high school, I did not know who I was for awhile. . . . I tried being someone I could not be."

"I feel like, what kind of guy is going to say that out loud in his class?" Wilbourn said.

Educators who supplement or replace their day jobs with online teaching for local public schools are discovering that the perks of working at home come with hurdles: grappling with awkward or confusing lines of communication with their pupils; gauging student performance without seeing facial expressions; and struggling to withstand the urge to check e-mails from students during weekends.

Online courses, mostly in high schools, have proliferated in recent years despite debate about their effectiveness compared with face-to-face instruction. The number of times students enrolled in distance education courses connected with public schools (using Internet, two-way video or other technologies) rose from about 317,000 in 2002-03 to more than 506,000 in 2004-05, the National Center for

Education Statistics reported in June. That's a 60 percent increase. In at least 66 percent of the cases, the report says, students earned credit with a passing grade.

Such students could be taking advanced courses unavailable at local schools, fulfilling graduation requirements or pursuing online schooling for other reasons. Prince William's Virtual High, for instance, is open to all students enrolled in a regular high school and rising ninth-graders; it also accepts some home-schooled students.

Competition for online teaching jobs, even those that are part-time, can be intense. Many school systems are willing to finance a limited number of courses and teachers. Fairfax and Arlington counties, for the most part, offer free online courses; Prince William and Loudoun counties charge fees in the hundreds of dollars. Teachers typically get paid stipends per pupil or course, funded by tuition or the operating budget.

"We don't have much turnover at all. People do randomly send in their résumé, but I am not able to offer much opportunity," said Gina Jones, administrative coordinator of Prince William's Virtual High, which has about 17 teachers, nearly half of whom work only at home and don't need regular classroom jobs.

Teachers who want full-time online jobs with benefits can work in some statewide programs, which can draw students from anywhere in the country or world. Virtual Virginia recently enrolled a student from Shanghai for Advanced Placement English. Jobs in the state-funded program, which has nearly 40 teachers and offers annual salaries of nearly \$40,000, are highly coveted. "We'll have three openings next year, and I expect to get hundreds of applications," said program director Cathy Cheely. "People are intrigued and realize it's pure teaching -- you're not worrying about cafeteria duty."

A D.C. schools spokeswoman said the school system does not offer online courses. They are available throughout Maryland, through programs such as the state's Virtual School.

In Fairfax, where about 40 online teachers earn \$9,000 a course, there are four openings a year, said Mike Kowalski, the school system's online program administrator. "We have a lot of people interested. Those who are qualified, that's another issue -- many haven't gone through training," he said. "The job is a lot of one-on-one time. If personal communication isn't your forte, this isn't your job."

The typical day for online teachers entails sitting down at a computer during "office hours" -- four hours a day in the summer, one to two in the fall and spring -- and answering student questions through e-mail, instant messages or phone calls. They grade assignments and call parents. They often proctor major tests in a school building.

At her three-bedroom home in Manassas Park, Wilbourn, 28, a part-time English teacher, sat cozily at her desk, on a fake-fur-covered seat, as she spent the day e-mailing summer school students and grading their work. She chatted with her interloping toddlers and her husband, Michael, a regular teacher. The faint tappings on her Apple keyboard were joined every so often by the thwacking of golf balls at General's Ridge Golf Course.

On her computer, she saw a comment on a class discussion board that slightly peeved her. Her fingers hovered over the keyboard, poised to reply to a student's comment. "This is good," she said. "I can edit my thoughts."

Wilbourn, who is paid \$300 a student per course, figures her family does decently. She reasons that her husband is a full-time teacher; that she does not pay for a car or high gas prices; that she can work two other jobs as an online college teacher and an independent distributor for Shaklee, a nutritional and cleaning products company; and that she can watch her kids instead of sending them to a pricey day care.

"My husband and I don't want to be working 9-to-5. We are doing a somewhat entrepreneurial model," she said, glancing up at her desk wall, on which are posted aphorisms and a self-described "Trini-tree" pyramid chart of Shaklee distributors.

Sometimes, Wilbourn must be stern, but diplomatic, in e-mail.

To a student who wrote on a class discussion board that his parents "HAVE NO POWER OVER ME," Wilbourn replied: "It seems to me as long as they are putting a roof over your head and paying for your food and your clothes and your various electronic equipment they do have some power over you."

Protracted e-mail conversations about grades and homework can be tricky, said Amy Bianco, 40, a Prince William online math teacher, who started in the field several years ago because it allowed her to spend more time with family.

One day, while watching her children and husband, a middle school teacher, tussle in the pool, Bianco sat at the living room table, shaking her head at her laptop. A summer school student e-mailed asking to submit an assignment late because the deadline coincided with a tutoring appointment.

"What do I say to this kid?" she asked. "You've got to be careful with these kids because you give them an inch, they'll take a mile."

She typed out a diplomatic response. Then a couple of students instant-messaged her, asking why they had what appeared to be zeroes on an assignment. "Hi Sarah, I have not graded the [module] 5 discussion forum yet:)," she wrote, slightly irked. Then: "Hi Joseph, I haven't graded them yet!"

Bianco wondered why Joseph had not been turning in assignments. She checked the course's online records to see how often he was logging on and saw that he hadn't completed his orientation assignments. "Before I make a phone call home, I want to get his side," she said. "But the worst part is that I can't see him and I can't look him in the eyes. Here, he has a chance to ignore my e-mails or [instant messages]."

She wrote: "Joseph, I was looking over our grades and I noticed that you are missing the module 1 and 3 activities. Is there a reason they were not submitted? Mrs. B."

The response, it's safe to say, was imperfect: "ok i wasnt sure cus i tried the best i could on it cus i just don fully understand exactaly what there asin most of the time so i jus do the best i can with what i no so ya."

Bianco laughed and chalked up the poor writing to different generational expectations. "Joseph, When you are having trouble understanding the material, please contact us and ASK questions!" she wrote. "This is what I am here for!"

She crunched her knuckles and continued typing her message.

The News & Observer (NC)**Service requirement cut in half. School board: New project takes time
7.26.08**

Sadia Latifi

Students attending any of Chapel Hill-Carrboro's three high schools next year will have a little less to accomplish before graduation.

The school board voted Thursday night to reduce mandatory community service for students, halving the graduation requirement from 50 to 25 hours.

The change came in response to a state-mandated graduation project that took effect for juniors and seniors this year. Board members said the new project cuts into the time students previously had for community service.

Dissenting board member Jamezetta Bedford said she would prefer cutting the volunteering requirement altogether, after judging this year's projects and learning that some students spent more than 30 hours working on them. The state project includes a research paper, portfolio and oral presentation.

Equity for Carrboro

Also Thursday, parents from Carrboro High School complained that the new school's limited advanced course offerings and lack of arts facilities were pushing it to "second-class status" in the district.

Almost two dozen parents and students attended the meeting, continuing a semester-long effort to urge school administrators to keep offerings between the district's three high schools equitable.

Carrboro High opened its doors in August; in the spring, school officials announced they were cutting about a dozen advanced placement and honors courses for the next year. Parents wrote to the school board, and some threatened to transfer their children to other schools, leading to the reinstatement of several of those courses.

"The realization that Carrboro High could be destined to offer a second-rate education came as a shock to many of us," said Jenny Kopczynski, a parent of a rising sophomore at the school.

Carrboro High will offer 15 AP classes next year, while Chapel Hill High and East Chapel Hill will offer 18 and 19, respectively.

Academic integrity

In other business, the board adopted a new student academic integrity policy for the district.

The policy follows the discovery of a cheating scheme at Chapel Hill High School in February that led to four student suspensions and statewide media attention.

The policy defines plagiarism, other violations and unauthorized collaboration and includes a section forbidding the use of cell phones, electronic devices and other aids without permission.

Associated Press
Big change for welfarist Sweden: School choice
7.26.08

Malin Rising

STOCKHOLM, Sweden—Schools run by private enterprise? Free iPods and laptop computers to attract students?

It may sound out of place in Sweden, that paragon of taxpayer-funded cradle-to-grave welfare. But a sweeping reform of the school system has survived the critics and 16 years later is spreading and attracting interest abroad.

"I think most people, parents and children, appreciate the choice," said Bertil Ostberg, from the Ministry of Education. "You can decide what school you want to attend and that appeals to people."

Since the change was introduced in 1992 by a center-right government that briefly replaced the long-governing Social Democrats, the numbers have shot up. In 1992, 1.7 percent of high schoolers and 1 percent of elementary schoolchildren were privately educated. Now the figures are 17 percent and 9 percent.

In some ways the trend mirrors the rise of the voucher system in the U.S., with all its pros and cons. But while the percentage of children in U.S. private schools has dropped slightly in recent years, signs are that the trend in Sweden is growing.

Before the reform, most families depended on state-run schools following a uniform national curriculum. Now they can turn to the "friskolor," or "independent schools," which choose their own teaching methods and staff, and manage their own buildings.

They remain completely government-financed and are not allowed to charge tuition fees. The difference is that their government funding goes to private companies which then try to run the schools more cost-effectively and keep whatever taxpayer money they save.

Bure Equity, listed on the Stockholm Stock Exchange, is the largest private school operator in Sweden and is expanding rapidly. In the first quarter of this year, net profit for its education portfolio rose 33 percent to \$3 million.

Such profit-making troubles Swedes who don't think taxpayers should be enriching corporations.

The Social Democrats strongly opposed the change as anti-egalitarian, but when they were re-elected to power in 1994, they found it was so popular that they left it in place, though they imposed a lid on fees.

Barbro Lillkaas, a 40-year-old accountant, is considering putting her child in a private school, and has no problem with the profit motive.

"If you run a good operation then you make a profit. But you won't get any students if you are bad," she said. "You have to do a good job to get money; that is even more important for a private school."

At the Vittra chain of 27 schools owned by Bure Equity, children of different ages share classrooms and have individual curriculums designed for their needs and skills.

Despite initially being labeled elitist, the new system has gradually gained support and is being recognized as a success story.

Andrew Coulson, an education expert at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C., called the Swedish program "a beacon, being more market-like than any other among rich countries," but said he had caveats.

In an e-mail, he said the system needed to be more flexible about how money can be spent, students recruited and curriculums chosen. "It's not a very market-like program. But since it's the best thing around in the rich world, it's definitely worth watching," he said.

Michael Fallon, who served in Britain's former Conservative government, said his party is working on a similar plan to be implemented if it defeats the ruling Labour party in the next election.

"It is a model that is clearly working and we need to learn from that," said Fallon, who visited Sweden in May.

In the U.S., publicly funded private school voucher programs for low-income children exist in some areas, including Washington, D.C., Wisconsin and Ohio, but the issue still arises from time to time in the U.S. presidential campaign.

Some Swedes say the private system drains funds from public education, but officials say independent schools have forced public schools to raise their own standards and improve efficiency.

"Today, I think we have at least as good quality if not better than some independent schools because we have really joined the battle and use our money in a much better way," said Eva-Lotta Kastenholm, who is in charge of public schools in Sollentuna, a suburb of Stockholm.

Competition has forced Gardesskolan, a public school in Sollentuna, to put two teachers in each class of 30 children instead of one. Its student body has risen more than fivefold to 400 since 1992.

"All the schools work with some kind of board or parents' council where they can take part," said Anette Lundqvist, Gardesskolan's principal. "Parents have a bigger influence now."

Many are irked by the private schools' marketing campaigns, which include those free iPods and laptops.

"Education is about profound learning, but now it has become superficial," said Kerstin Solang, headmistress of a public school in Eskilstuna, 75 miles west of Stockholm.

Some teachers worry about job security at private schools, but appreciate their greater autonomy.

"There was a lot of skepticism toward this in the beginning but we don't have an opinion about which owner is better," said Eva-Lis Preisz, head of the Swedish Teachers' Union.

It doesn't matter how the money is channeled because ultimately, she says, "it's all financed by taxes."

For some pupils, private and public schools have become wholly interchangeable.

In the Vittra school, a 10-year-old boy named Oliver has an assignment to write a crime novel, but he says, "I don't have the patience to become a crime novelist." He is leaving Vittra in the fall for a public school specializing in music because, he says, "music really is my life."

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The New York Times **Literacy debate: Online, R U really reading?** **7.27.08**

Motoko Rich

Books are not Nadia Konyk's thing. Her mother, hoping to entice her, brings them home from the library, but Nadia rarely shows an interest.

Instead, like so many other teenagers, Nadia, 15, is addicted to the Internet. She regularly spends at least six hours a day in front of the computer here in this suburb southwest of Cleveland.

A slender, chatty blonde who wears black-framed plastic glasses, Nadia checks her e-mail and peruses myyearbook.com, a social networking site, reading messages or posting updates on her mood. She searches for music videos on YouTube and logs onto Gaia Online, a role-playing site where members fashion alternate identities as cutesy cartoon characters. But she spends most of her time on quizilla.com or fanfiction.net, reading and commenting on stories written by other users and based on books, television shows or movies.

Her mother, Deborah Konyk, would prefer that Nadia, who gets A's and B's at school, read books for a change. But at this point, Ms. Konyk said, "I'm just pleased that she reads something anymore."

Children like Nadia lie at the heart of a passionate debate about just what it means to read in the digital age. The discussion is playing out among educational policy makers and reading experts around the world, and within groups like the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association.

As teenagers' scores on standardized reading tests have declined or stagnated, some argue that the hours spent prowling the Internet are the enemy of reading — diminishing literacy, wrecking attention spans and destroying a precious common culture that exists only through the reading of books.

But others say the Internet has created a new kind of reading, one that schools and

society should not discount. The Web inspires a teenager like Nadia, who might otherwise spend most of her leisure time watching television, to read and write.

Even accomplished book readers like Zachary Sims, 18, of Old Greenwich, Conn., crave the ability to quickly find different points of view on a subject and converse with others online. Some children with dyslexia or other learning difficulties, like Hunter Gaudet, 16, of Somers, Conn., have found it far more comfortable to search and read online.

At least since the invention of television, critics have warned that electronic media would destroy reading. What is different now, some literacy experts say, is that spending time on the Web, whether it is looking up something on Google or even britneyspears.org, entails some engagement with text.

Setting Expectations

Few who believe in the potential of the Web deny the value of books. But they argue that it is unrealistic to expect all children to read "To Kill a Mockingbird" or "Pride and Prejudice" for fun. And those who prefer staring at a television or mashing buttons on a game console, they say, can still benefit from reading on the Internet. In fact, some literacy experts say that online reading skills will help children fare better when they begin looking for digital-age jobs.

Some Web evangelists say children should be evaluated for their proficiency on the Internet just as they are tested on their print reading comprehension. Starting next year, some countries will participate in new international assessments of digital literacy, but the United States, for now, will not.

Clearly, reading in print and on the Internet are different. On paper, text has a predetermined beginning, middle and end, where readers focus for a sustained period on one author's vision. On the Internet, readers skate through cyberspace at will and, in effect, compose their own beginnings, middles and ends.

Young people "aren't as troubled as some of us older folks are by reading that doesn't go in a line," said Rand J. Spiro, a professor of educational psychology at Michigan State University who is studying reading practices on the Internet. "That's a good thing because the world doesn't go in a line, and the world isn't organized into separate compartments or chapters."

Some traditionalists warn that digital reading is the intellectual equivalent of empty calories. Often, they argue, writers on the Internet employ a cryptic argot that vexes teachers and parents. Zigzagging through a cornucopia of words, pictures, video and sounds, they say, distracts more than strengthens readers. And many youths spend most of their time on the Internet playing games or sending instant messages, activities that involve minimal reading at best.

Last fall the National Endowment for the Arts issued a sobering report linking flat or declining national reading test scores among teenagers with the slump in the proportion of adolescents who said they read for fun.

According to Department of Education data cited in the report, just over a fifth of 17-year-olds said they read almost every day for fun in 2004, down from nearly a third in 1984. Nineteen percent of 17-year-olds said they never or hardly ever read for fun in 2004, up from 9 percent in 1984. (It was unclear whether they thought of what they did on the Internet as "reading.")

“Whatever the benefits of newer electronic media,” Dana Gioia, the chairman of the N.E.A., wrote in the report’s introduction, “they provide no measurable substitute for the intellectual and personal development initiated and sustained by frequent reading.”

Children are clearly spending more time on the Internet. In a study of 2,032 representative 8- to 18-year-olds, the Kaiser Family Foundation found that nearly half used the Internet on a typical day in 2004, up from just under a quarter in 1999. The average time these children spent online on a typical day rose to one hour and 41 minutes in 2004, from 46 minutes in 1999.

The question of how to value different kinds of reading is complicated because people read for many reasons. There is the level required of daily life — to follow the instructions in a manual or to analyze a mortgage contract. Then there is a more sophisticated level that opens the doors to elite education and professions. And, of course, people read for entertainment, as well as for intellectual or emotional rewards.

It is perhaps that final purpose that book champions emphasize the most.

“Learning is not to be found on a printout,” David McCullough, the Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer, said in a commencement address at Boston College in May. “It’s not on call at the touch of the finger. Learning is acquired mainly from books, and most readily from great books.”

What’s Best for Nadia?

Deborah Konyk always believed it was essential for Nadia and her 8-year-old sister, Yashca, to read books. She regularly read aloud to the girls and took them to library story hours.

“Reading opens up doors to places that you probably will never get to visit in your lifetime, to cultures, to worlds, to people,” Ms. Konyk said.

Ms. Konyk, who took a part-time job at a dollar store chain a year and a half ago, said she did not have much time to read books herself. There are few books in the house. But after Yashca was born, Ms. Konyk spent the baby’s nap time reading the Harry Potter novels to Nadia, and she regularly brought home new titles from the library.

Despite these efforts, Nadia never became a big reader. Instead, she became obsessed with Japanese anime cartoons on television and comics like “Sailor Moon.” Then, when she was in the sixth grade, the family bought its first computer. When a friend introduced Nadia to fanfiction.net, she turned off the television and started reading online.

Now she regularly reads stories that run as long as 45 Web pages. Many of them have elliptical plots and are sprinkled with spelling and grammatical errors. One of her recent favorites was “My absolutely, perfect normal life ... ARE YOU CRAZY? NOT!,” a story based on the anime series “Beyblade.”

In one scene the narrator, Aries, hitches a ride with some masked men and one of them pulls a knife on her. “Just then I notice (Like finally) something sharp right in front of me,” Aries writes. “I gladly took it just like that until something terrible

happen”

Nadia said she preferred reading stories online because “you could add your own character and twist it the way you want it to be.”

“So like in the book somebody could die,” she continued, “but you could make it so that person doesn’t die or make it so like somebody else dies who you don’t like.”

Nadia also writes her own stories. She posted “Dieing Isn’t Always Bad,” about a girl who comes back to life as half cat, half human, on both fanfiction.net and quizilla.com.

Nadia said she wanted to major in English at college and someday hopes to be published. She does not see a problem with reading few books. “No one’s ever said you should read more books to get into college,” she said.

The simplest argument for why children should read in their leisure time is that it makes them better readers. According to federal statistics, students who say they read for fun once a day score significantly higher on reading tests than those who say they never do.

Reading skills are also valued by employers. A 2006 survey by the Conference Board, which conducts research for business leaders, found that nearly 90 percent of employers rated “reading comprehension” as “very important” for workers with bachelor’s degrees. Department of Education statistics also show that those who score higher on reading tests tend to earn higher incomes.

Critics of reading on the Internet say they see no evidence that increased Web activity improves reading achievement. “What we are losing in this country and presumably around the world is the sustained, focused, linear attention developed by reading,” said Mr. Gioia of the N.E.A. “I would believe people who tell me that the Internet develops reading if I did not see such a universal decline in reading ability and reading comprehension on virtually all tests.”

Nicholas Carr sounded a similar note in “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” in the current issue of the Atlantic magazine. Warning that the Web was changing the way he — and others — think, he suggested that the effects of Internet reading extended beyond the falling test scores of adolescence. “What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation,” he wrote, confessing that he now found it difficult to read long books.

Literacy specialists are just beginning to investigate how reading on the Internet affects reading skills. A recent study of more than 700 low-income, mostly Hispanic and black sixth through 10th graders in Detroit found that those students read more on the Web than in any other medium, though they also read books. The only kind of reading that related to higher academic performance was frequent novel reading, which predicted better grades in English class and higher overall grade point averages.

Elizabeth Birr Moje, a professor at the University of Michigan who led the study, said novel reading was similar to what schools demand already. But on the Internet, she said, students are developing new reading skills that are neither taught nor evaluated in school.

One early study showed that giving home Internet access to low-income students

appeared to improve standardized reading test scores and school grades. “These were kids who would typically not be reading in their free time,” said Linda A. Jackson, a psychology professor at Michigan State who led the research. “Once they’re on the Internet, they’re reading.”

Neurological studies show that learning to read changes the brain’s circuitry. Scientists speculate that reading on the Internet may also affect the brain’s hard wiring in a way that is different from book reading.

“The question is, does it change your brain in some beneficial way?” said Guinevere F. Eden, director of the Center for the Study of Learning at Georgetown University. “The brain is malleable and adapts to its environment. Whatever the pressures are on us to succeed, our brain will try and deal with it.”

Some scientists worry that the fractured experience typical of the Internet could rob developing readers of crucial skills. “Reading a book, and taking the time to ruminate and make inferences and engage the imaginal processing, is more cognitively enriching, without doubt, than the short little bits that you might get if you’re into the 30-second digital mode,” said Ken Pugh, a cognitive neuroscientist at Yale who has studied brain scans of children reading.

But This Is Reading Too

Web proponents believe that strong readers on the Web may eventually surpass those who rely on books. Reading five Web sites, an op-ed article and a blog post or two, experts say, can be more enriching than reading one book.

“It takes a long time to read a 400-page book,” said Mr. Spiro of Michigan State. “In a tenth of the time,” he said, the Internet allows a reader to “cover a lot more of the topic from different points of view.”

Zachary Sims, the Old Greenwich, Conn., teenager, often stays awake until 2 or 3 in the morning reading articles about technology or politics — his current passions — on up to 100 Web sites.

“On the Internet, you can hear from a bunch of people,” said Zachary, who will attend Columbia University this fall. “They may not be pedigreed academics. They may be someone in their shed with a conspiracy theory. But you would weigh that.”

Though he also likes to read books (earlier this year he finished, and loved, “The Fountainhead” by Ayn Rand), Zachary craves interaction with fellow readers on the Internet. “The Web is more about a conversation,” he said. “Books are more one-way.”

The kinds of skills Zachary has developed — locating information quickly and accurately, corroborating findings on multiple sites — may seem obvious to heavy Web users. But the skills can be cognitively demanding.

Web readers are persistently weak at judging whether information is trustworthy. In one study, Donald J. Leu, who researches literacy and technology at the University of Connecticut, asked 48 students to look at a spoof Web site (<http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/>) about a mythical species known as the “Pacific Northwest tree octopus.” Nearly 90 percent of them missed the joke and deemed the site a reliable source.

Some literacy experts say that reading itself should be redefined. Interpreting videos or pictures, they say, may be as important a skill as analyzing a novel or a poem.

“Kids are using sound and images so they have a world of ideas to put together that aren’t necessarily language oriented,” said Donna E. Alvermann, a professor of language and literacy education at the University of Georgia. “Books aren’t out of the picture, but they’re only one way of experiencing information in the world today.”

A Lifelong Struggle

In the case of Hunter Gaudet, the Internet has helped him feel more comfortable with a new kind of reading. A varsity lacrosse player in Somers, Conn., Hunter has struggled most of his life to read. After learning he was dyslexic in the second grade, he was placed in special education classes and a tutor came to his home three hours a week. When he entered high school, he dropped the special education classes, but he still reads books only when forced, he said.

In a book, “they go through a lot of details that aren’t really needed,” Hunter said. “Online just gives you what you need, nothing more or less.”

When researching the 19th-century Chief Justice Roger B. Taney for one class, he typed Taney’s name into Google and scanned the Wikipedia entry and other biographical sites. Instead of reading an entire page, he would type in a search word like “college” to find Taney’s alma mater, assembling his information nugget by nugget.

Experts on reading difficulties suggest that for struggling readers, the Web may be a better way to glean information. “When you read online there are always graphics,” said Sally Shaywitz, the author of “Overcoming Dyslexia” and a Yale professor. “I think it’s just more comfortable and — I hate to say easier — but it more meets the needs of somebody who might not be a fluent reader.”

Karen Gaudet, Hunter’s mother, a regional manager for a retail chain who said she read two or three business books a week, hopes Hunter will eventually discover a love for books. But she is confident that he has the reading skills he needs to succeed.

“Based on where technology is going and the world is going,” she said, “he’s going to be able to leverage it.”

When he was in seventh grade, Hunter was one of 89 students who participated in a study comparing performance on traditional state reading tests with a specially designed Internet reading test. Hunter, who scored in the lowest 10 percent on the traditional test, spent 12 weeks learning how to use the Web for a science class before taking the Internet test. It was composed of three sets of directions asking the students to search for information online, determine which sites were reliable and explain their reasoning.

Hunter scored in the top quartile. In fact, about a third of the students in the study, led by Professor Leu, scored below average on traditional reading tests but did well on the Internet assessment.

The Testing Debate

To date, there have been few large-scale appraisals of Web skills. The Educational

Testing Service, which administers the SAT, has developed a digital literacy test known as iSkills that requires students to solve informational problems by searching for answers on the Web. About 80 colleges and a handful of high schools have administered the test so far.

But according to Stephen Denis, product manager at ETS, of the more than 20,000 students who have taken the iSkills test since 2006, only 39 percent of four-year college freshmen achieved a score that represented “core functional levels” in Internet literacy.

Now some literacy experts want the federal tests known as the nation’s report card to include a digital reading component. So far, the traditionalists have held sway: The next round, to be administered to fourth and eighth graders in 2009, will test only print reading comprehension.

Mary Crovo of the National Assessment Governing Board, which creates policies for the national tests, said several members of a committee that sets guidelines for the reading tests believed large numbers of low-income and rural students might not have regular Internet access, rendering measurements of their online skills unfair.

Some simply argue that reading on the Internet is not something that needs to be tested — or taught.

“Nobody has taught a single kid to text message,” said Carol Jago of the National Council of Teachers of English and a member of the testing guidelines committee. “Kids are smart. When they want to do something, schools don’t have to get involved.”

Michael L. Kamil, a professor of education at Stanford who lobbied for an Internet component as chairman of the reading test guidelines committee, disagreed. Students “are going to grow up having to be highly competent on the Internet,” he said. “There’s no reason to make them discover how to be highly competent if we can teach them.”

The United States is diverging from the policies of some other countries. Next year, for the first time, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which administers reading, math and science tests to a sample of 15-year-old students in more than 50 countries, will add an electronic reading component. The United States, among other countries, will not participate. A spokeswoman for the Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm of the Department of Education, said an additional test would overburden schools.

Even those who are most concerned about the preservation of books acknowledge that children need a range of reading experiences. “Some of it is the informal reading they get in e-mails or on Web sites,” said Gay Ivey, a professor at James Madison University who focuses on adolescent literacy. “I think they need it all.”

Web junkies can occasionally be swept up in a book. After Nadia read Elie Wiesel’s Holocaust memoir “Night” in her freshman English class, Ms. Konyk brought home another Holocaust memoir, “I Have Lived a Thousand Years,” by Livia Bitton-Jackson.

Nadia was riveted by heartbreaking details of life in the concentration camps. “I was trying to imagine this and I was like, I can’t do this,” she said. “It was just so — wow.”

Hoping to keep up the momentum, Ms. Konyk brought home another book, "Silverboy," a fantasy novel. Nadia made it through one chapter before she got engrossed in the Internet fan fiction again.

The Washington Times
Schools need role in election debate
7.27.08

Adrienne T. Washington

Asya Wilson, with braids as long and thin as she is, is happy that she will enter the eighth grade at a popular charter school in Decatur, Ga., where her mother, Mei Mei Casswell, was finally able to get her enrolled.

But this is not the first time the shy, 13-year-old honor roll student has been enrolled in a charter school.

"By no means is she going to go to the public high school in the district that her mom lives in. It's horrible; really, really bad," said her father, Michael Wilson of Baltimore, to explain why his only child bounced back-and-forth from a public school to a now-defunct charter school to a public school and back to a charter school again.

She wasn't getting the attention she needed in public [elementary] school for "a really good student."

"It just didn't pass the smell test," Mr. Wilson said.

Her stepmother, Raina, said, "We're always looking for the best programs for her." This weekend she was helping Asya, who just completed computer camp at Morgan State University, pack to head off to historic Camp Atwater in Brookfield, Mass.

"But it shouldn't be a situation where parents have to move all around to where they're getting the best education for their kids," Mr. Wilson said.

He noted that Asya's mother has relocated a number of times seeking better schools in and around Atlanta.

Asya's parents are in that group of American voters who believe education is the key to economic opportunity - not only for their children, but for the country. Education reform is their No. 1 priority during this presidential election cycle. However, they see that the much-needed reform of the nation's schools is being overshadowed by rising gas prices, home foreclosures and foreign policy.

"Education is pretty close to the top of my priorities, right up there with world peace," said Mr. Wilson, who pointed out that he is a first-generation college graduate. "But the candidates have not talked enough about it."

An Associated Press poll on education conducted in mid-June found that half of Americans said the U.S. is falling behind the rest of the world in education, and 62 percent said that the quality of schools in the U.S. is worse than 20 years ago. The respondents rated education among their top concerns after the economy and gas

prices, but ahead of the war in Iraq, terrorism, the environment, immigration and health care.

A June Rasmussen poll also indicated that 90 percent of voters believe education is important in the next congressional election. A May Pew Research Center survey showed that education ranked as the No. 2 priority for voters this fall, ahead of taxes and Iraq.

Arizona Sen. John McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee, laid out the key points to his education-reform package at the annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People on July 16. It includes support for school vouchers, teacher certification and merit pay.

Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, the presumptive Democratic nominee, said in his July remarks to the American Federation of Teachers, which is part of the Democratic core base, "You've shown that it is possible to find new ways to increase teacher pay that are developed with teachers, not imposed on them."

Mr. Obama also supports residency programs, mentoring programs and service scholarships as ways to recruit new teachers. "We need to focus on fixing our public schools, not throwing up our hands and walking away from them," he said.

Both candidates have said they support higher standards and accountability and will back reauthorization of President Bush's controversial No Child Left Behind Act. Mr. McCain would revise the \$23 billion education initiative. Mr. Obama - who favors charter schools, but opposes vouchers for private schools - would increase resources for NCLB. He contends that Mr. Bush did not allocate enough funding.

One nonprofit, nonpartisan education-advocacy group, Strong American Schools (<http://www.edin08.com>), is not waiting for the presidential candidates to make education reform a higher priority on the campaign stump.

Last week, Strong American Schools - a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation - started a \$5 million advertising campaign, "One Nation Left Behind," targeted to voters in battleground states, including Virginia, Ohio, Colorado, Missouri, New Mexico, Wisconsin and Iowa, to raise the critical and immediate need for education reform as the campaign progresses.

"This is our 'man to the moon' moment. If we don't respond ... we will lose our American way of life," Marc Lampkin, executive director of

Strong American Schools said last week He'd like to see "a robust debate on how to improve the quality of teaching" so that every child gets a quality education, no matter where he or she lives and no matter what his or her parents' income.

In addition to the organization's campaign outreach efforts, which have included town-hall meetings on education, these ads lay out dire statistics about American students' poor academic performance and their increasing failure to keep up with their international peers. Actress and author Jamie Lee Curtis is featured urging our nation's leaders to "make education reform a priority."

Those statistics do not include the troubling fact that nearly one-third of America's teens do not finish high school.

Mr. Lampkin said "a lot's at stake" because many American students are not prepared for work or college, where far too many must take remedial classes.

According to figures provided by retired Gen. Colin L. Powell's America's Promise Alliance, the high rate of high school dropouts, estimated at 1.2 million students per year, or one student every 26 seconds, "will cost the U.S. economy \$329 billion in lost wages, taxes and work-force productivity over their lifetime." But this failure is more than an economic issue, it's a national security issue, says Gen. Powell, who along with his wife, Alma, established a dropout-prevention program this spring.

For its part, Strong America Schools is advocating three main strategies to strengthen K-12 public schools, including establishing higher standards, hiring effective teachers and increasing time and support for learning. The latter includes paying for longer school days and a longer school year.

But will those critical solutions come in time for Asya and her parents and countless others like them who don't have time to wait on campaign promises?

"We're learning as we go along that you have to get as much information on these schools as you can," said Mr. Wilson.

And what Mr. Wilson wants from the next president is someone who will "find a better way to hold these schools accountable."

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Cuyahoga Falls News-Press Governor stops in Akron for a 'conversation on education' 7.27.08

April Helms

Akron -- Funding. Time constraints. Technology. Attracting and keeping quality teachers and school staff. Servicing the needs of a diverse body of students.

These were some of the key issues that popped up repeatedly during an education forum July 23 at Akron's North High School. The forum, sponsored by Gov. Ted Strickland, was the second such public "Conversation on Education" planned. Other forums have been scheduled throughout the state through September.

Strickland said he planned to review the ideas he hears and will introduce an education reform proposal sometime in 2009.

"This is the chance to talk about something that is important to our students, to our schools and to our state," Strickland said to the roughly 100 people attending. "We are not looking at a nearly-finished painting, wondering where to put that last blob of paint. We are artists at a blank canvas, wondering what is the best painting we can paint there."

The governor has scheduled 12 forums; the first was in Columbus July 22. The governor said he is concentrating on his six principles for education reform, which he outlined in his State of the State address in February:

- Strengthening the state's commitment to public education;
- Linking education with economic prosperity;

- Identifying the current strengths of the school system;
- Consulting the best teachers and following their lead;
- Developing a specific, personalized education program that identifies how each individual student learns and use the teaching methods appropriate to that student's needs and abilities; and
- Using testing and assessment to guide personalized and individualized education through a comprehensive and ongoing understanding of a student's capabilities and weaknesses and growth in the educational process.

Beth Clute, a special education teacher and Hudson resident, said that education was important to the future prospects of not only the student, but the community.

"I wish we could use the money we have to actually teach the children," Clute said before the forum started. "I'm not sure people realize this, but we either pay now and have successful students, or we pay later with incarceration. We can pay for happy, productive citizens or we can pay for convicts."

Kellie Patterson, a member of the Cuyahoga Falls Board of Education, said that technology training in the schools should be emphasized more.

"I have an 11-year-old learning HTML coding," Patterson said. "He's not learning this at school, he's doing it on his own. I think that's sad. You can't get most jobs any more without some computer training. [Someone employed in] gas stations, retail, car repair, needs some computer skill. Even surgery is being done by computer."

According to information at www.conversationoneducation.org, attendance at the governor's forums is by invitation only due to space limitations. Those who cannot attend the live events are encouraged to form or join local watch parties -- a watch party is a group gathered together to watch the broadcast or webcast and to participate in a facilitated discussion after the broadcast. Video of the forums will be available online for viewing after the events. Residents also can send ideas and concerns online.

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The Tennessean **Data lend urgency to English-language learning** **7.27.08**

Dwight Lewis

It was definitely a clear indication of the changing face of America. The statistics from the letter and policy notes showed that fact.

But more importantly, they told of a major challenge facing those of us who live not only in Tennessee but all across America: We must make sure all of our children learn English.

Among the findings of the Educational Testing Service:

- In 2004-2005, approximately 5.1 million students, or 10.5 percent of the U.S. student population, were English-language learners.
- Approximately 79 percent of ELLs nationally are from Spanish-language backgrounds.

- While ELLs live throughout the U.S., they are heavily concentrated in six states: Arizona, California, Texas, New York, Florida and Illinois. These six states contain 61 percent of the nation's ELL population.
- Other states, including Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee, experienced ELL growth rates of 300 percent and higher between 1995 and 2005.
- California educates 1.6 million, or one-third, of all the nation's ELL students.
- Eighty-five percent of all ELLs in California speak Spanish.

And then, perhaps most astonishing, was this fact: The majority of ELLs in elementary and secondary schools were born in the United States.

Yes, as officials with the Educational Testing Service, based in Princeton, N.J., said, these statistics are staggering.

Advancing efforts to improve the educational achievement of the fastest-growing student population in the nation's schools was the focus of a symposium co-sponsored by ETS and the National Council of La Raza in January, according to Michael T. Nettles, ETS senior vice president of policy evaluation and research, and Delia Pompa, vice president of education for the National Council of La Raza,

"The symposium featured leading experts who have devoted years to studying, writing and advocating for the diverse population of ELL students," Nettles and Pompa wrote in a letter I received last week.

In the policy notes sent out from the symposium, ETS President and CEO Kurt Landgraf said, "We're no longer talking about dealing with a minority part of our population. We are in fact talking about the part of the population that is very quickly becoming the majority of our K-12 student cohorts.

"We need to find new ways to reach these populations. That is not only socially conscious but, frankly, in the best interest of the United States, both economically and in terms of equity in education. Because if we don't do this, leaving 25 percent of our student population behind in terms of education and opportunity has only one outcome — disaster for this country."

Seeing these statistics and reading some of these comments made it awfully hard not to write about this important issue.

That's the case, too, when you see that the 2006-07 Metro Nashville Public Schools annual report says, "Last year, close to 5,500 students received instruction in the district's English Language Learner program, making the program the largest in the state.

"The challenge for us is to ensure that children in school are gaining knowledge and skills of the English language to the point that they are able to learn other subjects like math, science, history, civics in English," said ETS' Nettles, who grew up in Nashville and makes his home here now after serving as an administrator at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and at the University of Michigan.

"That will require the state and local schools to develop programs that provide non-native speakers of English to become proficient. On a small scale, this is something schools have dealt with throughout history but the challenge is to do it in large numbers."

As we talked over the telephone Friday, Nettles told me that "because we've decided in this country already that English will be the mode of instruction and every child is expected to learn and demonstrate their performance in English, now we have to make sure every child has the opportunity to learn English.

"Otherwise, even if they are skillful in mathematics or other subjects, it will never show up in the assessments we administer."

When asked why everyone doesn't understand that, Nettles said, "I think most people think about their own children or situation first. I think they try to protect what they feel safest about — usually what they have grown accustomed to.

"And, I think there's an element of fear, an element of separation, and some of it is classism, and some of it is racism."

Even as the face of America changes? That's such a shame.

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Baltimore Sun **County schools to go wireless. Hariston's plan for Internet access is first in region.** **7.28.08**

Gina Davis

When Baltimore County schools reopen their classrooms to students in August, the system is expected to be the only one in the region with wireless high-speed Internet access in each of its buildings.

The development would be the realization of a goal for district-wide connectivity set by Joe A. Hairston when he became county schools superintendent nearly a decade ago.

"This is an important and exciting step in our ongoing commitment to provide schools with access to the type of technology that is available in our businesses and homes," Hairston said in a recent e-mail. "Anytime-, anywhere- access to our Baltimore County Public Schools network and to the Internet gives teachers the capability to better integrate technology directly into classroom instruction. It also provides schools the opportunity to introduce mobile computing, giving teachers and principals greater flexibility in scheduling classes as well as managing classroom space."

The move was prompted by the growing number of laptops in use in the county's 171 schools and centers and the increasing use of digital media-based instructional tools, along with the high costs associated with cabling and installation of wired networks, according to school officials. In addition, schools will be able to make greater use of video learning programs.

Baltimore County appears to be the only school system in the region that anticipates being fully wireless by the coming school year, but others, including Carroll and Howard counties, are looking into it. Baltimore City has a half-dozen schools that are "centrally managed for wireless," and about a fourth of Anne Arundel County's public schools have some form of wireless access, according to spokesmen for those

systems.

"It's part of our technology plan," said Patti Caplan, spokeswoman for Howard County public schools. "We're beginning a network redesign next week."

Most area school systems rely on wireless labs or wireless laptop carts that are wheeled from classroom to classroom, such as in Harford County.

"All secondary and many elementary schools have mobile laptop carts with a wireless access point built in," said Don Morrison, spokesman for Harford County public schools. "A teacher can wheel a cart into any classroom, distribute the laptops, plug the access point into a network drop and you have an instant lab all with network access."

No school system in the region, however, expects to have the kind of blanket wireless access that is planned for Baltimore County, which is moving toward having fiber-optic connections to all schools.

Nationally, more schools are moving toward wireless access. In 2005, 45 percent of public schools with Internet access used wireless connections, up from 32 percent in 2003, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics Web site.

In Baltimore County, the increased wireless capability means that more of the district's 105,000 students and hundreds of teachers and administrators can work on the same network simultaneously, school officials said.

"Users can carry their laptops around school campuses and have the same access experience virtually anywhere," Michael Goodhues, the school system's chief information officer, said in a statement. "And as schools expand or shift resources between locations, we won't be facing massive rewiring costs."

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The Washington Post

Longer year for Fairfax teachers. Extended contract pilot program adds duties and dollars
7.28.08

Michael Alison Chandler

The last day of school for most teachers in Fairfax County was June 17, but you wouldn't know it at George Marshall High School. One day this month, the hallway lights were dim and the parking lot nearly vacant, but an English teacher was advising an ambitious student in a bare classroom upstairs, and three social studies teachers were mulling over Harry Truman and test scores in the library.

The Falls Church area high school is part of an \$8 million, three-year county pilot initiative to extend teacher contracts into summer and encourage teachers to take on greater responsibilities, inside and outside the classroom.

With intensifying demands from high-stakes tests and an increasingly diverse student population, Superintendent Jack D. Dale said, effective teaching requires more planning and collaboration. "Teaching is a full-time job," he said.

Away from the whiteboard, some teachers are data analysts, combing through test results to set priorities for September. Others are curriculum developers, teacher trainers or researchers on instructional techniques.

Many teachers do some or all of these things on the fringes of their traditional jobs. By paying them for their time, Dale is trying to cement these roles in their careers. Whether he can expand the initiative in tight budget times is an open question, especially as class sizes are increasing and teachers countywide are getting smaller cost-of-living raises than they would like.

Schools nationwide are looking for ways to pay striving or successful teachers more so they can attract and keep talent. The District and Prince George's County are offering financial incentives for exceptional teachers in challenging schools. Arlington County is enabling qualified teachers to skip a step on the salary schedule.

Fairfax's move toward a year-round teacher schedule is unusual, said Allan Odden, a University of Wisconsin professor who studies alternative teacher pay and who has advised Dale. But Odden said the notion of giving teachers more responsibilities in exchange for more pay is gaining momentum in public education. He said a "cadre of teacher leaders" in a school has proven to be critical for student achievement.

Fairfax's "teacher leadership" program began in summer 2006 with extended contracts for about 600 teachers at 24 schools, issued through competitive grants. The contracts add nine, 14 or 24 days to the traditional 194-day schedule. They can increase salaries as much as 12 percent.

This summer, the school system gave an additional 1,100 summer school teachers extended contracts instead of per diem stipends. The shift meant a little more money for those teachers, partly in the form of retirement benefits, but it also meant higher expectations. The summer school teachers were selected through a more competitive process. And in elementary and middle schools, duties do not end with summer school: Teachers in the program are expected to follow student progress throughout the year and become "experts in intervention" at their schools, said Peter Noonan, assistant superintendent for instructional services.

Eventually, Dale hopes to have as much as 70 percent of the school system's 14,000-teacher workforce on extended contracts. But as officials seek to extend or expand the program in the coming year, they might face funding challenges because of a severe budget crunch.

Leonard Bumbaca, president of the Fairfax Education Association, which represents teachers, said that he supports paying teachers for extra work but that he is concerned the program might lack ongoing funding. In a year when teacher pay raises did not match inflation, he questioned spending more on a select group of instructors.

Other teachers have expressed concern that the program is confusing and funds a wide array of activities without requiring schools to clearly document progress. "Teacher leadership was never clearly defined," said Richard J. Baumgartner, former president of Fairfax Education Association and a McNair Elementary reading teacher. A school system-funded evaluation of the grant proposals also found that they lacked cohesion and that many lacked a detailed monitoring plan.

Leslie Butz, an assistant superintendent who oversees the teacher leadership program, said the first round of grants in 2006 encouraged schools to "be creative and try new things." The first evaluation came out last fall and showed some improvement in teacher collaboration and in reliance on research. Another is due in the fall.

The next round of grants, expected in the coming year, will require applicants to be very specific about which groups of students they are seeking to help and how they would measure progress in student achievement.

Several principals at schools that have received grants say teachers are learning new skills and students are making academic gains.

At Westlawn Elementary, 39 of 52 teachers have used extended contracts to create a three-week orientation and professional development program.

Typically, teachers have a few meetings "and then the kids are there," Principal Kim Dockery said. With extended contracts, new teachers have time to learn strategies from mentors and then observe them during summer school, which takes place simultaneously.

Marshall High is the only high school in the county where nearly every teacher has an extended contract. Drawing on research, teams from each discipline meet regularly to discuss what they teach and how they should teach it, including how to modify their approach for students who excel or struggle.

Rather than the traditional model, "where you shut the door and you are responsible for everything that happens there," the best way for teachers to improve is to share research and feedback and implement what works, said J. Timothy Kane, an International Baccalaureate history teacher.

In Marshall High's library, Kane and two other social studies teachers spent their summer morning studying results from the most recent IB history exam and analyzing a dip in scores in one area of the test. They reviewed what might have been different about the teaching in other areas. Three-quarters of their students scored a five or better on a seven-point scale. "That's very good, but you can always do better," Kane said.

Later, Kane grilled second-year teacher Susan Cimburek about Truman for a U.S. history course.

Without the extended contract, Cimburek said she would still be reading up on the 33rd president and preparing for school. "But here you are working with other people, and the product is better," she said.

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The Wall Street Journal
The greatest scandal
7.28.08

Editorial Board

The profound failure of inner-city public schools to teach children may be the nation's greatest scandal. The differences between the two Presidential candidates on this

could hardly be more stark. John McCain is calling for alternatives to the system; Barack Obama wants the kids to stay within that system. We think the facts support Senator McCain.

"Parents ask only for schools that are safe, teachers who are competent and diplomas that open doors of opportunity," said Mr. McCain in remarks recently to the NAACP. "When a public system fails, repeatedly, to meet these minimal objectives, parents ask only for a choice in the education of their children." Some parents may opt for a better public school or a charter school; others for a private school. The point, said the Senator, is that "no entrenched bureaucracy or union should deny parents that choice and children that opportunity."

Mr. McCain cited the Washington, D.C., Opportunity Scholarship Program, a federally financed school-choice program for disadvantaged kids signed into law by President Bush in 2004. Qualifying families in the District of Columbia receive up to \$7,500 a year to attend private K-12 schools. To qualify, a child must live in a family with a household income below 185% of the poverty level. Some 1,900 children participate; 99% are black or Hispanic. Average annual income is just over \$22,000 for a family of four.

A recent Department of Education report found nearly 90% of participants in the D.C. program have higher reading scores than peers who didn't receive a scholarship. There are five applicants for every opening.

Mr. McCain could have mentioned EdisonLearning, a private company that took over 20 of Philadelphia's 45 lowest performing district schools in 2002 to create a new management model for public schools. The most recent state test-score data show that student performance at Philadelphia public schools managed by Edison and other outside providers has improved by nearly twice the amount as the schools run by the district.

The number of students performing at grade level or higher in reading at the schools managed by private providers increased by 6.1% overall compared to 3.3% in district-managed schools. In math, the results for Edison and other outside managers was 4.6% and 6.0%, respectively, compared to 3.1% in the district-run schools.

The state of California just announced that one in three students in the Los Angeles public school system drops out before graduating. Among black and Latino students in L.A. district schools, the numbers are 42% and 30%. In the past five years, the number of dropouts has grown by more than 80%. The number of high school graduates has gone up only 9%.

The silver linings in these dismal clouds are L.A.'s charter high schools. Writing in the Los Angeles Daily News last week, Caprice Young, who heads the California Charter Schools Association, noted that "every charter high school in Los Angeles Unified last year reported a dropout rate significantly lower than not only the school district's average, but the state's as well."

On recent evidence, the Democrat Party's policy on these alternatives is simply massive opposition.

Congressional Democrats have refused to reauthorize the D.C. voucher program and are threatening to kill it. Last month, Philadelphia's school reform commission voted to seize six schools from outside managers, including four from Edison. In L.A., local

school board members oppose the expansion of charters even though seven in 10 charters in the district outperform their neighborhood peers.

It's well known that the force calling the Democratic tune here is the teachers unions. Earlier this month, Senator Obama accepted the endorsement of the National Education Association, the largest teachers union. Speaking recently before the American Federation of Teachers, he described the alternative efforts as "tired rhetoric about vouchers and school choice."

Mr. Obama told an interviewer recently that he opposes school choice because, "although it might benefit some kids at the top, what you're going to do is leave a lot of kids at the bottom." The Illinois Senator has it exactly backward. Those at the top don't need voucher programs and they already exercise school choice. They can afford exclusive private schools, or they can afford to live in a neighborhood with decent public schools. The point of providing educational options is to extend this freedom to the "kids at the bottom."

A visitor to Mr. Obama's Web site finds plenty of information about his plans to fix public education in this country. Everyone knows this is a long, hard slog, but Mr. Obama and his wife aren't waiting. Their daughters attend the private University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, where annual tuition ranges from \$15,528 for kindergarten to \$20,445 for high school.

When the day arrives that these two candidates face off, we hope Senator McCain comes prepared to press his opponent hard on change, hope and choice in the schools.

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The Plain Dealer **Ohio allowed more flexibility under No Child Left Behind** **7.28.08**

Scott Stephens

Ohio is one of just six states that will be allowed a little more flexibility under the federal No Child Left Behind law.

That new flexibility will:

- a) Result in students learning more.
- b) Offer teachers greater creativity in their lesson plans.
- c) Enable districts that post good test scores to avoid being labeled as failing.
- d) None of the above.

If you answered "d," award yourself a shiny red apple.

Fact is, the state's 1.8 million public-school students who will march back to class this fall won't have a clue that the U.S. Department of Education eased regulations for Ohio.

Nor will the state's teachers, principals and superintendents find their day-to-day

chores any easier.

That's because the new program - the Differentiated Accountability Pilot, in education jargon - hands the increased flexibility to state officials rather than to practitioners in the field. That's a disappointment for districts that have struggled to meet federal benchmarks despite continued academic improvement.

Lakewood, for instance, met or exceeded 25 of 30 state academic targets in 2006-07, showing strong improvement in almost every building.

But the district failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress, the federal academic benchmark, because black and disabled students missed math and reading targets.

The various combinations of student groups in Lakewood - a district with children who speak 42 languages - give the school system more than 100 hurdles to clear to make Adequate Yearly Progress. More-homogeneous suburban neighbors may have only 20 such hurdles.

The relaxed federal rules in Ohio won't change that conundrum.

"The thing that frustrates me is that it doesn't change anything in terms of the scoring system for school districts," said Lakewood schools Superintendent David Estrop. "In terms of labeling a district, this will have no impact whatsoever."

Here's how the change will work in Ohio, pending approval by the legislature:

The No Child Left Behind act requires all public-school students to meet state reading and math standards by 2014. Schools and districts that miss targets in those subjects fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress. About two-thirds of the more than 600 school districts in Ohio last year fell short of meeting the progress standard. That's mostly because the federal benchmark requires that all groups of students - regardless of race, income, ethnic origin or disability - meet state targets.

So even if a district has generally high test scores, the failure of small groups of students to meet math or reading targets can prevent that district from making Adequate Yearly Progress.

Under the law, those hundreds of districts that didn't make Adequate Yearly Progress were all labeled underperforming, regardless of whether they missed by a millimeter or a mile. Continued failure to reach that target could result in sanctions, up to and including state takeover.

The proposed change will allow Ohio to create three tiers of districts missing the yearly progress target - those requiring low support, medium support and high support. That way, the state can target the appropriate level of help to the districts that need it the most.

"Our goal in applying for this flexibility was so that we would be able to provide districts additional supports to address the needs of their students," said State Superintendent Susan Tave Zelman.

Seventeen states applied to participate in the pilot program. In addition to selecting Ohio, a panel of experts gave Illinois, Florida, Georgia, Indiana and Maryland the green light. The six states made the cut because of their advanced use of data in education policy decisions.

"I'm hopeful that they will build on this progress by creating effective new strategies that we can share and take to scale," said U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.

The Ohio legislature is expected to take up the proposed revisions contained in the pilot program this fall. Meanwhile, Estrop and others are hoping that Congress, which is reauthorizing No Child Left Behind, will come up with a kinder formula. He said that between 400 and 500 of Ohio's school districts are expected to miss Adequate Yearly Progress this year.

"My hope is that we can convince decision-makers in Columbus and Washington that we need to make some changes," he said. "The children themselves, as well as the school districts, are being labeled failures, and that just doesn't make sense."

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Chicago Daily Herald

'Leave No Child Inside' gives city kids chance to embrace the outdoors

7.28.08

Jake Griffin

As a bluegill nibbles on the corn 12-year-old Tammy Stelnicki uses as bait, the youngster yanks too quickly with her rod and loses the fish.

It would have been her third catch of the day, and she seems somewhat disappointed by the missed opportunity. But since the native of Chicago's South Side is releasing the bounty she catches anyway, isn't she glad she doesn't have to grapple with the slippery, squirming fish?

"Nah, that's the cool part," she said.

Tammy hurriedly applies another corn kernel to the tiny hook and casts the lure into the lake hoping for another chance at No. 3 before she and her fellow campers go canoeing in a DuPage County Forest Preserve lake.

Forget about a fish that got away, though. The young girl's entire camping experience almost didn't happen this year. The Chicago Park District's "Under Illinois Skies" program that allows more than 100 area children to experience camping was in jeopardy when state natural resources officials backed out because of funding and staffing shortages after nearly a decade of support. For many of the young participants - most who hail from the inner city - the program is their first opportunity to camp.

"The DuPage forest preserves had everything we needed, and they were able to help when we needed it," said Peggy Stewart, manager of outdoor and environmental education for the Chicago Park District. "The facilities in DuPage are just beautiful."

Natural relationship

The placid lake provides a far different setting than 13-year-old Gabriel Villarreal's South Side Chicago neighborhood. He buckles his life vest and waits for camp counselors to haul the canoe from the boathouse to the lake.

"I really wanted to do this again as soon as it was over last year," he said. "I've gone canoeing before, so I feel pretty comfortable going again."

Such return customers as Gabriel are exactly what Dave Guritz, forest preserve director of education, hopes the program yields. More than 1,000 youngsters will camp in DuPage forest preserves this summer as part of such organized outings as, "Under Illinois Skies."

Guritz said he offered Stewart's group a hand because it fits the goal of the national outdoor recreation campaign called "Leave No Child Inside."

The purpose of that program is to provide children with a connection to nature that doesn't exist as it once did.

"I don't really see this as too big a burden for the district to take on," Guritz said. "This is a partnership that might lead to future funding opportunities, and we can use to help secure grant funds."

The success of this Chicago Park District partnership may spawn similar programs with youngsters from this county who may not have ample opportunities to interact with nature. There are plenty of children locally with no conduit to nature despite the proximity of forest preserves to most homes in DuPage, forest preserve officials said. Guritz said his office would begin looking into starting similar partnerships with local municipal park districts.

"We have pockets of disadvantaged people in DuPage County and I think we should be reaching out to them," said forest preserve Commissioner Roger Kotecki.

Stewart said the Chicago program is free and available on a first-come-first-served basis.

"Kids just need loose parts like dirt and water and rocks," she said. "It's not like we need a lot of equipment for this."

Guritz said the partnership is a perfect fit for the forest preserve's emphasis on providing youngsters with "unstructured" play time outdoors. That simply means letting children outdoors to explore.

"Kids will get into those areas of nature, but they need to be told it's OK to go in and have those experiences and see what's under that rock or what's at the bottom of a stream," he said. "It's important for the parents to know where the kids are and to set boundaries and limits, but they also have to engage the children in nature."

World of wonder

Counselors say they can see the change immediately in the youngsters when they step off the bus and onto the campgrounds.

"They get really obsessed about what we're going to be doing next," said first-year counselor Carrie Costanzo. "I think they're worried we're going to run out of time."

The three days and two nights in the forest preserve often prove to be quite enough for the campers, who range in age from 10 to 13.

"They're all sleeping on the way home," Costanzo said. "This wears them out."

Forest preserve officials requested that the location of the camp not be identified as a safety precaution. But the campers sleep under the stars near a lake and spend their waking hours participating in activities including fishing, boating, archery, crafting and hiking. The forest preserve also provides naturalists who swing by the campgrounds to teach the campers about a specific nature topic. Every group receives a different lesson.

"See, that's a really nice touch," said 8-year counselor Gabriella Rudek. "That way we get something different, too."

The atmosphere is pretty laid back at camp. There's a schedule, but it's kept pretty loose. If the group wants to keep fishing a while longer, then they stay put instead of going to archery at a certain time.

"The food here is way better than last year, too," Villarreal said. "We made pizzas in the campfire last night. We just put them on tinfoil and cooked it up. It was so good."

The counselors said they are often amazed by how well the campers acclimate to the new surroundings.

"I had one mom warn me that her daughter gets really homesick and might want to call," Rudek said. "Once she got to the camp, she was doing everything she could and she didn't ask for her mom once. She totally forgot she even had a home."

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NPR
McCain, Obama offer dueling education plans
7.28.08

Larry Abramson

Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama is proposing a laundry list of educational benefits that would reach from birth to college. His rival, Republican John McCain, plans to focus on enabling local educational initiatives and expanding virtual learning.

Although both Obama and McCain have criticized the No Child Left Behind Act, neither proposes scrapping it altogether. While Obama regularly bashes the landmark education law for being underfunded, he is not planning to drop the measure's reliance on standardized tests, which is its most controversial provision.

McCain would offer vouchers to children in schools that fail to meet federal standards, so they can attend private schools. Obama opposes vouchers.

Both major teachers' unions have endorsed Obama, despite the fact that he has endorsed so-called "performance pay" — bonuses for successful teachers — something many unions have resisted. Obama would let teachers negotiate how to dole out these bonuses. McCain, who also endorses merit pay, would let principals decide how to distribute the money — something unions roundly reject.

The New York Times**A conversation for Steven A. Farber: To teach genetics, zebra fish go to school****7.29.08**

Claudia Dreifus

Steven A. Farber is a biologist who studies how vertebrates digest fats, research that may be useful in combating heart disease. But Dr. Farber, 45, an investigator at the Carnegie Institution for Science in Baltimore, moonlights at a second job. He heads Project BioEYES, a nonprofit organization he founded seven years ago to bring science to inner-city schools in Baltimore, Philadelphia and South Bend, Ind. He and his staff members try to introduce children to genetics, natural selection and the scientific method. Their tool of choice is Dr. Farber's favorite experimental animal, the zebra fish.

Q. HOW DID YOUR FISH-IN-THE-SCHOOLS PROJECT BEGIN?

A. It started in April of 2001. I'd just opened up my own lab at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. This was my first lab ever, the very first one with my name on the door. My research involved looking for genes important in the digestive process.

Starting one's first lab can be a scary experience. You're unpacking boxes, hiring staff, ordering equipment — and you're doing it while still running experiments and writing grant proposals. In the middle of all this happy chaos, a "Take Your Children to Work Day" was scheduled at the hospital. Someone in the administration heard I had a state-of-the-art zebra fish facility and said, "After a tour of the place, send the kids to Farber's lab for his zebra fish."

Q. ZEBRA FISH ARE USUALLY FOUND IN RIVERS IN INDIA. WHY DID YOU HAVE THEM?

A. They're my experimental model. Biologists have long used yeast, fruit flies and rodents as their models. But since the 1990s, it's often zebra fish. They're particularly useful because they are fecund, inexpensive to maintain and their embryos are transparent, which means you can observe biological processes as they occur.

Also, most of the human genome is represented in the fish genome. Much to our shock, whole clusters of genes are the same. So if you can get to understand the function of a certain fish gene and you can find a corresponding human gene, you might have a shortcut to discovery. A lot of researchers are knocking out fish genes, figuring out what they do, and then using this for insights into human diseases.

Q. AND DID YOUR GUESTS LIKE YOUR FISH?

A. Oh, yeah. The very thing that make zebra fish so useful to scientists — their transparency — hooked them. I was able to show live fish embryos. The kids could see organs forming. I took the children to my high-powered microscope and showed them a fish's heart pumping out red blood cells. Afterward, the children said it was the best part of their day.

In any large bureaucracy, if you do something well, you're asked to do it again and again. So suddenly, there was a parade of children's groups trooping through my laboratory. I was hardly getting my research done. Finally, I spoke to one of the deans: "I know outreach is important, but this is becoming a problem. Why don't you help me hire a teacher to do it professionally?" He came up with enough seed money to hire a teacher for a year. That was the beginning of Project BioEYES.

Q. WHY DID YOU WANT A TEACHER AND NOT A SCIENTIST TO HELP OUT?

A. Because scientists are not trained to teach youngsters, or even grown-ups. The first educator we hired, Jamie Shuda, a former third-grade teacher, taught me a ton about how to engage children's interest and how to talk biology at levels kids get. I'd advise anyone who wants to start a project like this to work with a professional teacher. That's key.

Q. WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU DO WHEN YOU TAKE PROJECT BIOEYES INTO A CLASSROOM?

A. We've created this educational unit, where we work with the homeroom teacher over a one-week period. We begin by appointing the kids "junior scientists," and we give each child their own workbook.

On the first day, we bring in a bucket of zebra fish and say: "Now that you're scientists, you have to be good at observation. Which of these fish is male and female?" After some hits and misses, the kids usually figure out that the fish with the swollen belly is female and the sleek one is male.

We then ask them to scoop out a male and female and put them into mating cages. A child will say, "I don't think my male and female like each other — they are chasing." And that lets us discuss fitness. We ask, "What skills does it take to chase?" We get them to see that in the chase, the females are assessing male health and choosing who will fertilize their eggs.

Q. YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT REPRODUCTION. DOES THAT EVER GET YOU INTO TROUBLE?

A. No. Unlike mammals, zebra fish fertilize their eggs outside of the body. Believe me, that sidesteps a lot. If the kids ask about human reproduction, we go, "Talk to your parents."

Over the course of the week, the children will tend the larvae. They'll take notes on everything they see, and they'll do little experiments. With older kids, we'll mix albino zebra fish with striped ones — "What colors do you think the babies will be?" That's a way of getting to genetics.

Q. HOW DO THE CHILDREN RESPOND?

A. They get it. Kids like animals. The fish grab their interest. The teachers tell me that they don't have attendance problems in the week we're there. Most of the children we see are low-income. When we identify a child with talent, at least in Baltimore, we get them to a special magnet school where their scientific interests have a chance.

Some of what we see is heartbreaking. We got a letter from a Philadelphia youngster named Dasha. She wrote us something like: "I just wanted to thank you for coming

to our class. I think you thought we were the worst class you ever had. All our teachers say that. Thank you for letting us use your microscope.”

Can you imagine kids hearing that from teachers?

Q. YOU AND THE FISH ARE THERE FOR JUST A WEEK IN THE LIVES OF THESE KIDS. IS IT ENOUGH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THEIR FUTURES?

A. It’s a start. The important thing is that they learn that science is fun and that they could actually be scientists. We cover a lot of basic biology that the kids should know. And when we test them afterward, they show comprehension. And I think that happens because the lessons were without stress and because they were enjoying themselves. As Margaret from Philadelphia wrote me after we went to her class, “Hope being a scientist is not boring because I want to be one.”

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**New American Foundation – Ed Money Blog Watch
Let the funding debate begin!
7.29.08**

Jennifer Cohen

Now that Republican and Democratic presidential candidates Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama have both released their education agendas, Ed Money Watch has decided to examine the federal education funding implications of both plans. While both candidates' plans leave some questions unanswered, the differences between them on education funding are stark.

Sen. Obama's platform would increase federal funding for K-12 and early education programs by \$18 billion annually. The largest share of that new funding—\$10 billion—would go to Obama's "zero to five" early education plan to improve the quality and availability of childcare, preschool, and Head Start programs. Obama's proposal would more than double the current federal investment in early childhood programs such as Head Start and the Child Development Block Grant.

Fewer details exist on where the additional \$8 billion intended for K-12 education reforms would go, however. Obama proposes significant investments in improving teacher preparation and quality, including \$100 million to stimulate school-university partnerships for teacher education, \$1 billion for teacher mentoring programs, and an unspecified amount to provide college scholarships of up to \$25,000 to recruit 40,000 new teachers. But the campaign hasn't provided a price tag for many other teacher quality proposals, including the most significant ones.

Obama's proposal also includes \$200 million for state grants for extended learning time, and would double the current funding level (\$1.08 billion) for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool program. Obama has also proposed doubling the current \$260 million federal investment in education research and development. According to the campaign, these investments will be paid for by cutting programs and utilizing tax loopholes elsewhere in the federal budget to funnel money into education.

Sen. John McCain, in contrast, has said that he will freeze all federal discretionary spending until his administration determines which programs are actually working. Within that set funding amount, he will provide \$250 million in grants to states to

develop new virtual learning curricula and programs, and provide \$250 million in scholarships for low-income students to take online coursework or tutoring. These programs would be paid for in part by repurposing the \$267 current federal investment in Education Technology State Grants. McCain would also increase funding for DC's Opportunity Scholarships to \$20 million, and reallocate 65% of the \$2.9 billion in NCLB Title II teacher quality funds to teacher recruitment and performance pay bonuses.

McCain's platform also talks about providing school principals greater autonomy in their use of federal funds, but is unclear about how he would do that. Senator McCain has voted against fully funding No Child Left Behind and has not yet said whether he will support increases in funding for education programs to keep up with increased student population or inflation.

We look forward to seeing more details on both McCain's and Obama's education funding plans, particularly which programs they plan to cut to make new program spending possible. This is just a taste of the education debate that's yet to come. And if our event last Thursday was any indication, the audience for a conversation on education is large and ready and waiting for more.

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Time Congress lays ground for 2009 7.29.08

Jay Newton-Small

Just because their approval ratings are at all-time lows and they are dismissed as a do-nothing Congress doesn't mean Democrats on Capitol Hill aren't keeping busy. On the contrary, since they took control of both legislative chambers in 2006, party leaders have devoted a lot of time and energy passing bills, on everything from global warming and children's health care to embryonic-stem-cell research and a windfall tax on oil companies. Now it's true that they knew their efforts were in vain — that their bills either had no chance of passing, or they would force President Bush to deliver on his veto threat, as he has done twice on legislation to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). But in some respects, that's beside the point — because in the middle of an election that looks to make the Dems' hold on power even stronger, much of this Congress's work is really more about laying the foundation for next year. "Some of these things are like spring training, you know, that the real game is going to be played next year," says Senator Byron Dorgan, a North Dakota Democrat.

A lot will depend, of course, on who wins the presidency. But regardless, at least two measures are sure to see votes: the children's health program and the No Child Left Behind Act, both of which will expire without congressional action (No Child Left Behind actually expires in September, but it's likely that another extension will be passed). Both, also, are stepping-stones to two major campaign issues: education reform and universal health care.

"It's very obvious on some of the biggest domestic issues, health care and energy, the American people want a much bolder response than is possible to enact in this Congress," says Senator Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat. "So what we have done is essentially have a two-track strategy: one to get as much done in this Congress, and then hopefully we lay a bipartisan track for next year, when there'll be an

opportunity to take a bolder approach."

Traditionally, the first two years of any new presidency are the most productive in terms of legislation. In his first term, Bush used his political capital to pass the Medicare Prescription Drug Program, No Child Left Behind, the Patriot Act and tax cuts. In 1993 Clinton passed the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Brady Handgun Bill and the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, and he created AmeriCorps. If Senator Barack Obama wins, this would be the first time that Democrats control both branches of government since the Clinton era, and the potential (and pressure) to complete lots of unfinished legislative business greatly increases.

Even if Senator John McCain wins the presidency, more legislation would likely be enacted; not only does the Republican agree with Democrats on key issues such as global warming, immigration and stem-cell research, but he has spent nearly three decades in the Senate. McCain has said that if elected, he would move to pass \$1 trillion in corporate tax cuts and make Bush's income tax cuts permanent, cut wasteful government spending and pass a gas tax holiday, and seek to allow offshore drilling to help ease the energy crisis — almost none of which has support from Democrats. Obama has said he would pass two new economic stimulus packages, move to end the war in Iraq and shore up the Veterans Administration — all goals congressional Dems support.

There are also the perennial issues that the next Administration must deal with, such as the budget and supplemental war funding (which, if McCain wins, will be one of the most contentious measures). Two other annual thorns — Band-Aid fixes for a middle-class tax hike known as the alternative minimum tax and an ever growing increase in fees paid by Medicare to doctors — could see permanent solutions next year, though such moves would require a serious look at the tax code and reforming entitlements, both tall orders. "These are big problems. I think these are core policy issues, and having them out there so the public understands and can help build momentum to get these things done is critically important," says Senator Maria Cantwell, a Washington State Democrat. "It helps show the public who's for and against things, so it helps us shape the debate at the presidential level too."

Given the logjam that has built up since Democrats took control of Congress in 2006, there's a lot to get through. Rather than jumping into the basket of smaller existing bills, like SCHIP and the windfall tax on oil companies, lawmakers should take this opportunity to go slowly and look at big solutions, says Thomas Mann, a presidential scholar at the Brookings Institution. "I would urge a President Obama or McCain to just forget the whole idea of a first 100 days," he says. "We face mega-problems, and they can't be rammed through in a brief period of time. They'd be much better to take their time and achieve some real change." But given Congress's already low approval numbers and the legislative gridlock of the past few years, it will be hard for leaders on Capitol Hill to be patient, especially with so much low-hanging fruit at hand.

Three other time-sensitive large items remain to be finished this year by Congress: a housing bill that Bush has now, after initially threatening a veto, agreed to sign; reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration; and a yearly extension of popular bipartisan corporate tax cuts. If any of these bills don't make it into law, they too will take priority next year.

The Washington Times
Stop dumbing down America: Reform No Child Left Behind Act
7.29.08

George Allen (Op Ed)

When I was governor more than 10 years ago, we significantly reformed Virginia's public school system and stopped social promotion. The key to our reform was creating new standards of learning (SOL) in math, reading, writing, science, economics and history for grades K-12. We instituted School Performance Report Cards so that parents, students, teachers and taxpayers could see how each school performed. Ours was one of the first standards- and measurement-based accountability education systems in the nation.

Recently, an American Federation of Teachers' report rated Virginia as the only state in the nation to have "strong standards" in all levels and subjects, according to its criteria for clarity, specificity and comprehensiveness. Virginia's SOLs have been proven successful, with student achievement rising significantly on a variety of tests, including SATs and national NAEP tests, and in all subject areas, with many more students mastering subjects from basic reading to advanced math and AP courses.

When the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law was proposed six years ago, I was hopeful that it would provide the structure and incentives for schools across America to improve similar to Virginia's schools. As the NCLB was much less demanding in academic standards and testing than our Virginia reforms, I expected that it would fold in easily with Virginia's existing high academic standards. Unfortunately, the NCLB managed to muddy the waters for states that have or want high academic standards. By forcing bureaucratic federal determinations, the NCLB provides perverse incentives to states to set the lowest, most easily cleared standards to avoid sanctions. This problem of "dumbing down" will only get worse if the NCLB is not logically and promptly changed.

Similar to our approach in Virginia, one of the results of the NCLB that has received near universal acclaim is the disaggregation of test results into subgroups of students on the basis of ethnic background, economic situation, disabilities, and limited English-speaking ability. Breaking down these test results has shown us where pockets of students are being perpetually left behind while the school overall may be succeeding. However, the way the federal bureaucracy manipulates those subgroup numbers in evaluating the performance of a school has been unfair, illogical and, ultimately, detrimental to students and schools.

The NCLB requires every school to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the 2014 goal in every subgroup simultaneously. Thus, if one subgroup of 60 students fails to show AYP, then the entire school is labeled as "needing improvement," and NCLB-mandated sanctions go into effect, even if 80 percent of the students are learning and passing the exams.

For example, one of the subgroups is Limited English Proficiency (LEP), or non-native English-speaking students who are learning English. NCLB rules require students who are English beginners to take reading tests just like those taken by fluent English speakers, and many have not yet learned enough English to pass the test. Schools with increasingly diverse populations of LEP students, including many in the Northern Virginia area, have failed to meet NCLB goals specifically because of this

demographic. It just does not make any sense to fail an entire school because a few young students who are new to America have not yet learned English.

This is just one of the ways in which NCLB's standards and sanctions have created as many problems as they have solved, in addition to the enormous costs in time and paperwork that contradictory NCLB reporting requirements have imposed. One of the best proposals to retain the successes of NCLB and to avoid its perverse incentives and costs has been introduced by Sens. Jim DeMint and John Cornyn and by Rep. Pete Hoekstra: the Academic Partnerships Lead Us to Success Act (A-PLUS).

Both House and Senate versions of A-PLUS would dramatically reform NCLB to restore state and local control over education while retaining accountability through state-level standards, testing, and reporting to parents and taxpayers. Each state could opt out of NCLB by entering into a performance agreement with the federal Department of Education. The state would receive federal education funds but would be free to spend that money to further its own particular education priorities. In exchange, the state would have to maintain its standards and goals and an accountability system for school failures and must publicly report results of student achievement, including disaggregated information on sub-groups of students. If the state does not meet the terms of the agreement, the state's schools would return to the NCLB system.

Reform such as A-PLUS would preserve beneficial aspects of NCLB - goals and consistent testing that provide real results and expose underachievement to parents and taxpayers - but restore freedom to states to use their competitive creativity to meet academic goals. Congress must act on NCLB reform - or the increasing number of school failures under NCLB will heighten the pressure on states to "dumb down" standards, harming the education of all students and defeating the very purpose of the law.

Former Sen. George Allen, who also served as Virginia's governor, is the Reagan Ranch Presidential Scholar for Young America's Foundation.

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The New York Times The biggest issue 7.29.08

David Brooks (Op Ed)

Why did the United States become the leading economic power of the 20th century? The best short answer is that a ferocious belief that people have the power to transform their own lives gave Americans an unparalleled commitment to education, hard work and economic freedom.

Between 1870 and 1950, the average American's level of education rose by 0.8 years per decade. In 1890, the average adult had completed about 8 years of schooling. By 1900, the average American had 8.8 years. By 1910, it was 9.6 years, and by 1960, it was nearly 14 years.

As Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz describe in their book, "The Race Between Education and Technology," America's educational progress was amazingly steady over those decades, and the U.S. opened up a gigantic global lead. Educational levels were rising across the industrialized world, but the U.S. had at least a 35-year

advantage on most of Europe. In 1950, no European country enrolled 30 percent of its older teens in full-time secondary school. In the U.S., 70 percent of older teens were in school.

America's edge boosted productivity and growth. But the happy era ended around 1970 when America's educational progress slowed to a crawl. Between 1975 and 1990, educational attainments stagnated completely. Since then, progress has been modest. America's lead over its economic rivals has been entirely forfeited, with many nations surging ahead in school attainment.

This threatens the country's long-term prospects. It also widens the gap between rich and poor. Goldin and Katz describe a race between technology and education. The pace of technological change has been surprisingly steady. In periods when educational progress outpaces this change, inequality narrows. The market is flooded with skilled workers, so their wages rise modestly. In periods, like the current one, when educational progress lags behind technological change, inequality widens. The relatively few skilled workers command higher prices, while the many unskilled ones have little bargaining power.

The meticulous research of Goldin and Katz is complemented by a report from James Heckman of the University of Chicago. Using his own research, Heckman also concludes that high school graduation rates peaked in the U.S. in the late 1960s, at about 80 percent. Since then they have declined.

In "Schools, Skills and Synapses," Heckman probes the sources of that decline. It's not falling school quality, he argues. Nor is it primarily a shortage of funding or rising college tuition costs. Instead, Heckman directs attention at family environments, which have deteriorated over the past 40 years.

Heckman points out that big gaps in educational attainment are present at age 5. Some children are bathed in an atmosphere that promotes human capital development and, increasingly, more are not. By 5, it is possible to predict, with depressing accuracy, who will complete high school and college and who won't.

I.Q. matters, but Heckman points to equally important traits that start and then build from those early years: motivation levels, emotional stability, self-control and sociability. He uses common sense to intuit what these traits are, but on this subject economists have a lot to learn from developmental psychologists.

I point to these two research projects because the skills slowdown is the biggest issue facing the country. Rising gas prices are bound to dominate the election because voters are slapped in the face with them every time they visit the pump. But this slow-moving problem, more than any other, will shape the destiny of the nation.

Second, there is a big debate under way over the sources of middle-class economic anxiety. Some populists emphasize the destructive forces of globalization, outsourcing and predatory capitalism. These people say we need radical labor market reforms to give the working class a chance. But the populists are going to have to grapple with the Goldin, Katz and Heckman research, which powerfully buttresses the arguments of those who emphasize human capital policies. It's not globalization or immigration or computers per se that widen inequality. It's the skills gap. Boosting educational attainment at the bottom is more promising than trying to reorganize the global economy.

Third, it's worth noting that both sides of this debate exist within the Democratic Party. The G.O.P. is largely irrelevant. If you look at Barack Obama's education proposals — especially his emphasis on early childhood — you see that they flow naturally and persuasively from this research. (It probably helps that Obama and Heckman are nearly neighbors in Chicago). McCain's policies seem largely oblivious to these findings. There's some vague talk about school choice, but Republicans are inept when talking about human capital policies.

America rose because it got more out of its own people than other nations. That stopped in 1970. Now, other issues grab headlines and campaign attention. But this tectonic plate is still relentlessly and menacingly shifting beneath our feet.

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USA Today

Fuel prices force schools to weigh class, staff cuts

7.29.08

Greg Toppo

Fuel and costs are rising so quickly for the USA's public school districts that nearly one in seven is energy considering cutting back to four-day weeks this fall. One in four is considering limits on athletics and other extracurricular activities, and nearly one in three is eliminating teaching jobs.

In the first detailed look at how fuel costs are affecting schools, a survey by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) finds 99% of superintendents contacted say they're feeling the pinch — and 77% say they're not getting any help from their state.

"No question that schools are being impacted here," says Steven Crawford, executive director of the Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School Administration. "The price of fuel has impacted everybody's budget."

The AASA survey of 546 superintendents, out today, follows an informal poll last month that found fuel and heating costs rising from 10% to 32% over last year.

Other surveys have found that transportation costs are up by as much as 40% in the nation's 14,100 school districts.

The new figures paint a vivid picture, finding that:

- 15% of districts are eliminating bus routes and either eliminating or modifying extracurricular offerings or sports.
- 15% are considering moving to a four-day school week.
- 44% are cutting back on field trips.
- 29% are eliminating or modifying teaching positions.

Crawford, who until this summer was superintendent of Byng, Okla., Public Schools, says two Oklahoma districts are "seriously considering" four-day weeks to trim fuel and heating costs.

Other districts are looking into converting diesel bus fleets to run on natural gas — and a consortium of districts in the western part of the state is considering building its own wind-generated power plant to provide electricity, heating and cooling. They'd sell the surplus electricity for a profit, Crawford says.

"You can reap the benefits for 20 or 25 years or longer," he says.

A 35-year education veteran, Crawford says Oklahoma schools went through similar woes in the 1980s' oil bust and are used to tightening belts. But rising energy prices, he says, could bring a "huge shift," forcing schools to downsize in new ways.

"If it's for a prolonged period of time, it'll change the way we do business."

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Associated Press

Call for Chicago students to skip 1st school day

7.29.08

Michael Tarm

Community leaders on Monday called on students from poorer parts of Chicago to protest inequalities in school funding by skipping the first day of classes.

State Sen. James Meeks wants students to spend Sept. 2 trying to enroll in a suburban school district that spends much more per student than Chicago Public Schools does. Critics of the planned protest say it will send the wrong message to children and undermine campaigns to get as many students as possible to attend the first day of classes in the nation's third-largest school district.

Protest organizers, though, say their message about unequal funding trumps any on attendance.

"Today we are back to two-tiered schools — white and affluent on one side, and black, brown and poor on the other," said Meeks, who also is a minister on the city's South Side. "That's an injustice and it's immoral."

Meeks said he expects several thousand Chicago students to travel in a caravan of buses to New Trier Township High School in the leafy, North Shore suburb of Winnetka, where they will attempt to enroll.

State statistics indicate that the New Trier district spends around \$17,000 annually on each of its students compared to the roughly \$10,000 a year spent for each student in Chicago public schools.

"We, as a civilized people, can't do it this way," Meeks said. "We're doing irreparable harm to hundreds of thousands of kids."

Officials at New Trier Township High School District 203 said it wasn't yet clear how they'll deal with so many Chicago students showing up at one time to attempt to enroll at the high school.

"We have sympathy for the issue of school funding. ... But I think (Meeks) is harming his cause by doing this," said the district's superintendent, Linda Yonke.

Meeks said the protesters would seek to enroll based on state rules allowing students to transfer to another district if their safety is at risk. The inferior education they receive in Chicago, he said, "was not good for the safety of their futures."

Yonke said she would have to consult lawyers to see if the district might be obliged to enroll any of the Chicago students.

Overhauling how public schools are funded in Illinois has been hotly debated for years — but to little avail. Critics want the state to move away from a system where money for local schools derives largely from local property taxes, saying the status quo results in vastly better funding of schools in property-rich neighborhoods.

Officials at Chicago Public Schools said they sympathize with the planned protest but don't support it.

"We appreciate Rev. Meeks' efforts to spotlight the inequities in our state-funding structure, but we want our students in our schools on Sept. 2," district spokesman Mike Vaughn said. "We want to make sure students hit the ground running, and that starts with being in school the first day, the first week, the first month. It sets the tone for the rest of the school year."

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Campaign K-12 (Education Week Blog)

An education debate?

7.29.08

Alyson Klein (Op Ed)

Could there be an entire presidential debate focused on education? Maybe, if the Business Coalition for Student Achievement gets its way.

The group, which includes some major business organizations, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, big names in the philanthropy world, such as the Broad Foundation, and corporations including Microsoft, sent a letter last week to both campaigns asking for an "event, town hall meeting, or debate" on education.

It seems like a longshot. Even during the primary season, when it felt like the presidential candidates were holding a debate roughly every 10 minutes, education policy watchers felt lucky to hear even a question on K-12 issues. Still, there are some heavy hitters in this coalition and a debate on school issues would give both candidates a chance to appeal to educators, parents, and the business community -- all at the same time.

And, of course, as an education reporter I'm really hoping that the group gets it wish. If nothing else, it would be a great opportunity to get the candidates to say something about the No Child Left Behind Act beyond that it must be "fixed." So ... fingers crossed!

Mansfield News-Journal (OH)
Editorial: Do something about education this time
7.30.08

Editorial Board

Gov. Ted Strickland starts a series of town meetings to discuss changing Ohio's education system.

Our opinion:

We've had these discussions before. This governor had better do more than just talk about the problem.

If Gov. Ted Strickland wants to fix public education funding in Ohio, he's going to have to do more than talk about it.

He's going to have to actually do something about it.

Strickland's predecessors loved to talk about it. Bob Taft had a Blue Ribbon Task Force assigned to the problem. George Voinovich had his own "education management council." Even Richard Celeste had his Education 2000 commission.

The common denominator for these three chief administrators? None of them did anything to fundamentally alter our school-funding system, which the Ohio Supreme Court has repeatedly deemed unconstitutional, most recently in 2002, because it relies too heavily on local property taxes.

For more than a decade, school funding in Ohio has been like the weather. We love to talk about it. But no one does anything about it.

That simply must change.

One difference this time could be Strickland will represent himself at the "listening table" more often than not. Hopefully, that will make a difference.

If Strickland listens well in his meetings with teachers, students, parents and local school district officials, the picture will become crystal clear. It will look remarkably similar to the picture the state's high court saw when it made its original ruling more than a decade ago.

Over-reliance on local property taxes to fund public education creates tremendous inequalities around Ohio from one district to the next. It forces every school district and superintendent to constantly spend time and effort gearing up and running school levy campaigns instead of focusing on education.

It cheats the young people of our state of the best possible education we can provide.

The good thing is Strickland knows his ability to fix the problem will be the single biggest determinant in his legacy as governor. If he finds a way to muster the political will to solve the problem, he will be remembered as the governor who made

a huge, positive difference. If not, he will simply go down as yet another failure among state leaders in solving the crucial issue in Ohio.

We urge Strickland to become directly involved in the upcoming town-hall style meetings. Listen carefully. Ask questions. And then listen to the answers.

If he does, the answers will become clear enough.

His own courage to complete this test will be his ultimate test. Can he pass?

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ABC News 7 (CA)
Parents are outraged at SF School District
7.30.08

Lilian Kim

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (KGO) -- Some parents in San Francisco have to start searching for a new kindergarten for their kids, months after they thought they were all set. School officials met with parents Tuesday night, to try to explain how a glitch caused all the confusion.

"How the students who were displaced chosen and singled out?" asked a parent.

Parents had a lot of questions for the San Francisco Unified School District. They are outraged that after receiving acceptance letters nearly five months ago, their children can no longer attend Spanish immersion programs at Alvarado and Flynn Elementary schools. In all, 23 kindergartners are affected.

"We bought uniforms. We paid for the afterschool care. It's like throwing everything up in the air again and saying our son doesn't have a kindergarten anymore. It's not a good thing," said Loretta Johnson, a parent.

The San Francisco Unified School District says for the Spanish immersion program to be effective, there needs to be an equal number of native Spanish speakers and English speakers. School officials thought they had achieved that balance, until they realized there was a coding error.

"In fact it was almost 100 percent native English speakers and so there were a lot of different possibilities that were considered and the Superintendent finally decided that the best choice was to reassign these 23 families," said Gentle Blythe, a SFUSD spokesperson.

Still, for parents, such explanations offer little comfort. Many are already frustrated by the district's complicated assignment system, one where families often don't get their top choices and where students are forced to attend school miles away from their home.

"I don't feel like I can look at my friends and my family and look at them and say, oh yes, you should go to public schools. And my family, personally, we're now considering a private school," said Todd David, a parent.

Some parents, however, say when it comes to the Spanish immersion program, the district is doing the right thing.

"It's important for the culture, it's important for the language that there is a balance of children in these programs," said Kim Garcia-Meza, a parent.

The parents of the 23 kindergartners are now forced to look at other schools. They have until August 6th to make up their minds.

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USA Today

Costs, concerns push schools to use eco-friendly elements

7.31.08

Ledyard King

Waterless urinals. Geothermal cooling systems. Photovoltaic solar panels.

The space shuttle? Try your child's school.

Classrooms are slowly going green, prodded by rising energy bills, public health concerns and a general desire to adopt eco-friendly principles. Green schools cost a little more to build — generally 1% to 2% extra — than conventional schools but promise payback through lower utility bills and, some studies suggest, better student achievement.

"A school district that might have been thinking 'I can't afford to build a green school' is now saying 'I can't afford not to'," said Rachel Gutter, schools sector manager for the U.S. Green Building Council which certifies school construction projects based on environmental criteria.

Several states, including Hawaii, Florida and New Jersey, now require that new school buildings be more energy efficient, reduce their water usage and recycle more. In June, the U.S. House of Representatives sent a bill to the Senate requiring schools built with federal money to incorporate green elements.

Nearly 100 public and private schools nationwide have been certified by the U.S. Green Building Council since 2000 and another 800 are seeking certification.

Ohio has been a leader in the green school movement, Gutter said. Using money received through a legal settlement with tobacco companies, they are planning to build 250 green schools over the next two years. The state expects to save \$1.4 billion in energy costs over the next 40 years thanks to the program.

It goes beyond simply imbuing a sense of environmental responsibility, green advocates say. Some of the elements can help improve schooling.

Studies in 1999 and 2003 by the Heschong Mahone Group, a California consulting firm that promotes energy-efficient design, found that children generally fared better on math and reading tests in schools where natural light was more prevalent because it improved student focus and achievement. "Daylighting," as it's called, is encouraged because it cuts down on energy bills by reducing the need for artificial lighting.

"Most of the time we don't even turn on the lights in my classroom because there's so much light from the windows," said Lily Kamali, 11, a fifth-grader who attends Great Seneca Creek Elementary School in Germantown, Md. The school was the first in Maryland certified by the green council.

With large windows a prominent feature in most classrooms, daylighting is a central feature at Fossil Ridge High School, which opened four years ago in Fort Collins, Colo. That's not just because it's one of several green elements, such as low-flow faucets and wind power usage, aimed at saving money.

School officials say it also helps student performance. Fossil Ridge Principal Dierdre Cook said there is no hard data to suggest daylighting is a reason the school, which draws from upper-income neighborhoods, scores among the best in Colorado. Still, she added, the airy layout of the campus and its emphasis on clean air contributes to an academically enriching experience.

"It's just a happy building. It gives you a sense of well-being," she said. "The better you feel about where you are, the better you're going to perform."

Not everyone is enamored with the idea of going green.

Federal lawmakers who opposed a green provision in a school funding bill that passed the House in June don't like what they view as Congress meddling in a local issue.

"The problem with America's public education system isn't that it's failed to build a sufficient number of green schools," said Rep. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., the GOP's second-in-command among House members. "The problem is it's failed to empower our communities, parents and teachers with the tools and authority they need to provide the quality educational experience our children need, expect and deserve."

Much of the focus has been on construction. But teachers, parents and children at those schools say it's easier to imbue pupils with a sense of environmental responsibility in buildings that promote those principles.

At Summerfield Elementary, a Neptune, N.J., school recognized for its green design, students go on nature walks, plant flowers and engage in recycling projects.

"I do find that whatever they learn at school comes home with them," said Loretta Eichenour, Summerfield PTO president and mother of two girls who attend the school. "They're more environmentally conscious and that makes everyone more environmentally conscious."

That's the way many students feel at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, where a renovated middle school includes photovoltaic solar panels on the roof to save energy, a wetland to enable the reuse of wastewater for the school's toilets, and plenty of recycled building materials.

"It makes you look at everything in a new way," said Chitti Raju, 14, an eighth-grader at Sidwell. "You're used to seeing all these renewable and sustainable materials (at school) and you go to your house and you don't see any of this and you're like, 'Hey Mom, we can put in different light bulbs that do this.' It really makes you think about these things."

Chicago Tribune**Voice of the People (Letters): Invest in quality after-school programs****7.31.08**

State Rep. Kathy Ryg (D-IL, Vernon Hills)

As co-chair of the Lake County After School Coalition and sponsor of Illinois House Resolution 384, which established the After-school Funding Policy Task Force, I have followed with interest the recent series by Tribune reporters Stephanie Banchemo and Patricia Callahan regarding the state funding of after-school programs. In fact, it was a similar investigation several years ago that prompted my legislative action.

HR-384 established the task force to develop recommendations for the administration and coordination of the after-school, mentoring and student-support line item in the State Board of Education's budget. The task force includes stakeholders who understand the importance of quality after- and out-of-school time programs and services.

The resolution was adopted unanimously and is supported by the governor's office and the Illinois State Board of Education. Our primary purpose has been to address the issue of accountability from the programs receiving this funding.

The Illinois After-School Partnership has been meeting to develop policy recommendations to ensure adequate funding and accountability, using national standards and best practices. The Tribune series has helped to focus attention on the need for a change in the process.

The recommendations of the After-school Funding Policy Task Force will guide that change. We must invest in quality after-school programs and services, both to ensure that our children have access to programs that promote their academic and personal development and to help them make healthy choices to avoid engaging in or being victimized by juvenile crime and violence.

For every dollar spent on quality after-school programs, the state can save \$7 in reduced costs for juvenile detention, teen pregnancy and substance abuse. These dollars are scarce, so increased accountability is vital. The report of the After-school Funding Policy Task Force is a step toward a system that can work. Our children deserve a system that works to help them become the very best they can be.

-- State Rep. Kathy Ryg (D-Vernon Hills)

The Wall Street Journal**This Recess Is Really From Accountability****7.31.08**

Craig R. Barrett and Edward B. Rust Jr.

Regarding Reg Weaver's July 24 letter¹ responding to "Wrong Education Fix²" (Review & Outlook, July 12): The Business Coalition for Student Achievement (BCSA) could not disagree more. The president of the National Educational Association

claims that H.R. 6239, "The Recess for NCLB Until Reauthorization Act," introduced by Reps. Tim Walz and Sam Graves does not undermine education accountability.

While he may be correct in stating that the proposal would not suspend the law's testing or reporting requirements, the bill would in fact end the most important components of accountability -- the actions and interventions which must take place to improve student achievement in schools still not making the grade.

The NEA also states that the bill "does not minimize or eliminate the consequences for schools and districts that have already been subject to sanctions." However, the proposal would essentially end intervention and student support such as free tutoring and public school choice to underperforming schools.

Improving the performance of the U.S.'s K-12 education system, by shoring up accountability requirements for our schools, is essential if we want to be sure that the American education system prepares our youth to succeed, and our nation to be competitive in our rapidly changing world.

Craig R. Barrett
Chairman of Intel
Santa Clara, Calif.

Edward B. Rust Jr.
Chairman and CEO
State Farm

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Detroit Free Press

Get Bolder in effort to lift all children's education

7.31.08

Susan B. Neuman

Six years after the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind law, there is frustratingly little evidence that it will close the achievement gap between low-income, minority children and their middle-class peers. Despite the heroic attempts of many dedicated educators, NCLB-inspired school reforms, like so many others before, have failed and will continue to fail to change the trajectory of our disadvantaged children.

As President George W. Bush's assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education during NCLB's passage and initial implementation, I began my journey believing that raising standards would be enough to help low-income children succeed. I have learned that closing the achievement gap requires much more. The failure is not a result of the president's espoused "soft bigotry of low expectations," but because many children grow up in circumstances that make them highly vulnerable.

Schools educate middle-class children well but struggle to function as remedial, clinical institutions. Once a child starts falling behind in school, catching up is mostly a pipe dream.

In their 1995 book "Meaningful Differences," Betty Hart and Todd Risley calculated it would take approximately 41 hours of extra intervention per week to raise language

scores of poor children to those of their well-off counterparts by age four -- and that's before starting preschool!

The impetus for change built into NCLB was to effectively "shame" schools into improvement. We now see that the shame game is flawed.

Schools fail not because they lack resources, or quality teachers. School influences are overwhelmed because so many children are molded by highly vulnerable and dysfunctional environments. The rhetoric of leaving no child behind has trumped reality.

A child born poor will likely stay poor, likely live in an unsafe neighborhood, landscaped with little hope, with more security bars than quality day care or after school programs. This highly vulnerable community will have higher proportions of very young children, higher rates of single parenting, and fewer educated adults. The child will likely find dilapidated schools, abandoned playgrounds, and teachers, though earnest, ready to throw in the towel. The child will drop further behind, with increasingly narrow options.

Shaming schools has become the cure to everything but the common cold, distracting attention from the devastating effects of poverty. We need to move beyond touting school reform as the magical elixir. It is important, but we need to mobilize other institutions to help solve this problem.

I've now joined with a group of national experts, from diverse backgrounds, areas of expertise and political beliefs, calling for a "broader, bolder approach" to education. Our proposals (at www.boldapproach.com) certainly include improving schools, but tie changes in classrooms to changes in the world outside.

For example, as a researcher and government official, I've seen highly successful early childhood programs where teachers focus relentlessly on prevention, effectively changing the odds for poor children. But such programs are too rare.

A broader, bolder approach must also ensure routine pediatric, dental, hearing and vision care for all infants, toddlers and schoolchildren. Many of the most intractable problems faced by young children and their parents can be traced to maternal health-related behaviors. Programs such as the nurse-family partnership project have shown stunning effects on young mothers' ability to care for their infant's nutritional, health and social needs.

I've also seen hospital and health center services that show low-income parents and children the pleasures of looking at books together. They demonstrate that pediatricians' literacy-promoting interventions can dramatically improve the language of young children.

Disadvantaged students often lose ground after school and during summers.

All this suggests that perhaps schools don't have exclusive rights to education.

If we are to take seriously the prospect of really leaving no child behind, we need to support education whether delivered in K-12 schools, in clinics, child-care centers, community-based organizations, libraries, church basements or storefronts. By using the science of what we know works, we can help millions of children growing up in highly vulnerable circumstances to achieve a more promising future.

SUSAN B. NEUMAN is a professor in educational studies specializing in early literacy development at the University of Michigan. Write to her in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226 or at oped@freepress.com.

Los Angeles Times
Obama and McCain miss the mark on education
8.01.08

Kate Applebee

Neither candidate's proposed solution can address underlying issues with the K-12 system.

Although Barack Obama and John McCain try to offer solutions to help America break from conventional thinking on educational policy, both senators are missing key pieces to the puzzle of why our public schools are failing.

In an article that ran recently in the Los Angeles Times, McCain told the NAACP, "I want to reward good teachers." McCain's education platform is built on merit pay for teachers and school vouchers for families who would like to trade in their students' failing schools for private schools. According to McCain, families whose children are stuck in failing schools should have choices and opportunities that are not limited by entrenched bureaucracy or unions. Although Obama has opposed school vouchers, he has encouraged merit pay for teachers. What they fail to take into account is that we've become spoiled. Not too long ago, a free and public education was appreciated because families remembered when education was not free or even available. But it has been so long since anyone in this country has been denied an education that there are now three or more generations that take the benefits for granted.

That's not to say public education does not have its issues. As a teacher who has made it past the standard four-year dropout mark, I am worried about the state of public education and my role in changing it. I hear McCain say the goal of his education platform is to boost pay for great and outstanding teachers, and I wonder if I am one of those teachers. My principal thinks highly of me -- and other staff members regard my teaching as outstanding -- but my students are still failing. I know my weaknesses as a teacher, and I try to find remedies for them -- remedies that often include sacrificing my own time and needs.

This summer, I have spent five weeks participating in the Inland Area Writing Project, a part of the National Writing Project, in order to develop my skills as a teacher of writing, an area that I know I need to improve regardless of the praise I receive. I am responsible for teaching students how to read and write critically, but I cannot do so in isolation. It would be easy for me to blame the teachers who have previously taught my students. In each student's background, there may have been teachers who did a poor job, but we, as a society and a bureaucracy, forget that although we can educate and guide students, we can't control them.

Students and their families make choices. Students choose to attend school or not, often manipulating their parents into letting them stay home or excusing the absences that accumulate from ditching. Other students and their families decide that although an education is valued for all you can do with it, there are other activities and people deserving more time and attention. Yes, the responsibility of

educating should rest on the shoulders of teachers, but as teachers, we cannot change the choices of students and their families.

Unfortunately, neither presidential candidate is capable of the mind control necessary to influence the choices that students and their families make regarding education. True education reform can only begin with an adjustment to the attitudes and beliefs of the individuals directly affecting the state of education: the students and their families; it's an adjustment that remains nearly impossible in a democratic republic.

Will I meet McCain's or Obama's qualities of a great and outstanding teacher? I don't know. The answer, and perhaps my pay, is held in the choices and desires of my students and their families.

Kate Applebee is a high school English teacher in the Inland Empire.

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The New York Times Education as a Civil Rights issue 8.01.08

Editorial Board

Civil rights groups have begun a welcome attack on a House bill that would temporarily exempt the states from the all-important accountability requirements in the No Child Left Behind Act, which was signed into law in 2002. The attack, led by powerful groups like the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, was unexpected, given that the nation's two big teachers' unions actually hold seats on the conference's executive committee. Recent events suggest that the civil rights establishment generally is ready to break with the teachers' unions and take an independent stand on education reform.

Despite innocuous packaging, the House bill looks very much like a stealth attempt to gut the national school accountability effort. Introduced by Representatives Sam Graves, a Missouri Republican, and Timothy Walz, a Democrat from Minnesota who is a former teacher, it is supported by the National Education Association, the influential teachers' union that has been trying to kill off No Child Left Behind for years.

The bill, which is unlikely to pass, would permit the states to ignore the parts of the law that require them to pursue corrective actions at failing schools. That would encourage lassitude in states and districts that have already dragged their feet for too long. It would sap the energy of states that have shown clear progress since the law was passed and are eager to move forward. Once stopped, the reform effort could take years to get moving again.

The support of civil rights groups for the No Child Left Behind Act has been muted in the years since the law was first passed. But with the reauthorization process under way, the groups are making it clear that they view education reform as a civil rights issue. They want changes in No Child Left Behind — but only changes that strengthen the law — and they are fully prepared to fight the unions for those changes if necessary.

Forbes
Virtual schools, real businesses
8.11.08

David K. Randall

Ron J. Packard, the chief executive of K12, an online education company in Herndon, Va., is adamant that he runs a public school. "We are more public than any other public school in the country," he says. "You don't have to buy a million-dollar house in the suburbs to come to my schools. We take every child who comes, regardless of income, race or ability."

Teachers aren't thrilled about this competitor. The Chicago Teachers Union sued the Illinois State Board of Education in October 2006 in Circuit Court of Cook County, challenging the state's decision to send public education dollars to the not-for-profit Chicago Virtual Charter School. The union alleges that the school does not provide sufficient direct instruction by certified teachers and amounts to homeschooling at taxpayers' expense. K12 was paid \$1.5 million last year to provide the curriculum, technology and management services for the charter school, and is on the hook to the school for any claims or challenges to its validity. The case is pending and the company won't estimate its potential loss if the Teachers Union were to win the case. But a similar suit in Wisconsin spurred that state's legislature to enact a law in April that allowed the Wisconsin Virtual Academy, another K12 partner, to continue to enroll students.

In an echo of the charter school movement of a decade ago, the fight boils down to money. When students abandon the blackboard for the flat screen, their schools lose up to 70% of the taxpayer money that attaches to them, Packard says. Rural districts, which depend more heavily than urban ones on state aid, are more fearful of losing those dollars, says Julie Young, president and chief executive of the Florida Virtual School.

School district administrators say it's not money they're fighting over, it's educational quality. "The drawbacks aren't around the programs being online per se but are around the lack of policy and oversight, which in a few cases brought into question the quality of a few online programs," says John Watson, a consultant in Denver who has done research and policy reports for clients including the University of California and the Colorado Board of Education. An audit by the State of Pennsylvania also found that several online charter schools received payments from school districts that were 30% higher on average than the costs to educate those kids.

The fighting will only get louder with the \$300 million market for online school-age education growing 30% a year, according to the North American Council for Online Learning. Twenty-six states now have statewide virtual schools. Total enrollment nationwide is estimated to be 1 million students. The Florida Virtual School, established by the legislature in 1997, is the largest online public school program, with enrollment of 54,000 this year.

K12, with revenue of \$140 million last year, operations in 21 states and the District of Columbia and an enrollment of 40,000, is the leader in the elementary-to-high-school online education market. It went public in December and enjoys a \$650

million market value. Its sales have doubled since 2004 and analysts are bullish, predicting a \$5 million net this year on revenue of \$217 million.

Packard, 45, a former banker and McKinsey & Co. consultant, founded K12 in April 2000 and got it off the ground with \$40 million in venture capital from such sources as Andrew Tisch of the Loews billionaire family, Larry Ellison of Oracle and Knowledge Universe, a for-profit education conglomerate chaired by Michael Milken. Knowledge Universe's \$10 million investment in K12 is now worth \$125 million.

Despite hostility from the education establishment, says Packard, his company has been "flooded" with résumés from teachers. K12 has 1,100 teachers teaching through its virtual schools, about 200 of whom are employed by K12.

"A lot of education groups are resistant to change," says Packard. "We view ourselves as a service for the public school system and not competition for public schools." That's a tactful way of describing what could be an ugly battle.

Do Your Homework

Investing in online learning brings a mixed bag of tiny stocks and a few giants like Apollo and DeVry that own physical and virtual schools.

| COMPANY | RECENT PRICE | MARKET VALUE (\$BIL) | ENTERPRISE MULTIPLE | 3-YR EPS GROWTH ¹ |
|----------------------------|--------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| APOLLO GROUP | \$55.19 | \$8.7 | 11 | 15% |
| CORINTHIAN COLLEGES | 11.92 | 1.0 | 9 | 20 |
| DEVRY | 53.04 | 3.8 | 17 | 25 |
| K12 | 21.89 | 0.6 | 26 | 43 |
| STRAYER EDUCATION | 204.63 | 3.0 | 23 | 18 |

Prices as of July 14. ¹Projected annual rate. Source: Reuters Fundamentals via FactSet Research Systems.