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Feature

Linking Learning to What Teachers Earn: The “Pay for Performance” Movement

Bustling children hurry to put away their toys and blocks as their kindergarten teacher at Edward Brooke Charter School calls them into a circle where they will read the daily digest. The digest has the day of the week, the month, and the first names of the children who will be in charge of a classroom activity. Most of the children can already read these simple words, but that was not the case last September when they entered kindergarten. Over the last eight months, the children have learned to master letters, words, and simple sentences, and have increased their reading proficiency so most of them score at the first grade level. The school recently received a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, and this classroom teacher received a performance pay bonus for her innovative efforts in the classroom and the subsequent increase in her students’ academic achievement.

Many employers offer bonuses and rewards for employees who do excellent work. And in many jobs, professionals who achieve important results are paid accordingly. But what about schools? Do they give their teachers a raise when their students’ test scores go up? Unfortunately, in most cases, the answer is no. The single-salary teacher schedule most commonly used today, while developed for logical reasons many decades ago, often ties pay increases to the teacher’s academic credentials, administrative and extra-curricular duties, and time on the job. Policymakers at all levels of government are calling for a re-examination of educator compensation to ensure that schools of the 21st century can recruit and retain the best teachers, especially for America’s most disadvantaged students.

The [Teacher Incentive Fund](#), in connection with other Department initiatives, is supporting new approaches to rewarding effective teaching. Begun in 2006, TIF is helping schools, districts, and states pilot new compensation strategies and measure the results of these innovations. The results of the pilot programs and subsequent evaluations will ultimately help to determine effective ways to serve America’s

students and to attract and retain the best teachers.

The Department has funded a wide range of TIF grantees including charter schools; rural schools, in such places as Alaska, New Mexico, and South Carolina; as well as large urban school systems in Dallas, New York City, Chicago, Miami, and Pittsburgh. Each takes a slightly different approach to finding the best ways to retain, develop, and reward educators. The Department provides technical assistance to the 34 current TIF grantees through the [Center for Education Compensation Reform \(CECR\)](#). Among other activities, CECR supports an online library of information, tools, and resources, which assists grantees with the conceptualization, design, implementation, and management of compensation reform programs.

Many of the current TIF grantees are implementing locally based models of the [Teacher Advancement Program \(TAP\)](#). TAP was created in 1999 by the Milken Family Foundation and is now managed and operated nationally by the [National Institute for Excellence in Teaching](#), a nonprofit organization. TAP recognizes that under the current pay system, the way for teachers to advance and increase their salaries is to become administrators--taking them out of the classroom, where they were making significant contributions to student learning. TAP encourages the compensation of teachers according to their roles and responsibilities, their performance in the classroom, and the performance of their students.

A Charter School Seeks to Sustain and Enhance Effectiveness with TIF

Just outside inner-city Boston, an effort is underway to bring students on par with the best performing public schools in the state. Edward W. Brooke Charter School provides an academically challenging environment for its 360 students currently enrolled in grades K-2 and 5-8. While Edward Brooke initially opened as a middle school with an inaugural class of 88 fifth-graders, school leaders made the decision to add an elementary component as a way of laying an even stronger academic foundation. August 2006 marked the beginning of the elementary program, with the enrollment of new kindergarten and first-grade students. The school's goal is to become a fully operational K-8 school by 2009. Sixty-seven percent of students receive free and reduced-price meals, and 65 percent are from some of Boston's poorest neighborhoods.

Edward Brooke's status as a charter school allows it the freedom to innovate, and among its innovations are new approaches to rewarding teacher performance, which the principal and staff believe are integral to the school's remarkable success with raising student achievement. Incoming students often test below grade level, but Edward Brooke has a goal of raising student achievement to match any publicly funded school in the state. The longer school day (from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.) and longer school year (190 days), strict discipline, rigorous academic expectations, and dedicated teachers provide students with the support they need to reach higher academic and personal standards. Literacy is at the heart of the instructional program. In the elementary school, students receive at least 3.5 hours of literacy instruction daily. At the middle school level, every day begins with 30 minutes of silent reading. All students have a 100-minute reading class and 50-minute writing class. And, a full-time reading specialist works with both individuals and small groups.

According to the 2007 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results, students who have been at the school since their fifth-grade year posted strong gains. Indeed, 91 percent of eighth graders scored proficient or advanced in reading, making Edward Brooke the ninth highest-ranked public school in Boston. Likewise, 75 percent of eighth graders scored proficient or advanced in math, putting Edward Brooke as the fifth-highest ranked publicly funded school in the city.

Brooke administrators realize that continued success requires the retention of effective teachers and the recruitment of additional high-quality teachers. "We are concerned with how we can keep our best teachers over time and keep them in teaching," said Jon Clark, executive director and middle school principal. "We talked and surveyed and found that a factor in keeping the best teachers is compensation. It is not the only factor, but it helps us create a culture that not only rewards seniority, but recognizes when someone has an impact on the bottom line – student achievement."



On a recent visit to Edward Brooke Charter School, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings watched kindergarten teacher Meghan Thornton and her students work out exciting problems with inch-cube blocks.

When U.S. Secretary of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings recently [visited](#) the school to celebrate National Charter School Week, she recognized Edward Brooke's outstanding academic gains and congratulated them on being the only individual charter school to be awarded a Teacher Incentive Fund grant. With the help of TIF, teachers are eligible for annual bonuses of as much as \$5,000, and principals' bonuses range from \$5,400 for the middle school to \$10,000 for the elementary school. The teacher incentive structure is tied to achievement gains at the individual and classroom level and teacher performance is based on observed classroom performance and demonstrated professional growth. Bonuses

for principals are based solely on school-wide achievement gains. “I like and deserve recognition if the kids are achieving,” said Clark, who received a principal bonus, “but I am not committed because of the bonus.... We all want the profession to be recognized for what it takes to be good – intellect, energy and stamina, and skills in leading. The performance bonus, as long as it is fair and transparent, is recognition for achievement in a very challenging profession.”

Because TIF has been operating at Edward Brooke for only a year, the school has baseline data, but no year-to-year comparison data. There is a plan to conduct a teacher survey in June of this year. At this point, there is anecdotal evidence that teachers believe the extra compensation makes them feel appreciated. Katie Stevens, a kindergarten teacher for two years at the school, thinks the model may not work at every school, but at Edward Brooke, she said, teachers are all given the same resources and the same professional development opportunities. “The school is functional on so many levels. Teachers work together, they share ideas...so we are not competing. We work hard for the students. I know the teachers here would work hard without the bonus, but it feels good to get something extra, just as we would if we worked at a for-profit company.”

Paying Teachers For Performance – State Led Efforts

Whether there is a need for states to set policy around incentive pay is still a matter of debate. Some scholars and researchers advocate for states to play an integral role. Currently, only a handful of states have experimented with performance pay. Dr. Dan Goldhaber, a research professor of public affairs at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education, has studied teacher labor markets and the role that teacher pay structure plays in teacher recruitment and retention. His research suggests that compensation is a key workforce policy that holds promise for education reform aimed at improving student performance. However, he asserts that districts often lack the political will to reallocate high-quality teachers to where they are most needed. “No matter how it's measured,” said Goldhaber in a recent [web chat](#) on teacher compensation, “it's the most needy students who tend to end up with the least experienced, least credentialed teachers...the state has a real role to play here because the politics of local districts make it hard to move good teachers from advantaged to disadvantaged schools.”

In 2006, South Carolina received a \$34 million TIF grant to start pilot incentive programs in six of the state's poorest districts. State education leaders hope the grant, based on the TAP model, will increase teacher recruitment and retention and will enable districts to reward principals and teachers who increase student learning and achievement. The TIF effort is underway in 43 schools, all located in high-poverty, rural districts where the percentages of students receiving free and reduced-price meals usually exceeds 80 percent. Results from the first year of implementation were quite promising as teachers and administrators in many of the participating schools qualified for performance bonuses. South Carolina's TIF project director and former teacher Jason Culbertson was optimistic about the first year results and said, “Many of those discussing performance pay do so from a theoretical basis—they have never run or participated in a performance-pay program. I've seen instruction improve, teacher turnover decrease, recruitment made easier in our highest-need areas, and most importantly, test scores rise.”

Future Growth of Performance Pay Plans

Federal policymakers, state officials, and district professionals are looking at educator compensation reform more closely than ever in an effort to use every way possible to attract new teachers and improve troubled schools. A long-standing program in Denver known as the [Professional Compensation System for Teachers](#) (ProComp), is a collaboration among the teachers' union, the district, and city government that has led to a program that includes nine ways for teachers to raise their earnings. New teacher hires are automatically enrolled in the new program, whereas veteran teachers have the option to stay with the old salary schedule. A pilot study of ProComp has found that students of teachers who enrolled on a trial basis performed better on standardized tests than other students. Brad Jupp, senior academic policy adviser to the superintendent of Denver Public Schools, and the coordinator of the ProComp transition team, says states need to develop the data-information systems that link teachers to their students' performance. The program has also been successful on another level—there has been an increase in the number of teachers applying to work in Denver's most troubled schools.

The [National Center on Performance Incentives](#) (NCPI) at Vanderbilt University is conducting scientific research on the effects of performance pay on education so that observers can know more about the issue. A recent conference brought together more than 20 scholars from multiple disciplines to debate the merits and weaknesses of performance-related pay. Policymakers are indicating that they believe paying teachers for performance is worth pursuing and implementing. The initiatives are gaining support, while researchers are gathering evidence and insight to inform future policy decisions regarding performance-based compensation systems.

Key Resources

- [Center for Educator Compensation Reform](#)
- [Center for Teaching Quality: *Performance-pay for Teachers: Designing a System that Students Deserve*](#)
- [National Center on Performance Incentives](#)
- [National Institute for Excellence in Teaching](#)
- [Teacher Incentive Fund](#)

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings [delivered](#) remarks on the role of education in social and economic development to an audience of regional leaders, education ministers and CEOs at the Council of the Americas Conference in Washington, D.C. Spellings said that “advancing peace, prosperity, freedom, and social justice begins in the classroom.” (May 7)

Secretary Spellings, Wendy Bhagat, senior vice president, First Book, and Heidi Kilgras, editorial director, Random House Children's Books, [announced](#) the availability of free books through the 2008 Summer Reading Initiative at Edward Brooke Charter School in Boston Mass. The Initiative marks the first stage of a national distribution of over 850,000 free, new Random House children's books to schools, libraries and literacy organizations serving low-income youth across the country. The Secretary also [hosted](#) an education policy roundtable discussion on *No Child Left Behind* at the Massachusetts State House. (May 6)

Secretary Spellings [announced](#) recipients of the 2008 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards in Washington, D.C. The awards, sponsored by Prudential Financial and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, honor middle and high school students at the local, state and national level for outstanding community service. (May 5)

On the 25th anniversary of the historic 1983 report *A Nation At Risk*, Secretary Spellings released an issue paper entitled [A Nation Accountable](#). To further advance the dialogue on the state of American education, the Secretary will pose questions on the Department's Web site in an effort to spur debate and ideas that will help America's students. (May 2)

Secretary Spellings [announced](#) the selection of 139 outstanding high school seniors as the 2008 Presidential Scholars. The students have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement, artistic excellence, leadership, citizenship and service to their schools and communities. The scholars will be honored for their accomplishments in Washington D.C., from June 21-24. (May 1)



Secretary Spellings joined President Bush as he presented the 2008 National Teacher of the Year award to Michael Geisen, an Oregon science teacher.

Secretary Spellings joined President Bush at a White House ceremony where he named Michael Geisen, a science teacher at Crook County Middle School in Prineville, Oregon, as the 58th [National Teacher of the Year](#). After receiving the award, Geisen noted that fostering students' creative capacity and natural curiosity about the world is a key to teacher success. "We really need to honor their creativity," he said, and "honor their desire to learn useful skills that are going to be relevant in a 21st century world." Geisen recently met with U.S. Department of Education officials and staff as he begins his yearlong tour around the country speaking about teaching and learning. (April 30)

On April 24, President Bush hosted a White House [Summit on Inner-City Children and Faith-Based Schools](#) to increase awareness of the alarming school closure rate of inner-city faith-based schools – nearly 1,200 have closed between 2000 and 2006. The event brought together educators, policymakers, philanthropists, business and community leaders, parents, and students to develop local strategies to keep the doors of inner-city faith-based schools open to America's disadvantaged students.



Aysia Mayo-Gray, a student at St. Ann's Academy in Washington, D.C., introduced the President to the White House Summit on Inner-City Children and Faith-Based Schools.

In his [remarks](#), the President recognized that many children can find a bright future in faith-based schools. The President also called for federal reauthorization and expansion of the Opportunity Scholarship Program in Washington, D.C., and for Congress to enact his Pell Grants for Kids proposal, which would provide \$300 million to help low-income children currently attending troubled public schools to enroll in schools of their parents' choice.

In addition, the summit highlighted the need to preserve the critically important educational alternatives for underserved students attending chronically underperforming schools. U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings [moderated](#) a panel discussion on "Educational Options and America's Cities." Other panels highlighted the impact faith-based urban schools have had in the education of youth in America's inner cities; challenges faced by faith-based urban schools; community solutions to keep faith-based urban schools strong; and, innovative public policies that help under-served communities.

Additional information on the summit, including videos and transcripts from the plenary and panel presentation sessions, are available at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/education/whschoolssummit/index.html>.

The What Works Clearinghouse has released the latest practice guide from the Institute of Education Sciences, [Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools](#). The goal of this practice guide is to formulate specific and coherent evidence-based recommendations for use by educators aiming to quickly and dramatically improve student achievement in low-performing schools. The four recommendations are: 1. Signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership; 2. Maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction; 3. Make visible improvements early in the school turnaround process; and 4. Build a committed staff. They are specifically aimed at helping low-performing schools make adequate yearly progress. (May 2008)

High Performing Teachers: Leading Students to Success in the 21st Century, the May broadcast of “Education News Parents Can Use,” explored how effective teaching is at the core of America’s long-term economic competitiveness; highlighted progressive strategies to recruit, train, and reward effective teachers; and, featured award-winning educators from across the country who are dedicated to improving student achievement and ensuring student success in today’s global economy. To find out more about the TV show, 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>. (May 20)



Teachers and other educators are encouraged to register now to attend the U.S. Department of Education's summer workshops, where teachers share successful strategies to raise student achievement. Each workshop will include breakout sessions featuring effective teachers and practitioners sharing strategies that have been successful in their classrooms, schools and districts. Registration and information on the 12 free workshops being held across the country are available at www.ed.gov/teacherinitiative.

Arts Education

The National Endowment for the Arts has [announced](#) that it will award \$77.4 million to fund over 1,000 grants to national, state, regional, and local nonprofit organizations. Funds will be made available in the following categories: “Access to Artistic Excellence,” “Arts on Radio and Television,” “Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth,” “Partnership Agreements,” and “American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius.” (May 1)

Do you know a budding filmmaker? If so, you may choose to direct him or her to the American Film Institute’s “ScreenNation” a place where teenagers learn about filmmaking, share their work, and compete for recognition and prizes. Submissions for ScreenNation's first “challenge,” [Hometown Claim to Fame](#), are being accepted now through June 30. The winner will be announced on July 15. (May 2008)

Charter Schools/School Choice

National Charter Schools Week was celebrated this year from May 5-9. A primary purpose of this annual observance is to connect charter school students, parents, teachers, and leaders to policymakers, so that more individuals can be exposed to the successes of charter schools. The week began with a National Charter School Policy Forum at the U.S. Department of Education. Secretary Margaret Spellings opened the daylong event, which featured some of the foremost leaders and thinkers on school choice and charter schools. As another part of the celebration, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools encouraged charter schools to participate in a video campaign called [“See Us Growing Excellence.”](#) (May 2008)

Parents in Louisiana and Georgia will benefit from new tax measures aimed at increasing opportunities for children to attend schools of their choice. In March, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal (R) [approved](#) a personal-tax deduction for educational expenses, including private school costs. Parents can deduct up to 50 percent of elementary and secondary private or parochial school tuition and fees; the deduction also applies to parents of home schoolers and public school students. On May 14, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue (R) signed a \$50 million Corporate and Individual Scholarship Tax Credit program into law, allowing corporations to receive a 100 percent tax credit for donations to organizations that provide scholarships to students attending private schools. The [Alliance for School Choice](#) estimates that as many as 10,000 children from low-income families in Georgia can benefit from the new law. (Spring 2008)

A new study by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute examines the crisis of urban Catholic school closures and provides case studies and recommendations for reversing the trend. The report, [Who Will Save America's Urban Catholic Schools?](#), finds that the decline of inner-city Catholic schools has been hastened by Catholics moving to the suburbs and rising tuition costs that are unaffordable for poor and minority families. In some areas of the country, Catholic schools are being converted into charter schools. (April 2008)

Closing the Achievement Gap

The eighth edition of the Council of the Great City Schools' [Beating the Odds](#) report analyzes student performance and achievement gaps on state assessments using results from the 2006-2007 academic year. The entire report may be purchased [online](#). (April 2008)

Early Childhood

A RAND Corporation [report](#) analyzes the "economics of early childhood policy" and suggests that there may be economic benefits to providing pre-kindergarten programs. Recent statistics show that more than one million children were enrolled in public preschool programs in 2005, up 63 percent from ten years earlier. (2008)

Education Reform

A study from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development suggests that improving school leadership is a problem around the world. The [study](#) of 22 nations finds that the roles and responsibilities of school leaders have expanded dramatically in recent years. At the same time, principals in many nations are nearing retirement, and a majority of the nations studied reported difficulties in finding enough suitable candidates to replace outgoing school leaders. (May 2008)

The [Education Industry Association](#) (EIA) has won the Award of Excellence in the 2008 Associations Advance America Awards program, a national competition sponsored by the American Society of Association Executives and The Center for Association Leadership. EIA earned the recognition for the development and promotion of the "Code of Ethics for SES Providers," which has helped guide the conduct and operations of tutoring organizations that provide supplemental educational services (SES) under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). (May 2008)

Raising Student Achievement

"LOL," "BRB," and "OMG," may be standard shorthand for an online or text messaging teenager. A new [study](#) from the Pew Internet and American Life Project shows that the informality of electronic communications is influencing students' academic writing. Richard Sterling, emeritus executive director of the [National Writing Project](#), a program funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII), said, "When e-mail shorthand – or for that matter, slang – appears in academic assignments...it is an opportunity for teachers to explain that while such usages are acceptable in some contexts, they do not belong in schoolwork." (April 24)

Recognizing that far too many U.S. students are dropping out of high school, the AT&T Foundation announced plans to commit \$100 million over four years to help reduce the dropout rate and better prepare students for college and the workforce. Called "[AT&T Aspire](#)," the initiative consists of four parts: 1.) [grants](#) to school districts, school district foundations, and nonprofit organizations focused on high school retention and preparing students for college and the workforce; 2.) a [job shadowing program](#) in conjunction with Junior Achievement Worldwide; 3.) continued [research](#) on the dropout problem; and 4.) [100 community dropout-prevention summits](#). (April 2008)

Reading

Students can boost summer reading by registering with [Uboost](#), the online game and rewards program for the [Weekly Reader](#). The new Web site is geared to teachers and students. Students who register on the site from now through August 2008 can get free summer access to electronic issues of Weekly Reader magazines, plus they can take quizzes based on the material and earn points for rewards over the summer. The points can be redeemed for coupons and prizes, but also can be donated to a charity in support of their favorite cause. Students who input a designated classroom code given to them by their teachers will be able to join an online “class”. Students learn, have fun and receive rewards while teachers can track their progress. (May 2008)

Teacher Quality and Development

A bill signed into law by Missouri Governor Matt Blunt will enable the [American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence](#), a nonprofit group, to help mid-career professionals with college degrees to earn teacher certification in the state. (May 1)

Aspiring early childhood and elementary school educators will have to prove that they know how to teach reading on a test that the [state board of education](#) has added to Connecticut's teacher certification requirements. The change comes amid concerns that not all teachers in the state understand the mechanics of reading instruction and that students' reading scores are declining statewide. (May 2008)

A [research brief](#) from Education Sector asserts that there is a lesser-known ingredient involved in the success of school reform efforts in Hamilton County, Tenn. Called the “Benwood Initiative,” the reforms, which were centered on the county's teachers, drastically improved student achievement. Most accounts attribute the initiative's success to recruiting new and better teachers into the school system. The brief argues that success has had at least as much to do with a second, equally important teacher-reform strategy: helping teachers improve the quality of their instruction. (April 7)

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality Connection is now available [online](#). This new resource provides access to research, policy, and promising practices in five areas of education: assessment, classroom management, inclusive practices, instructional strategies, and reading/literacy. Another feature includes an online discussion forum facilitated by Vanderbilt University. (April 2008)

Innovations in the News

Charter Schools

Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue (R) signed a trio of bills designed to help the state's charter schools, including creation of a statewide commission that can approve petitions for local charter start-ups even when the petitions have been rejected locally. According to State Rep. Jan Jones (R-Alpharetta), sponsor of the measure, this “will lead to a great variety of smaller, specialized or innovative public schools that will be held in high achievement standards.” The other measures will improve charter schools' infrastructure through state support for capital improvements or construction and give charter school teachers access to state health benefit plans. [More—[The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)] (May 14)

Students at charter schools in Chicago “are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college than similar students in regular public high schools,” according to a new [study](#) released by the RAND Corporation. According to the report, charter school attendance increased a student's likelihood of graduating from high school by 7 percent and of them enrolling in college by 11 percent. “The bottom line,” according to Brian P. Gill, a co-author of the study with the Mathematica research group, “is that the attainment effects that we're seeing are very promising ... and they're going to be important not only for policy but for future research on charter schools.” The study is the first among several in a larger project that is examining charter school developments in four urban areas and in three states. [More—[Education Week](#)] (May 8) (*paid subscription required*)

High-performing charter schools in Denver are spurring lots of interest in creating at least a dozen more charters in the near future. Successes by the KIPP Sunshine Academy, the West Denver Preparatory

Charter School, and several other charter schools at educating the city's poorest students have stimulated the interest of Denver's public school (DPS) leaders and education advocates. In response to a call-for-proposals to develop new schools, the DPS received 19 proposals, eight for charter schools and an equal number for "innovation schools," which are operated by employees of the district, but with more flexibility than traditional public schools. Some charter advocates in Denver are also exploring the creation of a group to promote more charter schools, modeled after Chicago's Renaissance Schools Fund. [More—[The Denver Post](#)] (May 7)

According to a new national poll conducted for the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, more than three out of four voters (77%) favor giving parents more options when choosing a public school for their children. There is also broad support for many of the qualities that charter schools provide. [More—[National Alliance for Public Charter Schools](#)] (May 5)

Parent Engagement

For an increasing number of parents and their students, the question, "How was school today?" is becoming unnecessary because of a proliferation of software programs that provide parents with information on pending or incomplete assignments, tardiness or missed classes, homework and test grades, and discipline problems. For some parents, these programs are a welcome intervention, but some educators worry that they can be too much of a good thing, potentially increasing student anxiety. Others, such as Joyce Epstein, director of the National Network of Partnership Schools, caution, "the interpersonal connections of teachers, parents, students, and counselors really are necessary to go beyond the impersonal technologies." [More—[New York Times](#)] (May 5) (*free registration required*)

Parents in Maryland who make a difference in their schools are now recognized by the State Department of Education. Maryland State Superintendent Nancy Grasmick expects the new program, Parent Involvement Matters, which is co-sponsored by Comcast, to change "the old perception" of parents' primary purpose being that of fundraising. An inaugural set of awards recognized 23 parents, and they included cash amounts for the state winner and four semifinalists. [More—[Education Week](#)] (April 30) (*paid subscription required*)

Raising Student Achievement

Osbaldo Hernandez, a high school student in Washington state, was tired of seeing his Hispanic classmates drop out of school, so he organized his fellow students and reached out to their parents, creating an initial dialogue among the students, parents and school officials. Known as ELITES – Estudiantes Latinos Internacionales Trabajando por una Educacion Superior (International Latino Students Working Toward Higher Education), the effort began with a "Grand Opening," at which students encouraged one another to succeed in school and parents shared their hopes for and support of their children. [More—[The Seattle Times](#)] (May 8)

Nineteen of 20 incoming Alaskan high school freshmen will not earn a college degree within 10 years, according to a new study released by the state's Postsecondary Education Commission. "[This] really sends the message of how immediate the need is and the gravity of the situation," said Diane Barrans, executive director of the state commission. [More—[Anchorage Daily News \(Alaska\)](#)] (*free registration*) (May 7)

At Francis Scott Key Elementary/Middle School in Baltimore, the "sound of the bell" might be the one on Wall Street and not one that signals changes in class periods. In an "unusual experiment in capitalism-meets-education," 400 middle-grades students at Key and other schools in the Baltimore-Washington, D.C., region are learning about economics through the "Stocks of the Future" program, a private initiative conducted in partnership with the local school districts. Students can "earn up to \$80 a year, which they can invest in blue chip stocks and cash out when they graduate." In Baltimore, the incentive concept is being expanded to offer students cash for improving their scores on the state's High School Assessment exams. [More—[The Christian Science Monitor](#)] (April 29)

Researchers at Ohio State University question the importance of using real-life examples to teach abstract mathematics concepts, based on the results of a randomized trial, controlled experiment in which college

students were tested using both concrete and abstract approaches to learning an unfamiliar mathematical system. The students who learned using only the abstract symbols outperformed others who learned with concrete examples as well as students for whom the abstract symbols were presented following the concrete examples. The researchers suggest that their findings might also apply to math instruction in grades K-12, and they have begun similar experiments with elementary school students. [More—[The New York Times](#)] (April 25) (*free registration required*)

Students in 10 Connecticut districts who earn passing scores on Advanced Placement (AP) tests will earn \$100 per test as part of a nearly half-million-dollar grant from the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI), which was launched in 2007 with support from Exxon Mobil Corporation. The NMSI grant also supports teacher training and new equipment for AP classes. [More—[Republican-American \(Waterbury, Conn.\)](#)] (April 16)

School Improvement

New North Carolina night schools are giving high-school dropouts another shot at earning their diplomas while continuing to work or care for their families. With the number of high school dropouts in N.C. topping 23,000 in 2007, programs such as the Twilight School in Guilford County and elsewhere are gaining the interest of both state and local school leaders, as state legislators have indicated interest in supporting new approaches to getting students through high school. In January, \$7 million in state funds was awarded to districts “to expand or create programs to keep high schoolers on track.” [More—[The News & Observer](#)] (May 4)

While educators and employers agree that creativity is important to the workplace, a new report from the Conference Board and Americans for the Arts indicates a disconnect between what the respondents to a national survey of school leaders and business executives said they believe about the importance of creativity and the extent to which they act on those beliefs. Among the findings: “most high schools and employers provide creativity-conducive education and training only on an elective or ‘as needed’ basis.” The results also revealed that while schools often focus on students learning “how to solve problems put before them,” businesses tend to require “workers who can identify problems in the first place.” [More—[eSchool News](#)] (May 2)

The first recipient of the Mind Trust’s fellowship for education entrepreneurs, Michael Bitz, an adjunct professor at Columbia University, is “helping students learn academic subjects while creating their own record labels.” He is testing his ideas with New York City students in an after-school program in which the students do every part of the creation-to-production process, from writing the songs to designing the CD covers to marketing the products. Bitz hopes to implement the program in schools in Indianapolis, which is home to the Mind Trust. [More—[USA TODAY/Associated Press](#)] (April 30)

Pittsburgh educators have embarked on the creation of “full-service” schools with longer hours that not only impart academic lessons but also aim to improve students’ health and well being through the offering of social services and projects meant to uplift their communities. Organizers also seek to expand students’ vistas by providing them with enrichment classes in subjects such as poetry, art, and dance. [More—[Education Week](#)] (April 28)

Teacher Quality and Development

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), at its recent annual meeting, offered members new to the classroom a series of seminars to help them “master new or difficult math content, manage their classrooms effectively, and know where to go for resources.” NCTM based the need for the sessions and their contents on a survey of aspiring and new teachers from among its members. “The main challenge in the (math) field,” according to NCTM president James Rubillo, is “to make the early career period positive.” [More—[Education Week](#)] (May 7) (*paid subscription required*)

A majority of teachers in a recent national survey expressed concerns that tenure can make it difficult to remove ineffective teachers. The recent poll of approximately 1,000 teachers sponsored by Education Sector, a non-partisan think tank, also revealed that only 25 percent of those surveyed felt that their most recent evaluations were “useful and effective.” Most of those surveyed indicated that evaluation processes

for new teachers need to be strengthened to help ensure that only strong teachers receive tenure. [More— [USA TODAY/Associated Press](#)] (May 6)

A new publication from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education ([NCATE](#)), *It's All About Student Learning, Assessing Teacher Candidates' Ability to Impact P-12 Students*, highlights performance assessments from 13 teacher education programs. Noting that nearly all of NCATE's 700 member institutions now require teacher candidates to gather and analyze data that shows the extent of students' learning, Arthur E. Wise, president of NCATE, cited a "dramatic change" in teachers' capabilities in recent years because of an emphasis on performance assessments. [More— [Education Week](#)] (April 21) (*paid subscription required*)

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

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