



Headlines

8.08.08 — 8.15.08

Article	Date	Headline	Publication	Author
1	8.08.08	<u>Fun and games and academics too</u> Excerpt: At Dorchester's Murphy Community Center, 7-year-olds are using chemistry to learn how police investigators identify mysterious substances.	The Boston Globe	John C. Drake
2	8.08.08	<u>College Board to debut an 8th-grade PSAT exam</u> Excerpt: High school students already face a battery of standardized tests on their way to college. Now, the college testing frenzy is reaching into middle school.	Los Angeles Times	Gale Holland
3	8.08.08	<u>Problem: Boys don't like to read. Solution: Books that are really gross</u> Excerpt: The book's main character slaughtered his victims by running them through with sharp stakes. He once left hundreds dying slowly on a hillside while the soil grew "muddy with blood" and "blackbirds flocked around the corpses, fighting for a meal."	The Wall Street Journal	John Hechinger
4	8.08.08	<u>Did the teachers' unions endorse the wrong guy?</u> Excerpt: USA Today editorial writer Richard Whitmire makes that case in an EdWeek commentary you can read here.	Campaign K-12 (Ed Week Blog)	Michele McNeil (Op Ed)



5	8.08.08	<u>Businesses added to Meeks' school boycott</u>	Chicago Sun-Times	Rosalind Rossi
		Excerpt: For three days, hundreds of students would cut their classes and camp out instead in the lobbies of some of Chicago's most prominent businesses -- from the Chicago Stock Exchange to Aon Corp. -- under an expanded September school boycott plan detailed Thursday by state Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago).		
6	8.08.08	<u>Neighborhoods focus of supervisor's school plan</u>	San Francisco Chronicle	Jill Tucker
		Excerpt: A committee of San Francisco supervisors has jumped into the long-running fray over how students are assigned to public schools, pushing a resolution that urges the school district to emphasize neighborhood preference in the assignment process.		
7	8.09.08	<u>Governor's education fix remains a surprise</u>	Chicago Daily Herald	John Patterson
		Excerpt: The governor is ordering lawmakers back to the Capitol next week, demanding they fix Illinois' much maligned system for financing public schools.		
8	8.10.08	<u>Outdoor educators pushing for 'No Child Left Inside' funding</u>	USA Today	Kristen Wyatt
		Excerpt: Canoeing trips on the Chesapeake Bay. Endangered butterfly camps for teachers in Rhode Island. A new corral and barn for a nature center in Texas that wants to show kids live bison.		
9	8.11.08	<u>Civil Rights and the No Child Left Behind Act</u>	The New York Times	Monty Neill (Op Ed)
		Excerpt: 'Education as a Civil Rights Issue' (editorial, Aug. 1) asserts that civil rights organizations support strengthening the No Child Left Behind Act.		

10	8.11.08	<u>Class Struggle: The thinking behind critical thinking courses</u>	The Washington Post	Jay Mathews
		Excerpt: Looking for a way to improve your mind and make some money? Check out the latest "critical thinking" courses.		
11	8.11.08	<u>Technical education the solution to state's high dropout rate</u>	San Jose Mercury News	Paul R. Hay (Op Ed)
		Excerpt: The California Department of Education has reported that one in four students who start high school will drop out.		
12	8.11.08	<u>Uptick in 'No Child' failures largely due to suburban schools</u>	Star Tribune (MN)	Sarah Lemagie
		Excerpt: For a glimpse at the numbers behind the news last week that nearly half of Minnesota's public schools are falling short of state benchmarks in reading and math, many suburban families need look no further than the school down the block.		
13	8.11.08	<u>Obama & education: Backward Barack</u>	Pittsburgh Tribune-Review	Editorial Board
		Excerpt: When Barack Obama was young and poor but lucky, he received a scholarship to Honolulu's prestigious Punahou School, an elite private K-12 school where tuition now tops \$16,000 a year.		
14	8.11.08	<u>NY high school graduation rate rise slowly</u>	Associated Press	Michael Gormley
		Excerpt: Keeping students for a fifth or sixth year in high school, along with substantially more summer school sessions and after school programs, is boosting New York graduation rates, according to state officials.		
15	8.12.08	<u>How well are they really doing?</u>	The New York Times	Editorial Board
		Excerpt: Congress has several concerns as it moves toward reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002.		

16	8.12.08	<u>Are we science-savvy enough to make informed decisions?</u>	USA Today	G. Jeffrey MacDonald
		Excerpt: For decades, educators and employers have worried that too few Americans are preparing for careers in science.		
17	8.12.08	<u>Keep the kids in school</u>	Chicago Tribune	Dennis Dyme
		Excerpt: That was big of Sen./ Rev. James Meeks to dare someone to arrest the kids he's leading out of the city's public schools in an ill-conceived protest, when he's the guy who should be pinched.		
18	8.12.08	<u>Collaborative to take over schools program</u>	The Providence Journal	Talia Buford
		Excerpt: The district is turning over the reins of its alternative day school program to the West Bay Collaborative, a move officials say will save them money.		
19	8.12.08	<u>Students learn hard lesson in school budgets</u>	MSNBC.com	Alex Johnson
		Excerpt: As 56 million children return to public schools in coming weeks, officials across the nation are cutting bus service, laying off teachers and putting off critical infrastructure repairs.		
20	8.12.08	<u>Westside 8th-graders will get laptops</u>	KETV 7 Omaha	KETV 7 Omaha Staff
		Excerpt: The Westside School district voted Tuesday morning to purchase laptops for its eighth-graders.		
21	8.13.08	<u>Online student-teacher friendships can be tricky</u>	CNN	CNN Staff
		Excerpt: Randy Turner knows there's a huge gap in age and technology between him and his adolescent students.		
22	8.13.08	<u>City schools chief opposes plan to keep kids away on first day of class</u>	Chicago Tribune	Monique Garcia

Excerpt: Chicago Public Schools chief Arne Duncan said thanks, but no thanks Wednesday to those calling for students to boycott the first day of class as a way to draw attention to Illinois' education-funding situation

23	8.13.08	<p><u>Report fuels four-day week debate</u></p> <p>Excerpt: The trend of the four-day school week is growing in Louisiana and nationwide - especially in rural areas - but the concept is not catching on in larger areas such as Baton Rouge, local and state education officials agree.</p>	The Advocate	Jordan Blume
24	8.13.08	<p><u>Confidence in public school and NCLB is declining, survey finds</u></p> <p>Excerpt: Public confidence in America's public schools and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) declined in 2008 according to new research by Martin West, assistant professor of education at Brown University.</p>	Media-Newswire	Press Release
25	8.14.08	<p><u>Our goal: Strong schools</u></p> <p>Excerpt: Next weekend, the Democrats will gather in Denver and one of their first priorities will be to adopt a party platform. The following week, the Republicans will gather in Minneapolis with a similar mission.</p>	Denver Post	Gov. Bill Ritter and Roy Romer (Op Ed)
26	8.15.08	<p><u>S.F.'s black students lag far behind whites</u></p> <p>Excerpt: San Francisco schools earned bragging rights on state standardized tests again this year - performing better than the state as a whole across every grade in both math and English - but any celebration was clouded by the subpar proficiency of the district's African American students, who continued to fall further behind their peers.</p>	San Francisco Chronical	Jill Tucker

Excerpt: Scores on state standardized tests took a step upward in annual results released Thursday, but that rise won't prevent more schools from failing federal targets that have become more difficult this year.

[Article 1](#)[Top](#)

The Boston Globe
Fun and games and academics too
8.08.08

John C. Drake

At Dorchester's Murphy Community Center, 7-year-olds are using chemistry to learn how police investigators identify mysterious substances. At Franklin Park's White Stadium, children from 7 to 14 are writing essays and discussing literature. And at Allston's Jackson-Mann Community Center, children are learning sign language and Spanish.

If this doesn't sound much like summer camp, get used to it.

This is what Mayor Thomas M. Menino's new "Boston miracle" looks like: Children in summer camp putting down basketballs and jumping out of the pool to open a book or conduct a science experiment.

Dozens of the recreational camps based at community centers across the city have been incorporating academics into the regular routine, the first step in a broad community learning initiative meant to link programming at community centers, libraries, and schools.

In his January State of the City address, Menino called the initiative a new "Boston miracle" to put it in league with the city's 1990s community policing efforts. The idea is to improve test scores and decrease youth violence by getting all of a community's resources lined up behind student success.

Given what children have been doing voluntarily at White Stadium, miracle may be an appropriate designation. More than 100 youths have been filing into the Roxbury athletic complex every Monday this summer to talk about their summer reading and to study grammar and punctuation. They are among the 400 to 600 students who also participate in drop-in summer athletic activities at White Stadium Tuesday to Friday.

"It's summer fun and sun, and yet there's this academic piece," said Daphne Griffin, executive director of the Boston Centers for Youth and Families.

The students gather under tents on outdoor athletic fields when the weather is nice or underneath the stands when it's not. They have also met in locker rooms and offices, said Ryan FitzGerald, the city's director of recreation, sports, and fitness. Staff members at the center who also are Boston public school teachers design the

curriculum, which is intended to help bridge the learning gap that typically occurs in the summer.

"You work hard during the school year and have this time where you can run around and have some fun, but this will allow them to not come back with the same amount of cobwebs in the fall," FitzGerald said. "It keeps them sharp and competitive as students."

At the Murphy Community Center, which bustled on a rainy summer day Wednesday, 7-year-olds tried out some crime scene investigation techniques under the direction of camp counselor Sarah Downing.

"Last session we did one about the human body, and this session we're doing one about crime scene investigation, and they're really excited about it," Downing, 20, said, as campers ran back and forth across a gym floor playing street hockey. "We need to calm them down a little bit to start it off - read the directions and stuff - and at first they're kind of like 'eh,' and then they get really into it and volunteer to do stuff."

The workbooks and materials for the Murphy Community Center's science lab were purchased through a \$120,000 Associated Grant Makers grant that funded similar academic activities at 17 community-center camps in the city this summer, Griffin said.

An informal survey of children yesterday found the science lab was mostly a hit.

"We get to experiment with stuff, and we get to learn, and we get to write stuff," said Nina Mazzella, 7, of Dorchester, who described that morning's science experiment. "I learned that when you put vinegar on baking soda, it bubbles."

Even Nolan Mahoney, a 6-year-old who said he prefers gym to science lab, said that learning about how police lift fingerprints and investigate crime scenes was interesting.

Griffin said the integration of academics into the camps, which she said was taking place "to varying degrees" at each of the city's more than 50 summer day camps, is intended to get staff members thinking about the more in-depth coordination that will take place starting in the fall. In coming months, city workers in community centers and gyms will start receiving training on how to coordinate their programming with schools and libraries in their area.

"While in the summer we dealt with the breadth of academic infusion into summer programs, in the fall we'll begin to deepen that engagement," Griffin said.

That means that after-school basketball leagues at community centers in the city could start explaining how statistics are used in sports. Other children may learn graphic design by creating their own baseball trading cards.

"These are the things we know reinforce the school day," Griffin said.

Los Angeles Times
College Board to debut an 8th-grade PSAT exam
8.08.08

Gale Holland

High school students already face a battery of standardized tests on their way to college. Now, the college testing frenzy is reaching into middle school.

The College Board, which owns the SAT, PSAT and other tests, plans to introduce an eighth-grade college assessment exam in 2010, a top College Board official said this week.

After first try, put the pencil down

The new test would be voluntary, said Wayne Camara, the vice president for research and analysis at the New York-based nonprofit, who spoke at a college enrollment conference at USC early this week. But critics noted that the PSAT, which also is voluntary, was taken last year by 3.4 million students, and said the new test would just boost the pressures for students considering college.

High school students now can take the PSAT in 10th or 11th grade to practice for the SAT college entrance exam and to qualify for educational aid programs including the National Merit Scholarship. But younger students have been signing up for the PSAT in growing numbers, perhaps to establish eligibility for gifted or enrichment programs, or to measure college readiness.

The new test would be tailored to eighth-graders. And it would put students on notice to start lining up the rigorous courses required by selective colleges, Camara said.

"By the time they're taking the PSAT, it's much too late to determine whether they should be taking algebra in the eighth grade, biology, and other important gatekeeper classes needed for college," he said. "This test will help schools identify students who have some talent and could likely succeed if they take honors or AP courses, but have not been recognized."

Some Southern California educators said they welcome the opportunity to get students, particularly African Americans and Latinos who are underrepresented in higher education, into the college game early.

Los Angeles Unified School District Senior Deputy Supt. Ramon C. Cortines said he has proposed that the district offer all eighth-graders the chance to take the PSAT beginning next year, as many top private schools do. "Polytechnic, Westridge, Harvard-Westlake all do," Cortines said. "Just because you go to a public school you should still have the same opportunities."

Honey Koletty, a college counselor at Carson High School, agreed: "If you want your kid to go to a highly selective institution, you really do have to know in the eighth grade."

But critics questioned whether the College Board, whose SAT test is coming under increasing scrutiny from universities, is pushing the admissions frenzy into middle

school simply to boost its revenue. The exam will compete with testing rival ACT's Explore, an eighth-grade assessment test used in Long Beach Unified School District and schools across Southern California, an ACT spokesman said.

Nearly 1 million students took the Explore test in the 2005-06 school year, the spokesman said.

"It's a brilliant marketing ploy, but it's pure Pablum," Paul Kanarek, head of the Princeton Review test prep service in Southern California, said of the College Board's pitch for the eighth-grade exam. "They're locked in a death match with ACT over who takes the ACT or the SAT. Once you buy into a certain product line, you're likely to stick with it."

Camara said the exam, which has not been named, is now undergoing field development tests. It will be multiple-choice and will cover critical reading, math and writing. A spokeswoman for the College Board said it was too early to provide other details about its content.

Colleges would not use the exam's results, Camara said. "The test is given in the eighth grade," he said. "By the time they apply to school, [the results] would not be relevant."

Russlyn Ali, executive director of Education Trust-West, the Oakland arm of a Washington-based nonprofit dedicated to improving education, said many California public school students are first-generation college aspirants who lack the background and information to map out their own routes to higher education.

"That plays out in kids' real lives; most of them are taking a hodgepodge of classes . . . and by the end of 11th grade it's too late," Ali said.

Princeton Review's Kanarek, however, said eighth grade is too late to begin pulling together a college prep portfolio.

"Eighth grade is not the key year for college assessment. That's sixth grade," he said.

"Now we're going to have a preadmission test to get ready for the preadmission test? Get ready to get ready to get ready?" said Robert Schaeffer, public education director of Cambridge, Mass.-based FairTest, which is critical of standardized testing. "To believe you need an eighth-grade test on top of the PSAT and SAT is just insane."

Cortines said he welcomes the new test, as it will focus families and teachers on what students need to succeed. The deputy superintendent said he has asked the board to budget \$125,000 for eighth-grade PSAT tests in the coming school year.

At the same time, Cortines said he believes Los Angeles Unified students are overtested. For example, many California high school students now take the state standards tests, the state exit exam, the SAT and SAT subject tests, the ACT and several Advanced Placement tests, all in the junior year.

"We have people in Sacramento and in political offices that think that accountability is testing. And accountability is not testing," Cortines said. "The eighth-grade California standards test . . . should tell us how children are prepared for high school. I'm not sure we need it again in the ninth grade . . . in the 10th grade, and then the

11th grade. Teachers are so loaded down with tests they have very little time to teach anymore."

Deborah Sigman, deputy superintendent of assessment and accountability for the state Department of Education, defended the state-mandated tests.

"Our primary purpose is to check on how effectively are schools preparing students, and we see them as very important," she said.

Several educators said they would wait to see the College Board's new test before judging whether it will be useful.

"California has a very shabby test setup. A lot of these testing outfits are entrepreneurial, they're trying to make a buck," said W. James Popham, a professor emeritus of education at UCLA who has written extensively about testing. "If there is a market to be served, to add another test, they're more than willing to do that. But if the test is well-conceived, it will have an instructional yield.

"But testing takes time, testing costs money. You really have to demonstrate that the addition of another test is worth it. The jury is still out on that."

Article 3

[Top](#)

The Wall Street Journal

Problem: Boys don't like to read. Solution: Books that are really gross
8.08.08

John Hechinger

The book's main character slaughtered his victims by running them through with sharp stakes. He once left hundreds dying slowly on a hillside while the soil grew "muddy with blood" and "blackbirds flocked around the corpses, fighting for a meal."

Although it has the contours of a horror story -- with splotches of red ink on its pages depicting blood -- it's actually a children's book. "Vlad the Impaler: The Real Count Dracula" is widely available in libraries and is making its way into middle-school social-studies classes.

Children's publisher Scholastic Corp. features the 128-page tale of the 15th-century Romanian sociopath in its new "Wicked History" series, also starring "Leopold II: Butcher of the Congo" and "Mary Tudor: Courageous Queen or Bloody Mary?"

Publishers are hawking more gory and gross books to appeal to an elusive market: boys -- many of whom would rather go to the dentist than crack open "Little House on the Prairie." Booksellers are also catering to teachers and parents desperate to make young males more literate.

"There has been a real revolution" in books that "have more kid appeal," especially when it comes to boys, says Ellie Berger, who oversees Scholastic's trade division. "It's a shift away from the drier books we all grew up with."

Last year, U.S. publishers released 261 new works of juvenile fiction aimed at boys, more than twice the number put out in 2003, according to Bowker's Books in Print database. There were 20 nonfiction entries for boys, compared with just four in 2003.

Scholastic last fall started selling both "Wicked History" and "24/7: Science Behind the Scenes," a series inspired by the cadaver-heavy hit TV show, "CSI." One title in the series is "Help! What's Eating My Flesh: Runaway Staph and Strep Infections!" Readers are treated to color pictures of putrefying limbs and the warning that "sometimes, relatively harmless bacteria can turn into a gruesome killer." The two series already have more than 300,000 copies in print.

Karen Parker, a seventh-grade science teacher in Montgomery, Ala., plans to use the "24/7" series in her classes this coming fall after finding it on a recommended list from the National Science Teachers Association. "Half the battle is getting boys to want to read," she says.

In a series called "Sanitation Investigation," Capstone Press in the fall is bringing out "Getting to Know Your Toilet: The Disgusting Story Behind Your Home's Strangest Feature." Other popular selections in the grossness genre include Workman Publishing's "Oh, Yuck: The Encyclopedia of Everything Nasty" and Simon & Schuster's "It's Disgusting and We Ate It! True Food Facts from Around the World and Throughout History." (Think worms, rats and squirrels.)

'Shock Tactics'

Jan Harp Domene, national president of the Parent Teacher Association, decries what she calls publishers' "shock tactics" to reach young males. She wants boys to read about the heroes of Greek mythology, the fantasy of Jules Verne and the antics of Tom Sawyer. "Does it all have to be blood and guts and gore?" she asks.

Eleven-year-old Yathrib Aryanpure, who just finished sixth grade in Tuscaloosa, Ala., says the answer is a resounding yes. He loved "Vlad the Impaler," especially when the boy learned the tyrant was assassinated, ending up with his own severed head on a stick. "I like gory books," he says. "Vlad the Impaler went on a killing rampage. In the end, he got a taste of his own medicine."

Scholastic and other publishers are heeding the research of such academics as Jeffrey Wilhelm, an education professor at Boise State University. Prof. Wilhelm tracked boys' reading habits for five years ending in 2005 and found that schools failed to meet their "motivational needs." Teachers assigned novels about relationships, such as marriage, that appealed to girls but bored boys. His survey of academic research found boys more likely to read nonfiction, especially about sports and other activities they enjoy, as well as funny, edgy fiction.

Boys' literary depth is an abiding concern in educational circles. Boys have persistently lagged behind girls in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, an influential federal test for gauging achievement. The gap widens by the time they reach 12th grade.

Many experts attribute the lag to the time spent with the printed page. In a survey of bookstores this year by Simba Information, a publishing-industry market-research firm, only 2% said boys made up most of their children's book customers. As adults, females also outscore males on literacy exams, and continue to read more. In an age when the Internet is pulling many away from books, boys in particular spend more time than girls do on computers and videogaming.

J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, with more than 400 million copies in print, successfully crossed the gender divide. But research from Scholastic, the U.S.

publisher of the wizard series, shows that children's interest in reading declines sharply starting at age 8 and continues to fall into the teens, especially among boys.

In battling for those boys, many in the industry consider Scholastic's "Captain Underpants" series a major victory. First published in 1997, the series, with plenty of toilet humor and pictures, has 37 million copies in print. In 2003, Scholastic followed up with "The Day My Butt Went Psycho," which the publisher says is "the epic tale of a brave young boy and his crazy runaway butt." Now a trilogy with the latest installment published two years ago, the "Butt" series has racked up 1.2 million copies.

Kevin Bolger, an elementary-school teacher in Ottawa, offers "Captain Underpants" to his third-grade classes, calling the response "awesome." "It's like reading-candy," Mr. Bolger says.

Inspiration

The experience inspired Mr. Bolger to write his own children's book, "Sir Fartsalot Hunts the Booger." It's the story of "the bravest, boldest and, most, er, potent knight in all the land." The hero is on "a quest to solve the riddle of the foul west wind -- a ghastly odor that turns up whenever danger's lurking." Pearson PLC's Penguin Group published the book in May. It's already in its second printing, with 55,000 copies now in print.

Ben Schrank, president of Penguin's Razorbill children's imprint, says the book, especially the title, inspired internal debate and critical blog comments, including one saying his company had "sunk to a new low." But Mr. Schrank calls the book's humor "sophisticated," saying the industry must publish fiction that "will pull a boy away from a videogame."

Mr. Schrank might be talking about 10-year-old Parker Self. Parker, who lives in Dallas, dismisses "Charlotte's Web" as a "girl's book" and assigned texts from school as "good for nothing" and "really boring to read." He prefers soccer and his PlayStation.

His mother, Hope, worried that Parker would never open a book. Then, Parker's grandmother found a copy of "The Day My Butt Went Psycho," and the boy was hooked. "Mom, this is a great book!" Parker raved.

"New York, sadly, is not leading in this, but following," he said.

Article 4

[Top](#)

Campaign K-12 (Ed Week Blog)

Did the teachers' unions endorse the wrong guy?

8.08.08

Michele McNeil

USA Today editorial writer Richard Whitmire makes that case in an EdWeek commentary you can read [here](#).

The gist of Whitmire's piece? John McCain will do more to gut NCLB than will Barack Obama.

What do you think?

Flypaper thinks his idea isn't so far-fetched. This Week in Education thinks it's true.

I'll weigh in on one minor point. Whitmire says that teachers' unions don't need to worry about McCain's support of school choice because vouchers are dead. "Period," he writes. While the idea of federally funded vouchers may be dead, for now, I do think it's too early to write off this movement at the state level.

In Georgia, for example, a school-voucher group called All Children Matter spent more on legislative races this year than any other independent committee, according to this story. In Florida, the same voucher group has raised \$2.1 million to help elect like-minded candidates to the legislature. That state is also considering a constitutional amendment that would help restore a hallmark voucher program created under then-Gov. Jeb Bush but later struck down by the Florida Supreme court.

And as another sign this movement isn't dead, the wealthy Overstock.com CEO Patrick Byrne, who was one of the chief supporters of a failed voucher initiative in Utah, has joined the Friedman Foundation, a school-choice advocacy group, as one of its co-chairs.

[Article 5](#)

[Top](#)

Chicago Sun-Times Businesses added to Meeks' school boycott 8.08.08

Rosalind Rossi

For three days, hundreds of students would cut their classes and camp out instead in the lobbies of some of Chicago's most prominent businesses -- from the Chicago Stock Exchange to Aon Corp. -- under an expanded September school boycott plan detailed Thursday by state Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago).

"I dare the business community to arrest our children and send them to jail because all they want is a quality education," Meeks said.

More than 1,000 parents, children and school activists packed the Daley Center on Thursday to hear Meeks outline his latest version of a plan to galvanize attention on a state school funding formula that has created the second-largest funding gap between rich and poor districts in the nation, according to one 2008 analysis.

Last month, Meeks, a South Side pastor with a huge congregation, revealed plans to protest school funding inequities by sending busloads of Chicago Public Schools students to New Trier High School in Winnetka on Sept. 2 -- opening day for most CPS kids.

On Thursday, Meeks said he wants to expand the boycott to four days. On Sept. 3, 4 and 5, the protest would move downtown and into the lobbies of "every major building," including the Chicago Stock Exchange, the Mercantile Exchange, Chase Bank, Fifth Third Bank, and the Aon building, Meeks said.

There, CPS students would "take a seat on the floor and learn," Meeks said. Retired teachers would hold class in lobbies for about four hours a day, Meeks said.

The goal is to "sensitize" Chicago's business community to the "seriousness of this problem" and encourage them to get involved in crafting a solution, Meeks said.

"If they won't let us in [to their lobbies], we won't go in, but I guess we'll just sit on the sidewalk. That's when we'll protest. We'll picket because then business will be showing their insensitivity to this crisis," Meeks said.

Chicago School Board President Rufus Williams said Meeks' boycott plan will hurt Chicago financially by reducing the system's attendance rate for September -- traditionally one of the best-attended months and therefore one of three generally used by Chicago as the basis for state funding.

"If the message is fix school funding, we are all for it. If the method is to keep kids out of school, we are completely against it," Williams said.

Meeks also voiced support Thursday for an idea by Will Burns, the Democratic nominee for the 25th District state Senate seat, to craft and pass a bill this coming legislative session that would abolish the current school funding formula by Dec. 31, 2010. That means lawmakers would have two years to come up with a replacement.

[Article 6](#)

[Top](#)

San Francisco Chronicle
Neighborhoods focus of supervisor's school plan
8.08.08

Jill Tucker

A committee of San Francisco supervisors has jumped into the long-running fray over how students are assigned to public schools, pushing a resolution that urges the school district to emphasize neighborhood preference in the assignment process.

The resolution was approved Thursday by the City Operations and Neighborhood Services Committee and sent to the full board for a vote later.

Currently, where a student lives has little, if any, influence in school assignments. The district instead assigns students using a complex system that aims to desegregate schools.

The process has been hotly debated for years, pitting those who want access to schools close to home against those who want to promote diversity.

Supervisor Carmen Chu, who authored the resolution, said it's time for the city to take on the emotionally charged topic and fix a broken system.

"We have seen a lot of neighbors who have called to complain about this," she said. "You end up having communities that are shipping their kids all over the place."

School board President Mark Sanchez said the supervisor's effort amounts to a run around the school board.

"It's unfortunate that Carmen Chu didn't come to the school board with the resolution, or at least show it to us before going to the supervisors," he said.

Sanchez said it should have gone before the city's joint committee, which includes both supervisors and school board members.

Instead, the measure was passed by the City Operations and Neighborhood Services Committee, which Chu chairs. Chu and Sanchez are running for separate supervisor seats in the November election.

School district officials said they already have plans to overhaul the assignment system by January, with the new process in place for the fall of 2010.

Currently, however, there is no firm proposal for a new system, said Superintendent Carlos Garcia, noting community involvement will play a big part in the process.

Sanchez said he believes the new system will probably include both neighborhood preference and the continued option of citywide school choice, perhaps involving a lottery.

That means at popular schools, a certain percentage of seats would be reserved for those living within a nearby geographic area while the rest would be available for residents citywide.

The current assignment process allows families to request up to seven schools anywhere in the city. If a school receives more requests than it has available seats, siblings of current students at a school are placed first. Then the district uses a complicated system called the diversity index to assign others.

Five factors are considered: whether the student lives in extreme poverty; the family's socio-economic status; home language; the state ranking of the child's previous school (not included for kindergartners); and the child's previous standardized test scores, or, for kindergartners, attendance in preschool.

Technically, the assignment system also includes a geographic component. When a school has more applicants than seats, students who increase the diversity and live nearby are admitted first.

Sanchez said a new system probably would mean giving up on desegregation efforts, which haven't been successful under the current system of assigning students.

"We, as a society and as a city in particular, have failed in that endeavor," Sanchez said. "I don't think San Francisco parents, for a number of reasons, want real diversity in the classroom in any great measure. ... I'm very disappointed, but that's the reality."

Supervisor Jake McGoldrick, a member of the committee, voted against the resolution, saying it was an issue for the school district to determine, not the supervisors.

"I think they need to work it out," he said. "I do not feel really up to snuff in terms of entering into this arena right now."

The third committee member, Supervisor Sean Elsbernd, joined Chu in supporting the resolution.

Chicago Daily Herald
Governor's education fix remains a surprise
8.09.08

John Patterson

SPRINGFIELD - The governor is ordering lawmakers back to the Capitol next week, demanding they fix Illinois' much maligned system for financing public schools.

Exactly what that fix is, Gov. Rod Blagojevich won't say.

But he did tell reporters Friday he opposes abolishing the use of local property taxes to pay for local schools and if the lawmakers send him a tax increase for education, he'll veto it.

"I'm not going to raise taxes on people," the Chicago Democrat told reporters following the opening of the Illinois State Fair.

Blagojevich has previously said he opposes so-called "tax swaps" that would raise state taxes and use the money to roll back local taxes and provide more for schools.

His idea during the 2006 campaign was to lease or sell off the lottery for billions now and use the money to dramatically increase school funding over four years. It didn't happen.

But that lottery deal is now the lynch pin for his massive push for statewide construction. Without it, he's left with no way to pay for the roads, bridges and schools projects he wants built.

Education funding is back in the spotlight as elections and the start of the school year approach. In Chicago, Democratic state Sen. James Meeks is encouraging public school children to skip classes one day next month and try to instead enroll at Winnetka's New Trier High School. It's aimed at drawing attention to inequities in the state's education finance system that relies on local property values.

Meeks proposes raising state taxes to come up with more money for districts with low property values, leading to lower revenue and thus fewer academic and extracurricular activities.

Blagojevich said Tuesday's session is a chance to see if Meeks and others can pass any of the funding plans they've touted over the years.

Yet, there's little chance lawmakers will fix the funding system during the one-day session.

"And I think we're going to cure cancer, and win the war, both of them - Afghanistan and Iraq," said state Sen. Michael Noland, an Elgin Democrat who supports turning more to state taxes for education so long as property tax breaks are in the mix.

If they don't find a solution, the governor hasn't ruled out keeping lawmakers at the Capitol at least three days a week for the foreseeable future beginning next month.

USA Today**Outdoor educators pushing for 'No Child Left Inside' funding****8.10.08**

Kristen Wyatt

BETHEL, Del. -- Canoeing trips on the Chesapeake Bay. Endangered butterfly camps for teachers in Rhode Island. A new corral and barn for a nature center in Texas that wants to show kids live bison.

Outdoor and environmental educators across the nation are ramping up pressure on Congress and their state lawmakers to add funding for nature learning. The effort dubbed 'No Child Left Inside' could mean millions more for environmental education - and a major windfall for nonprofits hoping for more federal help getting kids outside.

The resolution, which awaits a vote in the House, would send money to nonprofits and state departments of education for outdoor education aimed at kids who now spend more time in front of computer screens, video games and televisions than playing outside.

'This is so cool,' says 12-year-old Emma Osborn, an Annapolis, Md., girl climbing out of a canoe she spent eight hours steering down Broad Creek through rural Delaware.

Osborn is one of a dozen or so kids on a weeklong outdoor camp run by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a nonprofit group that works to clean up the nation's largest estuary. Environmental education is a major task of the Foundation, which teaches nature programs to 40,000 kids across three states each year. Highlights of this weeklong camp include night hikes, setting up tents and campfires and learning to read topographical maps and navigate canoes.

'I've never seen that many stars in my life,' Osborn said, recounting her favorite event, the night hike.

Environmental activism groups say nature learning is crucial amid alarming rates of childhood obesity and a growing concern about the health of the outdoors.

'You're seeing a disconnection from the natural world,' said Don Baugh, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's vice president for education. 'And you're also seeing a lot of health issues from kids not building a fort out back or playing on the stoop and their neighborhood.'

Those worries are getting politicians' attention.

'I think it's responding to a number of anxieties out there,' especially childhood obesity and the environment, said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., lead sponsor of the 'No Child Left Inside' bill. 'The next generation is the one that's going to make or break us as a planet.'

Sarbanes hopes that when Congress revisits the No Child Left Behind law next year, they'll revise it to include some \$500 million over five years for outdoor education. Though Sarbanes is a freshman lawmaker, and he concedes there's not much time left before Congress' terms ends to steer the resolution through to passage, he said he's optimistic his proposal will clear at the least the House before returning next

term.

As Congress weighs Sarbanes' proposal, many states aren't waiting, even as declining tax revenues in most states mean less money for new programs. New environmental literacy requirements are pending from Maryland to Oregon. The plans could mean a boost for groups offering outdoor education already through a patchwork of grants and private donations.

'Not one person I've ever talked to doesn't think this is a good idea,' said Shareen Knowlton, director of education at the Roger Williams Zoo and Park in Providence, R.I. Knowlton runs weeklong teacher training courses on American burying beetles and wants to start a new program studying the endangered Karner Blue Butterfly - 'but the funding isn't there,' she said.

At the Sibley Nature Center, a 49-acre nature preserve in west Texas, executive director Burr Williams has two nature teachers but wants to hire more, and build a corral and barn to hold live animals. He says the 'No Child Left Inside' push is the result of years of pressure from outdoor educators to bring back the classic field trip.

'This is really a product of thousands of educators pushing Congress to get at it,' Williams said. 'You're sitting at a desk in rows, you're engaging a couple of your senses. If you go outside, you engage all your senses.'

In New Mexico, where lawmakers two years ago set aside money to send more schoolchildren to state parks, the fund was increased from \$250,000 to \$400,000 after only one year.

'It's so important to look at the education of the child in terms of the environment,' said state Sen. Cynthia Nava, sponsor of that state's Outdoor Classroom Initiative and a school superintendent in southern New Mexico.

Parks officials are pushing for nature education, too. In Maryland, where Gov. Martin O'Malley issued an executive order earlier this year pushing for more outdoors education, parks managers plan to start work later this month on new nature teaching programs.

'We've got this growing crisis on our hands where we've got these kids magnetized to the computer,' said John Griffin, head of Maryland's Department of Natural Resources, which manages state parks. 'This idea is really catching fire all over the country. ... We want our parks to be not just parks but learning laboratories for kids.'

The potential for more funding has outdoor educators e-mailing Congress and crossing their fingers for money to expand.

'I would love to offer more programs,' said Katie Girvin, curator for education at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park in Florida, which started its first day camps this summer.

'Kids are lacking the time outside. Kids come to summer camp, and they get a little free time outside to play, and they don't know how to do it anymore.'

The New York Times
Civil Rights and the No Child Left Behind Act
8.11.08

Monty Neill (Op Ed)

'Education as a Civil Rights Issue' (editorial, Aug. 1) asserts that civil rights organizations support strengthening the No Child Left Behind Act. While you are correct that education is a civil rights issue, we disagree with your generalization about the position of civil rights groups.

The failures of No Child Left Behind's hand-tying mandates are acutely felt by minority students nationwide: students and teachers in communities of color are smothered by the testing mandates of this broken law.

Civil rights leaders have recognized the law's shortcomings. They have united to sign the Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind Act, which has been endorsed by more than 20 prominent civil rights groups and more than 120 other organizations.

The N.A.A.C.P., Aspira, the League of United Latin American Citizens and the National Urban League have joined the call to overhaul No Child Left Behind.

Yes, education is a civil rights issue, but strengthening No Child Left Behind is not the way to level the playing field.

Monty Neill

Cambridge, Mass., Aug. 1, 2008

The writer is deputy director of FairTest and chairman of the Forum on Educational Accountability.

Original Article:

To the Editor:

The No Child Left Behind Act has provided the opportunity to close the insidious achievement gaps between students of color and white students in America's schools.

By holding schools less accountable for student progress, the bill proposed by Representatives Sam Graves, Republican of Missouri, and Tim Walz, Democrat of Minnesota, would make standard the educational status quo.

Fortunately, as you note, the bill is unlikely to pass.

Every student should, as a basic civil right, be guaranteed a quality education. We should not render the nation's commitment to achievement for all students meaningless by eviscerating accountability.

Instead, a stronger, reauthorized No Child Left Behind Act must include higher standards of accountability and clear, consistent requirements for reporting graduation rates and student progress. Otherwise, we will fail to provide the

necessary academic opportunities to our country's future business and political leaders, jeopardizing the strength of our economy and our democracy.

Michael Wotorson

Washington, Aug. 1, 2008

The writer is the director of the Campaign for High School Equity.

[Article 10](#)

[Top](#)

The Washington Post
Class struggle: Five ways to motivate students
8.11.08

Jay Mathews

Looking for a way to improve your mind and make some money? Check out the latest "critical thinking" courses. Many come up on a Google search. Many promise better grades and higher test scores. Without much effort, you can create your own course and tap into this hot topic.

The only thing is, it turns out such programs don't work very well, except as a measure of the gullibility of even smart educators. A remarkable article by Daniel T. Willingham, the University of Virginia cognitive scientist outlines the reasons. Critical thinking, he explains in a summer 2007 *American Educator* article, overlooked until now by me, is not a skill like riding a bike or diagramming a sentence that, once learned, can be applied in many situations.

Instead, as your most-hated high school teacher often told you, you have to buckle down and learn the content of a subject--facts, concepts and trends--before the maxims of critical thinking taught in these feverishly-marketed courses will do you much good.

"The processes of thinking are intertwined with the content of thought (that is, domain knowledge)," Willingham says. "Thus, if you remind a student to 'look at an issue from multiple perspectives' often enough, he will learn that he ought to do so, but if he doesn't know much about an issue, he can't think about it from multiple perspectives."

Willingham is a kind and patient scholar who occasionally emails me when I stray too far from reality in my columns on learning. Now, with his upcoming book "Why Don't Students Like School? -- A cognitive scientist answers questions about how your mind works and what it means for the classroom," everyone can get a dose of his clear prose and practical wisdom.

Our quick-fix embrace of critical thinking shows how susceptible we are to nostrums that don't make much sense. Even I, alleged foe of press-agentry, have occasionally tossed those two words into a sentence just to look fashionable. I will try to do that less often, knowing that it will disappoint Professor Willingham after he has gone to so much trouble to explain why this is bad.

It is small comfort, but I am not alone in my sloppiness. Willingham notes that the National Center on Education and the Economy, the American Diploma Project and the Aspen Institute have all called for more instruction in critical thinking, without

explaining how difficult this is to do well.

The College Board revamped the SAT in part to assess students' critical thinking, and the ACT offers a critical thinking test for college students, even though any such test will only show how students think critically about whatever is being tested. A good critical thinker in physics will be unable to apply those same skills in biology if she doesn't know much about that subject.

The celebrated 1983 report "A Nation At Risk" by the National Commission on Excellence in Education was referring to critical thinking when it decried the lack of "'higher-order' intellectual skills" in 17 year olds. That led to much hand-wringing. By 1990, Willingham says, "most states had initiatives designed to encourage educators to teach critical thinking, and one of the most widely used programs, Tactics for Thinking, sold 70,000 teacher guides."

Researchers have tried to assess the benefits of these programs, without much success. "The evidence shows that such programs primarily improve students' thinking with the sort of problems they practiced in the program--not with other types of problems," Willingham says. "More generally, it's doubtful that a program that effectively teaches students to think critically in a variety of situations will ever be developed."

Critical thinking programs seem very sophisticated. Some go on for three years, with one or two lessons a week. Evaluations of their success, Willingham notes, suffer from having no peer review, being very short-term, having no control groups, using improperly constructed control groups or making no effort to see if the students being evaluated can transfer their new abilities to materials that differ from those in the program.

Willingham, like any good educator, still hopes for enlightenment even in his slowest students, like me. He provides tips for teachers who want to give critical thinking instruction a try: avoid expensive special programs, teach critical thinking only after students have absorbed sufficient content and don't reserve such lessons just for advanced students.

Willingham's own work is, in my view, a triumph of critical thinking because he knows his content so well. His new book is full of surprises. Did you know, for instance, that the mind is not designed for thinking? His analysis should be a lesson for both the young and us not-so-young. We need to do our homework and remember that no matter how brilliant we think we are, we can be useful critics only after we master the facts.

Article 11

[Top](#)

San Jose Mercury News

Technical education the solution to state's high dropout rate

8.11.08

Paul R. Hay (Op Ed)

The California Department of Education has reported that one in four students who start high school will drop out. While not new information, it validates what educators have known through independent studies and observations.

So, what do we do now that we have more accurate numbers? A 2006 study by the

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation ('The Silent Epidemic') reported that 47 percent of former students who dropped out said classes were not interesting, while 81 percent called for real world learning opportunities. Eighty-eight percent had passing grades when they dropped out.

A major recommendation from this study is that, 'Instead of the usual 'one size fits all' school, districts should develop options for students, including a curriculum that connects what they are learning in the classroom with real life experiences and with work.' The 'one size fits all' strategy suggests that all high school students should be prepared to attend college. Sacramento policy-makers have placed their emphasis and funding on 'A-G' college preparatory curriculum, and use high-stakes testing to measure performance. To try to succeed in this environment, students end up taking an array of required and recommended courses, including remediation courses. There's little time for much else.

Tragically, this educational strategy doesn't fit reality, or the needs of the state's workforce. The California Employment Development Department expects 6.5 million Advertisementnew job openings by 2014. Three-quarters of these jobs will require a high level of technical literacy and training, while only a quarter will require a bachelor's degree or higher.

Vocational programs, now known as Career Technical Education (CTE), provide students with relevant, hands-on learning opportunities. Problematically, during the last 20 years, CTE programs have declined more than 50 percent as high schools emphasized academics and college preparation. CTE labs have been converted to academic classrooms; expensive equipment has been sold at a fraction of its value and the number of credentialed CTE teachers has fallen precipitously. And now, a substantial majority of students leave high school without the technical skills to earn a decent living.

This trend must be reversed. Balance must be restored. High school students must have the opportunity to graduate with a marketable skill, whether or not they choose to go on to post-secondary education. Under-funded for years, the state's 74 Regional Occupational Centers and Programs are finally being recognized by our state leaders as a central player in bringing hands-on, applied learning and career opportunities to our high school students. Regional Occupational Centers and Programs offer nearly 100 career pathways and programs, career counseling and guidance, work-based learning and placement assistance. They open doors to many options, including college, apprenticeship and well-paying jobs.

While Regional Occupational Centers and Programs are only part of the answer to fully integrating CTE into California education, they have an already proven track record. Research studies show that students who take classes in vocational programs have lower dropout rates, earn higher wages than comparison peer groups, enroll in post-secondary education in large numbers and have a better understanding of the value and relevance of educational opportunities.

Santa Clara County has CTE courses at nearly all its comprehensive high schools, including rigorous career programs at the Central County Occupational Center on Hillsdale Avenue in San Jose.

But these programs are limited in both funding and the number of students they can serve. It doesn't make sense to limit funding and capacity for a proven program, especially now that official numbers confirm the crisis in California education.

The current system isn't working. CTE needs to be fully integrated into the high school curriculum. We need to provide our young people with more choices and the skills to obtain and succeed in well-paying jobs. We need balance, and the state should dedicate the resources to make it happen.

PAUL R. HAY is superintendent of the Metropolitan Education District, which serves six school districts in Santa Clara County. He wrote this article for the Mercury News.

Article 12

[Top](#)

Star Tribune (MN)

Uptick in 'No Child' failures largely due to suburban schools

8.11.08

Sarah Lemagie

For a glimpse at the numbers behind the news last week that nearly half of Minnesota's public schools are falling short of state benchmarks in reading and math, many suburban families need look no further than the school down the block.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, 937 of 1,951 schools are not making "adequate yearly progress" under the 2001 No Child Left Behind law. The numbers represent a dramatic uptick from last year, when 727 schools didn't make the cut. And this year, suburban schools account for much of that change.

In the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan School District, 17 of 31 schools -- including Eastview, Apple Valley, Rosemount and Eagan high schools -- were tagged by the state this summer as falling behind, compared with just five last year.

Those figures, from Minnesota's fourth largest district, are a striking illustration of statewide trends. The list of schools that aren't making adequate progress grew by 210 from last year, with about half the increase coming from metro-area schools outside the core Twin Cities.

By contrast, Minneapolis and St. Paul had only four more schools on the list than they did last year, out of about 160 schools in the two districts.

"Quite a lot of those urban schools are already on the list," said Charlie Kyte, executive director of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators.

A shifting target

No Child Left Behind requires schools to test students' performance, paying attention to whether subgroups of children -- special education or Hispanic students, for example -- are keeping pace with the rest. If one group doesn't improve enough, the whole school is tagged as falling behind.

By 2014, every student group is supposed to pass the tests. And as targets shift upward every year toward that ultimate goal, "It's going to be harder and harder for schools not to be identified in at least one area," Kyte said.

"I think the list is eventually going to get everybody," said Peter Zak, assistant principal at Eagan High School, which was tagged because one group -- students who receive free and reduced-price meals -- didn't perform well enough in math.

This year, the list "got" some high schools regarded as among the best in Minnesota, including Edina and Wayzata.

Larger schools such as Eagan High tend to have more students that fall into subgroups highlighted by the test, which gives the schools more chances to fall short of targets, Zak added.

"The idea that (No Child Left Behind and 'adequate yearly progress') are some magic accountability measure that people can easily look at (to see) which schools are doing well and which ones aren't is just an absolute joke, because every state has different measures and the bar keeps rising," said Tony Taschner, a spokesman for the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan School District.

But, he said, "Can we get information from it that is useful? Yes."

Competing needs

The district has long had an achievement gap, with many minority students struggling. The state benchmarks, because they break down the data, help schools focus on those students, Taschner said.

Still, suburban districts in particular face the challenge of juggling the needs of all their students, said Kyte, who pointed out that many parents move to the suburbs to enroll their children in good schools. Even while concentrating on smaller groups that aren't doing well, he said, districts "have to continue doing a very good job with their majority kids if they want their parents to continue having confidence in them."

Some parents say they still have that confidence.

Test results are important, but "you have to look at what is happening in the classroom," said Todd Lafrenz, whose daughter is entering second grade at Cedar Park Elementary. The Apple Valley school is the only one in the district that faces federally mandated consequences this year under No Child Left Behind. It's also the most racially diverse school in the district -- which is, Lafrenz said, why he enrolled his daughter.

"You walk down the hallway at Cedar Park, and you have an incredibly diverse student body. You can't replace that," he said.

[Article 13](#)

[Top](#)

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review
Obama & education: Backward Barack
8.11.08

Editorial Board

When Barack Obama was young and poor but lucky, he received a scholarship to Honolulu's prestigious Punahou School, an elite private K-12 school where tuition now tops \$16,000 a year.

Today, Sen. Obama sends his two daughters to a private school in Chicago that costs \$15,528 a year -- for kindergarten.

And yet our presumptive president disses school choice because, while "it might benefit some kids at the top," it "leaves a lot of kids at the bottom."

We know that's how "progressives" garner ringing endorsements from the National Education Association, the teachers union whose core mission is protecting public schools from competition.

But as The Wall Street Journal recently editorialized, Obama has it completely backward.

It's not privileged kids who need school choice; they can afford private schools or can move to neighborhoods with decent public schools. It's the poorest kids -- those stuck in wrecked inner-city districts -- who choice helps the most.

Charter schools, voucher plans, opportunity scholarships and other alternatives exist in our broken cities, but they are still too rare and don't begin to satisfy the demand.

Obama -- himself a poster child for the efficacy of school choice -- has a unique chance to invigorate the public-private debate in education. Instead, he panders to teacher unions by expressing disdain for the "tired rhetoric about vouchers and school choice."

So much for the politics of change.

[Article 14](#)

[Top](#)

Associated Press

NY high school graduation rate rise slowly

8.11.08

Michael Gormley

Keeping students for a fifth or sixth year in high school, along with substantially more summer school sessions and after school programs, is boosting New York graduation rates, according to state officials.

State Education Department figures released Monday showed the statewide graduation rate was 68.6 percent after four years for the class that began ninth grade in 2003, up from 65.8 percent two classes before. In New York City, that class graduation rate was 52 percent after four years, up from 46.5 percent.

The report showed 25,000 students from the Class of 2007 dropped out statewide.

But graduation rates, while still low in some poorer schools, rose substantially after a fifth and sixth year. An evaluation of the class that began ninth grade in 2002 showed New York City's graduation rate rose to 59.5 percent by the end of the fifth year, up from 49.8 percent after four years. Meanwhile, the statewide graduation rates for Hispanic and black students each increased about 10 percentage points by the end of their fifth year, compared to the four-year graduation rate.

The graduation data is the most accurate to date. Students are now tracked by identification numbers starting in ninth grade, so the state no longer has to rely on school district estimates of their rates. In the past, some districts inflated graduation rates, a key measure of success or failure. The education department plans to audit these latest rates, too.

"After a decade of near-stagnation, New York City's graduation rate has climbed significantly since 2002," said Mayor Michael Bloomberg. "We clearly need to help larger numbers of students to graduate, but the progress we've made so far means that thousands more students are graduating today than would have six years ago."

State Education Commissioner Richard Mills said Monday that in New York City, other big city districts and in poorer districts, the additional year or two is already common. He said summer school enrollment has also increased in recent years and more schools offer tutoring and after school programs.

State schools Chancellor Robert Bennett said the Board of Regents is open to longer stays in the traditional four-year high school. For the class of 2006, a fifth year meant 13,000 more students graduated statewide. That improved the five-year graduation by 6 percentage points, to a rate of 73 percent statewide.

"I think a fifth year, if it works, is perfectly acceptable," said Bennett.

Mills, however, doesn't see high school extending to five years or more for most students. But it is among the more frequently used tools to improve performance of minority and poor students who haven't scored as well on standardized tests as white students and those in wealthier districts.

Mills said such unconventional measures, as well as greater use of summer school and longer school days, are improving student performance through more "time on task." School years beyond the usual 180-day schedule and longer school days have been used by some of the state's public charter schools for years, which charter advocates say has been a key to some gains in student performance compared to students in neighboring traditional public schools.

"I think 180 days is not adequate," Bennett said.

"We don't have a Regents action item on that yet," Mills said, adding, "The Regents will consider just about anything that works."

[Article 15](#)

[Top](#)

The New York Times How well are they really doing? 8.12.08

Editorial Board

Congress has several concerns as it moves toward reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. Whatever else they do, lawmakers need to strengthen the requirement that states document student performance in yearly tests in exchange for federal aid.

The states have made a mockery of that provision, using weak tests, setting passing scores low or rewriting tests from year to year, making it impossible to compare progress — or its absence — over time.

The country will have difficulty moving ahead educationally until that changes.

Most states that report strong performances on their own tests do poorly on the

more rigorous and respected National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is often referred to as NAEP and is also known as the nation's report card. That test is periodically given to a sample of students in designated grades in both public and private schools. States are resisting the idea of replacing their own tests with the NAEP, arguing that the national test is not aligned to state standards. But the problem is that state standards are generally weak, especially in math and science.

That point was made yet again in a study of gender differences in math performance published last month in *Science* magazine. The study, which examined standardized test scores for about seven million students in 10 states, found no gender differences. But the state math tests turned out to be terribly watered-down when it came to testing the problem-solving skills that are crucial in science and engineering.

Analyzing test items on a four-level scale, with level one being the least challenging, the researchers found that most state tests had no questions at the third or fourth levels at all. Worse, the teachers may be dropping more challenging math course work to focus on the low-level material covered in state tests.

That's bad news, especially when the United States is already losing ground to other nations in the crucial areas of math and science.

Congress needs to take the testing issue head-on. It should instruct the NAEP board, an independent body created by the government, to create a rigorous test that would be given free to states that agreed to use NAEP scoring standards. Then the federal government could actually embarrass the laggard states by naming the ones that cling to weak tests. Without rigorous and consistent testing, there is no way to know whether our children are getting the education they deserve and need.

Article 16

[Top](#)

USA Today

Are we science-savvy enough to make informed decisions?

8.12.08

G. Jeffrey MacDonald

For decades, educators and employers have worried that too few Americans are preparing for careers in science. But there's evidence to support a new, broader concern in this election year: Ordinary Americans may not know enough about science to make informed decisions on key questions.

Seventy-six percent of Americans say presidential candidates should make improving science education a national priority, according to a national Harris Interactive survey of 1,304 adults in November and December. Results were released this spring.

But only 26% believe that they themselves have a good understanding of science. And 44% couldn't identify a single scientist, living or dead, whom they'd consider a role model for the nation's young people.

These results are disturbing, science education experts say, because scientists aren't the only ones who must distinguish solid scientific methods from bogus ones. Some important scientific questions are being debated this year, including food safety, imported-product safety and the effect of biofuels.

Finding trustworthy sources

Whether a person is planning a child's diet or staking out a position on global warming, insights from science are indispensable, experts say, but only if someone knows which findings to trust.

"People will respond to demagoguery if they don't believe they have sufficient knowledge and sufficient confidence in their ability to weigh arguments and assess what's behind them," says Walter Massey, a board member of Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, which commissioned the survey.

"The danger is that we move increasingly toward being a society where the most important decisions are ultimately made by fewer and fewer people."

Even figuring out which organizations to trust for guidance requires some basic knowledge of what constitutes good research methodology, Massey says.

Non-scientists can use Internet resources to get a handle on technical subjects as long as they exercise "healthy skepticism," says Donald Kennedy, former editor in chief of Science.

His tip: Consider credentials. Research that has an economic stake in particular outcomes isn't as trustworthy as research that is independent and published in peer-reviewed journals. Such journals, in which studies submitted for publication are judged by an independent panel of experts, include Science, Nature and the New England Journal of Medicine.

Good places to start researching technical subjects are websites of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences (aaas.org) and the National Academy of Sciences (nasonline.org), Kennedy says. Working with science-based knowledge "is a game that can be played by anybody with a serious interest in discovery," he says.

Americans are making progress on the science front, says Jon Miller, a Michigan State University political scientist who has been studying scientific literacy for 20 years.

For example, in the late 1980s, most Americans believed that antibiotics killed both viruses and bacteria. Now, Miller says, about 60% know that antibiotics kill only bacteria, not viruses. "It's a kind of learning that occurs through interaction with health care professionals," Miller says.

Experts contend that people need some health-related science knowledge for their own well-being. For instance, should you be more worried about germs on your kitchen table than about your smoking habit?

No, but you would need a bit of science to recognize that smoking presents the bigger health risk, says Michael Jacobson, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a health advocacy group.

More rigor needed

Other day-to-day questions require a measure of science acumen: Which chemicals should be avoided? Of the cure-all-type products sold only via television and the Internet, which ones should you buy, if any? Informed scientific opinion and an ability to identify weak evidence go a long way in making such judgments, Miller

says.

Some science educators worry that Americans still aren't rigorous enough in deciding which sources to trust.

"We have in this country a major crisis of people listening to people they feel comfortable with (rather than) listening to a variety of groups and critically thinking through their messages," says Gerry Wheeler, executive director of the National Science Teachers Association.

Scientific knowledge isn't a silver bullet for building an informed citizenry. In public-policy decisions, technical insight matters only up to a point, Kennedy says.

He notes that nuclear waste controversies hinge on how much risk a community is willing to tolerate, which is not a matter decided by science. Likewise, debates on the use of embryonic stem cells in scientific research routinely boil down to moral beliefs about when life begins.

"Public policy is for everybody (to make) — it's not just a science game," Kennedy says. "But you have to be able to weed out the scientific arguments that aren't right."

Article 17

[Top](#)

Chicago Tribune Keep the kids in school 8.12.08

Dennis Byme

That was big of Sen./ Rev. James Meeks to dare someone to arrest the kids he's leading out of the city's public schools in an ill-conceived protest, when he's the guy who should be pinched.

As for the students, truant officers ought to round them up and take them back to school where they belong. Of course, no one will do any of that because they don't want to appear mean, racist or elitist. And that's exactly the point of Meeks' plan to haul Chicago students out of the first week of school to protest, at downtown offices and at Winnetka's New Trier Township High School, the "inequities" of the state education funding formula.

"I dare the business community to arrest our children and send them to jail because all they want is a quality education," Meeks said. New Trier School Supt. Linda Yonke, for one, bent to this extortion, saying she wouldn't want to "undermine" his position by "engaging in a public argument." And what would she do? Hold a forum, she suggested. Oh, joy.

The issue already has been studied, protested and demagogued to death. Illinois school funding has fostered years of debate, lawsuits, constitutional revisions and a complicated formula for allocating state aid that will make your head spin. The formula ensures a "basic" funding level for every school district and takes into account local property tax base, student population, poverty and average daily attendance.

It entitles Chicago to more than \$1.1 billion in state aid in 2008. Average spending per student for all grades in Chicago is \$9,282, about 11 percent higher than the statewide average, according to greatschools.net, but certainly lower than the \$17,184 spent on each New Trier student. But then, nearly everyone spends less than New Trier. That's because New Trier generally is free to spend whatever additional money it wants, and so it does, in large sums.

Would Chicago public school students do any better if this "inequity" were narrowed by New Trier spending less? Of course not. What New Trier spends has nothing to do with the performance of Chicago's students.

Truth is, the biggest problem with Chicago and other major school systems is manifested in the performance of black male students. A recent study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education concludes that African-American males in Chicago's public schools are less than half as likely to graduate as their white peers. The foundation attributes the poor performance to "the resource disparities that exist in schools attended by black males and their white, non-Hispanic counterparts." John Jackson, foundation president, lamented that this is the state of affairs 50 years after the Supreme Court decision ending school segregation. Meeks chimed in: "I want to keep kids out of the 'colored' schools. I don't want kids to have to go and drink from the 'colored' water fountain. I don't want them to use the 'colored' toilet or to have to sit at the 'colored' desk."

But if resource inequities account for the poor performance, why don't their white male, Hispanic and black female counterparts do as badly? After all, they are going to the same public schools in Chicago. Or are only Chicago's African-American male students shipped off to junkier schools, where they can only use the "colored" water fountain? Is it part of the state funding formula to somehow apportion less funding to black males? Are black males forced to use 20-year-old textbooks, while everyone else gets new ones? What precisely is there about how money is spent that mainly leaves black males so dismally out of it?

Maybe a complex of factors, other than funding disparities, explains the troubling performance of black males, and thus, a large part of the schools' problems. Perhaps the same thing that accounts for the decay of neighborhoods at the hands of black male gangs, or for the absence of fathers in the unraveling African-American family. These are symptoms of a cultural climate—corrupted by loosening morals, radical individualism, materialism, Hollywood's adulation of violence and parental irresponsibility, among other strands—that converges on African-American males in particular with all the focused and destructive force of a tornado. I dare say that in this cultural climate, if Chicago were able to spend as much as New Trier spends on each student, black males still would underperform. What is needed is not so much a change in the school funding formula, but a fundamental change in attitudes about family and society.

But I'm not saying anything new, or anything that Meeks doesn't know already. All that I'm saying is that if Meeks truly has the interests of Chicago's students at heart he ought to concentrate his energies elsewhere. He can start by proving to the students why every day spent in school is precious.

Dennis Byrne is a Chicago-area writer and consultant. His blog can be read at <http://dennisbyrne.blogspot.com>

**The Providence Journal
Collaborative to take over schools program
8.12.08**

Talia Buford

WEST WARWICK — The district is turning over the reins of its alternative day school program to the West Bay Collaborative, a move officials say will save them money.

"It tends to be a more costly program to run," said Paul Vigeant, the schools' special-education director. "You look at the amount of personnel needed to run that kind of program, it's more effective to have the collaborative do that."

Last year, the district began the alternative day school program in the West Warwick Civic Center as a way to bring students back into the district from tuition placements elsewhere. Under the new partnership, the day school will essentially work as an extension of the collaborative.

The agency will rent the space from the district for a "nominal fee." Tuition will be paid for the West Warwick students served there, but it will be lower than it would be if they were enrolled elsewhere. The West Bay Collaborative, said Supt. Kenneth Sheehan, will have "sole control" of the alternative program.

The program is for high school students who have behavioral issues that keep them from traditional classrooms within the district. The program at its inception could accommodate 20 students in the 9th through 12th grades.

The program, along with the apartment transitional program at Clyde Towers, was to be overseen by Kimberly Carson, assistant special education director.

But Carson has resigned, and "We were left with a big void," Vigeant said. "We needed someone very quickly to move into the role and ensure the program's consistency."

So they turned to the West Bay Collaborative.

The collaborative provides programs for special-needs students and professional development for teachers and graduate courses in partnership with local universities. In some cases, it takes over programs already established by a partner community, or steps in to create one where a need exists. It also operates a school in Coventry, for students who require additional services.

The organization serves eight communities: West Warwick, Providence, Warwick, Coventry, Cranston, Scituate, Foster and Gloucester. Vigeant used to work for the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative, so he knew the kind of work the organization performs.

"I don't view it as an outside company," Vigeant said. "In many ways, they're an extension of the School Department they represent. ... We're not turning the program over to a private entity; they're just an extension of the West Warwick School Department."

A temporary collaboration began in April and was a success, said Sheehan. As the district began thinking of what to do with the program when the school year begins in September, they noticed some savings in the program's account.

It would cost less to have the collaborative manage the program than it cost to pay another salary.

"For a quarter of the school year, the savings to us was around \$18,000 to \$19,000," Sheehan said.

But it wasn't just the cost savings. By having the collaborative take over the program, the district is also tapping into the cache of experience from collaborative staff.

"They will administer the program with seasoned veteran administrators who run those types of alternative programs," Sheehan said. "Their teachers are trained in those programs and skills."

Under the district-run program, students were assigned to one of two classrooms and generally fell into two categories: those who would stay in the program throughout the year, and those who would use the program to transition back into the main high school building. Teachers taught using differentiated instruction, where students receive a general lesson and then show their comprehension with tasks adjusted to their abilities and grade level.

The program under the agency's lead will probably change, said its executive director, Karen Ostroff.

"We are very focused on individualizing for kids," she said. "Children with special learning needs are not successful in a traditional classroom. Every day is different; every child is different. We have to teach to their strengths, and bring up the skills in attention and behavior that are not allowing them to succeed."

[Article 19](#)

[Top](#)

MSNBC.com
Students learn hard lesson in school budgets
8.12.08

Alex Johnson

HIGHLIGHT: As 56 million children return to public schools in coming weeks, officials across the nation are cutting bus service, laying off teachers and putting off critical infrastructure repairs.

Around Valentine's Day, parents in Cheatham County, Tenn., near Nashville, could face a problem: how to get their children to school.

There's enough money in the 2008-09 school budget to pay for bus fuel only until February. The Cheatham County Board of Education doesn't know what it will do after that.

"In the area where we live, those children are 12 miles from school," said Kim Lane of Ashland City, the mother of a high school-age son. "That's a long walk. What are they going to do?"

Lane could be asking the same question about school districts across the country. As 56 million children return to public schools in the coming days and weeks, they are getting a real-world lesson in economics.

In a survey of 546 local superintendents late last month by the American Association of School Administrators, 99 percent said rising costs and shrinking budgets were hurting their school systems.

Three in 10 superintendents said they were laying off or reassigning teachers to save money; even more, 33 percent, said they were eliminating or reassigning support staff, such as janitors and maintenance workers.

Nearly half - 44 percent - said their districts were cutting back on field trips, while 37 percent said they were cutting back on heating and air conditioning and 31 percent said they were buying fewer supplies.

"While school systems are working hard to limit programming cuts, the sharp increase in costs will have a negative impact on children, especially disadvantaged children, unless the states and federal government act quickly to provide relief," said Randall Collins, the association's president.

Jobless teachers, crumbling schools

Late last month, the Miami-Dade County school board tentatively approved budget cuts of \$700 million for the new school year. More than 1,500 teachers will lose their jobs, and none of the rest will get raises.

In the rural Maccray school district in southwestern Minnesota, students will stay home on Mondays. The district is moving to a four-day week to save \$85,000 in costs for buses, heating bills, substitute teachers and student lunches. Districts in at least 11 other states are doing the same.

"We wouldn't do the four-day school week if we had money," Superintendent Greg Schmidt said. "With the state budget the way it is, there's just no hope right now."

Meanwhile, in Indianapolis, students at Floro Torrence School 83 will put up for at least another year with a crumbling entryway, an antiquated fire alarm system and restrooms that aren't accessible for the handicapped. Edgar H. Evans Magnet School 11 won't replace tiled floors or the concrete crumbling beneath them. Pieces of brick will keep falling from Stuart Hall at Tech High School.

That's because the Indianapolis Public Schools system has a to-do list that's about \$10 million long, but it has only about \$3 million for maintenance and repairs.

'It's very hard and very emotional'

In many school districts, crimped state budgets also are forcing spending cuts.

"The mortgage crisis going on means there are fewer property owners, fewer property taxes being paid," said Bill Siegfert, president of the Akron (Ohio) Education Association.

To save money, Virginia officials decided to merge the state's two schools for students with disabilities. As a result, parents of students at the Virginia School for the Deaf, Blind and Multi-Disabled in Hampton will have to decide whether to send their children hours away to the state's only other facility, in Staunton.

In Traverse City, Mich., Michael Murray, superintendent of the Suttons Bay School District, said he expected to fall at least \$1 million short this year thanks to cuts in state and federal funding.

The district has to find its own money to make up the shortfall, which represents 13.5 percent of its projected expenses. Class sizes will grow, and the athletic program will be cut so sharply that freshman sports teams could be eliminated, meaning ninth-graders would play on junior varsity teams.

Twenty-one teaching and staff positions are also on the chopping block.

"We've had layoffs before, but never this many all at one time," said Keven Cross, president of the Suttons Bay Education Association. "It's hard and very emotional."

Food, fuel add up to crushing burden School districts are also getting hammered by higher prices for food. The School Nutrition Association projects that it will cost \$1.5 billion more to feed the nation's schoolchildren this school year.

"Milk, cheese, bread, grains, they're all going up," said Sandy Matelski, food service director for the Gaylord Community Schools in Otsego County, Mich.

Fuel costs are a special burden, because districts have little flexibility to make a difference short of cutting bus routes. The targets become field trips and buses that take sports teams on the road.

Trustees of the Brazosport Independent School District in Freeport, Texas, south of Houston, voted last month to drop all field trips that aren't required by a course's curriculum or by the University Interscholastic League, which oversees athletic, music and academic contests in Texas schools.

Aquatic science students, for example, can still visit a beach to collect samples, but trips to Houston's museums are too pricey, as they require a 100-mile round trip for five or six buses at a time. District officials said the new policy would save them at least \$80,000, a small but real step toward addressing the district's \$3 million budget shortfall.

"It's no different than what our own families are doing," Superintendent Joe Ripple said. "We're trying to decide how to enjoy ourselves the most for the least amount of dollars spent on fuel."

In Mississippi, the state High School Activities Association cut sports teams' schedules by 10 percent, except for football. To reduce the number of bus trips taking teams to competing schools, varsity basketball, softball and baseball players will turn out for three fewer games a season.

Administrators in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where sprawling distances mean sports teams can travel hours-long round trips to play games, are looking for other ways to keep their athletes nearby. They're discussing realigning conferences, which could end decades-old rivalries.

Down to the bone marrow

At a time when strapped parents most need the services of schools to help raise their children, the outlook is bleak, said James Notter, superintendent of the Broward County schools in South Florida.

In hard-fought budget negotiations, "we worked hard for roughly a year and a half so we could meet the challenges of an economic downturn," Notter said.

The district dropped optional summer school classes and extra instruction for slow learners. It consolidated bus routes and streamlined the administration. It bought less expensive food for students. It froze hiring, leaving about 300 positions unfilled.

And the school board still had to slash \$61 million from the budget for new academic year. That's on top of \$40 million it cut last year.

"We are truly at the bone marrow," Notter said.

[Article 20](#)

[Top](#)

KETV 7 Omaha
Westside 8th-graders will get laptops
8.12.08

KETV 7 Omaha Staff

District votes to purchase 500 Apple Macbooks

OMAHA, Neb. -- The Westside School district voted Tuesday morning to purchase laptops for its eighth-graders.

Four years ago, the district handed out laptops to its high school students.

Education officials said the plan worked so well that it will now be extended to 14-year-olds.

They said the cyber learning will enhance the learning process and they don't want to supplant textbooks with the new laptops.

"I think this opens up a wide variety for all of our students," said Westside Middle School history teacher Lance Mosier.

Associate Superintendent Dr. Bert Jackson said the laptops will be used to make practice test, lectures and review sessions more accessible. Students will use the laptops to also listen to podcasts.

Jackson cites studies that she said show computers improve student writing.

The purchased gear is the new Apple Macbook.

The 500 Macbooks will go into the students' hands with some stipulations, of course. Internet access will be restricted, students will be responsible for lost or damaged laptops and parents will be able to request that the laptops stay at school.

CNN**Online student-teacher friendships can be tricky****8.13.08**

CNN Staff

Randy Turner knows there's a huge gap in age and technology between him and his adolescent students.

So when the 52-year-old set up a MySpace page and his students began asking to add him as a friend and sending him questions about assignments, he realized he was on to something.

"Just the very fact that I have MySpace makes them think, 'Well, maybe we can talk to this guy and open the lines of communication,' " said Turner, who teaches English at South Middle School in Joplin, Missouri. "I realized this is a major way of communication for them."

MySpace had 72.8 million national users in June, versus Facebook's 37.4 million, according to a ComScore Media Metrix study. Once available only to students with college e-mail addresses, Facebook opened its virtual doors to everybody two years ago.

Despite perceptions, the sites aren't populated just by teens and 20-somethings. A 2006 ComScore survey found that half of those registered on MySpace were 35 and older, while a similar study last year found that almost 40 percent of Facebook users were above 35.

Teachers such as Turner believe sites like MySpace help them connect with their students about homework, tutoring and other school matters. But others fear the social-networking sites are breeding inappropriate relationships between teachers and students.

In Missouri in particular, a rash of student-teacher sexual relationships have spawned crackdowns on social-networking friendships. Web site badbadteacher.com, which keeps track of teachers disciplined, arrested and convicted of inappropriate behavior with students, lists 11 such teachers from Missouri within the last two years.

Which is why state legislator Jane Cunningham is sponsoring a bill in the Missouri House of Representatives that would ban elementary school teachers from having social-networking friendships with their students.

Turner said he understands the reasoning for the bill. He acknowledged that in some cases, teachers have become the public face of inappropriate Facebook and MySpace relationships with kids.

"I see where they are coming from," Turner said. "You can't argue with people whose intentions are trying to protect children. But the simple fact is, you take these people who prey on children and they are going to find a way to do it, whether it's over Facebook or not."

Those teachers are ruining it for the ones legitimately trying to help children, Turner said.

"There are so many kids who are stubborn against anything teachers say, who are struggling in the classroom and refuse to ask for help," Turner said. "When it's so hard to reach these kids, why would you remove any of the weapons at your disposal to make a difference?"

Facebook does not knowingly collect personal information from anyone under the age of 13 or knowingly allow such persons to register, according to its Web site. Users must be at least 14 to register on MySpace, although such age restrictions are difficult to enforce.

In addition to the bill in the Missouri legislature, other school boards, teacher unions and parent-teacher associations across the country are drafting policies and issuing advisements about which online or text-messaging relationships are acceptable.

The Lamar County School Board in Missouri recently implemented a policy forbidding teachers and students from having any text-message conversations or social-networking friendships.

Jim Keith, an education lawyer who represents several school boards in Missouri, has been giving talks to teachers in which he explains that most of the inappropriate student-teacher relationships start out on a friendship level.

Keith spoke of one instance where a parent thought her child was spending extra time with a teacher who was trying to help her child overcome shyness. At Keith's urging, they checked the child's phone bill and found 4,200 text messages between the teacher and student.

"As an educator, there is a line of demarcation between you and your student," Keith said. "It's a line that you cannot come close to, let alone step over. You've got to establish it from Day One and say, 'I'm not your buddy; I'm not your friend; I'm just your teacher.' "

Keith agrees that teachers sometimes need to communicate after school with students about educational matters, but he said that's why teachers in Missouri have their own class pages hosted by their school districts. Those pages eliminate the need for Facebook or MySpace, he says, and allow the schools to monitor all student-teacher communication.

Many students, including Dixie Johnston, a senior at Hickman High School in Columbia, Missouri, said that although their teachers have school-sponsored pages, most students rarely check them.

Turner insists that Facebook and MySpace aren't the evils that regulators should be after. Instead Turner wishes the focus remain on vetting the teachers being put in charge of the nation's youth.

"It's a sad thing, but with teaching you are going to have people who are attracted to the profession because of easy availability of kids," Turner said.

"Those predators are going to be there. But most of the time there are warning signs, and that's what we need to be working on, getting those people out ... not

stopping teachers who haven't caused problems from reaching those who need [help] most."

Article 22

[Top](#)

Chicago Tribune **City schools chief opposes plan to keep kids away on first day of class** **8.13.08**

Monique Garcia

Chicago Public Schools chief Arne Duncan said thanks, but no thanks Wednesday to those calling for students to boycott the first day of class as a way to draw attention to Illinois' education-funding situation.

"We've worked extraordinarily hard . . . to build a culture where every single day matters. And that first day, that first week, does set a tone . . . for what happens the rest of the school year," Duncan said at a news conference to remind students and parents that school starts Sept. 2.

In recent weeks, Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago), who is a minister, and other church leaders have called on parents of Chicago students to protest funding disparities by keeping their children out of class and instead attempting to register them in two wealthy north suburban school districts.

But Duncan said encouraging students to skip the first day undermines a long-term effort to beef up attendance.

"I am very grateful for the attention [Meeks] has brought to this issue," Duncan said. "But I think we can fight this battle and win this battle without doing anything that puts students on a course of behavior that is self-destructive."

Gov. Rod Blagojevich called lawmakers back to Springfield to address education funding, but legislators met only briefly on Tuesday and no action was taken.

Meeks was not at the Capitol on Wednesday and could not be reached for comment.

Article 23

[Top](#)

The Advocate **Report fuels four-day week debate** **8.13.08**

Jordan Blum

The trend of the four-day school week is growing in Louisiana and nationwide - especially in rural areas - but the concept is not catching on in larger areas such as Baton Rouge, local and state education officials agree.

A new Southern Regional Education Board "Focus on the School Calendar" report released this week explores the pros and cons of the four-day school week and essentially concludes that the known outcomes are inconclusive.

"There is a decided lack of evidence that the four-day week helps or hurts student

achievement - anecdotal information seems to point merely to a 'lack of harm' where student achievement is concerned," according to the report.

New Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Executive Director Amy Westbrook implemented a four-day week while heading St. Helena Parish schools two years ago in order to attract more highly qualified teachers.

Most schools make the switch to longer days, but shorter weeks, to save on utility and transportation costs. Westbrook said the switch has been a resounding success - attracting more good teachers, saving money and improving student performance.

"I don't know what the trend will be," Westbrook said. "But for a rural parish, I think it's worth investigating."

A major key, she said, has been offering class options during the Monday off day as well as more "course recovery" classes and more after-school tutoring.

East Baton Rouge Parish School Superintendent Charlotte Placide said the plan raises too many concerns about hurting the instruction quality and addressing child-care needs if students do not attend classes on Mondays.

"Child care is a large piece of the education puzzle these days because so many parents are working now," Placide said.

Apart from St. Helena, East Feliciana and Caldwell parishes also have a four-day school week. Caldwell just switched this year for cost savings.

A handful of other districts use a four-day week only for some of their schools. Last year, 43 schools in seven districts in the state used the four-day system, according to the report.

In East Feliciana Parish, which also switched to a four-day week two years ago, the new Superintendent Doug Beauchamp recently decried falling test scores and a lack of financial savings. But the district's School Board voted to continue the four-day week anyway.

Other districts such as Evangeline and Avoyelles parishes previously attempted a four-day week, but ultimately decided against it.

Nationally, some districts in 17 states are using the alternative schedules, the SREB report states.

The largest portion is in Colorado, where the idea took off in the 1980s but has only caught on popularly in rural areas where the populations are more spread out.

"Child-care issues may be more of a concern for urban districts where parents are more likely to work outside of the home," according to the report.

LSU College of Education Dean Jayne Fleener said she is pleased the SREB is initiating the conversation. "The history of our 180-day, six-hour-a-day school year goes back to agricultural times," Fleener said.

Caldwell Superintendent John Sartin said his small, 1,500-student district is switching to four days to save money. There has been positive community feedback thus far, he said, and class options are still being given on the Monday off.

More continuous time in the classroom during four days can be better than short, spread out time in five days, Sartin said.

"You have the opportunity to really go into greater depth," he said.

The larger and academically successful Ouachita Parish School District in northern Louisiana is looking at a four-day week, but only as a last resort if the economy worsens.

"I'm not convinced it's the best thing for instruction or education," Ouachita Superintendent Bob Webber said. "It'd need to be a 'have to' thing."

Four-day school week

PROS

- Savings on fuel, utilities and some salaries.
- Use of off days for professional development, tutoring and special programs.
- Fewer absences and long commutes for students and teachers.
- Students finish school about when parents finish work, so there is less need for after-school child care.

CONS

- Students may have too much idle time and not retain subject matters during three-day weekends.
- Negative perceptions of "giving a day off," although instructional time is not any less.
- More student fatigue and lost focus from longer school days.
- More child care needs on off days while parents work.

Source: Southern Regional Education Board

Article 24

[Top](#)

Media-Newswire

Confidence in public school and NCLB is declining, survey finds

8.13.08

Press Release

PROVIDENCE, R.I. [Brown University] — Public confidence in America's public schools and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) declined in 2008 according to new research by Martin West, assistant professor of education at Brown University. West co-authored the second annual national survey administered by Education Next, a journal about school reform published by the Hoover Institution and the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) at Harvard University.

The majority of Education Next/PEPG survey respondents say Democrats are "more likely to improve the nation's schools." Findings also show that Americans — especially African Americans and Hispanics — are more confident in their local police

force than in their local schools. And the public is now split over NCLB. Half support leaving it as is or renewing it with minimal changes; half think it needs a major overhaul or should be done away with. Some surprising results, however, concern public opinion on hot-button topics: race- and income-based school integration, mainstreaming disabled students, and single-sex education, among others. On each issue, Americans' views run counter to some current — and staunchly defended — practices in the nation's public schools.

"This survey indicates that the majority of Americans are dissatisfied with the status quo in American education," said Martin West, executive editor of Education Next. "In fact, Americans are quite critical of their local public schools, especially when compared to other public services."

The Education Next/PEPG findings come from the most comprehensive and detailed nationwide survey of public attitudes currently available, and the only survey to include a large sample of teachers to more precisely ascertain their opinions. In addition to West, the survey's authors are William G. Howell, associate professor in the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago, and Paul E. Peterson, professor of government at Harvard University, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, and editor-in-chief of Education Next.

NCLB and School Accountability

Survey findings show that public support for NCLB, President Bush's signature education achievement, is waning.

In 2007, the Education Next/PEPG survey results found that 57 percent of the public supported renewing NCLB as is or with minimal changes; today only 50 percent of the public do.

There are comparable declines in support among African Americans, Hispanics, and whites.

Public school teachers are especially critical of NCLB with only 26 percent supporting renewal as is or with minimal changes. By contrast, 33 percent suggest that Congress completely overhaul the act, and another 42 percent recommend that Congress not renew the act at all.

Confidence in Public Schools

Americans offered lower evaluations of the nation's schools in 2008 than the year before, according to Education Next/PEPG survey results, with some groups registering particularly sharp declines in confidence.

Twenty-seven percent of African Americans gave the public schools an A or a B in 2007, but in 2008 that figure fell to 20 percent.

The share of African Americans giving schools a D or an F rose from 22 percent to 31 percent. The share of Hispanics giving schools a similarly poor grade doubled during the period, from 16 to 32 percent.

In fact, the public has more faith in its local police force than it does in its local schools. This is especially pronounced among African Americans and Hispanics: Fifty-five percent of African Americans and 64 percent of Hispanics gave their police force

an A or B, a significantly higher show of support than for public schools.

The 2008 Presidential Election

As support for NCLB has slipped, Education Next/PEPG survey respondents believe Democrats are “more likely to improve the nation’s schools.”

Sixty-one percent of respondents rate the Democrats’ record on education more favorably, and 62 percent think them more likely to improve the public schools.

Teachers prefer the Democrats by even larger margins, as do Hispanics and African Americans.

Democrats and Republicans both tend to favor members of their party when it comes to education, but they do so with varying levels of conviction. Whereas self-identified Democrats prefer their own party on education by margins of roughly 10 to 1, Republicans do so by margins of just 3 to 1. This marks a departure from the pattern observed in 2000, when polls compiled by political scientist Patrick McGuinn showed that only 44 percent of Americans thought that the Democrats would do a better job of improving education, compared with 41 percent who favored the GOP in this area. The Education Next/PEPG 2008 findings reveal a return to the patterns seen in the 1980s and 1990s, when voters consistently favored the Democrats on education by margins of 20 percentage points or more.

Race- and Income-based School Integration

Education Next/PEPG survey results show that 63 percent of the public are opposed to assigning students to schools based on racial background in order to promote school diversity, a practice banned by the Supreme Court in 2007.

Only 16 percent say that districts “definitely” or “probably” should be allowed to take students’ racial background into account; 21 percent of the public are unsure. Among African Americans, only 30 percent think districts should be allowed to take race into account.

Surprisingly, on the question of assigning students to schools based on family income—a strategy now being considered by many districts as an alternative to race-based policies—the opposition is even greater. Only 13 percent support the idea; 62 percent are opposed and the remainder uncertain.

Mainstreaming Disabled Students

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that disabled students be educated in the least restrictive environment possible, which has resulted in mainstreaming all but the most severely disabled students into standard classrooms. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the percentage of disabled students considered to be “fully mainstreamed” has risen from a little more than 30 percent in 1989 to more than 55 percent in 2005.

Education Next/PEPG survey results show that neither teachers nor the general public express much support for the practice of mainstreaming emotionally or behaviorally disabled children.

When asked whether students “who have been diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disabilities should be taught in regular classrooms with other students,”

only 25 percent of teachers, and 28 percent of the public, favored the idea. The rest said they should be “taught in separate settings.”

Single-Sex Public Schools

There has been a resurgence of interest in single-sex public schools recently. The National Association for Single Sex Public Education projects that in fall 2008, roughly 400 public schools will offer students at least some opportunity for single-sex education, and a quarter of these schools will enroll only boys or girls.

According to the Education Next/PEPG survey results, 37 percent of respondents support the idea of public school districts offering parents the option of sending their child to a single-sex school; 25 percent oppose the idea; and the remainder are undecided.

Support is stronger among public school teachers. Forty-seven percent approve the idea.

When asked whether they would consider enrolling their own child in a single-sex school, 42 percent of all parents, 48 percent of public school teachers, and 53 percent of African Americans say that they would.

Home Schooling

More Americans are homeschooling than ever before. The most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics estimate that, as of 2003, 1.1 million students were being educated at home, up from 850,000 in 1999.

According to the Education Next/PEPG survey results, 45 percent of Americans report that they know a family that home schools a child — up from 40 percent in 2007. Sixty-four percent of public school teachers report knowing a home-schooling family.

Online Education

Online education is growing at a fast pace: according to the North American Council for Online Learning, enrollment in online courses in 2000 totaled 45,000. In 2007 enrollments reached 1 million, about 70 percent of which were for high school courses.

According to Education Next/PEPG survey results, more than two thirds of American parents say they would be willing to have their children take some of their high school courses over the Internet.

In most instances, the American public favors public funding for online courses that high school students take for credit over the internet. The breadth of their support, however, depends on the purpose of the online education. A majority favor funding for high schools offering advanced courses for students online and for high schools that offer rural students a broader range of courses online. A plurality of 40 percent support funding online classes that help dropouts gain credits, while only 26 percent of the public supports funding online classes for home schooled students.

The Education Next/PEPG survey was conducted by the polling firm Knowledge Networks between Feb. 16 and March 15, 2008. The findings are based on a nationally representative stratified sample of 2,500 adults age 18 years and older and an oversample of 700 teachers. The sample consists of 2,546 non-Hispanic

whites, 250 non-Hispanic blacks, and 239 Hispanics. With 3,200 total respondents, the margin of error for responses given by the full sample in the Education Next/PEPG survey is roughly 1 percentage point.

Education Next is a scholarly journal published by the Hoover Institution that is committed to looking at hard facts about school reform. Other sponsoring institutions are the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

Full results and analysis of the 2008 Education Next-PEPG Survey are available online at www.EducationNext.org.

Article 25

[Top](#)

Denver Post **Our goal: Strong schools** **8.14.08**

Gov. Bill Ritter and Roy Romer (Op Ed)

Next weekend, the Democrats will gather in Denver and one of their first priorities will be to adopt a party platform. The following week, the Republicans will gather in Minneapolis with a similar mission. The parties' final platforms will likely note rising energy costs, increasing unemployment rates and this nation's ongoing housing crisis all important issues.

But amid this discussion, we need a clear and reasoned voice to continually make the case that strong public education is the best driver of future economic growth.

New research by economist Eric Hanushek shows the inexorable link between the quality of a nation's schools and its economic productivity. He concludes that if the U.S. can improve its performance on international assessments to match top-scoring countries like Canada and South Korea, the U.S. economy will produce an additional 4.5 percent in gross domestic product in less than two decades.

That increase would amount to what the United States currently spends on K-12 education.

Bold education reform is needed to achieve these economic benefits. Consider these alarming statistics: Nearly 70 percent of U.S. eighth-graders are not proficient in reading. More than 1.2 million students drop out of high school every year. In a recent international assessment of 30 countries, U.S. 15-year-olds placed 21st in science and 25th in math.

We as a nation have the capacity to reduce dropout rates, improve student learning and enhance our international competitiveness, but we need the political will to achieve these goals. That's why we have joined together in support of the Strong American Schools campaign.

In Colorado, our 10-year education goals are ambitious: cut the high school drop-out rate in half; slice achievement gaps in half; and double the number of college degrees awarded to in-state Colorado students.

To help achieve those goals, we need to continue to enact groundbreaking education reforms to make our students competitive not just with other states, but also with

other countries. And it will take strong leadership at every level including the presidential level to ensure our efforts are successful.

At present, Colorado students perform higher than the national average. We're five points higher than the national average in fourth-grade reading levels, and eighth-grade minority reading levels beat the national average by five points as well. But it is not enough. Every state's standards need to be benchmarked against the best performing nations in the world.

As a nation, we are falling behind. As a nation, we must re-examine our standards and assessments to ensure that every student is equipped with the 21st century knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy. As a nation, we must enact rigorous standards and relevant assessments that challenge students and teachers so that we are providing American businesses with the best-educated and best-skilled workforce in the world.

In a global job market, Americans are competing for jobs with workers from around the world. We cannot allow our current generation of students to be the first generation of Americans whose economic outlook is worse than that of their parents.

We know it won't be easy; providing clear solutions to complex problems is never simple. But we do know that changing the course of public education will only occur if the next president makes it a priority from day one.

The Strong American Schools campaign is making a determined effort to ensure that education is a priority in this election and we are having an impact.

Our schools can be the best in the world again, preparing students to compete with the brightest. In doing so, we will not only protect our economic security, but we will also maintain our standing in the world.

Bill Ritter Jr. is Colorado's governor. Roy Romer is chairman of Strong American Schools and former three-term governor of Colorado, head of the Democratic National Committee and superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Article 26

[Top](#)

San Francisco Chronicle **S.F.'s black students lag far behind whites** **8.15.08**

Jill Tucker

San Francisco schools earned bragging rights on state standardized tests again this year - performing better than the state as a whole across every grade in both math and English - but any celebration was clouded by the subpar proficiency of the district's African American students, who continued to fall further behind their peers.

Nearly all other categories of San Francisco students, regardless of ethnicity, income or English language ability, outscored the city's black students in California Standards Test results posted Thursday.

On the plus side, the scores of black students did go up about 1 percentage point in math proficiency and nearly 1 percentage point in English.

But that wasn't as much as everyone else, meaning the achievement gap in San Francisco got worse.

"The achievement gap is the greatest civil rights issue facing our country today," school Superintendent Carlos Garcia said in a statement.

The number of white students who were proficient or better in both math and English was about 50 percentage points higher than the city's black students. In second-grade English, for example, 23 percent of blacks were proficient, compared to 74 percent of whites.

Special education students had slightly higher proficiency rates than black students in second-, third- and fourth-grade math as well as fourth-grade English.

The district tested 41,000 students, including 4,800 African Americans, in grades two through 11 in the spring.

San Francisco schools face a steep uphill battle in boosting the test results of black students, educators noted.

The test results are not surprising, said Omar Khalif, ombudsman for the city's Juvenile Probation Department and an advocate for education and children's issues. Khalif, who is running for a seat on the school board in November's election, said black students often face obstacles tied to neighborhood poverty, crime and broken families.

But some schools are succeeding in the black communities - schools that hold high standards, said Khalif, a Bayview resident.

San Francisco's shrinking middle class, especially in the black community, also has an impact on schools, said school board member Hydra Mendoza, who is also the education adviser to Mayor Gavin Newsom.

"When you have a healthy middle class, it really does change the dynamic of schools and housing," Mendoza said.

The median household income for the city's black population was \$31,080, about \$10,000 less than blacks statewide, according to 2006 U.S. Census estimates.

The median income for the city overall, however, was an estimated \$65,500, about \$9,000 more than the rest of the state.

In addition, 25 percent of blacks in San Francisco in 2000 lived in poverty and comprised nearly half of those living in public housing, according to the city's African American Out-migration Task Force and Advisory Committee.

Such statistics are not an excuse but at least offer some explanation, Mendoza said.

"I recognize there is still a huge achievement gap, but I don't want to lose the idea that our kids are gaining," Mendoza said. "Some are gaining at a faster rate. That is what is widening our gap."

But district officials said they believe black students can and will catch their peers.

"It gives me hope when we find out there are some places, in spite of difficult situations, that are doing well," Garcia said.

District officials cited E.R. Taylor Elementary School, Roosevelt Middle School and Balboa High School as examples.

The San Francisco school board adopted a plan this year to identify schools where the achievement gap is widening. Those closing the gap will also be recognized and modeled.

Also, city voters in June approved a school parcel tax to raise an estimated \$29 million annually, boosting teacher salaries, training staff on the needs of disadvantaged students, and providing incentives to teach in hard-to-staff schools - where students are more often than not black, Hispanic and poor.

"All of this work is going to be around the achievement gap," said Phil Halperin, president of the Silver Giving Foundation and co-chairman of the parcel tax campaign. "They are focused like a laser beam on making sure all kids get a quality education, all kids get what they need out of schools."

[Article 27](#)

[Top](#)

Time
Four-day school weeks
8.15.08

Kathleen Kingsbury

The kids in Caldwell Parish will be ditching a lot of school this year. Every Monday, to be precise--and they're doing so with the principal's permission. Starting Aug. 11, this rural school system in northeastern Louisiana will hold classes only four days a week, following the lead of more than 100 school districts in 17 states. The reason? To save gas money.

As the price of diesel--which most school buses run on--topped \$4.70 per gal. last spring, school officials across the country watched their transportation costs skyrocket as much as 40%. Maryland's Montgomery County is debating whether to shrink its school-bus routes. In California, where state law doesn't require school districts to provide transportation, some districts are planning to cancel bus service altogether. But perhaps the most radical solution is one that was employed during the last big gas crunch, in the 1970s: the four-day school week.

Back then, only a handful of districts switched to the shortened calendar (and most returned to a five-day week once the crisis subsided). This time around, however, nearly 1 in 7 school boards nationwide is considering whether to drop a day, according to a recent survey by the American Association of School Administrators. Of 546 superintendents surveyed, nearly half said they plan to cut back on field trips, and 15% will eliminate extracurricular activities that require busing. Nearly a third reported having to lay off teachers, while others have closed down schools entirely. 'A four-day schedule can often be the least painful option a district has,' says Marty Strange, policy director for Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit in Arlington, Va. 'It's really a small bandage on a deep cut.' In Caldwell Parish, where school buses travel more than 1,000 miles (1,600 km) a day ferrying the district's 1,800 students, the Mondays-off policy is expected to save \$135,000 this year, or about 5% of the annual operating costs. 'We found our budget could only stretch so

far,' says superintendent John Sartin. 'This was the best alternative under the circumstances.' With the new calendar, the number of hours Caldwell Parish pupils spend in class won't change. Instead, each of the four days of instruction will be lengthened an hour, and recesses and other breaks will be shortened. At the district's junior highs, for example, the school day will commence at 7:50 a.m. and end at 4:09 p.m.

So far there have been no formal studies on the effects that a condensed schedule has on student performance. Anecdotally, however, the experiment appears to be paying off for some districts, both financially and academically. Five years ago, Kentucky's Webster County school district faced drastic budget shortfalls caused by waning revenue from local property taxes. But after debating whether to close one of the district's seven schools, officials decided instead to institute a Tuesday-to-Friday schedule, which to date has saved more than \$300,000 on transportation, utility and insurance costs.

Student absenteeism has also fallen remarkably in Webster County. Ditto for teachers, which means fewer resources are being used to pay substitute teachers. Administrators also credit the schedule change for significant academic gains. The 2,000-student district went from being ranked 111th in the state on standardized tests in 2003 to 53rd last year. Says Riley Ramsey, district director of personnel and technology: 'We took our budget savings and plowed it right back into instructional content,' such as hiring one-on-one tutors and extending kindergarten hours.

Despite such optimistic reports from Webster County and several other districts that have switched to four-day weeks, many experts believe that, if anything, American youth should be spending more days in school than they already are. Most states mandate a minimum of 180 school days a year. That's three weeks shorter than nearly every industrialized nation in Europe and Asia, where pupils regularly outperform U.S. students in math, science and reading. In China and Korea, for example, school is in session more than 220 days a year.

Closer to home, a San Francisco--based network of charter schools called the Knowledge Is Power Program keeps its 16,000 students in class 60% longer than a typical public school, and last year 100% of its eighth-grade classes outperformed their district averages in both language arts and mathematics on state-administered exams. 'All the evidence says the more hours our schools are open, the better off our kids are,' says Jennifer Davis, president of the National Center on Time and Learning, a Boston research-and-advocacy group devoted to extending school schedules.

'Cutting days puts our country's economic future at risk.' For parents, a more immediate concern with four-day school weeks is what to do with younger kids on the fifth day, a burden administrators often acknowledge in letters they send home explaining the new policy. One district in central Minnesota that is launching a Tuesday-to-Friday schedule on Sept. 2 is trying to help families with child-care issues by training high schoolers as babysitters. But many families can't afford to hire outside help. 'You're likely to see a lot more kids staying home alone,' says Strange. 'That only leads to trouble.' Parents also worry that their children won't have the time--or the energy--for after-school activities. 'Some people caution an eight-hour day is already tough for younger kids,' says Marc Egan, federal-affairs director for the National School Boards Association, based in Alexandria, Va. But for many districts, the four-day week is the only way to keep from having to eliminate athletics and other extracurriculars. The extra day off also gives students more time to work on projects or at a part-time job. 'Now that economic tides have turned, this is a godsend for families where kids' jobs are helping make ends meet,' says

Webster County superintendent James Kemp.

Despite initial resistance, communities appear to have been overwhelmingly won over by the four-day school week. South Dakota's Custer school district adopted a Monday-to-Thursday schedule in 1995, and nearly 90% of parents now support it. Superintendent Tim Creal says the kids are more engaged in their studies, and though test scores have not changed significantly, teachers feel they cover 20% more material because of longer classes each day and less absenteeism. Creal wouldn't think of going back to a five-day week. 'I'd be tarred and feathered for even suggesting it,' he says. Which also means it's unlikely summer vacation will get downsized anytime soon.