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Purpose

The purposes of the U.S. Department of Education's on-line newsletter, *The Innovator*, are: to promote innovative practices in education; offer features on promising programs and practices; provide information on innovative research, schools, policies and trends; and, keep readers informed of key U.S. Department of Education 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 Innovator's* research, writing and production.

Morgan S. Brown, Assistant Deputy Secretary, OII, and Lauren Maddox, Assistant Secretary, OCO, sponsor *The Innovator*, which is published monthly and distributed through [EDPUBS](#).

Feature

Giving Parents Options: Strategies for Informing Parents and Implementing Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services Under *No Child Left Behind*

Over the past several years, options available to parents on how to best educate their children have significantly increased, thanks to provisions in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). The law requires school districts to provide eligible students attending Title I schools identified for improvement with the opportunity to obtain free tutoring and academic enrichment, known as supplemental educational services (SES), or the choice to attend another public school in their district.

What are these options and how are districts implementing and notifying parents about them? What are promising strategies for reaching the most eligible families and implementing quality public school choice and SES programs? All good questions—questions to which U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings wanted answers as well. That is why, in December 2006, she launched an outreach project to learn more about how the public school choice and supplemental educational services provisions of the *No Child Left Behind* law are working. A new handbook, [Giving Parents Options: Strategies for Informing Parents and Implementing Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services Under No Child Left Behind](#), offers answers to these questions and others and provides an easy-to-follow approach that can help states, districts, and schools as they aim to give students access to high-quality learning opportunities.



Department officials undertook the [outreach project](#) by touring the country and speaking to state and district officials in 14 school districts, as well as to parents, SES providers, and community groups. What Department officials found when meeting with individuals involved in public school choice and SES was that these options can have a major impact on children and families, and that busy, low-income parents appreciated being empowered with a range of options and opportunities to choose the best educational environment for their child's future success and growth. Parents view the opportunity to make an informed choice—from the option of transferring to another school to selection of a tutoring service or provider—as giving them a powerful voice that previously they did not have. Additionally, a recent [study](#) of school districts conducted for the U.S. Department of Education by the RAND Corporation confirmed that these options may be paying off. The study found that students receiving SES experienced significant gains in achievement. And there is evidence that effects may be cumulative; students participating for multiple years experienced gains twice as large as those of students participating for one year.

Making parents aware of their options continues to be a fundamental issue for districts implementing public school choice and SES. According to Kelly Rhoads, Program Analyst in the Office of Innovation and Improvement and one of the primary investigators on the project, districts need and welcome ideas and assistance for improving implementation of SES and public school choice, for providing information about the services, and for communicating options to parents. "They are trying to come to terms with how to provide the programs and services," he said. Rhoads found that, among the districts visited during the tour, districts' approaches to parent outreach and notification varied in quality and quantity, but he also heard directly from parents that when they knew about options and had enough information to make choices, they took advantage of them.

The handbook is a result of information learned from the outreach project, as well as from discussions among local and State administrators of SES and public school choice, SES providers, parents, technical assistance providers, and U.S. Department of Education officials during a national [summit](#) on public school choice and SES held in Washington, D.C. in June 2007. It features ideas and effective practices from a number of districts experienced in providing robust public school choice programs and SES services. Also, it is intended to serve as a tool to help states and districts learn more and think strategically and creatively about how they may better serve parents through the public school choice and SES options in the law.

An Effective Parent Notice and Beyond

A district's public school choice and SES parent notification strategy should take into account not only compliance with the law, but also the unique aspects of a district's schools and communities, such as parents' familiarity with the choice options, their involvement in schools, and their responsiveness to district communications. Good communication between districts and parents is essential, and a district should use language that is easily understood by parents with differing education levels and language backgrounds. Districts should avoid sending

parent notification letters that are overwhelming in size and content, and should be mindful of crafting user-friendly notices that truly reach parents' hands.

In addition to sending home a parent notice, districts should consider other ways to get the word out about public school choice and SES options. According to the handbook, a key point is that "a letter is not always enough."

Linda Young, Grants Coordinator in the Little Rock, Arkansas school district, enumerated the various ways her district publicizes the choices available to parents. "Parents are provided print materials at school sites, at registration, open houses, PTA meetings and in backpack fliers. Some other ways we reach parents include mailings to each home, distribution at each school office and the district's SES office, the SES Showcase (a provider fair for parents where providers can showcase their services), the Title I Parent Involvement Parent Institute and selected community-based sites, our Web site, and the cable access channel." In Little Rock, the SES brochure contains a simple explanation of SES, a list of participating schools, three simple steps for SES enrollment, and questions that families should ask potential SES providers. Additionally, there is information on each provider, such as their tutoring content areas, grade levels served, total number of hours, where services are provided, contact information, teacher qualification, evidence of effectiveness, and whether they can accommodate English Language Learners or students with disabilities.

In the Baltimore City, Maryland schools, Fred Cusimano, Director of Federal Grants and Title I, described the various ways the district informs parents about their SES options. "Our SES programs usually start in November. Parents can make their choice. We send out letters. We have an SES provider catalog that describes tutoring services. We have a FAQ pamphlet. Everything is provided in English and Spanish. We produced a DVD for parents. Schools use the DVD at parent nights and at parent fairs. This is how we get parents to make an informed choice. Last year, we enrolled nearly 9,000 students."

In Miami-Dade schools, according to Rafael Urrutia, Accountability Officer for the district, in addition to all of the so-called traditional outreach, after four years he has learned to find unique ways to get the word out. "I put on my marketing hat. I use the out-of-the-box methods, and it's paying off. I'm flabbergasted how quickly we've gotten better. Last year I used an automated phone message from a member of the Heat (Miami's professional basketball team) encouraging kids to take advantage of free tutoring. I got so many calls to sign up that this year, I didn't need to do it again." Miami-Dade will serve close to 20,000 students this year.

Positive Parental Response

The feedback from parents of students who have received SES services has been positive. "I only received one complaint," said Dr. Mary (known as "BB") LaMartina, principal of Belmont Elementary in Baltimore City. "One parent came to me to ask why can't they take my child?" she said. This child did not meet the eligibility criteria. She continued, "Parents tell me that their child's reading is better and it sounds better when she reads. She knows her math facts better. These are the kinds of comments we regularly hear." According to Little Rock's Young, "We have received only positive feedback from parents. Some parents have written thank you notes, sent thank you emails or called to say thanks. With a few exceptions, parents comment on the positive impact the tutoring has had on their students."

In Baltimore City, one of the problems they saw—lack of regular attendance at SES programs—is being addressed through a structured incentive program. Though not all districts or states may offer incentives, due to state statutes limiting them, incentives have been used as a means of keeping kids motivated to attend and achieve. According to Baltimore's Cusimano, attendance has increased from about 65 percent to about 85 percent as students benefit from incentives such as attendance certificates, pizza parties, ice cream socials, even toys and DVD players. In Baltimore City, Cusimano said that most parents tend to choose tutoring services, which are mainly provided at the home school, as opposed to transferring to another school.

Nicole Johnson, a mother of three children who attend Baltimore's Belmont Elementary, has greatly benefited from the SES tutoring received on site at the school. This year, two of her children will continue to stay after school to receive tutoring, but her fifth grader may take advantage of a new online tutoring program offered by an SES provider that allows him to do the work at home. "I heard that the online program is for only one child per household. My 5th grader will do the online one this year. They have to complete one level of math before they can move on to the next level. The company provides the computer for your home and they hook it up. If your student completes everything, you keep the computer."

Implementing SES and NCLB Choice

Putting public school choice and SES into practice is challenging, and school districts have used different strategies. In Hillsborough County, Florida, the delivery of SES and choice would not be possible without systems and staff to support it, according to Jeff Eakins, Director of Federal Programs (see chart 1 below). "With 40 providers and an \$8.5 million budget you have to build an infrastructure. We use technology on the management side. Our management system captures student-learning plans, the data for those plans, attendance records that drive providers' invoices, assessment data—all of that is in our system. We train our providers and in the long run it couldn't be done any other way. Paper and pencil wouldn't work. On the human resources side we have a supervisor of NCLB choice who has a staff that works with the schools. Each school site also has a facilitator (usually a teacher who receives supplemental pay) who works part-time in a coordination and communication role. The key to our success is communication, and it works by having that

Ideas for School Choice	Ideas for Supplemental Educational Services
Plan Ahead	Encourage School-level Involvement
Determine School Transfer Options	Develop Student Learning Plans Effectively
Create a School Choice Office	Facilitate Transportation
Provide & Coordinate Transportation Effectively	Set Uniform Implementation Policies
Provide Student Assistance at New Schools	Combat Attrition & Low Attendance
Obtain Support from State Education Agencies	Encourage communication between districts, schools and providers
	Obtain Support from State Education Agencies

More Choices for Parents

communication come down to the smallest level, down to the school site," he said.

As school districts and states increasingly look at how to implement SES and public school choice, they are finding strategies to improve ways they are serving children. Among them are: creating a school choice office, implementing public school choice earlier for students in schools that will automatically continue to be in their identified improvement status in the coming school year, providing transportation effectively, helping students adjust to new schools, and developing positive working relationships among districts, schools, and the SES providers who serve their students.

Strengthening Choice and SES

The Department will aim to strengthen choice and SES as part of its [plan](#) to reauthorize *No Child Left Behind*. According to the Department's publication, "[Building On Results: A Blueprint for Strengthening the No Child Left Behind Act](#)," states should be given flexibilities and new tools to restructure chronically underperforming schools, and families should be given more options. Proposed changes would also offer more intensive tutoring to help children catch up and keep pace. Parents are driving the interest in public school choice and SES because with more options comes the ability to meet the needs of more students.

Key Resources

- [U.S. Department of Education SES Web site page](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Choice Web site page](#)
- [Buildingchoice.org](#)
- [The Center on Innovation and Improvement](#)
- [State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act: Volume I—Title I School Choice, Supplemental Educational Services, and Student Achievement](#)
- [Innovations in Education Book Series](#)

Disclaimer

The Education Innovator and Web site contain links to other Web sites and news articles. We believe these links provide relevant information as part of the continuing discussion of education improvement. These links represent just a few examples of the numerous education innovation reference materials currently available to the public. Some of the news items may require both paid and unpaid subscriptions. The opinions expressed in any of these articles or web pages do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Office of Innovation and Improvement or the U.S. Department of Education. The inclusion of resources should not be construed or interpreted as an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any private organization or business listed herein.

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What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and U.S. Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman visited T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Va., to tour the school's new energy efficient campus and classrooms. The Secretaries underscored the need for more energy efficiency in our nation's schools and echoed President Bush's call for increased rigor in our nation's schools under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). (Oct. 10)

President Bush and Secretary Spellings spoke with civil rights leaders and advocates for students of color and economically disadvantaged children about closing the achievement gap and the need to reauthorize the *No Child Left Behind* Act. (Oct. 9)

Education Secretary Margaret Spellings named 287 public and private schools as 2007 *No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools*. The award, one of the most prestigious education awards in the country, honors schools that are helping students achieve at the very highest levels and for making significant progress in closing the achievement gap. (Oct. 2)

Secretary Spellings announced the award of \$100 million in Magnet School grants to 41 school districts in 17 states. The awards, which range in size from \$1 million to more than \$3 million, are part of the OII's Office of Parental Options and Information and help school districts create more school choices for parents, bring diverse groups of children together, and foster innovative educational programs. (Sept. 27)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

During Secretary Spellings' back-to-school bus tour through Indianapolis, Ind., she announced the availability of two new guides in the Innovations in Education series, produced under the auspices of OII: *Supporting Charter School Excellence Through Quality Authorizing* and *K-8 Charter Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap*. Mayor Bart Peterson of Indianapolis, whose office is featured in the charter authorizers' guide, joined her for the announcement. (Sept. 21)

Two of the charter schools featured in OII's Innovations in Education series are showcased in a new Department of Education NCLB "Success Story" video. In addition to viewing and downloading both charter school booklets, visitors to the Department's Web site can see firsthand how the Cesar Chavez Academy and the Media and Technology Charter High School (MATCH) are closing the achievement gap. [\[View video\]](#)

American History

The War is a new documentary film series on World War II currently being shown on PBS stations. Each episode promotes the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress, asking people to get involved and interview World War II veterans while there is still time. Millville Public Schools in New Jersey, a Teaching American History grantee, was one of the first districts in the country to get involved with the Veterans History Project and continues to introduce students to the powerful stories of wartime service. (Oct. 25)

Theresa Bartsch, a fifth-grade teacher at Maud E. Johnson Elementary School in the Rockford Public School District, was chosen as this year's Illinois History Teacher of the Year. Sponsored by the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History, the award recognizes an outstanding teacher in each state who best meets their criteria for classroom excellence in history education. Each state winner then becomes a finalist for the National History Teacher of the Year designation. Bartsch has benefited from programming made possible through a Teaching American History grant from OII. (Sept. 2007)

Arts Education

Students in Miami Dade County, Fla., many of whom attend schools that are the beneficiaries of Voluntary Public School Choice and Magnet Schools Assistance grants from OII, were recently honored by having their artwork and creative writing exhibited in the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. These students are regional award winners of the 2007 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. National award-winning Scholastic Art Awards winners were also honored with a yearlong exhibit at the opening ceremony on October 3. Andrea Peterson, 2007 National Teacher of the Year, was the featured speaker at the ceremony. (Oct. 2007)

The Arts Education Partnership released *Arts Integration Frameworks, Research and Practice: A Literature Review* by Gail Burnaford, Ph.D., with Sally Brown, James Doherty, and H. James McLaughlin. It covers what has been written in the field between 1995 and 2007, in the U.S. and abroad, and includes a historical overview, definitions, and theoretical frameworks for arts integration, research and evaluation studies as well as methods and practices for each of the art forms. Copies are available for purchase or can be downloaded free in PDF format. (Oct. 2007)

Charter Schools

The National Resource Center on Charter School Finance and Governance has launched a new [Web site](#) designed to disseminate information and technical assistance to charter leaders. Resources, including guides to state policy in charter school finance and governance and a catalog of federal funding sources for charter school operations and facilities, are forthcoming. The project is a collaborative effort among the Center on Educational Governance, the Finance Project, and WestEd. (Oct. 25)

Two studies released by the [National Alliance for Public Charter Schools](#) confirm that the charter school movement is growing and producing even stronger results. The second annual "[Charter Market Share](#)" report shows 29 communities are part of the "Top Ten" list of communities with at least ten percent of public school students in public charter schools—with New Orleans leading the list with 57 percent of its students enrolled in charter schools. Another report, "[Charter School Achievement: What We Know](#)" reviews 70 comparative analyses, including 12 new studies published in the last year, by reputable researchers, showing that public charter schools are "generating strong growth in student achievement, in many cases outperforming that of traditional schools." (October 2007)

A [report](#) from Education Sector, *A Sum Greater Than the Parts: What States Can Teach Each Other About Charter Schooling*, examines how the charter school movement is maturing. The report highlights the importance of high quality charter school authorizers and the problems that authorizers face, and analyzes issues such as funding, dealing with data, and charter school caps. (September 2007)

According to a new [report](#) by the [Center for Education Reform](#), there has been an eight percent increase in the number of charter schools since last year. Approximately 347 new charter schools opened in the 2007-2008 academic year. Currently, 4,147 charter schools are serving 1.2 million students across the country. The report found that 560 charter schools have closed since 1992. (September 2007)

Parental Involvement

Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman recently [declared](#) October "Nebraska Parent Involvement Month." He issued a proclamation and recognized a group of Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) parents who are part of the school community council at Everett Elementary in Lincoln. The OII-produced *Innovations in Education* guide, *Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons from Five Parental Information and Resource Centers*, now [online](#) and available from [EdPubs](#), provides more information about successful PIRCs. (Oct. 3)

Raising Student Achievement

A new organization, the National Center on Time & Learning, is up and running. The organization will provide research, advocacy, and technical assistance to increase academic and enrichment opportunities for students. The center will be co-chaired by Paul Reville, the president of the [Rennie Center](#) and director of the Education Policy and Management Program at Harvard University, and Chris Gabrieli, an entrepreneur and venture capitalist. The [Broad Education Foundation](#), the [Nellie Mae Education Foundation](#), and the [William and Flora Hewlett Foundation](#) are funding it. (Oct. 25)

A new Thomas B. Fordham Foundation [study](#) examines the difficulty level of state tests in 26 states and finds that mathematics tests are generally harder to pass than reading tests, and that students in their respective grades find that most middle school tests are more difficult to pass than elementary school tests. (Oct. 4)

Each year, the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) releases education data on its 30 member countries in the form of [Education at a Glance](#). The 2007 report examines attendance and achievement, funding, conditions for pupils and teachers, and the state of "lifelong learning." (Sept. 2007)

Reading

The [Presidential Award for Reading and Technology](#) from the [International Reading Association](#) honors educators in grades K-12 who are making an outstanding and innovative contribution to the use of technology in reading education. There will be one grand-prize winner, seven U.S. regional winners, one Canadian honoree, and one international honoree. All entrants must be educators who work directly with students for all or part of their working day. The application deadline is Nov. 15. (Oct. 25)

Research Opportunities

[The Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#) is launching a new grant program called [Fordham Scholars](#) that aims to fund junior researchers working on key issues in American K-12 education. Each year, the Fordham Scholars program will announce a theme and solicit applicants for research grants ranging in value from \$15,000 to \$25,000. This year's theme is "the courts and education." (Oct. 2007)

School Leadership

[Teach For America](#) (TFA), a national teacher corps of recent college graduates who commit to teach in under-resourced urban and rural schools, is making plans to have more than 800 alumni leading their own schools or districts by 2010. This new push is part of a school leadership initiative. By strengthening existing partnerships with other entrepreneurial groups, such as New Leaders for New Schools, TFA aims to create a clearer and more seamless path toward becoming an administrator. (Oct. 25)

The [American Architectural Foundation](#) (AAF) and [KnowledgeWorks Foundation](#) have announced that Rosa Parks School at New Columbia Community Campus in Portland, Ore., is the [winner](#) of this year's Richard Riley Award for Schools as Centers of Community. The school will receive a \$10,000 award from AAF and KnowledgeWorks Foundation that will be presented by former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley at an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., in November. (Sept. 27)

Ann Lieberman and Linda Friedrich, two of the directors of the [National Writing Project](#), an OII grantee, co-authored an article on teachers as leaders that was published in a recent issue of [Educational Leadership](#). (September 2007)

Teacher Quality and Development

[The Milken Family Foundation](#) has begun its 21st year organizing surprise notification ceremonies across the country for recipients of its [Milken Educator Awards](#). The award, which provides public recognition and an unrestricted financial award of \$25,000 to teachers, principals, and specialists who are furthering excellence in education, alternates each year between elementary and secondary educators. (Oct. 8)

[Teach For America](#) (TFA) is [launching](#) a new Teach For All organization that will support entrepreneurs in other countries who are pursuing the development of the TFA model locally. These local organizations will tap their countries' top recent college graduates to teach in underprivileged communities. Teach For All was created in partnership with Teach First, an adaptation of TFA in the U.K., and with support from the [Michael & Susan Dell Foundation](#) and the Amy and Larry Robbins Foundation. (Sept. 27)

Technology

The State of North Carolina launched a [Web site](#) this month that will allow high school students to participate in online college classes with their teachers there to help. The program allows students to earn their high school diploma and an associate degree in five years. (Oct. 5)

A lack of understanding regarding copyright law is making some educators reluctant to incorporate videos, images and other media in classrooms, according to a new [report](#) by the Center for Social Media at American University. Media-literacy experts contend that, generally, use of such materials is given wide latitude in the education arena. (September 2007)

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Charter Schools

Students at the Mastery Charter Schools' Shoemaker campus in West Philadelphia are part of an impressive transformation of the former Shoemaker Middle School from a violence-plagued, low-performing institution into a model charter school. From more than a dozen recorded assaults on students and less than a third of Shoemaker's eighth-graders passing the state math exam in 2005-06, altercations involving students decreased by almost two-thirds and eighth graders passing the math exam more than doubled in 2006-07. Mastery is using a \$2.65 million grant from NewSchools Venture Fund to expand its charter school efforts in Philadelphia and the success at Shoemaker prompted an anonymous \$1 million donation for start-up costs of another Mastery campus. [More—The [Philadelphia Inquirer](#)] (Oct. 7)

Assistant Deputy Secretary Morgan Brown visited Cesar Chavez Academy in Pueblo, Colo., to celebrate the release of the department's *Innovations in Education* guide, [K-8 Charter Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap](#). The booklet was featured in the September *Innovator*. [More—[Pueblo Chieftain](#)] (Oct. 3)

Education Reform

According to a report in *Education Week*, NCLB will require science tests this school year, and the requirement is expected to increase attention to the subject. Schools nationwide may have cut back on class time devoted to science in an effort to raise reading and math scores required by the law. But the law requires that, beginning this year, states must "test students once a year in science within three grade spans: 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12." Science test scores must be reported to the federal government, and "states can voluntarily use science test scores as part of determining whether their schools make AYP by selecting science exams as the 'other academic indicator' for judging elementary and middle schools, alongside reading and math." [More—[Education Week](#)] (Oct. 10) (*paid subscription required*)

Inspired by a series of reports from the National Research Council from 2001 to 2003, the Strategic Education Research Partnership (SERP) is focusing on solving practical problems of school districts with the help of higher-education researchers. While not yet realizing its "grand vision" of raising up to \$700 million for an extended effort of large-scale, long-term practitioner-researchers collaborations, SERP is active in several cities including Boston, San Francisco, and Evanston, Ill. Boston's challenge to the partnership of K-12 and higher education was to improve middle school literacy. Two Boston middle schools began testing interventions to address diagnosing difficulties prior to high school entrance and vocabulary deficits of middle school students. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Oct. 10) (*paid subscription required*)

The Washington, D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education is establishing a database to track the city's public school students from pre-kindergarten through college graduation. Officials acknowledge that poor records have made it difficult to compute accurate dropout and graduation rates, assess the curriculum, or determine how well students have been educated. Officials are using a \$5.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to establish the database. [More—[Washington Post](#)] (Oct. 9) (*free registration required*)

The public schools of the District of Columbia completed a shift to system-wide middle schools this fall as ninth graders at the remaining eight junior highs were assigned to high schools and the total number of middle schools rose to 21. "Ninth grade transition is a great way to introduce incoming ninth graders to the new graduation requirements as well as jumpstart their high school experience," said D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee. Freshman academies in all the D.C. high schools have been established to help with the ninth graders' transition. [More—[Washington Post](#)] (Sept. 23) (*free registration required*)

Raising Student Achievement

At the Christo Rey New York High School in East Harlem, NY, every student participates in a work study program to help pay the tuition. But the work is an integral part of the education philosophy of this private school and eleven others that began more than a decade ago in Chicago. With initial support from the foundation of venture capitalist B.J. Cassin and more recently the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Christo Rey schools serve about 3,000 students, most from low-income families, blending high academic expectations with entry-level internships in law firms, banks, and cultural organizations. From the class of 2006, a reported 96 percent of Christo Rey graduates enrolled in college. [More—[New York Times](#)] (Oct. 6) (*free registration required*)

A nascent effort to overcome the "culture of low expectations" in the Boston Public Schools has won favor with district leaders and is being expanded this year. It is called the "10 Boys" clubs because each of 44 pilot schools last year selected 10 boys at risk of failure and provided them with extra tutoring, group lunches, and outings with their principals. The goal? Help these students advance at least one level on the Massachusetts math and English exams. The results were promising, so much so that the rest of Boston's 144 schools are replicating the "club" this year and some schools are starting separate "10 Girls" clubs. [More—[The Boston Globe](#)] (Oct. 5)

Chicago's Science in the City initiative, now in its second year, involves hand-on opportunities to get students excited about the subject with the help of science carnivals, museum exhibits, workshops, and demonstrations both in and outside of schools. A robotics competition for Chicago high school students kicks off the two-week series of events in Daley Plaza. [More—[Chicago Tribune](#)] (Oct. 2)

Technology

In an effort to lower the dropout rate in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), a new campaign will rely heavily on popular Internet Web sites such as YouTube and MySpace, as well as radio spots aimed at vulnerable teens. The district has created a Web site designed to "highlight alternative ways of earning a diploma and describes the district's many continuation schools and community college programs." The nation's second-largest district, LAUSD, "has set a goal of reducing the district's dropout rate by 5 percent this school year," as state data show that more than one in four LAUSD high school students dropped out in 2006. [More—[Los Angeles Times](#)] (Oct. 12) (*free registration required*)

Portable digital players are being used at a school in Union City, N.J., to help bilingual students with limited English ability sharpen their vocabulary and grammar by singing along to popular songs. "It's an innovation," said Frank Belluscio, a spokesman for the New Jersey School Boards Association. [More—[New York Times](#)] (Oct. 9) (*free registration required*)

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