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Editor's Note:

We hope you will take a few minutes of your time to tell us what you think about our newsletter. Your opinion matters to us and will help us improve the quality of our information. This is the last month for our survey, so please provide your feedback now. [Click here](#) to take the survey.

Purpose

The purpose of the U.S. Department of Education's online newsletter *The Education Innovator* is to promote innovative practices in education; to offer features on promising programs and practices; to provide information on innovative research, schools, policies, and trends; and to keep readers informed of key Department priorities and activities. The Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) and the Office of Communications and Outreach (OCO) share the responsibility for the newsletter's research, writing, and production.

Douglas B. Mesecar, Assistant Deputy Secretary, OII, and Lauren Maddox, Assistant Secretary, OCO, sponsor *The Education Innovator*, which is published monthly and distributed through EDPUBS.

Feature

Math and Science Magnet Prepares Students for Algebra and Beyond

Algebra is an important foundation for building the critical thinking skills we need for solving everyday problems. Picture yourself at the local video rental store getting ready to pay for your selection. The clerk tells you that you have a choice of paying a \$25 annual membership fee, plus \$1.50 per rental, or paying no membership fee and \$2.75 per rental. Would you have imagined that an understanding of algebra and linear equations could help you decide which is the better deal? Or perhaps you have a job offer that requires you to move across the country from Buffalo, N.Y. to San Francisco, Calif., but you would have to cover the cost of gas for approximately 2600 miles in a moving van. If the national average for gasoline is \$3.25 per gallon, how much money would you need to save to cover the cost of the move? Would you have believed that when you learned to solve algebraic expressions it would help you find the answer to this unknown variable, too?

There is concern throughout the country that many American students lack the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in algebra. Those students may not only have greater difficulty solving some of the "real world" problems listed above, but they also may need remedial course work in college and may have a lesser chance of becoming the next generation of American scientists, inventors, and engineers. And with research showing that students who complete Algebra II in high school are more than twice as likely than students with less mathematical preparation to earn a 4-year college degree, we must ensure that students are ready to tackle the more advanced mathematics courses in high school and beyond.

To compete in the 21st century global economy, proficiency in mathematics is crucial. To help ensure our nation's future competitiveness and economic viability, President George W. Bush created the National Mathematics Advisory Panel in April 2006. The Panel was charged with making recommendations on the best use of scientifically based research to advance the teaching and learning of mathematics. During the past two years, the Panel held meetings around the country, reviewed more than 16,000 research studies, received public testimony from 110 individuals, and considered written commentary from numerous organizations and individuals. In addition, the Math Panel conducted, in partnership with the National

Opinion Research Center (NORC), a national survey of Algebra I teachers to determine what practices will best prepare American students to succeed in algebra. On March 13, 2008, the 24 expert panelists, including educators, cognitive psychologists, and leading mathematicians, released a [report](#) with actionable steps, containing 45 findings and recommendations on numerous topics. Some of these topics included instructional practices, materials, professional development for teachers, learning processes, assessments and research policies, and mechanisms. The report calls for students to attain a strong foundation in basic mathematical skills and for Americans to redefine how they view mathematics, shifting from a belief that particular people cannot learn mathematics to a belief that hard work and effort can pay dividends in achievement.

Math Panel's Key Findings

- Systematic Progression
- Fractions are Important
- Know and Recall Number Facts
- Student Effort is Essential
- Teacher Math Knowledge is Key

Some of the report's key findings include: 1.) there should be a systematic progression in mathematics curricula from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade with an emphasis on student mastery of each step; 2.) it is critical to understand and be able to work with fractions (including decimals, percents, and negative fractions), for such proficiency is foundational for algebra; 3.) it is crucial for students to demonstrate quick recall of computational facts if they are to be successful in mathematics; 4.) a student's effort in the learning process is an important factor to ensuring achievement; and 5.) teachers must have a strong understanding of mathematics both prior to and beyond the level they instruct, if students are to succeed.

Blue Ribbon Award-Winning Magnet School Puts the Panel's Findings into Practice

The [K J Clark Middle School of Mathematics, Science & Technology](#) in Chickasaw, Ala., is a magnet school that provides a curriculum rich with many of these recommendations, and the school is producing impressive results for its students. Clark offers a rigorous and relevant mathematics curriculum with a multitude of hands-on activities to get students excited about learning. As the National Math Panel report recommends, the school's approach is systematic and emphasizes conceptual understanding, computational fluency, and problem-solving skills.

Under the leadership of Principal Dianne McWain, a 2007 U.S. Department of Education Terrell H. Bell award recipient, fourth through eighth grade students throughout the Mobile County are being prepared to succeed in mathematics and science in high school and beyond. McWain notes, "We accelerated learning a few years ago. Now our students are so much better prepared. We integrate mathematics into the curriculum everyday and in every class."

The mathematics program allows students to see what is important, according to Math Department Chair Julie Boren. For example, in one algebra class, the students work in groups as they tackle a question involving which one of three candidates won the school's student council election, and by how many votes. "They know we are not going to skip the word problems just because they are difficult. We meet challenges head-on," she said.

The school prepares students for algebra by providing a "core plus" curriculum. The "core plus" takes place in grades four through six, during which time the mathematics instructors teach the grade level county curriculum but add skills from the next grade level as well. By accelerating instruction, all seventh grade students are prepared for the foundations of algebra and all eighth grade students are taught Algebra I for high school credit. Clark also offers geometry for more advanced eighth graders. "We add skills in the sixth and seventh grade that students may need to ensure they take and pass Algebra I in eighth grade," said Boren.

Clark also offers an after-school tutoring program, an in-house tutoring program that removes students from

their scheduled classes to obtain extra help, and one-on-one sessions during class with the teacher to ensure that all students, even those who are struggling initially, succeed in the rigorous math program. “It is critical that our students be competitive – it opens doors for them so they can take calculus and upper level math in high school,” Boren asserts.

Student enrollment at Clark is determined by a lottery in which there are no academic requirements for admission other than passing the grade the student is in at the time of application. Students come to Clark from parochial or private schools and as many as 60 public elementary schools across the county. The students also arrive with very different backgrounds and levels of academic ability. Teachers work collaboratively to bridge the gap between students’ initial levels of knowledge and experience and Clark’s standards of proficiency required for promotion.

The U.S. Department of Education named Clark a *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Blue Ribbon School in 2007 in part because it is a high achieving school regardless of its student demographic. Although 58 percent of Clark’s student population consists of those from disadvantaged backgrounds, all students have improved their performance on state assessments. Beginning in 2003, Clark began disaggregating information on student performance, in alignment with NCLB’s accountability measures and focus on data to drive instruction. By looking at the data on student performance, Clark was able to identify subgroups of students that were not performing as well as the school average and implemented strategies detailed in its *Title I School Improvement Plan* to close the achievement gap. The data showed that the subgroups that needed more attention were their black students and students eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch. Clark faculty members worked diligently to address the educational needs of those students, and data from the 2006 SAT-10 and Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) showed the progress students had made; on those tests there was little difference between the scores of students in the “black” and “free and reduced-priced lunch” subgroups and students in any other subgroup. In some instances, students in the “free/reduced lunch” subgroup outperformed students in the “paid lunch” group and black students outperformed non-black students.

High-performing schools often share similar characteristics. For example, teachers work collaboratively; there are numerous opportunities for professional development; and data drives instruction and further assessment. All of these characteristics are present at Clark, where teachers use a hands-on approach to address the learning needs of all students. Most importantly, the school’s faculty has high expectations, an approach that is paying off for teachers and students.

Teacher Knowledge Is Critical

Consistent with the Math Panel’s recommendation that teachers must know in detail the mathematical content they are responsible for teaching and its connections to other important mathematics, Clark aims to increase its teachers’ knowledge of math to positively influence student achievement. The district provides in-service training for teachers, and Clark’s Math Chair Boren encourages her teachers to be active in professional organizations. Recently some teachers took an online course on differentiating learning strategies and used the strategies to help students use their strengths to master concepts. Clark also sends some teachers to conferences sponsored by the [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics](#) (NCTM). Those teachers share what they learn with others at departmental meetings. Principal McWain explains that opportunities for professional development abound at Clark. “We are always on the cutting edge. We try to think outside the box. We incorporate this into the curriculum by giving students new techniques and strategies to succeed. The teachers work cooperatively together—including rewriting and enhancing the curriculum.”

Clark aims to increase their students’ knowledge with each grade level. A good example of early work with the foundations of algebra is apparent in fourth grade when students study fractions. The fourth grade goal is to expose students to equivalent fractions and basic operations with fractions of like denominators. Some of the activities in the classroom might include making fraction bars and grids, and the elementary teachers use different colors with the bars and grids to help students “see” the fractions.

In fifth grade classes, students use operations with like and unlike denominators. Teachers also expose students to canceling when multiplying fractions and putting fractions in lowest terms. Operations with mixed numbers also are introduced, and by the end of fifth grade, teachers expect students to be proficient

with operations with fractions of like denominators and to be able to find equivalent fractions. The sixth graders are expected to master these skills, in addition to changing fractions to decimals and then changing decimals to percents. In the “core plus” curriculum, teachers begin the process of teaching students to work with positive and negative fractions and mixed numbers early. In the seventh grade, students aim to master these skills.

Typical classrooms use a hands-on approach to help students understand key concepts. All of the teachers use games with fractions and white boards in the classroom to encourage students to be proficient. Sixth grade math teacher Angela Rocker said that her students enjoy “Fraction Face-Off,” in which a small group of students will be given a fraction problem and race to get the correct answer. The winner of the game will face a new group of challengers. Students use white boards to check for understanding. All of the students in the class are required to do a specific problem and hold up their answer on the boards. According to Boren, “This is a quick way to make sure that all students are focused and understand how to complete the problem. Our students enjoy using these boards!”

Parents also see the advantage of Clark’s approach to math. As one parent remarked, “My daughter doesn’t even realize she’s learning math. They integrate it throughout all the subjects and it’s important because we can use it at home in real situations, like sewing skirts for our theater group and determining the circumference of the waists without a pattern. They also have everything a parent needs for the tools to help their child and for the child to work and get whatever they want in life.”

Key Resources

- [No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon Schools Program](#)
- [OII Magnet Schools Assistance Program](#)
- [Magnet Schools of America](#)
- [National Mathematics Advisory Panel](#)

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings [announced](#) a new pilot program under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) aimed at helping states differentiate between underperforming schools in need of dramatic interventions and those that are closer to meeting the goals of *NCLB*. As part of the new pilot program, states that meet the [four eligibility criteria](#) may propose a differentiated accountability model. These eligibility criteria are based on the "bright line" principles of NCLB. (March 18)

During [testimony](#) before the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor hearing on "Ensuring the Availability of Federal Student Loans," Secretary Margaret Spellings launched a new brochure, Federal Aid First, a resource for students and families that encourages them to maximize more affordable Federal student aid options before pursuing other options. To access the brochure and additional information about federal student aid, please visit www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov (March 14)

Education Secretary Spellings [announced](#) the release of the final report of the [National Mathematics Advisory Panel](#), and the findings were passed unanimously at the panel's meeting at Longfellow Middle School in Falls Church, Va. The panel reviewed the best available scientific evidence to advance the teaching and learning of mathematics and stressed the importance of effort, algebra, and early math education. (March 13)

Secretary Spellings joined Intel Chairman Craig Barrett to honor [Intel Science Talent Search](#) (STS) finalists. STS is America’s oldest and most prestigious high school science competition. The top prize this year went to Shivani Sud of Durham, N.C, who developed a model that analyzed the specific "molecular signatures" of tumors from patients with Stage II colon cancer. She used this information to identify patients at higher risk for tumor recurrence and propose potentially effective drugs for treatment. (March 13)

Following a visit to Van Duyn Elementary School in Syracuse, N.Y., where Secretary Spellings [highlighted](#) progress toward NCLB goals in New York and across the nation, she joined Representative Jim Walsh (R-NY) and school officials at an education roundtable to discuss the state’s accountability plan, standards,

and assessments. She also discussed the new [tool](#) recently released by the Department known as Mapping New York's Educational Progress 2008. (March 10)

Continuing the dialogue on NCLB and priorities for 2008, Secretary Spellings [convened](#) an education roundtable at the West Virginia State Capitol Building with Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), First Lady of West Virginia Gayle Manchin, West Virginia State Superintendent Steve Paine, and state education leaders and policymakers. She also visited Saint Albans High School in Saint Albans, W.V., and delivered [remarks](#) recognizing the progress of the school's students under *NCLB*. (March 7)

Secretary Spellings continued her national tour to discuss *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in North Carolina, where she [addressed](#) the North Carolina State Board of Education in Raleigh and discussed how the federal government can support and facilitate further academic gains made by the state's students under the law. She also participated in a roundtable with educators and school administrators. (March 5)

Secretary Spellings delivered [remarks](#) at the Reading First State Directors Conference and declared that with the help of the Reading First program, there have been dramatic gains in student and school achievement. She called on Congress to restore funding for the program to \$1 billion, as requested in the President's fiscal year 2009 budget. (March 6)

The March edition of *Education News Parents Can Use* featured the work of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel and included a discussion about the Panel's final report and how its findings will lead to more effective math instruction in classrooms nationwide. The show also spotlighted what the Department and other key partners are doing to promote math and science literacy through the American Competitiveness Initiative and showcased the work of high-performing schools around the country that are excelling in math education and effectively implementing the Panel's recommendations. To find out more about the program, visit the [Education News Parents Can Use](#) Web site. The archived webcast of the show may be viewed online at <http://www.connectlive.com/events/ednews/>. (March 18)



Applications for the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship positions at the Department are due April 7, 2008. These positions offer highly motivated and innovative public school teachers the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and experience to the national dialogue on education. For more information go to the [Teacher Fellowship Web site](#).

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

The Full Service Community Schools (FSCS) Program is recruiting peer reviewers for its upcoming grant competition. This program encourages coordination of educational, developmental, family, health, and other services through partnerships between public elementary and secondary schools and community-based organizations and public or private entities. Grants are intended to provide comprehensive educational, social, and health services for students, families, and communities. To obtain additional information or to submit resumes, contact the program at FSCS@ed.gov, using the subject "Reviewer Information."

American History

Students at [Henry E. Lackey High School](#) in southern Maryland have developed one of the most comprehensive oral history projects of black life in the region. Students interviewed several of the region's oldest black residents and are creating an hour-long DVD that will be aired during Charles County's 350th anniversary celebration this summer. The project is one of several recent efforts to expand students' knowledge about the black population in Maryland's oldest counties. (March 6)

Elizabeth R. Varon, distinguished lecturer with the Organization of American Historians (OAH), writes in the [OAH Newsletter](#) about her experience visiting teachers who participate in the OII-funded [Teaching American History](#) (TAH) Program in Rockford, Ill. She notes, "The first thing that struck me was the dedication of the 60 or so teachers who were willing to give up their Saturdays... for a day of intensive collaboration." The Rockford Public School system is in its last year of a fiscal year 2004 TAH grant. (February 2008)

Arts Education

March is Arts in the Schools Month, and to bring attention to the importance of the arts in K-12, the American Association of School Administrators is putting the arts at “center stage” in its March edition of [The School Administrator](#). Among the journal edition’s features available to online readers are perspectives on the role of the arts in fostering innovation and the acquisition of skills needed in a knowledge-based economy, stories of schools and districts keeping the arts strong as part of leaving no child behind, and suggestions for policy leaders about the complete curriculum. (March 2008)

[The Art of Collaboration: Promising Practices for Integrating the Arts and School Reform](#) is a new research and policy brief from the Arts Education Partnership. The brief describes promising practices for building community partnerships that integrate the arts into urban education systems. The publication resulted from a roundtable discussion among the directors of eight demonstration sites that are participating in The Ford Foundation’s [Integrating the Arts and Education Reform Initiative](#). (March 24)

Findings from studies by neuroscientists and psychologists at seven universities are helping scientists understand how arts instruction might improve general thinking skills. [Learning, Arts, and the Brain](#), a Dana Consortium report on arts and cognition, does not provide definitive answers to the “arts-makes-you-smarter” question, but it does dispute the theory that students are either right- or left-brained learners. It also offers hints on how arts learning might relate to learning in other academic disciplines. (March 2008)

Charter Schools

[Synergy Charter Academy](#) in South Los Angeles was named Charter School of the Year at this year’s California Charter School Conference. Caprice Young, former president of the Los Angeles Unified School Board who is now chief executive of the California Charter Schools Association, said, “[Synergy Charter] should be credited with not only closing the achievement gap, but eliminating it.” The school was the highest-performing school in South Los Angeles in 2006 and 2007, and was named a National Charter School of the Year last year by the [Center for Education Reform](#). (March 3)

Students in South Carolina might be interested in a new virtual charter school that will open this fall. [South Carolina Connections Academy](#) will be the state’s first virtual charter school, and will enroll 500 students in its online K-12 program. Connections Academy, a company that runs schools enrolling 10,000 students in 14 other states, will manage the new school. (March 3)

The Center for Education Reform (CER), a Washington-based education reform advocacy group, recently [ranked](#) each state based on the strength of its charter school laws and found significant differences among the states. For example, Minnesota had the strongest charter laws in the country, while Mississippi had the weakest. Each state received a letter grade, “A” through “F,” based on criteria developed by CER. (Feb. 13)

As charter schools across the nation gear up for lotteries, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is offering a free ["Charter School Lottery Day Tool Kit."](#) Lottery days can present opportunities to: draw media attention to the demand for quality charters; create awareness among families of school choice, and create an opportunity for charters to communicate their success. Charter school staff can use the tool kit to create their own lottery day event. Materials on preparation, messaging, recruitment, media outreach, timelines, and costs are included. (February 2008)

Closing the Achievement Gap

Each year since the 2005 National Education Summit and the founding of the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network, Achieve has issued an annual report based on a 50-state survey of efforts to close the “expectations gap” between high school requirements and the demands of colleges and employers.

[Closing the Expectations Gap 2008](#) reveals that while a majority of states have made closing the expectations gap a priority, some states have moved much more aggressively than others. (February 2008)

Education Reform

PublicSchoolInsights.org is a new online resource aimed at building a sense of community among individuals who are working at the local level to strengthen their public schools. The site also features a variety of success stories from U.S. schools and districts that have adopted effective strategies for addressing key challenges in education. (March 2008)

Mathematics and Science

Nearly three out of five U.S. teens (59 percent) do not believe their high school is preparing them adequately for careers in technology or engineering, according to the [2008 Lemelson-MIT Invention Index](#), an annual survey that gauges Americans' attitudes toward invention and innovation. The good news is that 72 percent believe technological inventions or innovations can solve some of the world's most pressing problems, such as global warming and water pollution. Sixty-four percent of those surveyed are confident that they could invent the solutions. (Jan. 16)

Raising Student Achievement

Fifty-nine exemplary middle schools across the country have been [named](#) "Schools to Watch" as part of a recognition program developed by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. Each school was selected by state leaders for its academic excellence, responsiveness to the needs and interests of young learners, and commitment to helping all students achieve to high levels. In addition, each school has made a commitment to assessment and accountability to bring about continuous improvement, teachers who work collaboratively, and strong leadership. (March 14)

A nonprofit organization has launched a national campaign called "[Ready by 21](#)" that will work to help youth become better prepared for college, work, and life. Run by the Forum for Youth Investment, the initiative is intended to help state and local leaders improve education and social services during the first two decades of children's lives. The initiative urges leaders to work together on interrelated problems such as drug use, teenage pregnancy, and school dropouts. (March 2008)

Legislation under consideration in Maryland and many other states is intended to ease the transition for students whose parents serve in the military. These students change schools an average of six to nine times between kindergarten and 12th grade. A proposed [multi-state compact](#) supported by the Pentagon is intended to reduce the complications involved with these school transfers. (March 2008)

California students who fail to earn a high school diploma before they turn 20 years old cost the state \$46.4 billion over the course of their lives. Each year, about 120,000 students in the state drop out. The high cost associated with these dropouts is related to greater rates of unemployment, crime, and dependence upon welfare and state-funded medical care, as well as lost tax-revenues, according to a report from the [California Dropout Research Project](#). (February 2008)

Teacher Quality and Development

Attrition would be lessened if schools offered new teachers more support and guidance, according to an Alliance for Excellent Education [issue brief](#). The report found that teachers who graduated from very selective colleges, or who had high SAT scores, were more likely to leave the teaching profession before retirement or transfer to higher-performing schools. (February 2008)

Innovations in the News

Charter Schools

A mayoral change in Indianapolis, the only city nationwide in which the mayor's office authorizes charter schools, has not changed support for that city's 17 charter schools. The new mayor, Greg Ballard, voiced strong support for the charter movement created by his predecessor, Bart Peterson, at a recent conference of charter school leaders. The charter schools, according to Mayor Ballard, are in no danger, and they offer an important choice for parents and a way to improve education in the city. [More— [Indianapolis Star](#)] (Feb. 22)

The proposition that teacher quality is a more important variable than class size and other factors will be put to the test next school year, when the Equity Project, a new charter middle school in New York City, is slated to open. Its creator and first principal, Zeke Vanderhoek, plans to pay the school's expected teachers \$125,000 annually, plus potential bonuses based on school-wide achievement. Because that is nearly twice as much as the average teacher in the city earns, the experiment will no doubt garner more than just local attention. For their high salaries, Equity Project teachers will work a longer day and year and will accept some duties that fall to administrators in other schools. [More— [The New York Times](#)] (March 7) (*free registration required*)

Mathematics and Science

Two members of the [USA Today's 2007 All-USA Teacher Team](#) find ways to inspire their high school students in economics and mathematics. An economics teacher at the California Academy of Math and Science, where many students are the children of Asian or Hispanic immigrants, taps into students' creativity. The teacher uses techniques such as student playwriting to illustrate economic principles to semester-long assignments in which students develop a proposed start-up company. In College Park, Ga., at Benjamin Banneker High School, 63 percent of students are eligible for free- or reduced-priced meals, and many students already have children of their own or wear ankle bracelets that allow law enforcement officials to monitor their movements. It is at this school that one teacher has inspired his students to learn advanced mathematics and use education as a tool to improve their lives. The school's pass rate on the state graduation exam has jumped from 85 percent to 95 percent between 2005 and 2006. [More—[USA Today](#)] (Feb. 25) and [[USA Today](#)] (March 3)

In search of answers to the question of why students in Scandinavia scored high on the latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a U.S. delegation led by the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) toured Finland, Sweden, and Denmark, where educators cited "autonomy, project-based learning, and nationwide broadband Internet access as keys to their success." [More—[ESchool News](#)] (March 3)

Achievement in mathematics and science, rather than more general barometers of education attainments, are critical to the international economic performance of the U.S., according to a new study by professors at Stanford and the University of Munich. Reported in the spring issue of [Education Next](#), the research supports the conclusion that "if the U.S performed on par with the world's leaders in science and math, it would add about two-thirds of a percentage point to the gross domestic product. [More— [Wall Street Journal](#)] (March 3)

Interest in an international robotics competition among Minneapolis schools and the community's technology sector has flourished over the past two years, from two student teams competing in 2006 to 54 teams this year. For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) is a catalyst for both public and private investments in science and technology programs in high schools, not only in Minneapolis, but across the state of Minnesota. Driving the investment among such private-sector contributors as Medtronic, Boston Scientific, and the 3M Foundation is a desire to encourage future engineers. The Minnesota Department of Education has increased its funding for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) initiatives statewide as well, providing more than \$4 million to school districts between 2006 and 2008. [More— [Minneapolis Star-Tribune](#)] (March 4)

Raising Student Achievement

An analysis of recently released College Board data on Advanced Placement tests by *Education Week* found that while more students are taking the exams, the “percentage of exams that received [the passing score of at least] a three...has slipped from about 60 percent to 57 percent.” College Board spokesperson Jennifer Topiel, while noting that test scores often decline with increases in the number of test takers, observed, “Students should not be placed into AP classes without better preparation.” The analysis also revealed a widening gap over the past four years between black and white students earning at least a three on the exams. [More— [Education Week](#)] (Feb. 14) (*paid subscription required*)

First-year results of a federally supported study of two reading interventions for struggling adolescent readers indicate increases in proficiency, but not enough to get students to grade level in a single year. Research firm MDRC conducted the study of the Reading Apprenticeship Academic Literacy and Xtreme Reading programs, with support from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Science. It is the first of three reports under the Enhanced Reading Opportunities Study. Researchers plan to follow the 9th grade students involved in the two interventions through 11th grade. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Feb. 14) (*paid subscription required*)

A majority of American parents believe that their children have the “right amount” of homework, according to the findings of a poll commissioned by MetLife. Parents, teachers, and students were surveyed concerning time spent on homework as well as the perceived value of it. Clear majorities of both students (77 percent) and teachers (80 percent) said homework is important or very important. In addition, three quarters of the more than 2,000 K-12 students surveyed reported that they had adequate time to complete their assignments. [More— [Education Week](#)] (Feb. 15) (*paid subscription required*)

More than 10,000 preschool-aged youngsters in Dallas are expected to benefit from a city-sponsored early reading preparation program that is modeled on Ready to Read. With support from an \$8 million grant from the Wallace Foundation, the Dallas Public Library will manage the “Every Child Ready to Read @ Dallas” program, which will focus on parents, teachers, day-care providers, and others in the city who work with young children. In announcing the new program, Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert said, “Everything revolves around reading,” and indicated the city’s annual costs for the new program will be less than \$600,000, with the Wallace Foundation grant helping for the next three years. [More— [The Dallas Morning News](#)] (Feb. 22)

Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believe that physical education may be linked to academic achievement. This belief is based on a national study of students’ reading and mathematics test scores and the students’ degree of involvement in physical education between kindergarten and fifth grade. According to the CDC researchers, the connection was most notable for girls receiving the highest levels of physical education (more than 70 minutes per week), who scored consistently higher on the tests than those who received less than 35 minutes a week in physical education. The study is available online in the *Journal of American Public Health*. [More—[USA Today](#)] (March 5)

School Improvement

Standards for school leaders, originally drafted in the mid-1990s and used or adapted by more than 40 states, have been revisited and revised by a panel of experts convened by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration and managed by the Council of Chief State School Officers. The revised Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, which guide the preparation, licensure and evaluation of principals and superintendents, were approved last December. The two-year revision process was supported by the Wallace Foundation, which made the investment, according to its director of education programs, because “there’s a lot more known now from the research in terms of understanding what leaders do to impact teaching and learning...” [More—[Education Week](#)] (Feb. 27) (*paid subscription required*)

A \$5 million grant from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation will enable Dallas educators to have instant access to students’ academic records from preschool through high school graduation. The plans for an eventual mega-database of student academic information and other related data will begin with a planned

“data warehouse” pilot phase next school year. The new system will provide a “one-stop shop” for local educators and help the Dallas Independent School District with its goal of spotting weaknesses in academic performance under its Dallas Achieves reform plan. [More— [The Dallas Morning News](#)] (Feb. 27)

Houston will have its first public Montessori middle school thanks to the perseverance of the parents of Wilson Elementary, an elementary school currently based on the instructional approach pioneered by Maria Montessori more than a century ago. Parents raised more than \$345,000 over five years to expand the current school to grades seven and eight. The 25 seats in the school’s inaugural seventh grade will be open to students from several public and private Montessori elementary schools in the area. [More— [The Houston Chronicle](#)] (Feb. 27)

Pay-for-performance initiatives continue to attract the attention of local and national press. The National Center on Performance Incentives released its study of the Texas Educator Excellence Grant program, the largest merit-pay plan in the nation. Texas education department officials were reportedly pleased with the first year’s results and the study’s findings. An examination of The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), launched six years ago by the Milken Foundation and with 180 participating schools nationwide produced uneven results, with TAP elementary schools doing better than comparison schools in test-score gains, but those at the middle and high school levels lagging behind their non-TAP counterparts. [More— [The Dallas Morning News](#)] (Feb. 29) [[Education Week](#)] (March 3) (*paid subscription required*)

For more than two decades, Project STAR, a study of class size in Tennessee, has informed thinking about the policy issue of class-size reduction. Now, a Northwestern University professor’s review of the study’s data is questioning whether there is evidence that reducing class size reduces achievement gaps between groups of students. According to the study’s author, the longitudinal data provides weak or no evidence that lower-performing students benefited more than others from small classes. [More— [The Washington Post](#)] (March 10) (*free registration required*) and [[Education Week](#)] (Feb. 21) (*paid subscription required*)

Teacher Quality and Development

Can a single set of standards for accrediting teacher-education institutions be developed? This is the question that a new task force of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) will seek to answer this spring. Task force members include representatives of the two national accrediting entities – the longstanding National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the relatively new Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). While the two entities take very different approaches to granting their seals of approval, AACTE’s board of directors is hopeful that the task force can agree on a single set of standards. [More— [Education Week](#)] (Feb. 21) (*paid subscription required*)

The burgeoning field of online learning has launched its first voluntary national standards that will help policymakers and practitioners judge the credibility and worthiness of virtual teaching and online course work. Released last month by the [North American Council for Online Learning](#), the standards address such topics as teacher prerequisites and licensure, technology skills, and subject matter proficiency, as well as instructional issues like online interaction, intellectual property rights, and learning assessments and program evaluations. [More— [Education Week](#)] (Feb. 29) (*paid subscription required*)

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