

# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION NEWS ROUNDUP

Volume 3 Number 2, May 2009

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## **Afghanistan: Despite Dangers, Afghan Girls Determined To Learn**

*Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, National Public Radio (NPR) 1 May 2009*

Public education is among the many casualties of the growing war in Afghanistan, and the threat of violence is especially acute for Afghan girls. Parents, who in the past did not allow their daughters to go to school because of societal taboos, are once again keeping them at home because of the threat of attacks by militants wielding acid or worse.

But many girls are refusing to give up their schooling — no matter what the cost.

The Afghan government, aid groups and defiant teachers are operating public schools as well as secret, in-home classes in a risky effort to ensure that Afghan girls get an education.

Nearly half of the country's children do not attend classes, most of them in the Taliban-rife south, says Afghanistan's education minister, Farouq Wardak. Hundreds of schools have closed in Kandahar and neighbouring provinces because of militant attacks and threats.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/dkal43>

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## **Canada: Tech-savvy teens 'adopt' teachers**

*Kristin Rushowy, Toronto Star, May 4, 2009*

The teachers at Don Mills Collegiate Institute are now the students. Faced with teens who know more than they do about technology, the Toronto high school began an "adopt-a-teacher" program where students teach the adults how to create blogs or interactive graphics, edit video, or even just improve their PowerPoint presentations.

Half the school's teachers signed up for the tutoring, says Sharron Forrest, program director of the Toronto high school's renowned CyberARTS program, from which the student experts were drawn. "When we saw how many teachers were interested, that's when I came up with the idea to put them up for adoption. We work so well with our students, and they are our best resource, it just made perfect, practical sense."

"It's such a neat concept because it breaks down the walls and it's so logical, that we get to play and learn along with our students," said Forrest.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/cvpw29>

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## **Canada: Fear Alberta law impedes teaching of “religious” topics like evolution**

*The Canadian Press, 3 May 2009*

Educators and human rights experts in Alberta are worried that a proposed change to human rights legislation could make it tough to teach a number of controversial subjects.

The change says parents should be notified when classes "include subject matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation," and should have the right to ask that their child sit out that part of the class.

The term "religion" is extremely broad and could edge its way into almost anything that comes up in the classroom, said Dan Shapiro, research associate with the Calgary-based Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership.

Frank Bruseker, head of the Alberta Teachers Association, said he's worried that some parents might think mentioning different classes of worms would constitute a reference to evolution. And a discussion of ancient geologic formations can't be had without mentioning the world is billions of years old, much more than a literal reading of the Bible would suggest.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/d66ry2>

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## **China: A problem shared is a problem halved for troubled students**

*He Na, China Daily, 26 May 2009*

If you asked most people what May 25 or 525 means, they wouldn't have a clue but many college students know it as Mental Health Day. They would probably also point out that if you pronounce the number 5-2-5 one by one in Chinese, it sounds similar to "wo ai wo" ("I love myself").

Established in 2000 by several universities in Beijing and approved by the Youth League Committee of Beijing, the College Students Mental Health Day has quickly developed into a nationwide event.

Employment is the theme of this year's Mental Health Day, since the economic downturn has left graduates with bleak job prospects. The gloomy employment outlook has not only affected graduating students but younger students, too. Even university freshmen have been going to psychological counselling centres to pour out their concerns about finding future employment.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/oz9c7u>

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## **China: Too much pressure drives rising student suicides**

*He Na, China Daily, 26 May 2009*

Studies by the Beijing Suicide Research and Prevention Centre show that suicide among young adults aged 18-35 is becoming a major concern. A record number of college students killed themselves last year: 63 deaths from 38 universities, according to Guangdong Education Department. So far this year, seven university student suicide cases have been reported.

Yang Fude, president of Beijing Huilongguan Hospital and director of Beijing Suicide Research and Prevention Centre, says increasing pressure from the expectations of study, work, romance, family and society, and also a deep feeling of loneliness contributed to the problem.

Studies show that severe depression is the major cause of suicides. And many young Chinese, especially well-educated ones, suffer from different degrees of depression. According to Zhang Wenjuan, deputy director of the Chinese Juvenile Rights Protection Centre, because of the one-child family planning policy, almost all the students grew up under a "vacuum environment" without siblings.

"The direct result of parental indulgence is the lack of experience, skills and ability to tackle pressures and difficulties," she says. "They are more inclined to give up hope when in trouble."

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/l4etc4>

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### **India: Why India's Teachers Do Not Spare the Rod**

*Nilanjana Bhowmick, Time, May. 02, 2009*

My three-year-old son came home from a private preschool recently and told me that his teacher had hit him for not being able to colour properly.

I was shocked and angry. The next morning, however, I discovered that my anger could be funnelled into a wider controversy. I read in the local newspapers about Shanno Khan, 11, a Delhi schoolgirl had allegedly been punished at school but did not survive. Shanno's sisters, who attend the same government school, say that her teacher forced her to stand in the scorching sun for two hours until she fainted. She reportedly slipped into a coma and died in the hospital.

Her death has renewed calls to stop corporal punishment in schools; the issue is explosive because in India physical abuse in schools is widespread.

According to a 2007 joint study by UNICEF, Save the Children and the Indian government, 65% of school-going children have faced corporal punishment.

Teachers say they resort to physical punishment because of the inherent problems of India's public education system, specifically, the immense challenge of maintaining control of huge classes of unruly children.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/coxko7>

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### **India: To teach is to inspire**

*Sunayana Gupta, The Indian Express, 14 May 2009*

The most important factor governing a student's learning is dependent on the relationship he or she shares with the teacher(s).

Gone are the days of "spare the rod and spoil the child". Today, teachers are better known as 'facilitators', making students aspire to be better graduates, better working professionals and even better individuals.

A teacher is faced with many daunting tasks. She needs to put herself in the shoes of her students in order to understand them well, and quickly get a feel for their hang-ups.

Taking up this profession means taking up responsibility for many young, exposed children. It requires devoting listening ears and a compassionate heart to her students.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/n92gcm>

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### **Indonesia: Character building: The missing link in Indonesia's public school curriculum**

*Andra Wisnu, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta, 05/22/2009*

Pria Saptono, a math teacher at Sevilla School in Pulomas, East Jakarta, thought he could squeeze in some character building lessons for his students by having them compete in an international math competition.

“The Gauss contest puts more emphasis on student’s abilities in figuring out logical solutions to mathematical problems, since children are free to use their own methods,” Pria said, referring to the 2009 Gauss test — a Canadian mathematics competition held at Sevilla School on Saturday.

This was one of Pria’s attempts to develop his student’s willingness to learn by making mathematics fun, as opposed to information-cramming to get students through the national exams.

“The national exams focus so much on solving problems using formulae, teachers are pressed to cram as much as they can into students’ minds, which I think causes students to forget the essence of learning. As a teacher, I would be doing a disservice to my students and their parents if I didn’t teach them the more fun aspects of problem solving.”

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/m4nnnl>

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### **New Zealand: It’s a smoke and mirrors Budget**

*Media Release, Post Primary Teachers' Association, 29 May 2009 (Scoop News)*

Pay increases negotiated back in 2007 were re-wrapped as extra money for staffing in a Budget that PPTA president Kate Gainsford says is misleading.

“One of Bill English’s main selling points for education was \$169 million for teachers’ pay increases. What he failed to mention was that this is not actually extra money. It is hard-won money from collective agreements settled in 2007 that the government is legally obliged to pay – dressing it up as anything else is simply dishonest,” she said.

In what Gainsford has dubbed the “Smoke and Mirrors Budget” there was very little for teachers and schools that had not already been announced by the previous government.

“There are also clear signals that future belt-tightening will pose a serious threat to frontline staff,” she said.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mtv3tw>

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### **New Zealand: Budget Fails Frontline Education Workers**

*Media Release, New Zealand Educational Institute, 29 May 2009*

Budget Fails Frontline Education Workers And Signals Trouble Ahead In The Classroom

The Budget will do nothing to fix problems of low pay in the education sector, according to the education sector union, NZEI Te Riu Roa.

The government has announced a minimal inflation adjusted increase to school’s operational funding for 2010 and no new money to address the pay of frontline support staff for this year.

School support staff such as teacher aides, administrators and librarians are paid out of school’s operational funding. They are low paid, with many earning just above the minimum wage.

Schools needed a significant increase to their operational funding if support staff are to get the pay increases and job security that they deserve.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/nnk3no>

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### **New Zealand: Budget featherbeds private schools, ignores tail**

*Media Release, Quality Public Education Coalition, 28 May 2009*

Private schools (teaching just 3.5% of New Zealand students) are the biggest winners from National's 2009 budget with a \$35 million boost in funding on top of the \$40 million they received under the previous government.

Meanwhile education's biggest problem – the long tail of underachievement in schools in low-income communities receives no specific mention and only incidental resourcing through general literacy and numeracy funding which amounts to just \$36 million.

In fact additional funding for public schools (teaching 96.5% of New Zealand children) amounts to just \$170 million with almost half this figure (\$80.1 million) to meet the rate of inflation for operations funding.

The public will be able to understand the maths:

Private schools: \$35 million for 3.5% of children  
Public schools: \$170 million for 96.5% of children

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mw9nhd>

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### **New Zealand: Boys education lag linked to divorce**

*John Hartevelt, The Press, 30 May 2009*

New Zealand boys are further behind girls in the classroom than in any other developed country, and the head of a Christchurch boys' school blames marital splits.

The 30-member Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) yesterday released a report comparing achievement by 15-year-old boys and girls in 40 countries.

Of the OECD countries in the study, the difference in reading achievement in favour of girls was greatest in New Zealand, the report showed.

"There are significant gender differences in educational outcomes, and these appear as students grow older."

Last year's National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) results, released this month, showed girls outperforming boys by wider margins as pupils got older.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/nrc3vk>

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### **Pakistan: Religious schools get scrutiny**

*Mark Magnier, Los Angeles Times, May 30, 2009*

The madrasas, schools that teach the Koran and little else, are suspected of nurturing extremism. Under U.S. pressure, the Pakistan government has pledged to reform the system.

The Darul Uloom Haqqania campus is a sprawling labyrinth of ashen buildings where young men in black beards and white skullcaps spend their days and nights on hard concrete floors learning all 77,701 words of the Koran. Some people call it the University of Jihad.

The fact that some of Haqqania's graduates go on to become Taliban fighters and suicide bombers isn't the school's concern, said Syed Yousef Shah, the head of the 3,000- student madrasa, or Islamic seminary.

"One person may become a journalist, another a driver," he said as he reclined on a pillow in a small meeting room in the school. "We can't control what people do afterward."

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/nor7md>

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### **Rwanda: School Dropout Rate Alarming**

*Sam Nkurunziza, The New Times, 29 May 2009*

The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) has announced that the rates at which students drop out of schools are still alarming and subsequently declared intentions of reducing the trend by at least two percent by the end of the next financial year.

The targeted net enrolment is 97.8 percent from where it currently stands at 95.8, while the dropout stands at a stunning 13.9 percent according to statistics obtained by The New Times from the Ministry.

MINEDUC has put in place strategies to reduce the trend to 11.9 next year and by 2016, all children who start school will stand a chance of completing their education.

Dr Mathias Harebamungu, the Permanent secretary of MINEDUC stressed the need to empower teachers in order to enhance delivery and embark on the quick adoption of the now compulsory Nine Year Basic Education Programme.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mtw3vv>

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### **Rwanda: New Education Curricula Timely**

*Editorial, The New Times, 29 May 2009*

The National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), has introduced new combinations in order to reduce the workload of unnecessary subjects that have been offered in the past. Streamlining subjects students take according to relevance, saves them much time and energy.

Imagine that some students have had to endure strange mixes of both sciences and arts, but at the end of the day half of what they study is relevant to their future careers.

Changing curricula also means that our education system will groom and churn out students for specific fields, in furthering their studies or in their work.

The new system must therefore be held hand in hand with serious career development initiatives that enable students, to early enough identify subjects of their interest based on the jobs they wish for in the future.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/knfs3r>

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### **South Africa: 'Rent-a-Cop' for Cape Schools**

Western Cape education MEC Donald Grant wants some of the province's public schools to join the City of Cape Town's "rent-a-cop" drive in an effort to curb vandalism and increase safety at schools, his department said yesterday.

The Western Cape education department spends about R1,8m a year on repairs to vandalised schools -- a figure that rises when general repairs and security infrastructure costs are added, the department said.

"Vandalism at schools is affecting the rights of our learners and stakeholders. Pupils, teachers and principals are, in effect, under siege in some areas," Grant said.

The department proposed that companies rent Cape Town Metro Police officers to patrol high-risk schools to ensure school safety and also take pressure off the South African Police Service in areas that are out of control.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mqtb5n>

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### **Timor-Leste: Education and Cultural Ties with Timor-Leste Strengthened**

*Paul Henderson, NT Chief Minister, 28 May 2009*

Chief Minister Paul Henderson today met East Timorese President Jose Ramos Horta in Dili, as part of a delegation to Timor-Leste with Northern Territory business, education and community representatives.

"I reiterated the great friendship and unique relationship between Timor-Leste and the Northern Territory – and my determination to make it even stronger in the future," Mr Henderson said.

Mr Henderson also met the East Timorese Education Minister, Joao Cancio Freitas, and discussed several initiatives to improve educational opportunities.

Professor Barney Glover the Vice-Chancellor of CDU and Johnathan Carapetis, the Director of the Menzies School of Health Research announced that two PhD scholarships would be available for East Timorese students. Professor Glover also indicated that a number of East Timorese students could have fees waived at CDU.

Mr Henderson said the NT Government would establish a register of families in Darwin willing to house East Timorese students studying at NT institutions.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/msed7x>

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### **United Kingdom: Michelle Obama's plea for education**

*TED, posted May 2009, filmed April 2009*

Speaking at a London girls' school, Michelle Obama makes a passionate, personal case for each student to take education seriously.

It is this new, brilliant generation, she says, that will close the gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be.

View video online or download at <http://tinyurl.com/pxnyq9>

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### **United Kingdom: Why teachers shun pupil contact**

*BBC, 29 May 2009*

Following the trial of head teacher David Thorley, who was convicted of nine charges of the sexual touching of pupils, BBC Wales education correspondent Colette Hume looks at the challenges facing teachers over physical contact with young pupils.

Picture the scenario: a six-year-old girl is playing a game with her school friends, she runs across the playground, falls and cuts her knee and cries. What's your reaction?

Well it's obvious - to help her and comfort her, perhaps put a reassuring arm around her shoulders and wipe her tears away.

But if you're her teacher, would you do the same thing? It's something I've frequently asked teachers, and their response to that scenario is always the same - a firm "no."

It sounds at best, steely and cold - at worst, heartless, but teachers and indeed all those who work with children are increasingly aware that what seems to be the most normal and natural response to a distressed child could have serious implications for their career and their reputation.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lphy7d>

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### **United Kingdom: 'We want the wow factor'**

*Naomi Westland, The Guardian, 26 May 2009*

Seven-year-old Rayhan is talking excitedly about next week's medieval day. She will go to school dressed as a maid or princess, not just for fun, but as part of a themed learning system her school has adopted.

The day of dressing up is part of a "creative curriculum", which her teachers are using to engage children in learning everything from maths to drama. Most subjects are taught through a broad theme, used for up to a term at a time.

The overarching theme Rayhan's class is working to is castles. She is discussing themes her class has studied between mouthfuls of stir-fried vegetables and rice that she and her friends prepared as part of a literacy lesson, looking at a Chinese story called The Magic Paintbrush.

Rayhan is in year 2 at West Hill primary school in Wandsworth, south-west London. A year ago, in response to a growing awareness that children were not enjoying learning as much as they could, the school decided to review the national curriculum and the time it was spending on different objectives.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lpxwh>

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### **United Kingdom: Children only learn when they are enjoying it and see relevance:**

*Richard Garner, The Independent, 25 May 2009*

A withering attack on the way successive ministers have run Britain's schools is delivered today by the man chosen by Labour to head an inquiry into promoting culture and creativity.

In an interview with The Independent, Sir Ken Robinson attacked "the career politicians at the Department for Education" and described the schools system as "19th-century".

He said education secretaries were "almost all of them looking for one or two significant initiatives which will deliver very prompt results – and then move on to another ministry. They almost all resolutely refuse to listen to the people who do the work in the classroom."

He added: "Our present education system was designed not even for the last century but for the 19th century. Kids living in today's world need something completely different."

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/qn3zbj>

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### **United Kingdom: Mother in court over school place**

*BBC, 29 May 2009*

A mother is to appear in court accused of lying about her address in order to gain a place for her five-year-old son at a popular infant school.

Mrinal Patel, from London, is thought to be the first parent prosecuted in this way under the Fraud Act.

Harrow Council said it was prosecuting her reluctantly, but that the admissions system had to be seen to be fair to all parents.

Mrs Patel says she made the application in good faith and denies fraud.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lan9wl>

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### **United Kingdom: Licence to chill: the primary school taking learning to another level**

*Hilary Wilce, Independent, Thursday, 28 May 2009*

The film-maker David Lynch wants schools to teach meditation and has announced a campaign to support "consciousness-based" education around the world.

And the 600-plus pupils at Latchmere School in Kingston upon Thames would agree. Every child in this busy, successful primary school spends an hour a week in the school's chill-out Blue Room learning meditation and relaxation techniques, including visualisation and massage.

The Year Six pupils are the school's most experienced meditators. They have been doing it for four years and say they will take what they've learnt with them when they move to secondary school.

In fact, they already use it in their daily lives.

Over the years, these pupils have become so practised in settling down and turning inwards that when deputy head Kevin Hogston leads them in a short meditation session, they drop easily into a deep and focused calm.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/npawj7>

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### **United Kingdom: We have to tackle bad behaviour in schools**

*Steve McCormack, Independent, Thursday, 7 May 2009*

The Schools Secretary admitted that behaviour in a quarter of English schools is unacceptable, despite their being graded as "satisfactory" - which masks the fact that secondary education in England is riddled with dysfunction.

I believe that bad behaviour, and the surly hostility to education that lies behind it, outweighs every other factor in explaining (to pick just one depressing statistic) the fact that about half of 16-year-olds finish their 11 years of compulsory education without the level of literacy and numeracy regarded as necessary to function in the world of work.

It also accounts for the devastating haemorrhage of qualified teachers from the profession every year.

So, what do we do about it? First, be more honest about the problem and ditch the deliberately deceptive use of the word "satisfactory."

Second, allow all head teachers to treat behaviour as their top priority, ahead of all other demands.

Third, give heads real financial help to pay for the facilities and manpower to achieve these ends.

Finally – and this message is for everyone in the world outside the school gate – stop focusing exclusively on schools!

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mnderh>

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### **United Kingdom: Less than one in three pupils taking history GCSE:**

*Tories blame publishing of league tables for drop in teenagers taking history*

Anthea Lipsett, Guardian, 26 May 2009

Fewer than a third of teenagers took a GCSE in history last year, according to official figures revealed by the Conservatives today. Last summer a total of 202,482 pupils entered for the exam, leaving 451,410 children who did not.

The figures, released after a Freedom of Information Act request, show a drop in the proportion of teenagers taking history over the last 10 years, which the Tories blame on the government's policy of publishing league tables.

Michael Gove, the shadow schools secretary, said: "The number of children studying history beyond 14 has fallen to less than one pupil in three. The government's league tables encourage schools to push pupils away from harder subjects, even if they are of more long-term value."

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/q2dqp8>

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### **United Kingdom: Schools worry over lack of autism support**

*BBC News, 19 May 2009*

A report by the Welsh assembly's cross-party autism group (CPAG) revealed 75% of schools surveyed felt there was a lack of adequate local help available. Some 58% described further education provision in Wales as inadequate.

The National Autistic Society Cymru said the absence of support for autistic young people and their families was "sometimes devastating".

The study, A Snapshot of Autism Education Provision in Wales, is based on information gathered from 33 education providers. These include special schools, mainstream schools with autism resources and further education (FE) colleges.

It follows concerns raised in a number of CPAG meetings that young people with autism in post-16 and further education were missing out due to a lack of organisation, awareness and understanding.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lqtknt>

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### **United Kingdom: Specialist schools accused of failing their specialist subjects**

*Richard Garner, Independent, 19 May 2009*

Specialist schools face being overhauled if Labour loses power at the next general election, because both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats believe they are failing to raise standards in the subjects they specialise in.

Education spokesmen from both the main opposition parties have unearthed what they say is evidence that the scheme is failing to deliver "what it says on the tin".

The Schools minister Jim Knight has revealed that more than a quarter of the country's 310 specialist science schools failed to enter a single candidate for a physics, chemistry or biology GCSE last year.

Instead, they opted to put pupils in for what many academics have claimed is the less stretching "double science" exam. And only a handful of the 350 specialist language colleges (4.3 per cent) were putting every pupil in for a GCSE in the subject.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mfzg94>

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### **United States of America: Hundreds of high school students protest teacher cuts**

*Howard Blume, Los Angeles Times, May 22, 2009*

Hundreds of Los Angeles high school students stayed out of class on Friday to protest looming teacher layoffs. At one school, they also threatened to boycott important state testing that starts next week.

The largest demonstration involved about 450 students from the Santee Education Complex, who marched three miles to the downtown headquarters of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

The students were demonstrating against pending layoffs intended to help ease a \$596.1-million budget gap for the district next year. The projected shortfall grew as much as \$400 million this week in the wake of further declines in state revenue and the defeat of ballot measures in the May 19 special election.

"This is only the beginning," said Korrine Robinson, an 18-year-old Santee senior. "What I'm hoping for is that the bigger people upstairs will take notice."

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/olz83q>

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### **United States of America: Gates Foundation: Teachers trump class size**

*e-School News, 29 May 2009*

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation spent billions of dollars exploring the idea that smaller high schools might result in higher graduation rates and better test scores.

Instead, it found the key to better education is not necessarily smaller schools but more effective teachers.

Some people might cringe while recounting how much money the foundation spent figuring this out.

But the foundation's new CEO, Jeff Raikes, smiles and uses it as an example to explain that the world's wealthiest charity has the money to try things that might fail.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mxyqu5>

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### **United States of America: Common Sense Approaches to School Partnerships**

*Wana L. Duhart, EducationNews.org, May 29, 2009*

The sharing and exchange of ideas and resources between public school systems and organizations representing many sectors is playing a major role in the overall transformation of K-12 schools.

Private corporations are moving beyond the traditional school alliances which focused primarily on supplying adult mentors for students or donations of in-kind contributions. Recent business-to-school initiatives are increasingly more practical and hands-on for students and teachers alike.

Nonprofits are funding education programs that respond to system lapses such as teacher recruitment and incentive compensation. Communities of faith are working with neighborhood schools to engage parents more in their children's education and provide extracurricular activities for targeted age groups.

The participation of so many sectors, industries, and professions in the transformation of schools locally and nationwide underscores how important it is to foster dialogue and exchange among everyday people and diverse organizations.

School partnerships that transcend professional and sectoral boundaries are proving to be sensible solutions for school districts that lack the resources, leadership, and infrastructure needed to elevate the academic standards in their schools.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lnlv6e>

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### **United States of America: Aspiring Primary Teachers May Be Tested in Math**

*Sean Cavanagh, Education Week, 15 May 2009*

Elementary school teachers lay the foundation for students' knowledge in many subjects, including mathematics—an area in which they may have little background.

To address that concern, Massachusetts is preparing to require all elementary educators to pass a math-specific test for state licensure, as opposed to simply mandating that they notch a general passing score across all subjects.

Commissioner of Education Mitchell D. Chester said he expects to bring the proposal before the state board of education this week.

Until now, aspiring teachers “have been able to do poorly on the math, but they’re able to meet the licensure requirement,” Mr. Chester said in an interview. “That’s been a concern.” The new mandate, he added, would be a “pretty substantial standard.”

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/klvn5g>

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### **United States of America: Research report shows students falling behind in biosciences**

*Stephen Majors, Associated Press, May 18, 2009*

Middle and high school students across the country are generally falling behind in life sciences, and the nation is at risk of producing a dearth of qualified workers for the fast-growing bioscience industry, according to a report released Monday.

Students are showing less interest in taking life sciences and science courses, and high schools are doing a poor job of preparing students for college-level science, says the report, funded and researched by Battelle, the Biotechnology Industry Organization and the Biotechnology Institute.

The deficiencies will hurt the country's competitiveness with the rest of the world in the knowledge-based economy, the report concludes.

The report also found a wide disparity among the states in student performance in biosciences and science in general. Many states are turning to biosciences and biotechnology industries that require a more educated workforce because they no longer can rely on the manufacturing sector.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/qx3cm9>

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### **United States of America: Severe financial crisis threatens California schools**

*Terence Chea & Samantha Young, Associated Press 15 May 2009*

California's public schools already trail most states in academic performance, suffer from high dropout rates and struggle to improve the performance of black and Hispanic students.

Now they face a historic state budget deficit that is expected to force deep cuts in education funding that will lead to thousands of teacher layoffs, larger class sizes, school closures and a shortened school year.

"Simply put, additional cuts to public education would be paralyzing," Jack O'Connell, the state Superintendent of Public Instruction, said Friday. "We think about having a world-class education system. These cuts would bring us a Third World education system."

O'Connell said schools will lose counsellors, nurses and librarians. They are also likely to cut athletic programs as well as classes in art, music and career technical education.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/nzpt8d>

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### **United States of America: Rap boosting kids' academics - from multiplication to Shakespeare**

*Colleen O'Connor, Denver Post, 11 May 2009*

Math is not Koran Ray's best subject, but the 13-year-old student at Wyatt-Edison has figured out a trick to help him master his multiplication tables: He raps them.

"I can rap about social studies, language, even Shakespeare," he said, launching into a quick one that he learned from a video about Shakespeare being a mellow fellow who wrote "Othello."

He's part of a pilot program called Rap to Roots that debuted this month in Colorado after success in cities such as Chicago and Cleveland.

The after-school series — sponsored by Swallow Hill Music Association and Open Door Youth Gang Alternatives — teaches kids to use rap's rhythm, rhymes and even its history to boost their academics.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/ksn643>

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### **United States of America: President Obama wants 5,000 failing schools to rebound and reopen**

*USA Today, 12 May 2009 (Associated Press)*

President Obama intends to use \$5 billion to prod local officials to close failing schools and reopen them with new teachers and principals.

The goal is to turn around 5,000 failing schools in the next five years, Education Secretary Arne Duncan said Monday, by beefing up funding for the federal school turnaround program created by the No Child Left Behind law.

Obama doesn't have authority to close and reopen schools himself. That power rests with local school districts and states. But he has an incentive in the economic stimulus law, which requires states to help failing schools improve.

Duncan said that might mean firing an entire staff and bringing in a new one, replacing a principal or turning a school over to a charter school operator. The point, he said, is to take bold action in persistently low-achieving schools.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mpla42>

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