

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION NEWS ROUNDUP

Volume 3 Number 4, July 2009

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Canada: Video surveillance expands in P.E.I. schools

CBC News, 30 July 2009

The Eastern School District has begun to install surveillance cameras in all its schools, following the lead of the Western School Board, which put them in its high schools three years ago.

The cameras are meant to make the schools more secure. They are going inside and out, into high traffic areas and secluded corners. By September, they will be installed in high schools, junior highs and at Glen Stewart Elementary in Stratford. The rest of the schools will get their cameras the following year.

District property manager John Miodowski told CBC News Wednesday the main purpose of the cameras is to give authorities a way to track a possible intruder, part of new measures that included implementing lockdown drills in schools last year. They could also be used to keep on eye on students.

"If there's incidents of vandalism going on or bullying, you know, they might be able to pick up on this and stop the situation as quick as possible," said Miodowski.

"We're not out there in the business of spying, but we have to know in this day and age what's happening within our buildings."

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nm4osg>

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Canada: Bathurst mother upset over ignored recommendations

CBC News, 29 July 2009

A Bathurst mother who lost her son in last year's tragic van crash is upset over the New Brunswick government's decision to ignore key recommendations from a coroner's inquest.

Ana Acevedo lost her son, Javier, in the Bathurst van crash in January 2008. Since then, she's been fighting for safer student travel.

Education Minister Roland Haché said Tuesday that it would be impossible and too expensive to implement the recommendations mandating that only school buses or special vans driven by qualified drivers be used to transport students.

Instead, any coaches or volunteers who want to drive students will be forced to take a one-day course designed for transporting kids to extracurricular events.

Acevedo said a one-day training course isn't enough and she doesn't want volunteers driving students to sporting events.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/m9k2ze>

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Global: Global Education Digest 2009

UNESCO, 17 July 2009

The 2009 Global Education Digest (GED) presents the latest education statistics from primary to tertiary education levels for more than 200 countries. Data are provided for the school year ending in 2007 or the latest year available, as well as for 2008 for a small number of countries. The wide range of education indicators presented in the report helps assess progress towards Education for All and Millennium Development Goals.

The analytical chapter explores the changing patterns in global higher education. It analyses the rising demand for higher education, represented by an explosive growth in tertiary students worldwide since 1999. Moreover, this edition presents a unique picture of the landscape of international student mobility.

Beyond the global set of education indicators, the GED continues to report more in-depth education data for a group of 62 countries, including those that are members of the World Education Indicators (WEI) programme, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat. This data set offers cross-national comparisons of more detailed information on tertiary educational programmes, as well as on the sources and flows of tertiary education funding.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nx4y4l>

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India: Indian students in Oz accused of cheating: Report

The Times of India, 30 July 2009

After violent attacks and expose of migration scams, the woes of Indian students in Australia seem to be mounting with new scandal breaking that a large number of overseas students had copied their masters thesis particularly in the IT programme.

The fresh scam exposed by 'The Australian' newspaper said several overseas students, including Indians, were found to have graduated from University of New England with copied masters thesis which gave them better chance of getting permanent residency.

The paper said some of the students were allowed to graduate even after a probe began into the scam. The scandal was more prevalent for a master programme in the Information Technology offered by the New South Wales University.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/kurxmz>

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India: "80 pc of the young people in W Australia attend govt schools"

Deccan Herald, Bangalore, 30 July 2009

Marianne de Nazareth talks to Andre Baronie, from the Darling Range Sports College in Perth, about the difference in the system of education between India and Australia.

His eyes crinkle up in a welcoming smile when I sit down to interview him. Andre Baronie, Head of Department of Literature in the Darling Range Sports College in Forrestfield, Perth, Western Australia, is passing through Bangalore on his way to a holiday in Goa.

Originally from Rangoon, Burma, Baronie was born in Allahabad to where his parents had fled, during the Burma war of 1945. They made their way to Australia later in 1966 after returning to Burma, where Baronie had his formal education with the French Christian Brothers and later completed and honours degree with the Rangoon University in Literature. In Australia, Baronie upgraded his skills with a Bachelor of Education at the University of West Australia.

Baronie is a school teacher in Perth in West Australia and the racial attacks on students happening in Australia are not in schools, but on University students in Melbourne.

Where did you begin your career as a teacher?

I began teaching English in Wongan Hills, a country school, as I wanted to learn about the education system in Australia.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/l73cuc>

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Indonesia: Producers want badminton included in school curriculum

Wahyoe Boediwardhana, The Jakarta Post, 15 July 2009

Racket producers in Klayatan village, Malang, have called on the central government to include badminton in the school curriculum in a bid to help maintain the industry.

Despite positive impacts from various badminton tournaments, their business fluctuated because after the tournaments business usually slowed down again.

"Including badminton in school curriculums would guarantee work for racket makers and thousands of people here, because orders for rackets could be guaranteed," Iwan, the producer of Butterfly brand badminton rackets, said recently.

Another producer, Dadang Prayoga, 39, producer of Aero and Atlanta brand rackets, shared a similar opinion.

"Such a move [to put badminton in the national curriculum] could also net new badminton talents in Indonesia," said Dadang, who supplies products to various cities including Surabaya, Surakarta, Jakarta and Medan.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/l4b6ud>

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Japan: Education on practical nutrition for better health

Joon Ang Daily, 23 July 2009

The lot that stood empty for decades is now being put to good use as a garden where Sanya (Tokyo) students are learning more about what they eat and how it got on their plates so that they can have a better relationship with food.

In the school's class on nutrition, which began in 2005, students are learning how to raise carrots, tomatoes and other crops. They're also learning how to make their own lunch and leave less food on their plates at the end of their meal.

The class had an immediate effect on the students. According to teachers and parents involved with the school, more students are now willing to eat fruits and vegetables than they were before the program began.

Developed countries like Japan, the United States and Britain have recently increased the emphasis on nutrition in the classroom in order to counter rising obesity problems among teenagers.

Japan, for example, enacted a law on food and nutrition education in 2005. The aim of the law is to educate Japanese people of all ages how to eat more healthily. Young children are given opportunities to plant rice and grow vegetables as a way to get them interested in what they're eating and help them break bad eating habits.

Studies show that a lack of knowledge about nutrition leads to unhealthy eating habits and obesity in the young.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lkg64m>

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Japan: School earthquake perils require “education building revolution”

Editorial, Japan Times, 5 July 2009

More than 7,300 public school buildings in Japan face a high risk of collapse in a serious earthquake, according to a recent report from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Though the number of potentially dangerous schools is down significantly from last year, earthquakes of upper-6 seismic intensity on the Japanese scale of 7 can still reduce thousands of classrooms nationwide to rubble. This is a tragedy waiting to happen.

The survey further noted that of the 125,000 public primary and middle school buildings checked, over 40,000 or 33 percent lacked sufficient seismic resistance in some aspect. That bureaucratise means that thousands of school buildings may collapse "only a little." Despite a law requiring public disclosure of the results of seismic resistance tests, at least 320 municipalities have not done so. The procrastination, covering up and wishful thinking of officials at all levels must change.

The law requiring testing and release of data results was revised for a very specific reason — last year's earthquake in China's Sichuan Province. That tragedy left an estimated 70,000 dead, 18,000 missing and several hundred thousand injured. The number of children killed, most of whom were studying in poorly constructed school buildings when the quake hit, is estimated to be in the high thousands.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/le7l4z>

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Malaysia: English teachers in rural areas to get extra incentives

Malaysia, Star Online, 21 July 2009

English teachers will be given additional incentives to teach in rural schools, said Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. “We have no choice but to do this as the command of English among pupils in rural schools is poor,” he said.

He said the ministry would also send the best English teachers to these schools to help pupils. “The ministry has in principle agreed to place the best English teachers in these schools. Good English teachers will be given priority if they want to move to these schools.”

Muhyiddin said the concept would be similar to “Teach For Australia” where good teachers volunteered to serve in remote areas to help pupils who did not have access to facilities common in urban areas.

“We will model our program after the one in Australia. Teachers must be prepared to make sacrifices and we will in return grant them additional incentives,” he said.

Since 2007, teachers posted to remote areas were given a special allowance of either RM1,500, RM1,000 or RM500 depending on the location they were in.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/lbff4j>

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New Zealand: NZ's strong performance at Chemistry Olympiad

Media Release, University of Cambridge, 29 July 2009

A team of teenagers from New Zealand achieved great results in the 41st International Chemistry Olympiad (IChO) this year. All four entrants were awarded medals with Joel Lawson of Auckland coming top, winning silver. Team-

mates Hsiao-Chen Jan from Christchurch, Jared Lewis from Alexandra and Hyun-Sun Roh from Auckland each won bronze.

The competitors sat two challenging examinations in theoretical and practical chemistry, competing against the best chemistry students from around the world. A total of 253 young scientists, making up 65 national teams, took part.

Medals were awarded at a grand closing ceremony in the historic King's College antechapel at Cambridge on Sunday. The close links and friendships between the teenage competitors that the IChO fosters were evident as the students collected their awards.

At the end of the ceremony, the IChO flag was transferred to next year's host, Japan.

The IChO is an annual event that aims to test the most promising chemistry students while promoting co-operation and the exchange of scientific experience among the pupils.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/knu264>

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New Zealand: Hong Kong delegation visits city

Canterbury Development Corporation, 22 July 2009

Six Hong Kong students arrived in Christchurch this week to experience what secondary and tertiary education is like in New Zealand.

The students, Maisea Ko, Derek Lee, Sharon Lam, Kenneth Yiu, Elaine Fung, and Li Sui Xin, have been selected as Hong Kong ambassadors in a two week education experience called the New Zealand New Thinking Leadership Programme.

Jointly organised by the Education Bureau, New Zealand Trade & Enterprise and Wiseman Education, the programme gives students a taste of New Zealand culture through homestays and participating in cultural events. They will be hosted by Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, the University of Canterbury and Rangī Ruru Girls' School.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/m7sktb>

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New Zealand: Drop In Breach Of Exam Rules

New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 22 July 2009

The number of serious breaches of examination rules dropped by almost half in the 2008 senior secondary school examinations.

A total of 330 breaches of examination rules were investigated, slightly up from the 328 breaches in 2007, but of these, only 62 incidents led to results being withheld, down from 116 in 2007.

The majority of breaches related to NCEA examinations. Of six breaches reported from Scholarship examinations, only one led to results being withheld. These breaches are out of a total number of 511,000 individual exam sessions in 2008.

In 2008, the most common breach of rules investigated involved students taking notes into examination rooms - 68 incidents were investigated, with examination results subsequently withheld in 28 such cases. Cellphone-related breaches dropped from 47 in 2007 to 44 in 2008, with two cellphone breaches leading to results being withheld.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/l2slkp>

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New Zealand: Free Trade Brings Chinese Scholars to New Zealand

Education New Zealand, 17 July 2009

“New Zealand is the first Western country to sign a Free Trade Agreement with China, and we’re thrilled that one of the early results of that agreement is an exchange of doctoral scholarships,” says Robert Stevens, CEO of Education New Zealand.

As a result of the China-New Zealand FTA signed last year, up to ten doctoral research students per year from each country will be granted government-funded scholarships to study in the other country. The first Chinese students chosen to participate in the New Zealand - China Doctoral Research Scholarships Programme are now beginning their studies in New Zealand.

Yanwei Tan has recently arrived at the University of Otago, where he will be completing a PhD in English Literature.

“People here are very friendly and I’ve started to enjoy life here, though still with a measure of intermittent homesickness,” he says.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/n9jrah>

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Russia: Secular ethics and religion to teach values in Russian schools

Russia Today, 24 July, 2009

The Russian president has approved plans to introduce teaching the fundamentals of religious culture and secular ethics in schools, and a chaplain’s institute in the armed forces.

Dmitry Medvedev announced this week the launch of a pilot project on teaching religious culture in schools and the introduction of army priests. The Russian media is full of mixed opinions about this initiative.

According to the pilot program, representing the country’s traditional faiths, pre-teen students will take classes in religion or secular ethics at approximately 12,000 schools in 18 regions. Children and their parents will be allowed to choose classes to study one of four traditional faiths in the country: Russian Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Judaism.

Students also have the choice of studying an overview of all these faiths, or taking a course in secular ethics. The religious disciplines will be introduced in schools from September 1 this year.

The plan requires publishing new textbooks and training some 44,000 instructors – most likely teachers of history and social sciences – who will teach the new courses. The priests will not teach at schools, the media report. The pilot program involves some 256,000 students.

The new subject will be called, in the secular manner, “spiritual and moral upbringing”. After the end of the experiment it might be corrected and then introduced in all schools – but not sooner than in 2012.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/n22zx8>

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Saudi Arabia: English as medium of instruction

Abdulrahman Al-Sultan, Al-Eqtisadiyah via Arab News, 2 July 2009

The English of Saudi university graduates is very poor. Since the labor market in the Kingdom largely depends on foreign manpower, English has necessarily become the language of business.

Anyone who does not master English will be in a weak position when competing for a job. His or her chances for progressing in terms of career will be severely compromised.

Faced by this situation, some Saudi universities that could not improve their preparatory year for teaching English have thought of a more radical step to confront the problem: To make English the medium of instruction for specializations that are in huge demand in the labor market.

If this proposal is implemented, we could face a cultural catastrophe.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/lzxav5>

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United Kingdom: Girls 13 Boys 0: Testing reveals gender gap in basic skills

Richard Garner, Independent, 30 July 2009

Girls are racing ahead of boys in a whole range of skills, from reading and writing to showing the ability to concentrate before they even start their first day of school.

An analysis of the basic assessments carried out on every four-year-old before they start compulsory schooling shows a 20 percentage point gap already emerging in writing ability, with 74 per cent of girls able to use writing for a variety of purposes, compared with just 54 per cent of boys.

For the first time, the Government has published a gender breakdown of boys' and girls' results in the 117 different point scores they can achieve in the assessments.

It reveals that boys perform better than girls in only three of the 117 points. They top the scale for mathematical development – attained by 7 per cent of boys and 6 per cent of girls – and are better at getting to grips with new technology and at building and constructing objects.

In every other area of the curriculum, however, girls are either streets ahead or equal to boys.

"The fact there is a 20 percentage point gap between boys and girls in some areas of communication skills is worrying," said Anne Mountford, of the children's charity 4Children. "The economy is moving much more towards communications skills and girls seem to be tearing ahead. If we don't act, boys won't be job-ready for the world that is coming."

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mxjm5h>

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United Kingdom: The science behind the infant gender gap

Charles Ward, Independent, 30 July 2009

The differences in achievement between boys and girls probably start in the womb. We know that males have a higher average birth weight, have a higher basal metabolism and a greater vital capacity than females. We also know that girls reach puberty on average two and a half years earlier than boys.

Recent work by Simon Baron-Cohen suggests that there is some difference in the way males and females think. But we do still need to know a lot more about the neurological differences between boys' and girls' brains.

What is important is that these differences exist.

When boys and girls have equal chances there is likely to be a gender difference in their performance and achievement. The girls in the DCSF study have outperformed the boys in a whole range of areas that have been measured by Foundation Stage profile results. That is not surprising when schooling is dependent on language, communication and socialisation.

The boys have performed better in areas where they seem to have a developmental advantage and where their socialisation experiences best prepare them.

The lesson for the DCSF and for the world of education is to understand essential differences between boys' and girls' development and the implications for their learning.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/no9lbt>

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United Kingdom: Richard Dawkins joins criticism of new primary science curriculum

Ian Sample, The Guardian, 28 July 2009

In a letter organised by the British Humanist Association, leading scientists and educators point out that the proposed new curriculum for England fails to mention evolution.

Leading scientists and educators are calling for changes to the proposed new curriculum for primary schools in England amid concerns that it fails to cover science comprehensively.

A major review of primary school education was completed in April, but the newly drafted curriculum fails to mention the theory of evolution, the value of the scientific method, and the need to understand science to engage in public debate, the experts said.

In an open letter to Ed Balls, the children's secretary, 25 leading figures from science and education urge the government to rewrite the curriculum before it is finalised in the autumn.

Among the signatories are the Oxford University evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, three Nobel laureates and Reverend Professor Michael Reiss, professor of science education at the Institute of Education in London.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/ldwlkq>

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United Kingdom: Skipping scuppered! The death of playground games, conkers and tree-climbing in our cotton-wool society

The Daily Mail, 28 July 2009

The little girls twirl their skipping ropes while the boys gather round to bash each other's conkers.

In the corner, another group of children scramble up a tree.

For many parents, it is a picture of the perfect playground scene.

But it is not one they are likely to see today. It lives on only in memories of their childhood, while their own school-age children are more likely to be glued to a computer screen.

More than three in four of today's little girls do not play with skipping ropes, a survey has found.

The figure compares with 94 per cent of their mothers who remember skipping to rhymes and songs when they were at school.

Little more than 33 per cent of boys play conkers, while 83 per cent of their fathers have fond memories of glorious conker battles at the same age.

A growing appetite for computer games and television is not the only reason that traditional games appear to be passing the present generation by.

Read more: <http://tinyurl.com/lb3ceo>

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United Kingdom: Gifted pupil scheme targets poor

BBC News, 28 July 2009

The gifted and talented scheme for high-ability pupils in England is to target funds on some bright teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Scholarships of £250 per year will be available to develop the skills of gifted pupils on free school meals.

The government is expecting about 2,000 pupils to benefit - increasing their chances of getting into university.

Schools Minister Vernon Coaker said no child should be "held back by the luck of the draw in their circumstances".

The scheme is aimed at gifted but disadvantaged secondary school pupils aged between 14 and 19 - with the aim of helping to foster their interest in applying to university.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/l5bnoy>

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United Kingdom: How to be a green school

Zac Goldsmith, The Guardian, 28 July 2009

It's a worrying fact that around 400,000 British children are on behavioural drugs such as Ritalin. Some, no doubt, need the treatment, but the sheer number of children taking these drugs suggests that in our society, childhood itself has come to be seen as a disease.

Children spend an average of 13.9 hours a week in front of their televisions, and six hours in front of their computers. It can't be healthy. According to Unicef, British children are the unhappiest in Europe, despite unprecedented material wealth.

There are many reasons for this, but one, surely, is the fact that children have become increasingly insulated from the natural world. We've all heard of the surveys revealing that teenagers think cows lay eggs, and others where children can identify more brand logos than trees, by a staggering margin.

My view is that children will form a significant part of the green fightback. They instinctively understand the value of the environment. Ask any 10-year-old if Google – at its height – was really worth more than the Amazon rainforest, and they'd laugh.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nxs62a>

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United Kingdom: Balls defends home schooling plan

BBC News, 28 July 2009

Children's Secretary Ed Balls has felt the need to defend a review of home education in England following messages people have sent him.

He said in his MP's blog that he believed the review, by Graham Badman, had been fair and balanced.

Home education was "a well-established and important part of the education system", he said.

But the government wants to register and monitor home educating parents and bar those it deems unsuitable.

Mr Balls said there had to be action following a "small but worrying" number of cases in which children had suffered harm.

"I thought it crucial that the review found the appropriate balance between two important principles, and I believe Graham Badman achieved this," he said.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/kify5p>

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United Kingdom: Clip-on tie switch sparks protest

BBC News, 24 July 2009

Pupils at a South Yorkshire school have started an online protest over a plan to introduce clip-on ties.

More than 400 people have joined a group on Facebook, demanding that traditional ties be restored at McAuley Catholic High School in Doncaster.

Schools across the UK are said to be switching ties over safety fears.

The protesters said the move was a "pathetic waste of money". The school is closed for the summer holidays and no-one was available for comment.

A Doncaster Council spokesman said: "Dress code at a school is a matter for the governing body."

In May the Schoolwear Association, the trade body for the school uniform industry, said 10 schools a week in the UK were switching, because of fears of ties getting caught in equipment or strangling pupils.

The association also said that clip-on ties can stop pupils from customising the size of the knots in their ties.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/metuac>

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United Kingdom: Schools launch drive to recruit male teachers

Anushka Asthana, Observer, 12 July 2009

A major push to increase the number of male teachers in primary schools is being launched this week in an attempt to overcome a serious shortage which experts say is affecting boys.

Hundreds of men will attend events in schools, where heads, deputies and teachers will try to persuade them to join the profession. The sessions are being organised by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDAS), which hopes to capitalise on a recent surge in interest.

New figures reveal that inquiries by men about teaching in primary schools have risen by 30.4% in the past year. The number of male applicants has risen to one in five, while the proportion of those being accepted on courses has jumped from 15% to 18% in a year.

Campaigners say it is the first time in 100 years that there has been an increase, but it still leaves primary schools with a dearth of male staff.

"Whenever I talk about the need to get more men into primaries, the unions say I'm being anti-women" says Graham Holley, chief executive of TDAS. "But education is about more than just academic achievement; it is about preparation for adulthood, and there is a need for a mix of role models in primary classrooms."

Holley argued that schools needed to represent society better, "and if we are not attracting men, we are under-exploiting our pool of potential teachers", he added.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/mdoop5>

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United Kingdom: We are heartily fed up with being spun to

Professor Alan Smithers, The Independent, 2 July 2009

We need yet another education White Paper like a hole in the head. At this stage of parliament it smacks of shameless electioneering.

It also comes after 12 years of continual upheaval. The relentless push for change stems in part from the Government wanting to be seen to be making a difference.

But, more importantly, it is because the big ideas and sweeping narratives do not always fit reality and so have disappointing outcomes.

The Government seems to have recognised this to some extent. It is rowing back from central bureaucratic control.

Top-down education targets were never going to be truly effective as exam scores can be raised – by altering the requirements or teaching to the test – without the underlying education being improved.

Hence the many complaints from secondary schools that children appearing to reach the required standard in primary school still cannot handle words and numbers properly.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/mcxvyy>

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United Kingdom: Box clever: Singapore's magic formula for maths success

Liz Lightfoot, The Independent, 2 July 2009

One country teaches children to recite their times tables and drills them in mental arithmetic. The other bans rote learning and encourages pupils to manipulate real objects and share ideas as they work in groups. Which one is Singapore, which consistently comes first or second in the international league tables for mathematics, and which is England?

The answer may come as a surprise. For despite the reputation of Pacific Rim countries for traditional chalk and talk, it is Singapore that uses the so-called trendy modern methods whereby children learn by doing in noisy classrooms. Times tables are frowned upon, just as they once were in England before the advent of the national curriculum.

Singaporean classrooms are noisy places where children learn maths by folding paper, constructing models and re-arranging pieces of fruit or lollipop sticks. And it is this method devised by the ministry of education that the city-state says has led to its rapid rise up the international tables.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/krc63a>

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USA: California schools chief reacts to U.S. criticism on teacher evaluation

Seema Mehta, Los Angeles Times, July 28, 2009

California's top education official sought Tuesday to counter federal criticism of the state's reluctance to use student test scores to evaluate teachers, paying a visit to Long Beach to highlight one of the few California school districts to make extensive use of such data.

The Long Beach Unified School District's use of student scores to assess the effectiveness of programs, instructional strategies and teachers is a rarity in California, and state Supt. of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell called it a model for other California school districts during a hastily arranged round-table discussion. Other participants included district administrators and staff.

"Becoming a data-oriented culture, as Long Beach is, won't be easy, and it won't be overnight," O'Connell said. "Long Beach is ahead of the curve. . . . You're a model for this new culture of data for education."

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nadx34>

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USA: How the "Cons" Are Destroying Public Education

Thom Hartmann, EdNews, 28 July 2009

One of the primary elements of a true, functioning, representative democratic republic, like we aim for here in the United States, is that its citizens be well informed.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to his friend J. Correa de Serra on January 28, 1786, and said, "Our liberty depends upon the freedom of the press and that cannot be limited without being lost," he was assuming that Americans knew how to read their daily newspapers.

Not anymore. A 2005 study by the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that about 5 percent of the adults in the United States are not literate in English, meaning 11 million people lack the skills to handle many everyday tasks. Some 30 million adults, or 14 percent of the population, have "below basic" skills in prose. Their ability is so limited that they may not be able to make sense of a simple pamphlet, for example.

Another 95 million adults, or 44 percent of the population, have intermediate prose skills, meaning they can do only moderately challenging activities. An example would be consulting a reference book to determine which foods contain a certain vitamin.

The cons' solution, as usual, is to privatize education. They say the public school system is too broken to fix. And just to make sure it stays broken, they passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which will cost the states more in property taxes and other taxes than they are going to get out of it.

The solution is not to go in with a hammer and destroy the schools. It is not to privatize the schools. It's to change the way we are teaching.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nkzz6w>

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USA: 'Race to Top' Guidelines Stress Use of Test Data

Michele McNeil, Education Week, 23 July 2009

The U.S. Department of Education's proposed guidelines for awarding \$4 billion in Race to the Top money send a strong message that any state hoping to land a grant must allow student test scores to be used in decisions about teacher compensation and evaluation.

According to draft plans outlined by department officials on Friday, states would be judged on 19 education reform criteria, from how friendly their charter school climates are to whether they cut state K-12 funding this year.

But only two criteria would be absolute requirements: States must have been approved by the Education Department for stabilization funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (most already have been), and states must not have any laws in place barring the use of student-achievement data for evaluating teachers and principals.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/lp7pdq>

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USA: Draft Common Content Standards for Education Elicit Mixed Reviews

Sean Cavanagh & Catherine Gewertz, *Education Week*, 23 July 2009

A draft of common academic standards, meant to bring greater coherence to the nation's English and mathematics lessons, is drawing a mix of enthusiastic, ambivalent, and barbed responses from those who have seen it.

The working document, which was unexpectedly put out for public consumption yesterday, is meant to serve as the first step of a standards-writing process, led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The crafting and review of those academic guidelines is expected to play out at least through the end of the year.

The draft that was circulated on the Web yesterday attempts to set "college- and career-readiness" standards for English and math—the skills students need to succeed in credit-bearing postsecondary courses and workforce-training programs.

From there, the NGA, CCSSO, and other organizations collaborating on the project will attempt to move back through the K-12 system, crafting English and math standards for earlier grades. Eventually, it will be up to state education leaders to accept or reject the final documents, after they have gone through several iterations, officials from the governors' and chiefs' organizations say.

Read entire article: <http://tinyurl.com/nzq3vw>

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USA: Too much homework? Parents, schools seek balance

Angie Wagner, *Associated Press*, Jul 14, 2009

A grassroots parents movement has taken hold in recent years calling for less — or at least better — homework. Books like "The Case Against Homework" (Crown, 2006) and "The Homework Myth" (Da Capo, 2007) have argued that too much of today's homework is mindless busywork that takes away from family time and does not improve academic performance. Homework's critics argue that kids should instead be reading for enjoyment, exploring and being creative.

Many school officials are taking note. But how much homework is too much?

One standard that many school districts are turning to is the "10-minute rule" created by Duke University psychology professor Harris Cooper. The rule, endorsed by the National PTA and the National Education Association, says kids should get 10 minutes of homework a night per grade. A first grader would have 10 minutes of homework each night; a fifth grader 50 minutes.

Cooper said the amount of homework in America actually hasn't changed that much over the past 50 years except that there has been an increase in the amount given in the early grades.

Attitudes towards homework go in cycles, he said. After the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957, he says, there was a drive toward more homework because it was thought that the United States was falling behind. The same happened in the mid-'80s, and again in recent years.

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