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Feature

Improving Reading: One Mentor, One Child, One Book at a Time

When Kimberley started working with her mentor at her local Washington, D.C. elementary school, she would always choose books that were below her reading ability. Jill, her mentor and a U.S. Department of Education employee, thought that Kimberley needed help improving her self-confidence and completing what she was reading. Jill encouraged her to try more difficult books, ones that had more text than pictures or ones that were more advanced than books her peers in the third grade were reading. "Kimberley impressed me as a girl who was smart, but she didn't believe in herself, and she had trouble concentrating," she said. Nevertheless, Jill stayed with her, and trust and respect developed as they took turns reading to each other week after week. Two years later, when Kimberley graduated from fifth grade, things had changed. "At the beginning of fifth grade, I convinced her to read the first Harry Potter book because we were always talking about the movies," Jill remembered. "She did it! Her confidence had improved and sometimes she would read three or four pages before she realized that it was my turn to read. Kimberley tried to find out how the books end, but she would have to read all of them, I told her, if she wanted to find out."

The executive director of Everybody Wins! DC, Mary Saladar, has heard many stories like this over the past fourteen years. And she could tell her own stories, too, because Saladar has mentored the same child for eight years and has seen growth that has been nothing short of "amazing." Originally started in a single New York City school in 1991, Everybody Wins! (EW!) USA currently pairs more than 7,300 trained volunteers with more than 9,000 low-income students across the country. The Program aims to improve student achievement in reading by providing quality, age-appropriate books to students who might otherwise not have access to them, and by pairing "at-risk" students with adult volunteers who serve as their reading mentors. The nonprofit organization has a simple but powerful mantra of "one mentor, one child, one book at a time" and is working to close the "literacy gap" in elementary schools across 16 states and Washington, D.C. They presently serve 4,000 children in 36 Title I schools in D.C. alone.

A "Powerful" Approach to Addressing the Literacy Gap

EW!'s goals are aligned to address the literacy gap which, according to data from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), continues to exist between middle-class and low-income students in the elementary grades. Among the factors that contribute to the achievement disparity for low-income children are the relative lack of books in the home and lack of learning environments that foster students' interest in reading, as well as fewer opportunities to learn and practice new reading skills. NAEP statistics show that only one-half of low-income fourth graders read at or above the basic level compared to nearly 80 percent of middle-class students in fourth grade. In urban locations, the disparities are even greater. In Washington, D.C., for instance, less than a third of fourth graders who are eligible for free or reduced meals read at or above the basic level.

At the core of Everybody Wins! is the Power Lunch, a one-hour, once-a-week opportunity for participating students to meet and read with their EW! reading mentors. Adult mentors, generally recruited from local corporations and other organizations in both the public and private sectors, volunteer their time and talents to the program. Throughout the one-hour sessions, EW! reading mentors, using school libraries or

classrooms, read aloud to their student partners or listen to and encourage their partners as they read, promoting reading skills and the general enjoyment of reading and talking about books.

“Each school has an office with two part-time employees who are the communicators. They connect with the school, the teachers, the children, and the volunteer mentors,” said Saladar. “There are a lot of costs associated with running the program,” she noted, as she explained that they have to buy books, fund celebrations, hold at least three annual book distributions, supply book carts and provide enrichment activities. And yet, effective management has been noted as one of the reasons for their success. Another reason for success, according to Saladar, is that the point of Everybody Wins! is that children learn to read for pleasure. “Studies emphasize this,” she said. “Our volunteers do not go over drills or tutor. Our volunteers are there to inspire the children...to serve as positive role models. They root for the children, look into their eyes, and tell them that they can do anything.”

Federal Support to Improve and Expand the Program

A current \$478,492 U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE) grant is helping the national organization to improve its organizational capacity, to disseminate best practices in mentoring, marketing, and volunteer recruitment, as well as to expand its abilities to serve more low-income students. EW! USA will attempt to support 1,000 new Power Lunch student-mentor matches this school year, just the first step to reaching 100,000 students by 2016, the organization’s 25th anniversary. For EW! DC, support from the national program office has helped to fund the operation of Power Lunch, as well as Readers Are Leaders, which pairs upper-grade student mentors with younger students for weekly one-on-one, one hour read-aloud sessions; Story Time, which brings storytellers and local authors into elementary schools to perform for students; and EW! Book Clubs, in which groups of fourth- and fifth-grade students and their adult reading mentors select books to read and discuss each month. In D.C., mentors come from more than one hundred agencies and companies.



Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings recently visited Amidon-Bowen Elementary School and met with students enrolled in the Everybody Wins! DC Power Lunch Program: *left to right*: Maurice Spencer, Vy Ngo, and Kevon Scott

Employees at the U.S. Department of Education have mentored students in the Power Lunch program since 1998, at nearby Amidon-Bowen Elementary School in southwest Washington, D.C. The program at Amidon-Bowen, which pairs 140 students with mentors throughout the community, was recently recognized by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings as part of a visit to commemorate the Department’s special partnership with the school. Teachers at Amidon-Bowen and other school sites recently completed evaluation surveys that will serve as a baseline to evaluate students’ progress in the current school year.

An EW! DC Power Lunch evaluation conducted during 2007 – 2008, designed to enable the national organization to increase the alignment of its affiliate sites with a set of national EW! standards, showed that Power Lunch students had an 11 percent increase in excellent ratings on reading comprehension and fluency, interest in reading, class participation, and self-confidence. The evaluations were the result of teachers’ evaluations of their students’ participation in the Power Lunch program.

Across the EW! USA programs nationwide, a recent survey of executive directors of the 13 regional affiliates revealed four specific features that define the program and help contribute to its success:

- *Consistency*. This involves consistent attendance by the mentor and student, maintaining pairs over years, if possible, and the consistent reading-focused, student-mentor interaction that serves as the core of the program.
- *One-on-One Interaction*. All Power Lunch programs work within this same framework – from the mentor-student relationship to the school coordinator-school teacher interaction.
- *School-Based Programming*. Children in the program can participate easily, right at their own school, and the commitment of mentors to specific schools creates opportunities for program expansions, including addition of the Readers As Leaders and Story Time components.
- *School Coordinator Role*. Coordinators are present in each of the schools, which is an unusual yet successful feature, as compared to other literacy programs.

Connecting to National Mentoring Month

In January, EW! is honoring National Mentoring Month by inviting all reading mentors to share their experience with a friend or colleague who may be interested in joining the Power Lunch program. Guests may accompany mentors to join their reading session, meet their student mentee, browse the book selections, and learn more about the Power Lunch program.

Key Resources

- [Everybody Wins](#)
- [Everybody Wins DC](#)
- [National Mentoring Month](#)
- [The 2007 Reading Report Card](#) (NAEP)

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

Secretary Spellings [applauded](#) the nomination of Arne Duncan as incoming Secretary of Education and released a [fact sheet](#) on the Department's efforts to improve educational opportunities for all children. (Dec. 16)

Secretary Spellings announced the release of non-regulatory guidance to implement a uniform and accurate measure of the [high school graduation rate](#) that is comparable across States. The uniform high school graduation rate is a critical step toward improving high school accountability. (Dec. 23)

Secretary Spellings [delivered](#) remarks and administered the oath of office to new and re-appointed members of the [National Assessment Governing Board](#) in Arlington, Va. The 26-member governing board develops policy guidance for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the only continuing nationwide assessment of what students have learned in various subjects in the U.S. The board is involved in selecting the subjects to be tested; identifying learning objectives for each grade tested; identifying appropriate achievement goals; and ensuring that all test items are free from racial, cultural, gender, or regional bias. (Nov. 21)

The National Center for Education Research within the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) has announced its third "Summer Research Training Institute on Cluster-Randomized Trials," to be held June 21 through July 3, 2009, at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. This training institute aims to increase the national capacity of researchers to develop and conduct rigorous evaluations regarding the impact of education interventions. More information is available [online](#). For assistance, please contact Christina Chhin, at (202) 219-2280 or christina.chhin@ed.gov. (January 2009)

The National Board for Education Sciences, the advisory body to IES, has released the [National Board for Education Sciences: Five-Year Report, 2003 Through 2008](#). The report includes an evaluation of the performance of IES, and the board's recommendations for the improvement of IES and the reauthorization

performance of IES, and the board's recommendations for the improvement of IES and the reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act. (November 2008)

In response to the [Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy](#), the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services have issued joint [guidance](#) regarding the application of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) to student health records. This guidance addresses the interplay between FERPA and HIPAA privacy rules at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels, including during health or safety emergencies. (November 2008)

As the U.S. Department of Education and our entire nation observe the transition from one Administration to the next, the January 20th edition of *Education News Parents Can Use* will take a look back at some of the most engaging topics explored on shows from our recent past. The next edition of *Education News* will feature the Teaching Ambassador Fellows -- five exemplary teachers who are spending a year at the Department of Education, contributing their firsthand knowledge and experience to the development of federal education policy. They will consider a range of topics, from early childhood education to the value of service learning, and from supporting English Language Learners to the challenges of recruiting, preparing, retaining and rewarding teachers. Also featured on the program will be videotaped success stories from innovative schools and school districts on early childhood education, community service, health and nutrition curriculum, and language competency that will ready students for the challenges of the 21st century. FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE GO TO <http://www.ed.gov/edtv/> (You can watch archived webcasts at [http://www.connective.com/events/ednews/.](http://www.connective.com/events/ednews/))



From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

Many charter schools rank obtaining facilities as one of the greatest impediments to starting their schools. *Making Charter School Facilities More Affordable: State-driven Policy Approaches*, the latest [Innovations in Education](#) guide from the Office of Innovation and Improvement, is designed to help states better understand the facilities-related challenges encountered by charter schools and how to address them effectively. Within the guide are helpful links to state statutes that form or affect policies that are helping charter schools to successfully respond to these challenges. Free copies of the new guide can be ordered from [ED PUBS](#). This and the other guides in the *Innovations in Education* series can be [viewed and downloaded](#) from the Web site.

The [Women's Educational Equity Act \(WEEA\) Grant Program](#) is recruiting peer reviewers for its upcoming [grant competition](#) scheduled for April 13 - 24. If you are interested in serving as a peer reviewer, please notify the WEEA program by an e-mail to: Clifton.Jones@ed.gov.

Arts Education

[Americans for the Arts](#), [The NAMM Foundation](#), and the [Ad Council](#) have [collaborated](#) with Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment to create new public service announcements (PSAs) in the newest phase of "The Arts. Ask For More" public awareness program. Characters from Disney's "Little Einsteins" are used in the new PSAs to promote arts education to parents and to children in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The NAMM Foundation and the Ad Council also have produced television advertisements that encourage both children and parents to participate in the arts together. The characters' adventures with the arts help kids develop creativity and self-expression while emphasizing teamwork, friendship, and exploration. Spoofs of "healthy arts food products" like "Raisin Brahms," featuring the composer Johannes Brahms, and "Van Goghurt," featuring the artist Vincent van Gogh, continue the approach from the earlier phase of the national awareness campaign. (January 2009)

Charter Schools

The fourth annual report from the [National Charter School Research Project](#) at the University of Washington Bothell Center on Reinventing Public Education—[Hopes, Fears, and Reality](#)—reveals that charter schools generally are more different than alike, not only in terms of their student populations, missions, and achievement results, but also in their capacity and response to local needs. (December 2008)

Leadership

[New Leaders for New Schools](#) (NLNS) (see [Innovator](#), June 13, 2005), the national nonprofit that offers an innovative pathway for aspiring educators to become principals in high-need schools, has selected the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina as its newest partner. The goal is for schools in the district to achieve 90- to 100-percent proficiency in core academic subjects once NLNS principals have been at the helm for five years. (Dec. 10)

Raising Student Achievement

In September 2008, the [Data Quality Campaign](#) and the [National Center for Educational Achievement](#), with the support of the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), conducted a survey to determine the number of states that have built the infrastructure necessary to use longitudinal data. A progress report reveals that 29 states track students' individual college-readiness test scores. The report asserts, however, that states still have a long way to go before they have the types of data systems that will inform ways to drive improved student performance. A new [Web site](#) provides an overview of the findings. (January 2009)

The [National Governors Association Center for Best Practices](#) recently partnered with [ACT, Inc.](#) on a pilot project in Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania to increase the rigor of coursework in high schools. ACT trained 98 teachers in 18 high schools to use “state-of-the-art” curriculum units and new instructional practices, which were integrated with a system of assessments. [Results](#) of the pilot project indicate that increases in student achievement are strongly correlated to coursework that is aligned to academic standards. (2008)

Reading

The [National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance](#) has released a report, [Enhanced Reading Opportunities: Findings from the Second Year of Implementation](#). This is the second report on the impact of two literacy programs, “Reading Apprenticeship Academic Literacy” (RAAL) and “Xtreme Reading” (XR). Both programs are designed to improve the reading comprehension skills and school performance of struggling ninth-grade students. The report describes the effects of the programs on students entering high school who are two to five years behind grade level in reading. (November 2008)

School Improvement

The International Benchmarking Advisory Group has issued a report, [Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education](#). The report provides states with guidance for benchmarking their K-12 education systems against those of top-performing countries. Also included are recommendations for ensuring that the U.S. offers students expanded opportunities for college and career success. The *advisory group* was convened by the [National Governors Association](#), the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#), and [Achieve, Inc.](#) (2008)

The [Education Commission of the States](#) has produced two new resources focused on policies that relate to student performance in high school. The first [brief](#) reviews research emphasizing the freshman year as a predictor of later high-school performance. The second [brief](#) highlights research indicating the types of parental involvement that positively impact high school students, and identifies a set of policies and practices that can increase parental involvement in education. (2008)

[Achieve, Inc.](#) and the [Education Trust](#) have issued [Measures that Matter](#), a joint, ongoing effort that aims to provide strategic and technical assistance to states in creating college- and career-ready assessment and accountability systems that ensure all students graduate from high school ready to succeed in life. The two organizations conducted research and commissioned papers on various topics. (November 2008)

Science

The [Siemens Foundation](#) has [announced](#) the results of the prestigious “Siemens Competition in Math, Science, and Technology,” which enables high school students to receive national recognition for science research projects. Some of the nation’s brightest leaders of tomorrow took on groundbreaking research regarding life-threatening infections and the deadly side effects of chemotherapeutics. Wen Chyan and the team of Sajith M. Wickramasekara and Andrew Y. Guo were named the \$100,000 grand-prize winners. The competition is administered by the [College Board](#) and funded by the Siemens Foundation. (Dec. 8)

Teacher Quality and Development

The latest edition of the [Teacher Professional Development Sourcebook](#) is now online. Differentiated instruction—a practice in which teachers accommodate students’ various learning styles and needs—is a featured topic. The *Sourcebook* also includes an updated and expanded [resource directory](#) of professional development products and services, as well as topics on English-Language learning, reading, and classroom management. (January 2009)

For the second consecutive year, the number of new teachers certified through the [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards](#) (NBPTS) has reached a record high. NBPTS [announced](#) that 9,600 teachers earned certification nationally in 2008. This number represents a 12-percent increase over the number of teachers who achieved National Board Certification in 2007. Nearly half of all National Board Certified teachers work in high-need schools, as defined by the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). (December 2008)

Researcher and teaching analyst Richard Ingersoll reveals that that far too many teachers have neither a college degree nor a state certificate in the subjects they teach in a [report](#) for [the Education Trust](#). Using data from the latest federal [Schools and Staffing Survey](#), Ingersoll asserts that this problem is at its worst in middle schools, high poverty/high minority schools, and mathematics classes. (November 2008)

Innovations in the News

Math and Science Education

Students in several Asian countries again outpaced American students in math and science performance, according to the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or TIMSS, which surveyed fourth- and eighth-grade students worldwide. American students at both grade levels made gains in math, but not in science, over their performance in past TIMSS surveys. In a special analysis, students in Massachusetts and Minnesota outperformed both their American classmates and those of most other countries. [More—The [New York Times](#)] (Dec.10)

In Texas, a group of leaders from higher education and the private sector have put forward a plan to improve math and science achievement, as well as to attract more highly qualified teachers of these subjects. Citing the need for young persons who can innovate and help Texas compete in the global marketplace, the Academy of Medicine, Engineering and Science of Texas proposed improvements in pay and other financial incentives for teachers of science and math as well as changes in the state’s accountability system. [More—The [Dallas Morning News](#)] (Dec. 9)

An intrepid group of students and teachers at Dacula Middle School in Georgia are on a mission to “seek out new worlds of knowledge ...and boldly go where no student has gone before.” Their classroom, known as the USS Innerpride, is replete with a command bridge and other trappings of the venerable “Star Trek” series. The 40 “cadets” of the Starfleet Institute, all of whom were performing below grade level on the math and science state exams, received personal invitations to join the mission from co-commanders Celisa Edwards and Jayne Lawson, who are finding that their engaging theme and emphasis on learning motivation

Edwards and Jayne Lawson, who are finding that their engaging theme and emphasis on learning motivation are producing promising results: “Last year’s cadets boasted gains of 28 to 77 points on the math and science...exams.” [More—The [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)] (Dec. 7)

Raising Student Achievement

Known by various names in school districts, Response to Intervention (RTI), early-intervention programs that serve students needing extra support but who have not been identified as needing special education services, is getting more attention since its endorsement in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The National Education Association is trying to introduce many of its more than 3 million members to the RTI process, intended to “increase the capacity of teachers to engage in RTI programs as they spread through school districts.” Federal special education funds can be used in part for this early-intervention effort. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Dec. 10)

In *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, researchers from the University of California, Santa Barbara offer findings concerning the most effective methods of teaching new skills. Their conclusion: *It depends*. Study participants had to complete tasks that involved categorizing items by three different methods: “starting with easy problems, starting with harder problems then moving to easier examples, or being shown examples in random order.” In instances when the categories were easily described, all three approaches worked. When the categories were not easily described, researchers found that starting with the harder problems and moving to the easier ones produced favored results. [More—[ScienceDaily](#)] (Dec.1)

School Improvement

Alaska is on the way to having its first comprehensive, statewide education plan as the result of a recent summit in Anchorage. Organized by the state’s Department of Education and Early Development, the event brought together a diverse group of 450 Alaskans, including representatives of businesses, higher education, teachers, parents, and state and local policymakers. The 44 resulting goals and outcomes now go to the State Board of Education and Early Development and the University of Alaska Board of Regents. [More—The [Bristol Bay \(AK\) Times](#)] (Dec. 3)

And the 2008 Broad Prize for Urban Education goes to—the Brownsville Independent School District, where 94 percent of the students are from low-income families and more than 40 percent are English-language learners. Students outperformed other Texas districts serving low-income students in reading and math. The annual prize recognizes the most improved urban school district in the nation. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Dec.1) (premium article access compliments of Edweek.org)

A new statewide effort in Mississippi to reduce the high school dropout rate is experiencing positive results in the northeast part of the state. The Office of Dropout Prevention at the Mississippi Department of Education, which began its “On the Bus” campaign two years ago, reports that 22 of 31 districts in the northeast improved their dropout rates between 2006 and 2007. Statewide, the average dropout rate decreased as well, from 17.6 to 15.9 percent, but in a number of the northeast districts, the rates were in the single digits. With all Mississippi districts now required to have dropout prevention plans in place, the Office of Dropout Prevention is expecting the percentages to continue to decline. [More—The [AP](#)] (Dec.8)

In Colorado, education leaders are using the results of a study of dropouts in five of the state’s districts to target the middle grades for early warning signs of problems associated with dropping out. Researchers focused on multiple indicators, including behavior and attendance records as well as grades, in the five districts with the state’s highest dropout rates. While the complete data from the study will be ready for release next spring, school leaders in Pueblo, one of the five districts studied, are starting to make policy changes based on the data for their schools. [More—The [Denver Post](#)] (Dec.1)

Teacher Quality and Development

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) plans to streamline its process of accrediting teacher-preparation programs and may offer options to institutions that include nontraditional programs such as urban teacher residencies. According to NCATE's president, James G. Cibulka, the NCATE board has requested recommendations for redesigning the accreditation process by next spring. Among the expected changes are cost efficiencies for colleges and universities undergoing accreditation. A recent survey of NCATE-accredited institutions revealed their desire for a "more focused, streamlined process with less paperwork and more emphasis on adding value." [More—[Education Week](#)] (Nov. 20)

Technology in Education

Eleven school districts and one charter school in Michigan plan to increase the number of students taking online courses based on a waiver granted by the state's department of education. Michigan students are currently limited to taking only two online courses outside of their school buildings in a semester. Districts and charter schools applied for waivers of these restrictions in response to a challenge from State Superintendent Mike Flanagan to come up with innovative ideas for reaching more students and improving achievement. The waiver also follows Michigan's 2006 decision to require an online course or other online learning experience for graduation from high school. [More—The [Detroit Free Press](#)] (January 3)

The Tennessee Department of Education, in partnership with Apple, Inc. and the state's board of regents, launched ELC, the electronic learning center, making it the third state to offer resources to K-12 teachers and students through iTunesU. The new site contains more than 280 curriculum-based resources developed by the state education department. Teachers have access to training sessions about new state academic standards and resources on such topics as classroom behavior and reading. "Students can access relevant lessons when doing homework and or studying for tests," according to Education Commissioner Timothy Webb. The electronic center's content currently covers grades two through eight. [More—The [Murfreesboro \(TN\) Post](#)] (Dec. 18)

In Virginia, the state's secretaries of education and technology have launched an experiment with the "flexbook," an effort to digitize course content. Taking a cue from higher education where electronic texts are on the rise, Virginia is partnering with CK-12, a nonprofit, high-tech organization that provides electronic textbooks in several areas of the sciences, to work with teachers in the state in developing the new online resources in biophysics, nanotechnology, and other emerging science fields. [More—[The Washington Post](#)] (Nov. 30)

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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