

# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION NEWS ROUNDUP

Volume 4 Number 3, April 2010

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## Global: Two Billion Laptops? It May Not Be Enough

*Randall Stross, New York Times, 16 April 2010*

One Laptop Per Child is a non-profit group that thinks big. Since 2007, it has sold inexpensive but rugged laptop computers to the governments of less-developed countries. The goal is to equip each of the two billion children in the developing world with his or her own computer.

It's been slow going. About 1.6 million of the group's laptops have been distributed to date, said Matt Keller, vice president for global advocacy at the O.L.P.C. Foundation, based in Cambridge, Mass. Today, the largest concentrations are in Uruguay, at around 400,000, and Peru, at 280,000, followed by Rwanda (110,000) and Haiti and Mongolia (15,000 each).

In 2006, the O.L.P.C. Web site pitched its laptop as a technology that "could revolutionize how we educate the world's children." Today, the "R" word is gone. Now the site speaks in more muted language of "developing an essential resource — educated, empowered children."

"One-on-one, child-to-laptop — the interactive nature of that experience is the heart of what we do," he said. When a child owns a laptop, he added, the school day is effectively extended from a few hours to 12 to 14 hours — however long the child is awake, and wherever he or she happens to be. "

Read entire article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/18/business/18digi.html>

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## Canada: New rules all about making students better people

*Jennifer Dunville, Daily Gleaner, 14 April 2010*

Students and staff at Garden Creek Elementary School are participating in a program called Essential 45, which helps students become more polite and attentive. The Essential 45 includes rules such as: always say thank you; hold the door; make eye contact; if asked a question, ask one in return; and take only your fair share.

The concept came from an American teacher named Ron Clark. Clark spent his career working with disadvantaged students in rural North Carolina and Harlem, N.Y. "The Essential 55: An Award-Winning Educator's Rules for Discovering the Successful Student in Every Child" was Clark's first publication. It has been published in 25 countries and is used at the Ron Clark Academy, a private school in Atlanta, Ga.

After Garden Creek teacher Mark Slack and his colleague Jacqueline Fortner read the book, they were inspired to learn more.

"I had won an award, but hadn't used the money for anything yet, so I suggested to Mark that we use the cash to attend a workshop in Georgia about the Essential 55 and visit the Ron Clark Academy," Fortner said.

"We learned so much and were very impressed with the response from the students. As soon as we came back, Mark developed our Essential 45, a whittled down version of the Essential 55."

Read entire article: <http://dailygleaner.canadaeast.com/front/article/1016762>

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### **Canada: Ontario unveils full-day kindergarten curriculum**

*EducationNews.org, 15/04/2010*

Ontario unveils the play-based curriculum to be used in full-day kindergarten this fall.

Ontario has unveiled the program schools will use for full-day learning — it's a little bit kindergarten, a little bit daycare and a whole lot of play.

Contrary to what some have feared — a sort of Grade 1 lite with tests and homework — the new curriculum simply gives children more time at the sand table, book corner and drama centre to learn the building blocks of the 3 Rs and how to play nicely with others.

"It's not like a little Grade 1 with tests and it's not just duplicating what they did in half-day kindergarten; it's a true blend of the best of kindergarten and the elements of early learning," said Michelle Despault, spokeswoman for Ontario's education ministry, which will oversee the first phase of the full-day learning program in September at 600 schools for about 35,000 children.

The program, which will be tweaked next year if problems arise, will ultimately replace the current kindergarten curriculum when full-day learning is fully rolled out in 2015. It introduces the basics of language, math, science, arts, physical activity and personal development — all through activity rooted in play.

Read more at: <http://www.educationnews.org/global/89678.html>

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### **China: China, U.S. teach each other some lessons**

*Mitchell Landsberg, LA Times, 8 April 2010*

Light snow speckled the bare dirt courtyard outside teacher Cai Limei's fifth-grade classroom. Inside, an ancient radiator was barely warm to the touch.

The classroom at the Gaoyakou Central Primary School, about an hour outside Beijing and not far from the Great Wall, was as austere as it was cold. Little more than a Chinese flag and a blackboard served for ornamentation. Yet the students, bundled in colorful parkas and scarves, were bubbling excitedly as they sat in knots of twos and threes, trying to come up with answers to a series of grammar exercises.

An American teacher walking into this room might be put off by the lack of creature comforts, but surely would recognize the teaching methods being deployed by Cai, an enthusiastic 27-year-old in a puffy, shin-length blue coat.

And with good reason. Although she teaches at a school that outwardly appears little changed from the days of Maoist indoctrination, Cai is on the cutting edge of Chinese educational reform, using methods based on those used in the United States.

"In my time as a student," she said, "we accepted only what we were taught." Now, as a teacher, she tries to encourage "more active thinking," letting students figure out answers for themselves.

Read more at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/apr/08/world/fg-school8>

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### **China: Survey – Chinese high school students under more stress than in other countries**

*Xinhua News Agency, 9 April 2010*

China's senior high school students suffer a far greater rate of "high or comparatively high stress" than students in three other countries, an international survey has found.

More than 86 percent of Chinese senior high students felt under high stress, compared with 69 percent in Japan, 74.8 percent in the Republic of Korea and 61.7 percent in the United States.

The poll found the top causes of stress in China were parents' expectations, followed by the students themselves. While half of the Chinese respondents admitted the pressure partly came from peer competition, only about 20 percent from the other three countries cited this as a cause.

China's national college entrance exam, which falls on June 7 to 9 each year, is a major event in the lives of the country's high school students, with 10 million competing each year for the highest scores. The exam is widely described as "du mu qiao," or "a single-plank bridge" on which candidates jostle for the limited college places.

The Chinese government is considering reforms of the country's education system to raise standards and provide more opportunities with a 10-year blueprint up to 2020.

Read entire article: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/culture/2010-04/09/c\\_13244085.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/culture/2010-04/09/c_13244085.htm)

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### **Finland: Why do Finland's schools get the best results?**

*Tom Burrige, BBC World News America, Helsinki, 7 April 2010*

Last year more than 100 foreign delegations and governments visited Helsinki, hoping to learn the secret of their schools' success.

The Finnish philosophy with education is that everyone has something to contribute and those who struggle in certain subjects should not be left behind. A tactic used in virtually every lesson is the provision of an additional teacher who helps those who struggle in a particular subject. But the pupils are all kept in the same classroom, regardless of their ability in that particular subject.

Finland's Education Minister, Henna Virkkunen is proud of her country's record but her next goal is to target the brightest pupils. "The Finnish system supports very much those pupils who have learning difficulties but we have to pay more attention also to those pupils who are very talented. Now we have started a pilot project about how to support those pupils who are very gifted in certain areas."

According to the OECD, Finnish children spend the fewest number of hours in the classroom in the developed world. Primary and secondary schooling is combined, so the pupils don't have to change schools at age 13. They avoid a potentially disruptive transition from one school to another.

Children in Finland only start main school at age seven. The idea is that before then they learn best when they're playing and by the time they finally get to school they are keen to start learning.

Finnish parents obviously claim some credit for the impressive school results. There is a culture of reading with the kids at home and families have regular contact with their children's teachers.

Read entire article – and listen to online interview with Finnish Education Minister:  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/world\\_news\\_america/8601207.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/world_news_america/8601207.stm)

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### **Japan: Education with less latitude**

*Editorial, The Japan Times, 14 April 2010*

The education ministry has screened and approved 148 new textbooks for use in primary schools, most of which will be introduced to classrooms in fiscal 2011.

The textbooks are notably thicker than those that were approved in the last round of screening. When approving books for use from fiscal 2002, the ministry's catchphrase was "education with latitude." The average number of pages has increased 42.8 percent. In the case of mathematics and science, books' length has increased 67.0 percent and 67.3 percent, respectively.

The adoption of the dense textbooks underlines the ministry's desire to overcome criticism that Japanese pupils' academic ability has declined under the policy of "education with latitude," which was supposed to be the antithesis of cram-style education.

One potential problem is that teachers, due to insufficient time to properly teach books' entire content, may be tempted to cram information into their pupils. From fiscal 2011, class time allocated to the four major subjects will increase, but only by about 10 percent. Fifth and sixth graders' class time will be spread more thinly as they begin to study English. Responding to these concerns, the ministry now says teachers do not have to teach the entire content of the textbooks. But such a statement only muddles things further.

Read more at: <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ed20100414a1.html>

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### **Japan: Education ministry to review format of achievement tests**

*Associated Press, Apr 20, 2010*

The education ministry will ask the views of local education boards about how to improve the national achievement tests, which this year were conducted under a scaled-back format, ministry officials said Wednesday.

In a survey form to be distributed soon, the ministry will ask such questions as why unselected schools did or did not take part voluntarily in the latest tests held Tuesday, as well as views about the previous blanket format for the exam and requests for the future, the officials said.

The annual tests for elementary school sixth-graders and junior high school third-graders covered all schools when they were reinstated in 2007 after a 43-year hiatus, but the current government, launched last September, has scaled them back to cut costs.

Although only 30.7 percent of elementary and junior high schools in Japan were selected to take part in Tuesday's exam, 13,896, or 61.7 percent, of the schools not selected took part voluntarily, boosting the total rate of participation to 73.5 percent of schools.

Experts have called for reviewing the fact that the exam takes place every year and that only math and Japanese language are tested, while critics remain worried that nationwide tests encourage excessive competition among schools and regions.

Read more at: [http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9F74C7O0&show\\_article=1](http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9F74C7O0&show_article=1)

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### **Japan: Okada takes part in event promoting education in poor nations**

*Associated Press, Apr 20, 2010*

Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada took part in a lesson by Japanese high school students on Tuesday about the world's education expenses and Japan's educational aid, held as part of a global advocacy campaign by nongovernmental organizations called "the world's biggest lesson."

"There are so many children in the world who struggle in severe circumstances," Okada told a gathering hosted by an alliance of Japanese NGOs offering educational support for children in poor countries. "Japan wants to play a role in efforts to change such a situation."

The minister spoke about his personal experiences of collecting donations to build a school in China and meeting with many children who cannot attend primary school in Myanmar, vowing that Japan will help increase the number of children who can go to school.

During the event held at the Diet members' building, three high school girls asked Okada and other parliamentarians questions related to educational spending in the world.

Read more at: [http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9F6PIB80&show\\_article=1](http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9F6PIB80&show_article=1)

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## **New Zealand: Trend of serious bullying**

*John Hartevelde, The Press, 12 April 2010*

A "trend towards more serious bullying" in New Zealand schools is worrying Children's Commissioner John Angus. Angus and Police Commissioner Howard Broad yesterday expressed concern about the increasing number of violent incidents.

"There are some trends [among young people] that we should be worried about, and they are part of the trends in violence in New Zealand overall that we should be worrying about," Angus said.

Last year, violent crime was up by 9.2 per cent to 65,465 offences compared with the previous year, recent police statistics showed. There was a jump in homicides – up by more than 20 per cent to 134 last year. Angus said the New Zealand homicide rate, per capita, was well ahead of countries such as Australia.

"There is maybe a trend towards more serious bullying incidents, particularly when the bullying takes the form of physical violence," Angus said.

"And, of course, the use of new technology, of mobile phones and cyber-bullying on things like Facebook, reflects the easy access to that. It's of concern because it's insidious and invasive and 24/7. Kids are being abused 24 hours a day if they choose to look at their cellphones all the time."

A report released by Angus this month said New Zealanders "have a high tolerance for violence and bullying".

Read entire article: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/3570768/Trend-of-serious-bullying>

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## **New Zealand: Safeguards Needed to Protect Public Education**

*NZEI, 15 April 2010*

The education sector union NZEI Te Riu Roa says safeguards must be put in place to protect public education from profit-driven private investment.

The government will reportedly decide this month whether to approve the private sector building and maintaining a primary school by 2013.

Schools and their buildings are at the heart of our communities and are important public assets. NZEI President Frances Nelson says PPPs in schools raise big questions.

NZEI believes that when it comes to education, teaching and learning should come before profit, and allowing a school to be built as part of a PPP should not be considered a "worthwhile experiment" as the Infrastructure Minister Bill English has said.

"If the government is going to pursue a public private partnership agenda in education, safeguards must be put in place to protect the delivery and quality of public education in New Zealand," says Frances Nelson.

Read more at: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1004/S00033.htm>

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## **New Zealand: Confusion Reigns Over National Standards**

*NZEI, 19 April 2010*

As schools go back for Term Two, confusion reigns over the implementation of National Standards, says the education sector union NZEI Te Riu Roa.

The Education Minister claims implementation is going well because schools have rushed to participate in the first round of National Standards training workshops. Those workshops were held for principals and senior teachers who will be expected to train others and lead the implementation process.

NZEI President Frances Nelson says the reason so many schools signed up for training is because school leaders are under immense pressure to implement and are desperate for information.

"They were not involved in the development of the Standards and need to be in a position to assess them, discuss them and give feedback," she says.

"What we're hearing is that people are more confused than ever because the Standards don't seem to fit in with what schools are already doing in terms of assessment. "

Read more at: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1004/S00044.htm>

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## **New Zealand: Distance learning expertise sought by Australia**

*Massey University, 22 April 2010*

Massey University is a founding member of a new research consortium with four Australian Universities.

The Distance Education Hub includes the University of New England in Armidale, Charles Sturt University, Central Queensland University and the University of Southern Queensland.

With the aim of supporting research into best practices for distance learning, it is backed by the Australian Government's Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department through a \$A3.5 million diversity and structural adjustment fund. It was launched last month at the New England campus, from where it will be hosted and directed.

Read more at: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1004/S00061.htm>

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## **Saudi Arabia: Illiteracy drops significantly, says Al-Fayez**

*Hayat Al-Ghamdi, Arab News, Apr 15, 2010*

Illiteracy in Saudi Arabia has declined from approximately 60 percent in 1980 to 13 percent in 2009, according to Deputy Education Minister for Girls' Education Norah Al-Fayez.

Speaking at the opening of a conference on adult education in Abha on Tuesday, the deputy minister underscored the importance of continuing education.

"Adult education is the key to sustainable development," she said during her opening remarks.

Al-Fayez, the Kingdom's first woman minister, was appointed by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah under an initiative to advance girls' education in the country.

Read more at: <http://arabnews.com/saudiarabia/article43517.ece>

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## **Scotland: Warning of chaos over new school curriculum**

*Andrew Denholm, The Herald, 22 Apr 2010*

Teachers are warning of classroom chaos if the Scottish Government presses ahead with the introduction of a new curriculum for secondary schools.

The stark prediction comes with the publication of a survey of secondary teachers that reveals 87% of them lack the confidence to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence.

Michael Russell, the Education Secretary, has already said he believes schools are ready to deliver the curriculum at the start of the new school year in August.

Last month he announced a 10-point plan to help with its introduction, including moves to give local authorities a share of £3 million to help train staff.

However, a joint survey by the Government and the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) has found the vast majority of its members still do not feel ready.

Read more at: <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/education/warning-of-chaos-over-new-school-curriculum-1.1022296>

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## **South Korea: Girls Good at Languages, Boys at Math**

*Bae Ji-sook, Korea Times, 19 April 2010*

Girls are better with words and boys are good at calculating. They also study better when separated than in the same classroom, a state-run institute reported Wednesday while announcing an analysis of the nationwide College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) results. The test was conducted in November last year with more than 450,000 participants.

According to the Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation, a section of the education ministry, girls outshone boys in the Korean and English languages section, while the latter were better at mathematics.

Coed schools were less effective when it came to academic achievements ? they were behind single-sex schools by 5.7 points in the Korean language, 5 in English and 1.9 in mathematics, on average.

However, students in Seoul nabbed the top ranks in English, where experts assume that the elite private cram schools conducting English immersion classes contributed to the results.

Students from affluent areas such as Gangnam and Seocho in southern Seoul scored exceptionally high, while those living in rural areas were relatively less proficient.

Private school educated students achieved better results than those from public schools, the report noted. While students from the former scored an average 102 on the Korean language section, those from public schools received 99.7.

The same pattern was seen in math marks, 101.8 to 98.2 and English marks, 102.1 to 98.7. Private schools produced more students with higher grades, while public schools had a larger number of less academic ones.

The report is in line with that for 2008, which showed that private schools, especially foreign language high schools or those in large cities were rated more privileged than others. Civic groups and educational experts have claimed that such an "educational gap" should be narrowed by strengthening teacher training and class activities in public schools.

Read entire article: [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/04/117\\_64485.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/04/117_64485.html)

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## **UK: Teachers reveal toll of violence against them in schools**

*Rachel Williams, the Guardian, 29 March 2010*

A quarter of school staff have suffered violence at the hands of a student and a third have been confronted by aggressive parents, a teaching union said today.

Members of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) told of receiving death threats from families, being groped by students and police having to be called as a parent rampaged around a school. One woman reported being trapped in an office by a father and older brother of a pupil who were angry that she had confiscated his gold trainers until the end of the day.

In a survey by the union – which this week will debate a motion at its conference calling for parents of disruptive pupils to see their child benefit docked – 64 staff said they had been physically harmed by a student, and more than a fifth of the 1,000 questioned said they had developed mental health problems.

Nearly 40% of teachers said they had considered leaving the profession because of bad behaviour.

Physical attacks – on other children as well as teachers – were far more common in primary schools, where half of staff reported pupils being physically aggressive, compared with 20% in secondaries.

Nearly a quarter of staff felt they did not get enough support from parents when raising concerns about a child's behaviour. Another proposal set to be debated at the ATL's conference is Manchester is for mothers and fathers to attend parenting classes to help them deal with badly behaved children.

Read entire article: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/mar/29/violent-students-schools-teachers>

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## **UK: Disadvantaged pupils learn faster in weekend schools**

*Richard Garner, the Independent, 15 April 2010*

Children from disadvantaged homes learn faster if they have attended supplementary Saturday or Sunday morning schools, according to a government study.

Attendance at the schools – which are largely set up by ethnic minority groups in cities – helps boost their performance in tests and exams. It also gives them more confidence in their ability and improves their behaviour, as they are taught to respect their teacher.

The study, carried out for the Department for Children, Schools and Families, covered more than 300 schools. It concluded: "Many parents reported an improvement in the skills, knowledge and exam results of their children since attending supplementary schools. Teachers, parents and pupils identified more concentrated teacher/pupil time due to smaller class sizes [as a key reason]."

A fortnight ago, the Conservative schools spokesman Michael Gove told teachers that his party would encourage schools to start Saturday morning classes for disadvantaged pupils. However, the report counsels against such a "top-down" approach, pointing out that many believe the success of the supplementary schools is down to the fact that they are voluntary initiatives by the local community.

The pupils also responded to being taught by teachers of the same ethnic background as themselves. The effect, according to the report, was to raise their career expectations.

Read entire article: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/disadvantaged-pupils-learn-faster-in-weekend-schools-1945368.html>

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## **UK: Head-teachers vote to boycott Sats tests**

*Jessica Shepherd, the Guardian, Friday 16 April 2010*

Head-teachers in England today voted overwhelmingly to boycott national tests for 10- and 11-year-olds on the first day of a new government – a move likely to throw the primary school assessment system into chaos.

The two biggest teaching unions – the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) – balloted head-teachers and their deputies over whether to "frustrate the administration" of the maths and English tests, formerly known as Sats. The two unions combined represent head-teachers from about 80% of England's 17,000 primary schools.

The tests are due to be sat by 600,000 children in their last year of primary school on May 10 – the first day that a new government would begin office.

Teachers want ministers to abolish the tests because they argue they are used to compile meaningless school league tables. They say the tables unfairly stigmatise schools with the most challenging pupils, and turn children's last year of primary school into a repetitive drill for the tests. They want to see Sats replaced by teacher assessment.

Gordon Brown has made a personal appeal to teachers not to boycott the tests.

Read entire article: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/apr/16/headteachers-boycott-national-tests-sats>

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## **UK: Teachers may face legal action if tests boycott goes ahead**

*Richard Garner, the Independent, 22 April 2010*

Heads and teachers may face legal action after deciding to go ahead with their boycott of national curriculum tests for 11-year-olds next month.

Leaders of both the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) decided yesterday to boycott the tests – due to be taken by 600,000 pupils in English and maths in the week beginning 10 May.

That followed ballot results in favour of a boycott declared last Friday. The NUT voted 76 per cent in favour, while the NAHT was 61 per cent. The action will mean heads refusing to open the test papers when they are sent to schools and will present the incoming government with its first industrial-relations headache.

The unions are angry that league tables mean too much time is spent teaching to the test – and that schools which do badly are pilloried.

"We cannot continue to have our colleagues in the primary sector disparaged on the basis of a flawed testing regime," said Mick Brookes, general secretary of the NAHT.

Read more at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/teachers-may-face-legal-action-if-tests-boycott-goes-ahead-1950682.html>

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## **UK: We can't ignore the teachers' boycott of tests**

*Leading Article, the Independent, 22 April 2010*

In the war of words that will follow the vote by members of the National Union of Teachers and National Association of Head Teachers to boycott national curriculum tests for 11-year-olds, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the two unions have highlighted a problem that needs a solution.

We will hear a lot in the coming weeks about how it is the head's statutory duty to administer the tests. We may even see an injunction being sought to stop the action. While it would preferable if the unions did not take industrial action to protest at the inadequacies of the testing regime, it has to be borne in mind that legal intervention will not solve the dilemma.

The fact is that the testing apparatus is not fit for purpose. Secondary schools have so little confidence in the tests taken by children in maths and English at primary school that they test them again when they arrive at secondary school. The reason is that they have little faith in the way children are taught in the final year of primary school. They believe that children are being drilled too much – or "taught to the test". And this is because schools are so desperate to achieve a good showing in primary league tables.

Read more at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/schools/leading-article-we-cant-ignore-the-teachers-boycott-of-tests-1950137.html>

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## **USA: Reform: To What End?**

**We need a different orientation to school reform—one that embodies a richer understanding of teaching and learning.**

*Mike Rose, Educational Leadership, April 2010*

This is an exciting time for education as the federal government, state houses, and private philanthropies are all focusing on school reform. A lot of good ideas are in the air—thoughtful proposals for ways to change things, to imagine a new kind of schooling in the United States.

The history of school reform has taught us, however, that good ideas can become one-dimensionalized as they move from conception through policy formation to implementation. Also, in the heat of reform, politics and polemics can become an end in themselves, a runaway train of reform for reform's sake. In addition, reforms can have unintended consequences. As a reform plays out in the complex, on-the-ground world of districts, school boards, and classrooms, it can lead to counter-productive practices. In the case of No Child Left Behind, for example, we saw the narrowing of the curriculum to prepare for high-stakes tests in math and language arts.

At this moment, when we're focusing so much attention on school reform and so much is possible, it would be good to step back and remind ourselves what we're ultimately trying to achieve. What is the goal of school reform?

Most would agree it's to create rich learning environments, ones with greater scope and more equitable distribution than those we currently have.

As we re-imagine school, some basic questions should serve as our touchstone for reform: What is the purpose of education in a democracy? What kind of people do we want to see emerge from U.S. schools? What is the experience of education when we do it well?

Read entire article:

[http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/apr10/vol67/num07/Reform@\\_To\\_What\\_End%C2%A2.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/apr10/vol67/num07/Reform@_To_What_End%C2%A2.aspx)

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## **USA: Orangeburg native helps develop unique values teaching aid**

*Dale Linder-Altman, Times & Democrat, 6 April 2010*

Education isn't always about English or math, and it doesn't have to take hours of hard work. Sometimes, it's about a change in attitude and kids can have a fun time learning.

The Bridge Da Gap program uses hip hop music, written by Grammy-award nominee Kevin "Khao" Cates, to teach positive traits to America's youth.

The 19-lesson curriculum plan teaches anger management, self-respect, self-determination and abstinence and trains youth how to deal with peer pressure. It has already been tested in a pilot program with the YMCA in Georgia and two schools in the Atlanta area. It was a phenomenal success there, according to Thompson.

But the program doesn't stop with just teaching the traits, it also teaches the kids how to meet the problems they face every day, Thompson said.

Read entire article: <http://www.thetandd.com/articles/2010/04/06/news/doc4bbb9db295cbe813457021.txt>

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## **USA: Tying Teacher Evaluation to Student Achievement**

*Susan H. Fuhrman, Education Week, 7 April 2010*

The Obama administration, through its Race to the Top initiative, is encouraging states to develop approaches for evaluating teachers that incorporate student-achievement results.

This aspect of the program has been controversial, prompting some teachers' unions to refuse to endorse state applications for competitive federal grants.

However, a number of efforts to develop such indices of teacher effectiveness are under way, and the American Federation of Teachers' president, Randi Weingarten, has publicly endorsed including student-achievement results along with other measures to evaluate teacher success.

It is likely, then, that some form of teacher evaluation linked to student achievement will play a significant role in a number of upcoming policy initiatives.

It is therefore critical, in order to ensure fairness to teachers, that any plans to reward or punish them for gains their students have or have not made control for differences among students in their family situations and other factors that are beyond the teachers' control.

Read entire article:

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/04/07/28fuhrman\\_ep.h29.html?tkn=YMCCC1Byf3d9I7t3EIlzepRzmNdN5ElavJXu&cmp=clp-sb-ascd](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/04/07/28fuhrman_ep.h29.html?tkn=YMCCC1Byf3d9I7t3EIlzepRzmNdN5ElavJXu&cmp=clp-sb-ascd)

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## **USA: Cyber high school program reaches at-risk teens**

*Emphasis is on individual projects, not general classes*

Lori Higgins, Free Press, 12 April 2010

[Niquel Mitchell's] among 540 students who attend Westwood Cyber High School, where most of students' time learning is at home via the Internet. Students are required to step into the school building only two hours a week.

At this school, students - called researchers - learn by doing projects, a method that makes this school unique. But it's no cakewalk. These projects must be sophisticated enough to show students have learned the same concepts students in traditional classes learn.

Many in the state are watching this year-old online school, based in Westwood Community Schools, because state leaders are focused on finding new ways to reach students in danger of dropping out.

The Westwood school is succeeding at a time when online learning is becoming even more prominent in Michigan, with new laws that pave the way for two new cyber schools to open for students in grades K-12.

Westwood Cyber High, which caters to dropouts or potential dropouts, is one of a handful of Michigan schools in which all students learn online.

But what makes the school unique is its emphasis on what educators call project-based learning. Instead of taking classes in subjects such as algebra and biology, students complete projects.

It's a relatively new way of restructuring a school - and one that could become more prominent in the future as educators struggle to find ways to reform schools, particularly for struggling students. Westwood Cyber is the only school in the U.S. that uses a model called Not School, that has been successful in the United Kingdom.

Read entire article: <http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100412/NEWS05/4120321/Cyber-school-program-reaches-at-risk-teens&template=fullarticle>

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## **USA: Bikes, Balls in Class: How Phys Ed Transformed One School:**

### **New study shows physical activity can improve test scores**

*David Wright & Hanna Siegel, ABC News, 14 April 2010*

Sound body, sound mind has long been the accepted wisdom. But schools have traditionally promoted brains and brawn separately. Not so at Naperville Central High School west of Chicago. Here the kids who struggle with math and reading go to gym class first.

"What we're trying to do here is jump start their brain," says Paul Zientarski, chairman of the Physical Education Department at Naperville.

So the very first class of the day is physical education. And at Naperville, exercise isn't confined to the gym. There are bikes and balls right in the classroom. Even in reading class, these kids are constantly on the move.

Scientists say Naperville is on to something. "Exercise, good fitness-based exercise, makes our brain more ready to learn," says John Ratey of the Harvard Medical School.

At the University of Illinois, Dr Charles Hillman's research shows that after a 30-minute stint on the treadmill, students actually do up to 10 percent better at problem solving. "It's good for attention, it's good for how fast individuals process information, and how they perform on cognitive tasks," says Hillman.

At Naperville, the test results are astounding. Reading scores up nearly twice as much. Math scores up by a factor of 20. In an era when many schools are cutting PE programs to save money, Naperville is looking for new activities to get kids moving.

Read entire article: <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/exercise-school-leads-learning/story?id=10371315>

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## **USA: Obama's plan to reward schools for innovation sparks debate**

*Nick Anderson, Washington Post, April 14, 2010*

... President Obama aims to reinvent the Education Department as a venture capitalist for school reform, investing more in schools with innovative ideas.

The proposal splits congressional Democrats. They are staunch protectors of education funding for their states and districts, and many worry about promoting innovation at the expense of equity. Obama's \$4 billion Race to the Top, a prime example of what he wants to expand, awarded large payouts in March to Delaware and Tennessee but left 39 applicants empty-handed.

Most states will not receive a dime this year from the school reform fund. Some senior lawmakers say there's a limit to the value of competition at a time of enormous fiscal strain on schools.

"We're all for improving our schools," Rep. David R. Obey (D-Wis.), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, told Education Secretary Arne Duncan in a hearing last month. "But right now, many school districts are drowning in a sea of red ink. We need to help them keep afloat - not have them filling out long applications to compete for grants based on a reform agenda that they're not able to pursue in this economy."

But others are backing Obama's bet on the power of incentives. "Ensuring improvement of education in a globally competitive economy has got to be the top priority," said Sen. Mark Warner (Va.), one of several Democratic senators who have endorsed expansion of competitive grants. "That means we've got to break a little glass and shake up the system."

Read entire article: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/13/AR2010041302009.html?hpid=topnews>

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## **USA: U.S. Falls Short in Measure of Future Math Teachers**

*Sam Dillon, New York Times, April 14, 2010*

America's future math teachers, on average, earned a C on a new test comparing their skills with their counterparts in 15 other countries, significantly outscoring college students in the Philippines and Chile but placing far below those in educationally advanced nations like Singapore and Taiwan.

The researchers who led the math study in this country judged the results acceptable if not encouraging for America's future elementary teachers. But they called them disturbing for American students heading to careers in middle schools, who were outscored by students in Germany, Poland, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Switzerland and Taiwan.

On average, 80 percent to 100 percent of the future middle school teachers from the highest-achieving countries took advanced courses like linear algebra and calculus, while only 50 percent to 60 percent of their counterparts in the United States took those courses, the study said.

"The study reveals that America's middle school mathematics teacher preparation is not up to the task," said William H. Schmidt, the Michigan State University professor who was its lead author. To improve its competitiveness, Dr. Schmidt said, the nation should recruit stronger candidates into careers teaching math and require them to take more advanced courses.

Read entire article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/education/15math.html?ref=education>

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## **USA: Educators seek delay of school curriculum vote**

*Associated Press, April 15, 2010*

A group of university educators on Thursday called on the State Board of Education to delay a final vote on contentious state-wide school curriculum standards until experts from higher education can weigh in on the matter.

A far-right faction of the board succeeded in injecting conservative ideals into social studies, history and economics lessons.

The proposed curriculum standards will require teachers to cover the Judeo-Christian influences of the nation's Founding Fathers, but not highlight the philosophical rationale for the separation of church and state. Curriculum standards also will describe the U.S. government as a "constitutional republic," rather than "democratic," and students will be required to study the decline in value of the U.S. dollar, including the abandonment of the gold standard.

Many critics, including several Hispanic lawmakers and academic experts, have said the new curriculum minimizes the contributions of minorities.

On Thursday, the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas chimed in, saying it presents a troubling and biased revision of history.

Read entire article: <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/tx/6960651.html>

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## **USA: Education reforms get a failing grade:**

**Neither conservatives nor liberals have a cure for bad schools**

Steve Chapman, *Chicago Tribune*, 15 April 2010

In 1990, in one of the most innovative developments in modern American education, the Milwaukee public schools created a parental choice system. Some low-income parents got vouchers that could be used to send their children to private schools. It was a richly promising idea. The new option would let disadvantaged kids escape wretched public schools. Competition would force public schools to improve or close. Students would learn more.

Twenty years have passed. Last week, researchers at the School Choice Demonstration Project at the University of Arkansas published their latest assessment of the results. What did they find? Something unexpected: Kids in the program do no better than everyone else.

"At this point," said Professor Patrick J. Wolf, "the voucher students are showing average rates of achievement gain similar to their public school peers." This is a surprise to anyone who originally supported the voucher idea — as I did. But it's entirely consistent with the record elsewhere.

In Washington, D.C., voucher kids improved a little in reading after three years, but not in math. A 2009 review of all the studies on voucher programs found few gains, "most of which are not statistically different from zero." This type of school choice, whatever its merits, has not accomplished what it was supposed to do.

Read entire article: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/ct-oped-0415-chapman-20100415,0,7825146.column>

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## **USA: Study affirms benefits of preschool**

Carla Rivera, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 April 2010

Children enrolled in Los Angeles Universal Preschool programs made significant improvements in the social and emotional skills needed to do well in kindergarten, according to a study released Monday. The gains were especially pronounced for English language learners, the study showed.

The findings confirmed observations of preschool teachers that children attending high-quality programs are better prepared for kindergarten. For the first time, the study provided data to back up those observations, officials with the non-profit preschool organization said.

"This is unique because there's very little research in terms of cognitive progression in the preschool years," said Celia C. Ayala, chief operating officer for Los Angeles Universal Preschool. "We know there are differences, we see the differences, but this gives us a way to assess improvements."

The study, commissioned by the organization and conducted by the San-Jose-based Applied Survey Research, measured the readiness skills of 437 children at 24 preschools in the fall of 2008 and reassessed 364 of those children in spring 2009.

Read entire article: <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-0420-preschool-20100419,0,2289045.story>

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## **USA: City stretches physical education curriculum through yoga**

Karamagi Rujumba, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 19 April 2010

For some students, physical education classes offer a needed respite from the monotony of shuffling between stuffy classrooms. For others, they can be treacherous. They can feel singled out or self-conscious about their fitness and body shape in comparison to peers.

Pittsburgh Public Schools are integrating yoga into the phys ed curriculum to diversify the gym experience and give students at different levels of fitness an activity they can adapt to at their own pace and still have a workout.

"We build our curriculum around five components - body composition, flexibility, muscular, strength and cardiovascular endurance - and yoga has a direct impact on all of them," said Jerri Lippert, the school district's chief academic officer.

A former social worker who started yoga to heal from a knee injury suffered in a car accident a few years ago, Ms. Spence said the idea of yoga in schools appealed to her. "I thought it would be a good way to give kids who are having a hard time managing their bodies the confidence they need to become physically active."

Now a certified yoga trainer, she said that beyond the physical fitness aspect, yoga has the potential to enhance a child's mental maturity.

Read entire article: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/10109/1051535-114.stm>

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## **USA: Students seek a say on homework assignments:**

*Pushing for more relevancy, teacher feedback*

James Vaznis, Boston Globe, April 20, 2010

Sometimes, they say, the homework doesn't appear to have anything to do with what's being taught in class. Other times, teachers hardly check to see if students completed the assignments or had difficulty with it.

In too many cases, Boston student leaders say, homework assignments seem more like busy work, rather than opportunities to broaden students' understanding of a topic. Now, members of the Boston Student Advisory Council are pushing for changes to the district's homework policy in an effort to create more meaningful assignments.

It is one of three measures that the student group has brought to the School Committee as part of an effort to improve the quality of the classroom experience. The other proposals would enable students to provide anonymous written feedback to their teachers about their job performance and give students a say in hiring teachers.

"We want to get the most out of our education," said Adam Fischer, a Boston Latin Academy senior who is president of the advisory council, a citywide organization of student leaders. "If students don't get good teaching, they are [out of luck] for the rest of their lives."

Read entire article:

[http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/04/20/boston\\_students\\_take\\_a\\_turn\\_at\\_classroom\\_reform/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/04/20/boston_students_take_a_turn_at_classroom_reform/)

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## **USA: Tapping San Francisco school's recipe for success**

*Jill Tucker, San Francisco Chronicle, April 20, 2010*

A top education official in the Obama administration sat in San Francisco's Marshall Elementary School cafeteria taking notes Monday as parents, teachers and administrators recited a recipe for what it takes to turn around a struggling school.

The main ingredients included quality teachers, involved parents and a supportive principal mixed perhaps with a new dual-immersion language program. Time must be allowed to let it all take hold.

It is the kind of formula federal officials would love to see in place at schools across the country. Too many schools are failing year after year with no end in sight, said U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Tony Miller.

Some high schools have a dropout rate of up to 40 percent, and that's no longer acceptable, he said. Meanwhile, too many students graduate from high school unprepared for college and they end up needing remedial classes at their university or college, Miller said.

"We're lying to kids," said Miller during the second stop on a two-day tour around San Francisco to meet school officials and staff, politicians and business leaders.

Read entire article: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/04/20/BA1F1D134L.DTL>

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