

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION NEWS ROUNDUP

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USA: Improving Schools Requires New Thinking about School Leadership

"Although long seen as essential forces in school change, principals have largely been absent from conversations defining their own role as school leaders. For years we've had standards for students, but principals' pivotal role in academic progress has for the most part been overlooked.

"In *Leading Learning Communities: Standards of what Principals should Know and be Able to Do*, principals themselves identify six characteristics of instructional leadership that outline what their role in school improvement can and should be.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) believes that we cannot have first-rate schools without first-rate school leadership. Regardless of how charismatic or personable a school leader is, or how effective a manager, a principal is not going to improve academic achievement for all students unless she engages in her work differently. After a year-long collaborative process with principals, we present these six standards for principal leadership.

"The standards are directly related to the indicators of quality in schools. Influenced by the academic standards movement - which demands a sharpened focus on equity and instruction - school leaders are thinking anew about how to define "quality" in schools and how to create and manage environments that support it.

Download the Executive Summary of "*Leading Learning Communities*" at http://www.naesp.org/client_files/LLC-Exec-Sum.pdf

Dr. Vincent Ferrandino is the immediate past Executive Director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

USA: Arts education described as vital: State work force needs creativity

DANI McCLAIN March 29, 2008

Wisconsin needs to cultivate an innovative, entrepreneurial work force, and arts education is the key, Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton said Friday.

A new task force on arts and creativity, co-chaired by Lawton and state schools Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster, plans to survey arts offerings in Wisconsin schools, hold public hearings around the state, and issue a list of recommendations by the end of the year.

"I see artists imagining solutions to 21st-century problems," Lawton said at a meeting of arts advocates at the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design. "Creativity is important to every sector of Wisconsin's economy."

The event kicked off a daylong meeting of the Wisconsin Arts Board, which Lawton chairs.

The task force is expected to include members of the state's business, arts and education communities. The list of participants will be finalized within the next week, officials said.

The group's goal will be to position arts education as a way to teach critical-thinking skills and encourage Wisconsin's students to become visionaries who can propel the state to the forefront of the green economy and other emerging industries, Lawton said.

"The Silicon Valley wasn't brought in on semi trucks," she said, citing Apple CEO Steve Jobs as someone who combines technical know-how with an artist's touch.

Officials said the task force will address how to move arts education from the fringes of low-income school districts' enrichment offerings to their core curricula, which will mean involving arts advocates in the state budget process.

"The arts are not a luxury," said Burmaster, a former music teacher and drama director. "The arts are essential."

Read more at <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=733379>

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USA: Homework and Families

Cathy Vaterott

In many busy families, homework has become a source of stress between parent and child, and has created friction between parents and teachers.

Many parents are tired of the teary battles at the kitchen table, and the nagging they have to do to get the homework completed.

The NEA and the PTA have both endorsed the "10-minute rule", that the maximum amount of homework children should have each night is 10 minutes per grade level per night.

That is, a 2nd grader should have no more than 20 minutes, a 6th grader no more than 60 minutes, and a 12th grader no more than 2 hours.

If your child is spending much more time than that on homework, you may want to schedule a conference with your child's teacher.

Read more at <http://www.homeworklady.com>

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USA: Assessment Through the Student's Eyes

Rick Stiggins, Educational Leadership - Educating the Whole Child, May 2007

Rather than sorting students into winners and losers, assessment for learning can put all students on a winning streak.

Historically, a major role of assessment has been to detect and highlight differences in student learning in order to rank students according to their achievement. Such assessment experiences have produced winners and losers. Some students succeed early and build on winning streaks to learn more as they grow; others fail early and often, falling farther and farther behind.

As we all know, the mission of schools has changed. Today's schools are less focused on merely sorting students and more focused on helping all students succeed in meeting standards. This evolution in the mission of schools means that we can't let students who have not yet met standards fall into losing streaks, succumb to hopelessness, and stop trying.

Our evolving mission compels us to embrace a new vision of assessment that can tap the wellspring of confidence, motivation, and learning potential that resides within every student. First, we need to tune in to the emotional dynamics of the assessment experience from the point of view of students-both assessment winners and assessment losers. These two groups experience assessment practices in vastly different ways, as shown in "The Assessment Experience," p. 24. To enable all students to experience the productive emotional dynamics of winning, we need to move from exclusive reliance on assessments that verify learning to the use of assessments that support learning-that is, assessments for learning.

Read more at

http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journaltypeheaderimage=%2FASCD%2Fimages%2Fmultifiles%2Fpublications%2Felmast.gif&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_viewID=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalmoid=b886a294ba762110VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_articlemoid=92d6a294ba762110VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalTypePersonalization=ASCD_EL&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

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USA: Essential Qualities of Math Teaching Remain Unknown

By Sean Cavanagh Premium article access courtesy of Edweek.org.

It is one of most widely accepted axioms in math education: Good teachers matter.

But what are the qualities of an effective mathematics teacher? The answer, as a recent federal report suggests, remains frustratingly elusive.

Research does not show conclusively which professional credentials demonstrate whether math teachers are effective in the classroom, the report found. It does not show what college math content and coursework are most essential for teachers. Nor does it show what kinds of pre-service, professional-development, or alternative education programs best prepare them to teach.

As a result, while the report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel, released last month, offers numerous conclusions about math curriculum, cognition, and instruction, many of its recommendations about improving teaching are more tentative and amount to a call for more research.

"It is, in some ways, where the action has to come next," said Deborah Loewenberg Ball, the member of the panel who chaired its working group on teacher issues. "We should put a lot of careful effort over the next decade into this issue so that we can be in a much different place 10 years from now."

The uncertainty about math teaching skills emerges at a time when policymakers at all levels see a need to boost students' math and science achievement as a key to sustaining the nation's future economic health and producing a skilled workforce.

Read entire article at:

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/04/02/31math_ep.h27.html?tmp=1946349522

Access the Report "Foundations for Success: Final Report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel" (2008) at <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/mathpanel/report/final-report.pdf>

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UK - USA: Student Engagement Found to Rise as Class Size Falls

Debra Viadero Premium article access courtesy of Edweek.org.

A new British study quantifies and confirms what many teachers have long believed: Students tend to be "off task" more often when they are in larger classes.

The report, by researchers from the University of London Institute of Education, was one of several studies on the educational effects of reducing class sizes that were presented here Monday on the first day of the annual meeting of the Washington-based American Educational Research Association. The March 24-28 event is expected to draw more than 15,000 education scholars from around the world before it ends on Friday.

Studies on class size have long suggested that elementary school pupils tend to learn more in classes of 20 students or fewer. The papers presented yesterday, which were based on studies conducted in the United States and Hong Kong, as well as in the United Kingdom, extend and deepen the discussion on that topic by looking more closely at what goes on inside smaller and larger classes.

In his study of British classrooms, for instance, researcher Peter Blatchford found that both elementary and secondary students benefit from smaller classes and that the benefits at the secondary level are particularly strong for the lowest-achieving students. That study involved 686 students in 27 primary schools and 22 secondary schools in the United Kingdom.

Benefits in Britain

The students were closely observed by teams of researchers who recorded their "moment-to-moment" behaviors in blocks of 10-second intervals. The researchers found that adding five students to a class decreases the odds of students being on task by nearly a quarter. In fact, the study found that low-attaining students were nearly twice as likely to be disengaged in classes of 30 students as they were in classes of 15.

"As class size increases, the amount of teaching also increases," Mr. Blatchford, a professor of psychology and education, added. "But that's explained by more whole-class teaching." Teachers are not necessarily capitalizing on the smaller settings to engage more students in collaborative projects—a finding that some other studies have echoed.

Read more at

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/03/25/29aerasize_web.h27.html?tmp=133721671

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USA: But Smaller Classes Don't Close Learning Gap for Low Income Students, Study Finds

Jay Mathews Washington Post, March 10, 2008

For 20 years, a large study of class size in Tennessee, known as Project STAR, has raised hopes that reducing the number of children in inner-city classrooms to 17 or fewer would yield significant

increases in achievement. It was by far the most authoritative finding in favor of reducing class size and was generally considered one of the most important educational studies of its time

But a researcher, looking closely at the same data on thousands of students from kindergarten through third grade in 79 schools, has concluded that high achievers benefited more from the small classes than low achievers. Since low-income students in urban neighborhoods have lower achievement, on average, than students from more affluent families, the finding in the March issue of Elementary School Journal contradicts assumptions that class size reduction might have a significant effect on the gap between rich and poor students.

"While decreasing class size may increase achievement on average for all types of students, it does not appear to reduce the achievement gap within a class," Spyros Konstantopoulos, assistant professor at Northwestern's School of Education and Social Policy, said in a statement released by the university.

The \$3 million Project STAR study was launched in 1985. It was unusual for the large size of the sample of students, for the long, four-year period in which their progress was recorded and for the random assignment of students to three kinds of classes -- small (13 to 17 students per teacher), regular (22 to 25 per teacher) and regular with aide (22 to 25 students with teacher and full-time aide).

Classroom teachers were also randomly assigned, giving the study a scientific validity rarely found in educational research.

Read more at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/09/AR2008030901494.html>

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USA: Washington state begins to revise science education standards

Seattle Times - DONNA GORDON BLANKINSHIP Associated Press Writer

Changing the way Washington teaches math has led to one of the most contentious education debates in recent memory.

Now state education officials on working on what may be an even bigger black hole in Washington education achievement: science education.

Why is everyone so calm?

Kids are doing worse on the science section of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning than they're doing in math _ a little more than a third of 10th graders pass the science WASL. Only 2.8 percent of 10th graders learning English as a second language passed the 2007 science WASL. The 10th grade pass rate for African American and Hispanic high school students is less than 15 percent.

Eddie Harding, executive director of the state Board of Education, says she doesn't know why the process that started last fall has not attracted much debate. She says the existing state education guidelines for science are just as vague as the math standards were and the two subjects are closely intertwined academically.

The volunteer chairman of the board's science committee says math advocates are more formally organized than science enthusiasts. And the math debate has two distinct sides, which is not possible in science, because there are so many different specialties from earth science to chemistry.

"It's really more about the process of science. We want to make sure people are doing inquiry and data analysis, instead of memorizing rules versus problem solving," said science chairman Jeff Vincent.

Read more at http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2004314001_apwateachingscience.html

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USA: After school can be key to student's success: a seamless approach to the learning day

Linda Borg, Providence Journal April 8, 2008

The typical teenager has more in common with your household pet than you might think.

Teenagers operate from the gut. They haven't learned abstract thinking or how to generalize from one experience, according to Abigail Baird, director of Laboratory of Adolescent Studies at Vassar College, who kicked off yesterday's conference on after-school programs at the Providence Marriott hotel.

The daylong forum drew national and local leaders to discuss how to create an ideal learning environment for middle school students and was sponsored by the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) and the Rhode Island After School Plus Alliance, a statewide program.

When students reach middle school, their most important relationships are with their peers. Their friends are the ones who provide social cues about which clothes are hot and which are not, which boys are cute and which are dorks, and so forth. Baird described something called the Haley effect, in which students, when asked the same question, tend to mimic the answers of their peers rather than risk an answer that might earn them ridicule.

"Kids need the opportunity to take risks and learn from them," Baird told several hundred educators and after-school providers. "After-school programs can provide the perfect opportunity to experiment."

Read more at http://www.projo.com/ri/providence/content/mc_PASA_04-08-08_DJ9M855_v8.32f4bd3.html

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USA: Senate panel proposes no penalty for teaching creationism in State teaching evolution for first time ever in public schools

Michael Bender, Palm Beach Post April 08, 2008

TALLAHASSEE - Public school science teachers who want to include creationism or intelligent design in their lesson plan could not be punished by principals or school districts under a bill approved Tuesday by a Florida Senate committee.

The bill (SB 2692) was a response to a decision from the State Board of Education in January to require, for the first time in state history, that students learn about evolution in public schools.

It was approved, 6-2, by the Senate Judiciary Committee with Republicans succeeding in a party-line vote. The bill now moves to the full Senate for debate, while a companion bill has not yet been debated in the House.

The state education board, under pressure from religious groups that wanted to make room in science class for their beliefs, agreed to refer to evolution as "the scientific theory of evolution" in state documents.

But that concession was not enough for some lawmakers.

Read more at <http://www.palmbeachpost.com/politics/content/state/epaper/2008/04/08/0408evolve.html>

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New Zealand: \$500 a year: rising cost of free education

Martha McKenzie-Minifie, NZ Herald 30 November 2007

Parents spend almost \$500 a year on a primary school child's education, research has found.

The Council for Educational Research's three-yearly survey of primary schools found the costs of "free" education included school donations, activity fees, trips, uniforms, fundraising, stationery and transport.

On average, the cost was \$489 a child a year - up from \$471 in the previous survey, three years ago.

This year's study found school funding was parents' biggest worry about primary schools - 53 per cent of respondents cited it as a concern, compared with 47 per cent in 2003.

All but 5 per cent of principals who responded said they did not have enough money to meet the needs of their schools.

The Government ordered a review of schools' operational funding and a boost is expected in next year's Budget.

Other big issues for parents in the survey were retaining good teachers, the amount of support given by parents and the community to schools, and students' achievement.

Researchers surveyed 10 per cent of primary schools in June and approached a quarter of parents at each. Principals, teachers and school trustees also took part.

The Council for Educational Research's chief researcher, Cathy Wylie, said the findings showed primary schools were largely positive places, and many had reported gains in student performance.

Dr Wylie said positive trends included teachers increasingly working together. But she said it also appeared many schools were having to run "on a lot of long work hours and passion for kids".

NB: The negative pitch of the article attracted mainly negative responses from readers, unsurprisingly. The more lucid comments included "But education never was free!" and "But investing in a good education is the best gift we can give our kids". Exactly! ED

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USA: Research Shows Quality Time Seems Stacked In Favor of Firstborns

Donna St George Washington Post March 22, 2008

When her eldest child was in kindergarten, Laura Haggerty-Lacalle sat down with her every day to review reading or math, intent on providing that most precious commodity of all: parent time. "Oh my God, it's the most important thing you can do," she said.

But when her second child hit the same age, life was more hectic. Now, with a third child, Haggerty-Lacalle, 37, feels good when she gets five minutes to stack blocks or build Lego in her Oak Hill home.

"When you have three kids," she says, "you're just trying to survive."

Within this familiar progression of family life, new research has confirmed what some parents recognize and others quietly fear: Their firstborn children get more of their time than others in the family -- on average, 3,000 extra "quality" hours from ages 4 to 13, when sisters and brothers are in the picture.

That's 25 extra minutes a day with mothers on average and 20 extra minutes a day with fathers across a nine-year span of childhood, according to a study by economist Joseph Price of Brigham Young University.

Some parents find themselves surprised by the lopsided time log, but the big question, experts say, is whether this difference helps explain findings that show firstborn children get better test scores, more education and higher-paying jobs.

Read more at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/21/AR2008032103605.html?hpid=moreheadlines>

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USA: Good pay, steady work, few takers as young people spurn the trades

Amy Rolph, Seattle PI 23 March 2008

The average construction worker is well into his 40s, and unless something changes to make the fresh-from-prom set take a sudden interest in framing and drywall, that work force is just going to keep getting older.

In an industry where retirement tends to come early and knowledge is passed down on the job, that trend presents a potentially paralyzing problem -- especially as demand for workers continues to rise.

Crews will be at a loss for skilled workers. Buildings might not go up so quickly. So-called "green initiatives" could falter.

And the young people who passed up those opportunities? Unless they managed to land that desk job at Microsoft, they might have missed out on a chance to make a comfortably upper-middle-class living, some industry experts say.

The shortage isn't confined to carpenters -- it extends to plumbers, stonemasons, electricians, cabinetmakers, welders and a list of other trades that were once sought after.

What has some educators and employers puzzled is that many of those professions offer the chance to make upward of \$50,000 right away. But they say a negative perception of the trades coupled with a mounting push for college education has dealt the professions a hard blow in the United States.

Read more at http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/business/356181_trades24.html

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UK: Schools may be judged on teenage pregnancy rates and drug problems

The Guardian, 30 April 2008

Schools will be made to keep records of teenage pregnancy rates, pupils' drug problems, criminal records and obesity levels under government plans to give parents a true picture of children's lives.

The ideas, set out in a discussion document from the Department for Children, Schools and Families, suggest schools would become accountable for 18 new targets, from bullying and neglect, to what happens to pupils after they leave school. Sources said the 10-page document, entitled Indicators of schools' performance in contributing to pupil wellbeing, calls for Ofsted inspectors to judge schools on the wide range of measures in addition to existing criteria such as exam results and exclusion rates. The measures could be implemented by Ofsted from 2009, and suggest that schools would become broadly responsible for children's safety, enjoyment and happiness.

The move is part of a government attempt to tackle the UK's teenage pregnancy rate, which is one of the highest in Europe, and reduce drug use. A government survey of 115,000 children in England aged between 10 and 15 last year found one in seven had taken drugs.

The proposals were discussed last week at a meeting of the New Relationships with Schools group, which includes civil servants, teaching unions, children's services directors, local authority and Ofsted inspectors, governors and headteachers of primary and secondary schools.

They call for a study of pupils' experiences, suggesting "parents' and pupils' views will need to be gathered through surveys, probably regular and nationally administered", as there is no existing consistent national school-level data.

These findings could be included in Ofsted's annual report on the state of schools in England and Wales, which is used by parents to find out more about schools in their area.

Read more at <http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,2276894,00.html>

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UK: Only class war on [private] schools can rid us of this unhinged ruling class

George Monbiot, The Guardian, January 22 2008

If only the government would justify the paranoia of the ruling classes.

They believe, as they have always believed, that they are under unprecedented attack. All last week the rightwing papers rustled with the lamentations of the privileged, wailing about a new class war.

If only.

The whinge-fest was prompted by the publication of the Charity Commission's new guidance about public benefits. If institutions want to retain their status as charities, they should demonstrate that they do good: the benefits they create should outweigh the harm they might do; the poor should not be shut out; and "charities should not be seen as 'exclusive clubs' that only a few can join".

It hardly sounds radical. After all, what sort of charity is it that doesn't meet these conditions? Well, it's a distressed gentfolk's association called the private school, and it costs us £100m a year in tax exemptions.

Though private schools cannot meet even the crudest definition of a charity, the commission - doubtless terrified of the force they can muster - grants them a series of escape clauses. Their charitable status will be preserved if they provide some subsidised places to poorer pupils or share their facilities with other schools, even if these schools are charged to use them.

Read more at http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jan/22/publicschools_publicservices

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UK: This is no magic bullet for teaching children to read

Henrietta Dombey, The Guardian, 30 April 2008

In his profile of Ruth Miskin, Peter Wilby falls for her view that teaching children to read English is quite straightforward - just a matter of establishing phonic rules (A tonic for the phonics queen, Education, April 1). As Wilby rightly states, Miskin is the "star of several TV programmes on reading" and is "riding high just now".

He's also right that her position was strengthened by the views of Jim Rose, a former director of inspection at Ofsted, whose report has indeed brought phonics to the fore, attacking the mixed approach of the national literacy strategy. The official government line is now that synthetic phonics, in which children build words up from their component letter sounds, is the only legitimate way to introduce them to reading.

But this view is far from universally accepted by those working in or researching early literacy. Faced with a class of non-reading inner-city seven-year-olds 40 years ago, my early career success came through a mixture of exciting texts, systematic phonics and a focus on rhyme and analogy. I have spent the intervening decades investigating this complex process, as well as teaching both children and student teachers.

Read more at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/apr/30/schools.children?gusrc=rss&feed=fromtheguardian>

Henrietta Dombey is emeritus professor of literacy in primary education at the University of Brighton

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