

Archived Information



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Editor's Note

The Education Innovator will take a break for the holiday season and not publish in December. Please look for our next issue in January 2009.

Feature

New Policy Changes Give Parents More Choices

Several years ago, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings asked U.S. Department of Education officials to visit 14 school districts across the country to find out about the impact of public school choice and supplemental educational services (SES) on eligible students' academic achievement and growth. This request was a clear indication of the Administration's longstanding commitment to empowering parents and equipping them with options and opportunities to select the best educational environment for their child's future success. Since that time, the Department has held a national summit to learn more about and compare what districts and states are doing to provide quality public school choice and SES options to families. More recently, the Department published a [handbook](#) to answer questions and provide ideas about public school choice and SES implementation and parent outreach. On October 28, 2008, after months of working with legislators and state officials and after receiving more than 400 public comments from the field, Secretary Spellings announced final regulations to clarify and strengthen *Title I* in the areas of assessment, accountability, SES, and public school choice.

The new regulations strengthen and improve one of the hallmarks of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB)—increasing options for parents. When schools fall short of targets for improving student achievement, parents deserve a range of educational options to assist their children. Under NCLB, families with students enrolled in schools in need of improvement have the opportunity to transfer their child to another public school or receive extra academic help at no cost from an approved provider of their choice. Public school choice options are available to all students enrolled in *Title I* schools designated as in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. SES options are available to students from low-income families who attend a *Title I* school designated by the state as in need of improvement for two years, in corrective action, or restructuring. The final regulations aim to incorporate lessons learned over the past six years on how states and districts can best implement these provisions.

"School choice is part of the strategy to give every child an excellent education," Secretary Spellings has said, and she noted that SES programs extend "a lifeline for students who need more resources and parents who want more options." In particular, drawing on the success tutoring has had for students from more affluent families, SES makes this type of assistance for low-income families a real option for the first time.

Research indicates that students receiving SES are improving their reading and math skills. In a [study](#) conducted for the Department by the RAND Corporation, participation in SES had a positive effect on student achievement in mathematics and reading in five of the seven participating school districts. More importantly, there are data suggesting that the effects of SES may be cumulative; students in the study that received SES for multiple years experienced gains twice as large as those of students participating for just one year.

Despite these promising results, SES and public school choice program implementation could be improved, and student participation remains low. According to reports submitted to the Department by the states for the 2006-2007 school year, just two percent of students eligible for public school choice options transferred to another school, and only 14 percent of eligible students received SES. Additionally, both research and the Department's monitoring visits show that the quality of implementation by states and districts continues to be uneven. Lessons can be learned from these findings, and the goals of the new regulations as they relate to SES and public school choice are straightforward: increase awareness of and participation in these options, and, with respect to SES, strengthen the quality of tutoring programs.

Increasing Parent Awareness and Student Participation

Efforts to educate parents about their options to transfer their child to another school or obtain SES must be improved. *The National Assessment of Title I* [reported](#) that just over a quarter (27 percent) of parents of eligible students said they had received notice about public school choice, and about half of these parents (53 percent) reported being notified about SES options. The regulations intend to increase these percentages and, accordingly, the percentage of students participating in these options by improving the number, timing, and clarity of communications with parents; providing more sources of information on public school choice and SES options; and requiring districts to take additional steps before directing funds set aside for these options to other purposes.

Timely and Clear Notification to Parents

Timing of parent notification is a significant factor in influencing parent decisions to exercise their options under NCLB. This is particularly critical for the public school choice provision of the law. Parents who might otherwise be interested in transferring their child often are reluctant to do so because they generally do not receive notification until after the start of the school year (despite the law's requirement for parental notification to occur before the school year begins). As a result, parents often do not take advantage of the transfer option because they do not want to uproot their child after the school year gets underway. But, as Secretary Spellings has said, "These services can't make a difference if parents don't know they're available."

Research shows that school districts that notify parents prior to the first day of school have higher public school choice participation rates than those that provide notification later. Based on that finding, the *Title I* regulations require districts to notify parents about public school choice options as early as possible, but no later than 14 days before the start of the school year. Earlier notification will give parents the time needed prior to the start of the school year to make an informed decision about whether to transfer their child.

Another important goal of the new regulations is to improve the quality of the notice districts send to parents about SES. If a district's SES notification is incomplete or confusing, discourages the use of SES, or is buried among information on school improvement that districts send to parents, it is less likely that parents will take advantage of these services. It is essential that the notices adhere to the regulations, which specify that they be user-friendly, clear and concise, explain the benefits of receiving SES, and require the notification to be clearly distinguishable from other information related to school improvement.

More Access to Information about Public School Choice and SES

Districts' approaches to parent outreach and notification vary not only in quality, but also in quantity; that is, how many notices are sent to parents and how often they are distributed. The new regulations aim to increase parent awareness by requiring districts to take additional steps to notify parents, beyond the written notice sent to eligible families. Appealing to evidence from research that parents are more likely to take advantage of public school choice and SES when hearing about these options from more than one source, the regulations require districts to expand the media through which parents learn about their options by posting certain information about public school choice and SES on district Web sites. This information includes transfer options available to students, a list of approved SES providers, as well as data on student eligibility and participation in these options. Some districts also are required to partner with outside groups such as faith- and community-based organizations to help reach parents.

District Use of Funds for Public School Choice and SES

Since parents must be provided the opportunity to transfer their child to another school or to obtain SES, it is imperative that districts responsibly implement these provisions. The law requires that districts spend an amount equal to 20 percent of their *Title I, Part A* allocations on requests for SES and the transportation needed for public school choice, unless a lesser amount is required to meet demand. If a district spends less than the 20-percent obligation, and wishes to use the funds for other allowable uses under *Title I, Part A*, the regulations specify that districts must meet other criteria to encourage eligible families to take advantage of choice and tutoring options. These options include: partnering with outside groups, providing timely and accurate parent notices, ensuring that SES sign-up forms are distributed directly to families and made widely available, providing at least two SES enrollment windows at separate points in the school year, and giving SES providers access to school facilities on the same basis and terms as are available to other groups. The regulations direct states to monitor districts spending less than the 20-percent obligation for compliance with the criteria.

Recognizing that it takes resources to effectively inform parents about their public school choice and SES options, the regulations permit districts to count a portion of their costs toward the 20-percent obligation on parent outreach and assistance activities. It should be noted that this does not limit districts to only spending this amount.

Improving the Quality of SES

It is up to states to approve SES providers and monitor their quality and effectiveness. To ensure greater rigor, clarity, and consistency in states' processes for approving providers, the regulations specify that states must consider certain criteria when approving a provider. These criteria include that the provider's instructional methods and content align with state academic content and student academic achievement standards, and that the provider's program is of high quality, research-based, and designed to increase the academic achievement of eligible students. When approving providers, the regulations also require states to consider parent recommendations, results from parent surveys, or other available evaluation results regarding the success of the provider's program in increasing student achievement. Information on whether a provider has been removed from any states' approved provider list also must be considered

Additionally, the regulations require states to consider the following when monitoring a provider: evidence that the provider's instructional program is consistent with the instruction provided and the content used by the district and the state; whether the provider addresses students' individual needs as described in their SES plan; if the provider's programming contributes to improving students' academic proficiency; and whether programming is aligned with states' academic content and student academic achievement standards. The goal of these provisions is to enhance the quality of providers supplying SES at the state and district level.

A New Grant Program Gives Parents More High-Quality Educational Options

In addition to the final regulations, the Department recently announced grants awarded under the [High-Quality Supplemental Educational Services and After-School Partnerships Demonstration competition](#). The purpose of this new grant program is to encourage the establishment or expansion of partnerships between SES programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) projects in order to increase the academic achievement of low-income students in *Title I* schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. The grants aim to provide comprehensive after-school programs for families that combine academic tutoring along with enrichment so that more families enroll in, participate in, and complete an after-school program. Recently, five grants were awarded through this program.

These new grants, along with the new regulations, will make it possible for more students and families across the country to benefit from high quality after-school academic services.

Key Resources

- Final Regulations to Strengthen *No Child Left Behind*:
 - [Title I regulations](#)
 - [Web cast](#)
 - [Teleconference](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education SES Web site](#)
- [Buildingchoice.org](#)
- [The Center on Innovation and Improvement](#)
- [National Assessment of Title I: Final Report](#)
- [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](#)
- [Giving Parents Options: Strategies for Informing Parents and Implementing Public School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services Under No Child Left Behind](#)

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education



Secretary Spellings announces final regulations to strengthen and clarify No Child Left Behind.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced final regulations to strengthen and clarify *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), focusing on improved accountability and transparency, uniform and disaggregated graduation rates, and improved parental notification for supplemental educational services and public school choice in Columbia, S.C. The new regulations reflect lessons learned over the past six years since NCLB was enacted, and build on work that states have done to improve their assessment and accountability systems. Click [here](#) to find more information, including a webcast, regulations, fact sheets, and more. (Oct. 28)

At the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., Secretary Spellings [hosted](#) a roundtable discussion on performance pay for educators with policymakers, researchers, and state and local education leaders from across the nation. She also released [Lessons Learned About Implementing Performance-Based Pay](#), which outlines best practices in implementing performance pay systems. (Oct. 8)

Secretary Spellings [delivered](#) the keynote address at the National Mathematics Advisory Panel Forum. The forum brought together more than 300 educators and policymakers from across the nation in a two-day event to share ideas on how to improve mathematics education in America. She also announced a new section of the "Doing What Works" Web site for teachers called "Critical Foundations for Algebra," which shows how to apply the National Math Panel's findings in the classroom. It may be found on the Department's [Web site](#). (Oct. 7)

The next edition of *Education News Parents Can Use* will explore the issue of paying for college and using federal aid first. To sustain our country's economic security and high standard of living in today's global marketplace, we must increase our citizens' access to and completion of a college degree. In an effort to help families make higher education a reality, the Department has spent the past two years implementing many of the recommendations of Secretary Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education and her subsequent *Action Plan for Higher Education*. Key reforms to make college more accessible and affordable include:

streamlining the FAFSA application, working with Congress to reauthorize the *Higher Education Act*, raising the maximum Pell Grant award, and ensuring better coordination among high schools and colleges to



encourage low-income students to take the rigorous courses necessary to qualify for Academic Competitiveness and National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent grants. In addition, new tools like College.gov, FAFSA4caster, and College Navigator are helping families navigate the complex process of selecting and paying for college. The broadcast will highlight federal student aid programs, tools, and resources, spotlight schools and districts that are implementing innovative initiatives and programs to help disadvantaged youth succeed in college, and provide options and tips to help parents plan for and finance college. For more information, please visit the program's [Web site](#). Archived Web casts may be viewed [online](#). (Nov. 18)

The Department is pleased to announce the names of the 2008 American Stars of Teaching. These outstanding classroom teachers represent all grade levels and disciplines and were honored this fall. Awards were announced at special assemblies at the schools where the award-winning teachers work. Parents, students, colleagues, school administrators, and others nominated these exemplary teachers. One teacher was recognized from each state, as well as four teachers from private schools. To view a complete list of all American Stars of Teaching, click [here](#). (Fall 2008)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

Charter schooling began in 1991 with the idea that public schools—with additional freedom to innovate in exchange for accountability for results—could offer excellent choices for families and stimulate the entire public school system to improve. Now, more than 15 years later, charter schools are no longer an idea but a reality. The sector has expanded to over 4,300 schools in 40 states and Washington, D.C., serving more than one million students—about three percent of all public school children.

Believing that “the charter sector can do more to fulfill its promise as an engine of educational innovation and quality for students across the country,” Secretary Spellings released [A Commitment to Quality: National Charter School Policy Forum Report](#). The report provides information on creating and maintaining successful charter schools and summarizes a vision for the future of U.S. charter schools, outlining steps that fulfill that vision.

Produced by the Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII), the report draws from discussions with charter school leaders attending the Department's National Charter School Policy Forum held in May 2008, as well as 15 years of research and experience with charter schools. The forum featured nearly 100 of the foremost leaders on charter schools from across the nation who shared lessons and outlined the future of the charter sector.

According to Secretary Spellings, the new publication “further outlines our shared vision for achieving a vibrant and successful charter school community throughout the nation, and we hope it will serve as an informative and useful tool for education leaders.”

The latest guides in OII's *Innovations in Education* series, *Creating and Sustaining Successful K-8 Magnet Schools* and *Successful Magnet High Schools*, were released last month at the Magnet Schools of America 2008 Technical Assistance Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. Joining OII's former Assistant Deputy Secretary Douglas Mesecar to discuss innovative magnet programs were principals from four of the 14 magnet schools featured in the new guides. The guides have been distributed to more than 14,000 district-level leaders. Free copies can be ordered online from [EDPubs](#) or viewed and downloaded [online](#). (Fall 2008)

American History

The [Gilder Lehrman Summer Seminars](#) are designed to strengthen participants' commitment to high-quality history teaching. Public, parochial, and independent school teachers, as well as National Park Service rangers are eligible. These weeklong seminars provide intellectual stimulation and a collaborative context for developing practical resources and strategies to take back to the classroom. (Fall 2008)

Arts Education

New data reveals that Colorado public high schools offering more arts education boast lower dropout rates and earn higher scores on state tests in reading, writing, and science. A first-of-its-kind [study](#) of arts education in public schools by the Colorado Department of Education and the [Colorado Council on the Arts](#) shows that while most schools offer some arts education, many students who attend public schools do not have access to any formal arts education. Work is under way to increase access to arts education in these areas, and a team led by Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien and Commissioner of Education Dwight Jones has begun a review of standards and assessments for arts education. The committee also is looking into professional development opportunities for educators who want to integrate arts into core subject areas. (October 2008)

Charter Schools

Nationwide, 355 charter schools opened their doors for the first time this fall, with Arizona, California, and Florida having the most new charters, according to [survey results](#) from the Washington-based [Center for Education Reform](#). The new schools are educating at least 100,000 students, according to the analysis. The group pegs the total number of autonomous public schools at 4,568, based on its annual survey. Total enrollment in charter schools nationwide is 1.34 million, the group said. (Oct. 23)

Choice

[Choosing the Right Educational Path for Your Child](#), a new book by Paula J. Carreiro and Eileen Shields-West, examines the types of school choice options now available to parents. Various school designs are highlighted from public to private, secular to religious, and progressive to conservative. (November 2008)

Education Reform

A Goldwater Institute study, [Demography Defeated: Florida's K-12 Reforms and their Lessons for the Nation](#), examines recent education reform initiatives instituted in the Sunshine State and finds "remarkable improvement" in Florida's achievement test scores. The study discusses ways of emulating Florida's success in this regard and highlights specific initiatives. (September 2008)

Higher Education

Looking for information about individual colleges and universities? Explore the U.S. Department of Education's online tool, [College Navigator](#). You also may peruse [College Portrait](#), a source of basic, comparable information about public colleges and institutions, jointly sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. The [University and College Accountability Network](#) is another source that allows users to search by a wide array of variables to find hundreds of private college and university profiles. (November 2008)

A new [report](#) from the Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admission, which was created by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, examines the use of standardized tests in college admissions. According to the report, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams, rather than the SAT and ACT, may be more predictive of first-year and overall grades in college because they are more closely linked to high school curricula. (September 2008)

Mathematics and Science

The United States is failing to develop students' mathematics skills, especially among those who could excel at the highest levels, a new [study](#) asserts. The authors further claim that girls who do succeed in the field are almost all immigrants or the daughters of immigrants from countries where mathematics is more highly valued. The study was published in *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*. (November 2008)

Raising Student Achievement

The [U.S. Department of Energy](#) (DOE) has started a new competition designed to allow high school students to work on real-world engineering challenges. According to Bill Valdez, director of DOE's Office of Workforce Development for Teachers and Scientists, the "Real World Design Challenge" (RWDC) is intended to engage high school students with real engineering problems faced by industry. DOE "shares a concern with industry that not enough U.S. students are studying science and engineering. The...RWDC will encourage more students to choose scientific and engineering career paths," said Valdez. The 2009 RWDC theme is "Aviation and Fuel Consumption." (October 2008)

New Leaders for New Schools has unveiled a Web portal that contains in-depth analyses and case studies of schools that have raised the achievement of low-income students. The [Effective Practice Incentive Community](#) (EPIC) includes recorded testimonials, video clips that showcase instructional techniques, and lesson plans from successful schools. EPIC identifies principals, assistant principals, and teachers who are driving increased student performance and acknowledges them for sharing promising practices. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's [Teacher Incentive Fund](#). (November 2008)

A new [report](#), *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, coauthored by the National Center for Children in Poverty's senior researcher Mariajosé Romero and researcher Hedy N. Chang, found that one in 10 kindergarten and first-grade students will miss a month or more of school this year—with troubling impact on their short- and long-term academic performance, especially if they are poor. The study was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. (September 2008)

Teacher Quality and Development

[Bobbi Ciriza Houtchens](#), a [Teaching Ambassador Fellow](#) with the U.S. Department of Education, was recently honored as educator of the year by the Inland Empire Hispanic Image Awards. The awards program recognizes the achievements of Latinos in Riverside and San Bernardino counties in California. Houtchens taught English and English as a second language at Arroyo Valley High School in San Bernardino, Calif. Currently, she is working in the Department's [Office of English Language Acquisition](#). (Oct. 10)

In an event created by OfficeMax and [Adopt-a-Classroom](#), Theresa Baker, a teacher at Wheaton Woods Elementary School in Rockville, Md., was one of 1,300 educators surprised in their classrooms with boxes of supplies. The nationwide event, known as "[A Day Made Better](#)," was intended to erase "teacher-funded classrooms," according to the program's Web site. The sponsors estimate that teachers spend, on average, \$1,200 a year of their own money on classroom supplies. (October 2008)

The Milken Family Foundation has begun "National Notifications 2008," a recognition effort that is crisscrossing the country to honor up to 80 of America's finest elementary educators with the Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award. Winners receive \$25,000 and are recognized in surprise ceremonies in their schools. Photographs and blog posts chronicling the ceremonies may be found [online](#). (November 2008)

The [Center for Educator Compensation Reform](#), the provider of information and outreach regarding the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), has launched a revamped Web site. New features include a database of TIF grantees, a series of modules on the major aspects of compensation reform, and an interactive map that profiles compensation reform plans from areas across the country. (November 2008)

Innovations in the News

Charter Schools/School Choice

Inner City Education Foundation, which currently operates 13 schools in South Los Angeles, announced an ambitious plan to expand that number to 35 schools within eight years. Inner City's New Park Preparatory High School is scheduled to be joined by as many as seven more schools in 2009. The expanded cadre of charters will be divided among elementary, middle, and high schools. Founder Mike Pascal estimates that eventually Inner City Foundation schools will be educating as much as a quarter of the South Los Angeles student population. [More—The [Los Angeles Times](#)] (Oct. 1)

Raising Student Achievement

Hispanic students in dual-language programs in Idaho's Blaine County Schools outperformed their sixth-grade counterparts in the rest of the state on last year's Idaho Standards Achievement Tests. More than 80 percent of the district's native Spanish speakers enrolled in the immersion program passed the sixth-grade reading test in the spring, compared to a 39-percent state average for sixth-grade Hispanic students. [More—[Idaho Mountain Express and Guide](#)] (Oct. 29)

According to a new study of American students' academic skills in comparison to their counterparts in other countries, they "generally fared better at the fourth grade level" and "more unevenly in eighth grade." The study statistically linked the 2003 scores of students in selected urban districts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) with other countries' scores of the same year on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and then compared the TIMSS scores to the more recent NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment. Among the districts included in the study are Austin and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, whose eighth graders met the international average in mathematics for developed nations. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Oct. 22)

The College Board announced plans for a new test targeted at eighth graders and designed to meet schools' requests for a "measure of students' progress toward college earlier than 10th grade." Called "ReadiStep," the test is scheduled for its first administration next year, and will be divided into three multiple-choice sections on mathematics, critical reading, and writing skills. The announcement met with mixed reactions that included criticism from the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, as well as reports from schools slated to pilot the test that parental interest in the new test was very high. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Oct. 22)

Schools in Michigan concerned about the projected need for engineers in the state are taking advantage of a hands-on curriculum from the Society of Automotive Engineers to create interest in mathematics and science in the elementary grades. Students learn to think like engineers as they design and test such things as model bridges and paper boats that they race competitively across classroom floors. In the Plymouth-Canton Community Schools, which has adopted the curriculum for all its elementary schools, Johnson Controls is providing automotive engineers to help the students and teachers ponder the same kinds of problems that engineers regularly encounter. [More—The [Detroit Free Press](#)] (Oct.20)

Freedom Schools, a longstanding summer-school program serving more than 9,000 students in 61 cities nationwide, is being adapted to the after-school hours. In Dayton, Ohio, for instance, the program's emphasis on reading is continued in the after-school application, as is homework completion and opportunities to play games and participate in community-building group activities. In a recent study of the Freedom Schools summer program in Kansas City, Mo., funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, researchers followed participating students for three years and found a significant improvement in reading skills compared to similar students not attending the summer program. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Oct.14)

After-School Matters, a successful nonprofit after-school program in Chicago that emphasizes apprenticeships for high school students, is being adapted to New York City, thanks to a \$410,000 grant from the MetLife Foundation. The program offers students the opportunity to work in technology, the arts, and communications, providing the 13- to 19-year-olds who participate in the apprenticeships with stipends for their work. In Chicago, the program currently serves 28,000 students in 62 high schools. In New York

for their work. In Chicago, the program currently serves 28,000 students in 62 high schools. In New York City, the After-School Corp. and MetLife noted the Chicago program's success at improving participants' academic achievement and higher attendance. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Sept. 22)

School Improvement

A new statewide measure in Utah permits up to five school districts and five charter schools to pilot new testing methods that use computers to increase the difficulty of tests as students take them over the course of the year. Another part of the pilot has high school students no longer taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test, in favor of college-entry tests such as the ACT. [More—The [Salt Lake Tribune](#)] (Oct. 10)

Teacher Quality and Development

More than 400 elementary teachers in Miami-Dade County are participating in a program designed to increase the science knowledge of English language learners. The effort has shown effectiveness at increasing the science and mathematics test scores of students in the six schools that have piloted the program since 2003. "Promoting Science Among English Language Learners," or P-SELL, targets students in grades three through five, and combines efforts to improve teachers' understanding of science with hands-on classroom activities designed to promote in-class communications about science facts and ideas. With the program about to complete its five-year period of initial support from the National Science Foundation, Miami-Dade school leaders are pursuing funding to sustain and expand the program. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Sept. 29)

Georgia and Idaho are the latest states to move toward a system of teacher evaluations that has consistent, performance-based standards statewide. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality, only 16 states currently have such specific evaluation guidelines. In Idaho, the effort to establish more uniform standards resulted from a recently failed merit-pay initiative in the state legislature, which established a task force to tackle the consistency issue. In Georgia, a new program with five "strands" to measure teacher performance is being piloted this year in nearly 200 schools statewide. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Sept. 29)

In Massachusetts, something akin to a mathematics and science "swat team" approach is underway in some urban areas where there are high percentages of low-income students and histories of unlicensed teachers in these core academic subjects. TEACH! SouthCoast, as it is officially known, is headquartered at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, and is dispatching teams of newly qualified teachers, most of whom are mid-career changers, to eight schools in the two cities. Before they are placed, the new teachers must pass the state's qualification test and obtain their licenses. Once in their classrooms, veteran teachers and university professors mentor them for two years. The effort is funded by a \$1.75 million federal education grant. [More—The [Boston Globe](#)] (Sept. 25)

Technology

Since the Internet first came to the K-12 scene, the concept of virtual field trips has transformed the idea of taking students to educationally captivating sites and experiences without the costs of school buses and the logistics of organizing time away from the classroom. A new generation of virtual field trip providers is realizing the potential of the technology and transporting students to sites as diverse as the North Pole, Yellowstone Park, and the Lewis and Clark Trail. [More—[Edutopia.org](#)] (Oct. 29)

A growing number of students in New York City have a new incentive to study algebra as more than 100 schools are now using a videogame called "Dimension M." The game presents algebra problems in the midst of typical videogame activities. Students must answer the mathematics problems before they can progress further in the game. A reduction in students' "math phobia," was one benefit of videogame usage, according to a principal of one of the participating schools, along with reported increases in scores on state mathematics exams. Six universities and Microsoft Incorporation have teamed up to study the affects of using "Dimension M" in the classroom. [More—[The New York Times](#)] (Oct. 7)

Students across Florida soon will have the option of completing any grade online. A new state law mandates that each district must be able to offer a K-12 virtual school experience by the start of the next school year.

To ease the implementation process, districts can collaborate or seek the assistance of private providers approved by the state. Although the state already funds two K-8 virtual schools and the Florida Virtual School, the hope is that the new law will expand the option of online schooling to more students.

[More—[Palm Beach Post](#)] (Sept. 28)

Educators are making use of a developing communication tool known as Twitter. Since most people use Twitter with their cell phones, it has become an effective way for teachers to efficiently communicate with students. Twitter is a method of messaging among a set group of people who subscribe to your Twitter feed. Teachers are using Twitter to start discussions and remind students of class assignments or relevant events. A Maryland middle school teacher used his Many Voice Twitter account to have his students collaborate with students from six other countries to write a book. [More—[Search Engine Watch](#)] (Sept. 25)

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.

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