

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION NEWS ROUNDUP

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Brazil: Islam Missing in Brazilian Textbooks

Afif Sarhan, Islam Online, 1 September 2009

When Munir Hamdan grew thirstier for more information about his Muslim faith, he decided to resort to the most obvious source of knowledge; his school.

But the Brazilian teen was frustrated to find out there was nearly no information about Islam in his schoolbooks.

"Since I was five my father was trying to teach me everything about Islam and the Muslim culture," Hamdan, 13, told IslamOnline.net.

"But when I went to school I realized that what I learnt at home wasn't important for Brazilian education."

Hamdan found only two chapters about religion in the books for the primary and secondary school.

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

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Canada: Why science class has become a 'daunting slog'

Douglas Quan, The Globe and Mail, 21 August 2009

Critics of standardized testing in British Columbia schools say the results of a science-teacher survey bolster their position that the exams must go.

Last winter, the B.C. Science Teachers' Association conducted a web-based survey about the Science 10 provincial exam. According to the association, more than 200 science teachers responded, and the majority reported that the time devoted to exam preparation had essentially sucked the life out of their classes. There were fewer labs, presentations, research projects and field trips.

Teachers also reported that students were stressed out by the workload and by a final exam that requires them to memorize the meanings of hundreds of scientific terms and narrow math concepts, the association said in the report released in June.

"You have teachers teaching to the exam, so, as a result, teachers can't make the science interesting," said Grahame Rainey, the association's president and a science teacher at Ashcroft Secondary School in B.C.'s south-central Interior. The association prefers school-based, teacher-developed exams.

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

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Canada: School test results raise red flag

Caroline Alphonso, The Globe and Mail, 26 August 2009

About one-third of Ontario's elementary school students are not meeting provincial standards in reading, writing and math – and once they fall behind, many have a hard time catching up, new test results show.

There was little movement year over year in standardized tests results released Wednesday by the Education Quality and Accountability Office, an arm's-length agency of the Ontario government. But the sheer number of pupils still struggling with the 3 R's presents an ongoing challenge for educators in helping students achieve basic literacy skills.

And it will put increased pressure on Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, who has cast himself as the education premier. His government has devoted more money to classrooms as he pushes for a target of 75 per cent of students meeting the provincial standard – a feat that won't be easily achieved.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/kwrl3k>

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Canada: Alberta school boards with surpluses told to give \$44M back to gov't

Sarah O'Donnell, Calgary Herald, 27 August 2009

Alberta school districts with surplus cash will have to give \$44 million back to the provincial government, Education Minister Dave Hancock said Thursday.

The money represents about half of the \$80 million Alberta Education has been instructed to find in its budget in light of a projected \$6.9-billion provincial deficit for the current fiscal year.

"Given the current situation, we've asked boards to delay some of their plans and tap into the surpluses," Hancock said in a conference call with reporters. "No board has been asked to tap into more than 11 per cent of their surplus."

Hancock said he recognized that in some cases, school districts have set aside money for specific purposes, but said they may have to slow down those projects.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/m6rvdo>

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Canada: Cut to high school sports grant a 'devastating blow' for British Columbia

Janet Steffenhagen, The Vancouver Sun, 31 August 2009

Athletic competitions for tens of thousands of B.C. high school students may be reduced or eliminated in the latest round of provincial government budget-cutting.

B.C. School Sports, which oversees competitions for more than 100,000 high-school students, stands to lose up to one-third of its budget with the elimination of its \$130,000 annual grant from the province.

BCSS executive director Sue Keenan called the cut "devastating" and said it could be crippling to the organization.

It may mean some high-school sports competitions will be lost, Keenan said.

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

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China: Chongqing Federation of Trade Unions subsidizes 20,000 needy students

CQ News, 21 August 2009

As there are more poor families because of financial crisis, Chongqing Federation of Trade Unions will provide 25 million yuan for 20,000 students from low-income families, with a year-on-year increase of 10% respectively, said the federation on August 20.

Since 1995, Chongqing has raised 72.77 million yuan to subsidize 75,600 children of needy workers or rural migrant workers for study.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/nyqng2>

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Honduras: Teachers killed in violent repression in Honduras

Education News, 11 Augst 2009

Education International condemns the increasingly violent response of the de facto government and its infringement of civil liberties, while calling again for a restoration of democratic order. Since 28 June, teacher unions in Honduras have been voicing for a return to democratic governance.

Reports from EI's member organisations in the country, who together form the Federation of Teacher Organisations of Honduras (FOMH) and represent 52,000 teachers, outlines the details of ongoing repression by the army and the police.

Primary school teacher Roger Abraham Vallejo, a 38-year-old member of the union COPEMH, was shot in the head on 30 July during a demonstration. Another teacher, member of the COPRUMH, Martín Florencio Rivera, died after being stabbed 27 times when he left Vallejo's wake. Saturnino Sanchez, president of another EI member organisation in the country, COLPROSUMAH, was severely beaten.

Rosario Avila, co-ordinator of the FOHM National Committee for Prevention of HIV and AIDS in Honduras, denounced the recent surge in violence:

"The repression is increasing. They have suppressed constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, and freedom of movement."

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

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India: Towards quality teacher education

Sakshi Khattar, Times of India, 3 August 2009

To improve the teacher education system in the country, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), which sets norms and standards for quality teacher education and ensure planned and coordinated development of teacher education, is conducting a nation-wide study on the demand and supply of teachers and teacher educators at the school level, for the years from 2007-2008 through to 2016-2017.

Also, to upgrade the BEd curriculum and other teacher-training programmes, a revised National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) in synchronisation with the NCF 2005 is being finalised by the NCTE.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/mex3nt>

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India: India to be 'ruthless' with fake education agents: Krishna

Times of India, 8 August 2009

Amid reports that scores of Indian students were among those duped in a massive education scam in Australia, India on Saturday said it will be "ruthless" with the rogue education agents who take gullible youths for a ride.

The Indian government will go after unscrupulous education agents in the country as part of its effort to control the student crisis, external affairs minister S M Krishna told a press conference here.

"We will be ruthless" with the fake agents who paint a rosy picture and take gullible students for a ride, Krishna, who is on a five-day visit here, said when asked what measures the Indian government will be taking to tackle the issue.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/mr6vod>

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Iraq: Iraq Rebuilds Higher Education Abroad

Islam Online, 12 August 2009

Iraq is planning to send thousands of its students to compete their advanced studies in universities around the world, with the hope of breathing new life into the country's once-respected education system that was crushed under the sanctions and then invasion.

"It is a fantastic achievement," Zuhair al-Hummadi, personal assistant to the prime minister for educational affairs who is overseeing the initiative, told IslamOnline.net.

The plan will see some 50,000 students sent to get their masters and PhDs from abroad over the next five years.

While students will be encouraged to pursue studies in medicine, engineering, law and technology, they will be free to pick their area of interest.

The program will cost the government nearly \$1 billion, covering students' tuition, fees and accommodation.

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

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Israel: One-third of outstanding Israeli schools are from Arab sector

Or Kashti, Haaretz, 24 August 2009

Fifty-two percent of students graduating from the Israel Arts and Science Academy in Jerusalem received an "outstanding" grade on their matriculation exams - the highest percentage among all high schools in the country.

According to data for the 2007-08 school year, published by the Education Ministry Sunday, the academy was rated far above the second-best school: the Albion Academy in Sajur, with 40.6 percent. Third was Horev, a private religious school for girls in Jerusalem (36.0 percent), fourth was the Baptist High School in Nazareth (31.2 percent), and fifth was the state religious school for girls in Ramat Gan (31.0 percent).

The lion's share of the 15 top-performing schools were semi-private, or "recognized but unofficial," institutions that receive some state funding, but also charge high tuition and accept only excellent students.

About 40 percent of the best performers were national religious schools, and 33 percent were Arab schools. Only 26 percent were ordinary secular schools.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/ncep4d>

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Kuwait: Delay reopening of schools, MPs urge

B Izzak, Kuwait Times, 25 August 2009

MPs stepped up pressure on the government yesterday to delay reopening schools or at least part of them after the health ministry announced that a 17-year-old Kuwaiti teenager became the third casualty of swine flu. The ministry of health said the boy died because he was suffering of respiratory inflammation and he also was overweight. He died after staying several days at the hospital.

The health ministry reported the first swine flu death on Wednesday and the second was reported on Saturday for a pregnant woman. Health officials had said on Sunday that eight swine flu patients were in critical conditions at intensive care units in various hospitals. The latest death and the large number of A (H1N1) cases reported especially in the past few weeks has raised fears that the disease could spread easily among students when schools reopen after the holy month of Ramadan.

At least two MPs yesterday called on the government to delay the start of the academic year.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/lj6r6c>

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Kuwait: Teachers to undergo training on swine flu prevention

Kuwait Times, 31 August 2009

In the midst of the turmoil regarding the delay of the start of the school year, information revealed that thousands of teachers will start the school year after enrolling in training courses provided by the Ministry of Health.

In the mean time, a number of members of the Parents of Students at English Schools group have protested the fact that English schools won't be included in any postponement decision, indicating that they will not be sending their kids to school if these schools remain out of any postponement plans.

Teachers at the training courses will be trained with taking precautionary measures from the threat of infection of the swine flu virus. They will also be trained to detect any cases of infection among students and ways of handling the situation.

Furthermore, the sources added that the Ministry of Education has provided each school with qualified teachers who will be forming emergency teams that will supervise any potential evacuation operations or any other escalation pertaining to the infection threat.

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

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New Zealand: Stand-downs wrong approach: Families Commission

Families Commission, 1 September 2009

Expulsion or suspension from school is rarely necessary if a whole-of-family approach is taken to student management and learning, says the Families Commission.

Recent Ministry of Education statistics show that schools are standing down increasing numbers of primary school pupils for violent behaviour. Stand-downs for assaults by children aged eight have increased by 88 per cent from 2000 to 2008, seven-year-olds received 73 per cent more stand downs over the same period, six-year-olds had 70 per cent more, and stand downs of five-year-olds for violence reasons increased by 33 per cent.

Education researchers and teacher organisations say the problem is too hard to deal with at secondary level and more needs to be done with primary school children when the chances of turning behaviour around are greater.

"The Families Commission supports the principle of early intervention," says Commissioner Kim Workman, "but we do not support stopping a child from attending school. It is very concerning to see schools increasingly using stand-downs of primary-aged pupils when there are better solutions that build children and their families up, as opposed to punitive approaches which pathologise the child."

Mr Workman says the Families Commission's research shows clearly that when schools take a whole-of-family approach to education they can dramatically reduce behaviour problems and eliminate the need for expulsions or suspensions.

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

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New Zealand: Schooling by Skype to help struggling readers

Massey University, 2 September 2009

Literacy Professor Tom Nicholson is trialling a new approach to help struggling readers using the software application Skype over the Internet, and says it has the potential to help many others.

"Tutoring with Skype has enormous potential to lift reading levels of children who don't have access to one-on-one tutoring," says Professor Nicholson.

Skype allows users to make voice calls over the internet and using a web camera enables face-to-face dialogue. Discussions with school principals have prompted Professor Nicholson to look at developing a nationwide scheme for children with no access to reading tuition.

For several years he and a specially trained group of tutors at the Albany campus have been providing after-school reading clinics to pupils aged seven to 15 to improve reading speeds and comprehension.

However, many more children who need help live too far from centres with clinics like Massey's.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nlh5ur>

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New Zealand: What happens if residential schools are closed

Public Service Association, 3 September 2009

What happens to children if residential schools are closed?

The Public Service Association opposes closing the Ministry of Education's residential schools for children with significant behaviour issues because there are no other educational facilities that can accommodate these children.

Education Minister Anne Tolley has proposed closing Waimokoia residential school in Halfmoon Bay Auckland.

The Ministry of Education has released an Education Review Office report completed in September last year. It reviews the three residential schools - Waimokoia and Westbridge in Auckland and McKenzie in Christchurch - that accommodate children aged 7 to 13 with severe behaviour difficulties.

The report says that in the longer term retaining all three residential schools in their present form is not the best use of the resources available.

But ERO also acknowledges in the report that "there is a need for some kind of residential care and treatment for children."

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

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Qatar: Youth voice their hopes and fears

Al Jazeera, 16 August 2009

At the end of a week in which the United Nations has marked International Youth Day, Al Jazeera talks to young people from around the world.

We listen to the stories as told by a 16-year-old boy in Lebanon, a 13-year-old boy in the US, a 16-year-old Eritrean born in Sweden, a 13-year-old Palestinian-American and a 14-year-old girl in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We hear what they think about their lives today, and where they believe they and their countries are heading in the future, as part of Al Jazeera's series on The Next Generation.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/qkgbm4>

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Saudi Arabia: Need for job-oriented courses emphasized

Arab News, 30 August 2009

Suleiman Abalkhail, president of Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, has emphasized the need to introduce more job market-friendly academic programs for women in the Kingdom's public and private universities.

"The education of Saudi women is facing big challenges, especially in harmonizing between graduates and job market requirements," the president said, adding that the problem was snowballing with the establishment of new universities.

He called upon public and private universities to coordinate their efforts to focus on courses that are required by the job market and cut down on courses that have already produced a large number of graduates.

The president made this comment on the occasion of the university's plan to organize a conference titled "Saudi Women: Present and Future" on Dec. 23-24.

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

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Singapore: US, Other Education Officials Get Lesson in School Success

Kathryn Baron, VOA News, 20 August 2009

What are the ingredients of a successful school system? Getting the recipe right is important. In presenting his education agenda, President Barack Obama has said, "The future belongs to the nation that best educates its people."

For now, educators suggest, that distinction lies half a world away from Washington, D.C. - in Singapore.

On a hot, humid morning in this small island nation, Mike Smith enters a crowded third grade classroom. There's no air conditioner, just open windows and some fans. The entire class of 36 9-year-olds stands and greets him politely.

Smith is senior counselor to the U.S. Secretary of Education. The class is at East View Primary School in a low-income, densely populated neighborhood of Singapore.

Smith is struck by the number of students and tells Principal Veronica Tay, "In the U.S., you would never see a class this large!" She assures him it's actually smaller than the typical class at the school.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/m2pgsc>

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UK: State schools may be run for profit

Jonathan Oliver, the Times, 27 July 2009

STATE schools could be run by private companies for a profit under plans being considered by the Conservatives.

The Tories had said that only charities and non-profit-making bodies would be allowed to create new "free schools" supported by the taxpayer.

However, the party is considering a big change to its flagship policy for improving primary and secondary education.

Under the existing plan, the Tories would remove the red tape that stops the creation of new schools. These institutions would then be free from local authority control, with central government paying an allowance of about £6,000 per pupil.

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

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UK: Fewer primary children reach required English standard

Alison Kershaw, Independent, 4 August 2009 (Press Association)

The proportion of 11-year-olds reaching the level expected of them in English has fallen for the first time in the history of national curriculum tests, figures showed today.

A fifth of primary school pupils are not reaching Level 4 - the standard required of the age group - in English, according to data published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This is down 1 per cent on last year, from 81 per cent to 80 per cent, and the first time there has been a drop since 1995.

Today's figures also showed that almost two fifths of 11-year-olds are still failing to grasp the finer points of the three Rs. Just 61 per cent reached Level 4 in reading, writing and maths - down 1 per cent on last year. Almost three in 10 (28 per cent) failed to reach this standard in English and maths overall. This was also down 1 per cent on last year.

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

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UK: 'Forced' from school by bullies

Joe Kent, BBC News, 6 August 2009

Around 6,000 pupils have been taken out of - or invited to leave - mainstream schooling in England because of bullying, one children's charity estimates.

Parents, pupils and educational professionals say that all too often it is the victims' lives which have to change while the bullies remain in school.

Fourteen-year-old Louise (not her real name) is one of those children who have been taken out of school.

She suffered a three-year campaign of victimisation which began with name calling and developed into threats and eventually violence.

She was beaten up, tormented and on one occasion had her hair cut and glue sprayed on her while she sat in class. The effect was devastating.

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

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UK: Ministers hunt for 4,000 'bogus' foreign students

Independent, 7 August 2009

Ministers are trying to locate nearly 4,000 foreign students who are living in Britain after coming to the UK to study at bogus colleges, it emerged last night.

The students are all from colleges that have had their licences revoked by the Government under a system brought in to close immigration loopholes linked to foreign education. The Conservatives, who secured the new student numbers from the Home Office, accused the Government of not taking the problem seriously enough.

Despite the Government's claims to have tightened up the student visa system, they have failed to crack down on high numbers of "bogus" students who are already here, said the Tories' immigration spokesman, Damian Green.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/n9l37s>

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UK: Tories promise to break state monopoly on education

Joanna Sugden, The Times, 11 August 2009

The Conservative Party will break the state's monopoly over free education using independent providers if it gets into power, the Shadow Chancellor said today. George Osborne called for a radical overhaul of the state education sector to drive down costs.

"I think general public service reform, as we have seen in countries like Sweden, like the United States and elsewhere, can improve dramatically the quality of the education our children receive, the quality of healthcare our patients receive, even in a period of budget restraint," Mr. Osborne said.

Sweden had introduced independent providers into the state education sector as it coped with its own financial crisis, he told the BBC. They were able to negotiate better contracts for computers, textbooks and land, forcing the state bureaucracy to reduce its costs, he claimed.

"The result is that the quality of education for the children of Sweden has been improved."

The Tories want to emulate the Swedish model which has heavily influenced the education policy formulated by David Cameron, the Conservative leader, and Michael Gove, the Shadow Schools Secretary. The Scandinavian approach allows businesses, charities and parents' groups to establish new schools.

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

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UK: Four out of ten trainees quit teaching early, report warns

Richard Garner, Independent, 14 August 2009

Four out of 10 trainee teachers fail to enter a classroom after finishing their course, according to a report published today.

A snapshot survey taken six months after they had completed their training – for which the bill is about £87m a year – revealed only 63 per cent were teaching in state schools.

That means around 8,700 trainees on PGCE courses failed to take up a state school job after the course finished at a cost of £10,000 a head. The majority left teaching all together.

With figures showing a further 16 quit within their first three years, it also means there are more qualified teachers in the country not involved in education than in the classroom.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/ljr7f2>

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UK: School league tables 'a flawed beauty parade'

Graeme Paton, Telegraph, 18 August 2009

Perse School for Girls, which is consistently at the top of annual rankings, said it would withdraw from rankings this year in protest over the system.

Teachers claim league tables provide a “very crude measurement” of success and fail to recognise anything beyond performance in the exam hall.

It is also claimed that annual listings no longer differentiate between the large number of schools dropping conventional tests in favour of other exams such as the International Baccalaureate and the Pre-U.

Perse Girls, in Cambridge, is the latest in a string of top fee-paying schools to snub league tables.

More than 60 schools including Eton, St Paul’s, Winchester, Manchester Grammar, Marlborough, Sevenoaks and Radley withdrew from the rankings last year.

Many fear league tables force schools to “teach to the test” to boost their position, damaging children’s education.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/l57pv2>

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UK: Scandal of class divide at A-level

Richard Garner, Independent, 19 August 2009

Scores of state schools have become “no-go” areas for pupils taking traditional A-level subjects such as maths, science, history, geography or languages, research reveals today.

One in seven schools failed to enter a single candidate for A-level physics or geography this summer, while one in 13 failed to enter candidates for history and one in 17 for maths. Last night, academics warned of a major class divide in the take-up of A-level subjects as 250,000 students await their results tomorrow.

Professor Alan Smithers, of the Centre for Education and Employment Research at Buckingham University, said the damaging impact of league tables was partly to blame.

"This is the awful thing about league tables," he added. "They disrupt the behaviour of schools because they make them responsible for getting the highest scores." Schools in deprived areas were also more likely to have difficulty in recruiting high-quality maths, science and language teachers, he added.

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

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UK: Quarter of boys miss writing target at 7

Jessica Shepherd, The Guardian, 25 August 2009

A quarter of boys in England fail to master basic writing skills by the time they are seven, government figures reveal today.

And just over one in five cannot read basic words, the statistics from the Department for Children, Schools and Families show. The figures are based on teacher assessment, which has replaced national Sats tests at key stage 1.

The figures reveal how many seven-year-olds reach the standard expected of them – level 2 – in reading, writing, maths, science, speaking and listening.

Girls outperform boys in every subject at level 2, the statistics reveal.

A higher proportion of boys than girls achieve level 3 or above in maths and science, while a higher proportion of girls than boys excel at speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/m8nco2>

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UK: 200 rural schools to close by 2014

Richard Garner, The Independent, 1 September 2009

Rural primary schools are closing at the highest rate in years because families are having to move away to find affordable housing, a report says.

The village school is the heart of the community for many families and experts say they offer one of the most effective educational models but they are dying off at a rate of one a month – more than 200 face closure by 2014.

The report says a lack of affordable housing in rural communities is forcing villagers to move to urban areas and is depriving schools of pupils.

Between 2004 and 2008, 62 rural primary schools were closed, the highest level of closure since the 1990s, claims the report by the National Housing Federation, the National Association for Small Schools and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. But in 2001, only one such school closed.

The report's authors claim that local authorities are ignoring an edict made by ministers in 1998 which urged them to presume when making decisions that rural schools should stay open.

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

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UK: Teachers' workloads 'not reduced'

BBC News, 2 September 2009

Teachers' workloads in England and Wales have not been reduced as intended by recent reforms, research has found.

A report commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families found that any gains had been wiped out by new initiatives.

Head teachers felt teachers were less stressed and better able to focus on teaching and learning.

But support staff workloads had gone up "substantially", with many doing unpaid overtime and some taking lessons.

In some schools support staff were teaching whole classes for prolonged periods - weeks or a whole term - rather than just covering briefly for teachers.

Typically this was because qualified teachers could not be recruited, but in some cases the use of support staff rather than qualified teachers was to save money.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/n9rfsI>

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USA: \$4.5 Million in Grants Awarded for Special Education Parent Information, Training Centers

Jim Bradshaw, US Department of Education, 6 August 2009

The U.S. Department of Education today announced the award of more than \$4.5 million in grants to operate 16 special education parent information and training centers in 14 states, including targeted centers for American Indians and military families.

Every state has at least one parent information center funded by the Department of Education to help improve results for children with disabilities. There are more than 104 centers nationwide.

"Research shows that all students, especially those with disabilities, are more successful when parents are part of the educational decision-making process," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "These centers help families who have children with disabilities access services and negotiate the complex framework of special education rules and regulations."

Parent information centers provide parents with the training and information they need to work with special education professionals in meeting the early intervention and special needs of children with disabilities.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/l7oplB>

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USA: Toughen the Tests

Diane Ravitch, Education News Today, 13 August 2009

DAVID Steiner, our new state commissioner of education, has a golden opportunity to restore New York's reputation as a national leader in education. One of his first targets should be the state's shoddy testing regime.

I served with Steiner on the board of the Core Knowledge Foundation, an organization that believes that all children should have a balanced education that includes the arts, history, science and other subjects, not just reading and math.

Brilliant and well-educated, he's unlikely to tolerate the way New York's standards have declined in response to federal pressure.

In 2002, when the No Child Left Behind program became law, the federal government required every state to promise that every student would become proficient by the year 2014 -- a utopian goal that no state or nation has ever accomplished.

The feds left each state free to define what "proficient" meant. Like other states, New York made it easier to become "proficient."

Thus, the phenomenal test-score gains that New York has reported in recent years resulted not from students suddenly becoming smarter -- but from the state lowering standards.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/lzq2ag>

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USA: Gates Foundation offers Memphis City Schools chance at millions to help teachers

Jane Roberts, Memphis Commercial Appeal, August 18, 2009

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on Tuesday offered Memphis City Schools a chance at its \$500 million effort to improve U.S. teacher quality.

Under a memorandum of understanding the district and foundation plan to sign, the school system -- if selected in the fall -- could receive nearly \$100 million over seven years.

It would use the money to enhance teacher recruitment, professional development and school leadership.

"This is extraordinarily good news for Memphis City Schools and the city of Memphis," MCS Supt. Kriner Cash said from his home late Tuesday. "I am very pleased to announce that the Gates Foundation top brass called us (Tuesday) and invited us to be in the next stage for consideration."

Eight other districts are in the running, but it is unknown how many of the coveted sponsorships will be awarded. The Tulsa, Okla., district reported late Tuesday that its proposal had been turned down.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/og5mdj>

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USA: Schools shouldn't use data only as a way to beat up on teachers

Julia Steiny, Providence Journal, 23 August 2009

Most teachers hate data. And for really good reason.

The explosion of information technology produced lots of negative statistics that politicians were quick to use to blame teachers for poor academic achievement. As if poverty made no difference, for example.

By far the best thing No Child Left Behind (NCLB) did was to force states to build robust data systems.

The worst thing it did was use a subset of that data, mainly test scores, to jump to ugly conclusions, like schools weren't "meeting expectations," a euphemism for failure. NCLB measures everything in the negative.

In five years, when all kids in all schools MUST be 100 percent proficient, even the rich kids' schools will be failures.

By then, NCLB will have created equal opportunities for all teachers to resent data.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/l5onxa>

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USA: Kennedy Gone; Power Shuffles Likely on K-12

Alyson Klein, Education Week, 28 August 2009

The death of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy leaves a void in the landscape of education politics, with no obvious heir to his leadership on K-12 issues in the U.S. Senate.

The Massachusetts Democrat, one of the architects of the nearly 8-year-old No Child Left Behind Act—on which he joined forces across party lines with President George W. Bush—was celebrated for his mastery of the legislative process as well as for his passionate advocacy for children.

For decades, it was known in Washington that “all roads in federal education policy run through Kennedy, no matter who is president, no matter what the makeup of Congress is,” said Vic Klatt, who served as an aide to Republicans on the House education committee for 15 years and worked in the U.S. Department of Education under President George H.W. Bush.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/m4n5mf>

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USA: Intensive Teacher Mentoring Not Showing Effects, Report Finds

Stephen Sawchuk, Education Week, 31 August 2009

Some bad news for supporters of intensive, or "high quality," teacher induction: Teachers were no more likely to boost student achievement or to stay in the profession after two years of these services, compared with teachers who received less-intensive forms of mentoring, according to a new Institute of Education Sciences report released this afternoon.

If that sounds vaguely familiar, it's because this report offers the second year of findings from a three-year study. I wrote about the year-one effects here. The findings are notable because of the study's "gold standard" research design, which involves a set of "treatment" and "comparison" schools.

Intensive-mentoring programs are typically more comprehensive and structured than the more informal "buddy systems" that are widespread in America's schools. Mentors in the program are also more carefully screened and assigned to novices.

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

Read the report at <http://tinyurl.com/latncc>

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USA: Top-Notch Teachers Found to Affect Peers

Debra Viadero, Education Week, 1 September 2009

Teachers raise their games when the quality of their colleagues improves, according to a new study offering some of the first evidence to document a “spillover effect” in teaching.

Authors C. Kirabo Jackson and Elias Bruegmann based their findings on an analysis of 11 years of data on North Carolina schoolchildren. The study is due to be published in October in *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, a peer-reviewed journal.

The authors and some independent experts said the study results are important, because they carry implications for school staffing practices and debates going on now at the national level over how to structure merit-pay plans for teachers.

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

Read report at <http://tinyurl.com/lwb97b>

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USA: Parents upset over 'leftist propaganda' video

Lisa Schenker, The Salt Lake Tribune, 2 September 2009

A school principal has apologized for showing a video at an assembly that a politically conservative group leader is calling "radical, leftist propaganda."

Children at Eagle Bay Elementary School in Farmington were shown a short video called "I pledge" on Aug. 28. The video opens with an image of President Barack Obama and part of a speech in which he says, "Let us summon a new spirit of patriotism, of responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves but each other." The video then features celebrities making pledges about how they will help the president and the world -- and that's where some say the problem lies.

Many pledges, such as supporting local food banks, smiling more, and caring for the elderly are noncontroversial. But other pledges, such as "to never give anyone the finger when I'm driving again," "to sell my obnoxious car and buy a hybrid" and to advance stem cell research cross the line, some say.

"Showing the video in a public school is completely inappropriate," said Jennifer Cieslewicz, whose daughter is a first-grader at the school. "I don't believe a video such as this that promotes certain values should be shown to elementary students, especially without parents being aware. "

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/l9q7q2>

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USA: Back to School/Do the Math: Counting too much on calculators

Bill Schackner, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2 September 2009

Some of Katie Bungo's fifth-grade students question why they should puzzle over basic math facts the old-fashioned way when punching a few calculator keys will instantly yield an answer.

So the teacher at Horace Mann Elementary School in the Indiana Area School District is ready with a comparison: Calculator use is like her daily drive to school, a faster approach than walking, though it's no guarantee of success.

"Driving doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to end up at my school if I don't know what I'm doing," she tells her class.

In the same way, calculators can't replace the basic understanding of math needed to know if an answer displayed on a screen makes sense. That's why she lets her students use calculators to speed up their math, but only after they show her they understand the concept behind the work.

"Calculators are not magic," she said.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/lo4244>

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Venezuela: Violence Erupts in Venezuela Over Proposed Education Reform

Shani Saxon-Parrish, Latina, 14 August 2009

Protesters in Caracas were sprayed with tear gas as they gathered outside of parliament to oppose a bill that would broaden state control over schools.

The bill would require the country's public and private schools to base their teaching on "the Bolivarian Doctrine"— a reference to 19th Century independence hero Simon Bolivar's ideals, such as Latin American unity and national self-determination.

"They don't use the word 'socialism', but that's what they want to introduce in our schools," Ray Gonzalez, who opposes the bill, told the Associated Press. Supporters of the bill, like President Hugo Chavez, disagree with the opposition, saying the document stipulates that teaching should be "open to all forms of thinking."

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nn9xcx>

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Vietnam: Disgruntled student splashes teacher with acid

VietNamNet Bridge, 26 August 2009

On August 24, a student at the HCM City Agriculture and Forestry University dumped five litres of acid onto Dang Huu Dung, 51, Deputy Dean of the Mechanics-Technology Faculty of the university.

Witnesses related that while Dung was giving an English lecture to several hundred students, a young man in a mask came in carrying a basin with red water and said: "This is water for washing hands".

Then the young man, Tran Xuan Thanh from Thanh Hoa province, threw the red water into Dung's face.

After getting splashed, Dung shouted and ran out of the room. The young man chased him with a knife and tried to stab him from behind. A few minutes later student in the class had restrained him. The police escorted the attacker to the police station.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/nu3oud>

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Vietnam: Teacher recruitment missing the mark

VietNamNet Bridge, 28 August 2009

Ho Chi Minh City Education and Training Department has organized recruitment campaigns twice to seek teachers for area schools. Yet some schools are rejecting teachers while others plead for more.

"When we came to the education office in Binh Thanh district, we were told that district schools did not need teachers of 'industrial techniques,' but lacked teachers of 'household arts.' They sent us back to the HCM City Education and Training Department, which sent us there in the first place," complained L. and Q., two newly recruited teachers.

Many other teachers have also been turned away.

H., a history teacher, was assigned by the HCM City Education and Training Department to work for Nguyen Huu Huan High School.

"On August 19, I came to Nguyen Huu Huan School with the letter of introduction from the city's education department. However, the school's headmaster told me that the school has enough teachers already," H says.

Read more at <http://tinyurl.com/lwyn95>

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