

Archived Information



The Education Innovator

Office of Innovation & Improvement/Office of Communications & Outreach

June 26, 2008 Issue

Volume VI, No. 6

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Editor's Note:

The Education Innovator will publish an abridged issue in July. Please look for the next full issue in August.

Feature

History Matters: How Teaching American History Grants Are Helping Teachers and Students

Scholarly resources for studying our nation's history can be found not only in libraries, museums, and architectural sites, but also in the very streets, neighborhoods, and communities where our history once unfolded. Take, for example, the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Years ago, immigrants squeezed into the tall, brick buildings that characterize the neighborhood, with entire families living in one room and making due by sharing beds and floor space. Entrepreneurs sold goods from potato sacks or pushcarts and, eventually, the successful ones opened stores. Today, the area's shops, galleries, and restaurants are very different, but a trip to the vicinity can reveal to scholars the remnants of long ago. Such is the case for teachers participating in the U.S. Department of Education's Teaching American History (TAH) projects, who visit the island borough and learn the lessons of history by walking in the footsteps of the past.

For students to understand and appreciate our nation's history, their teachers need a strong grounding in American history content and pedagogy. The TAH grant program helps to improve student achievement by enhancing teachers' knowledge of traditional American history through intensive, ongoing professional development in both subject content and research-based teaching strategies. The program began in 2001 and is administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement. Grants fund multi-year projects, and grantees must partner with one or more organizations that have extensive resources and expertise in American history, including institutions of higher education, libraries, museums, and nonprofit history or humanities organizations. In total, the Department has awarded over 800 TAH grants to school districts in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands to provide intensive, content-driven professional development to K-12 American history teachers.

A number of TAH grants have incorporated travel to historic sites, such as Manhattan's Lower East Side, into the professional development offered to American history teachers. Thus, teachers are able to harness the power of place and bring meaning to history in ways that energize and inspire students and improve student learning.

History is one of the core academic subjects under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is commonly known as the "Nation's Report Card," shows improvement in history performance in grades four, eight, and 12, the three grades levels to which the test was administered. Yet, less than one-quarter of America's students in these grades are performing at the advanced or proficient levels in American history.

Through the White House's Preserve America initiative the Department of Education and a host of federal agencies are working hard to help Americans understand the importance of preserving our nation's history. Some 600 communities across America have been recognized for their work to create "Preserve America" communities. Communities that receive this designation actively protect and celebrate their heritage. They use their historic assets to spur economic development and community revitalization, and

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they encourage appreciation of local historic resources through education and tourism programs.

The President also recognizes the classroom teacher's role in promoting heritage education. Since 2003, the White House has recognized an outstanding history educator with the *Preserve America History Teacher of the Year* award. Award winners are recognized for their abilities to impart an appreciation for historic preservation in the classroom.

TAH Projects that Incorporate Historic Preservation: Savannah's Historic District

Among the TAH projects that have and are continuing to innovate in the area of American history are ones that incorporate historic preservation into their programs. Two districts that have been at the forefront of this approach are the Savannah Chatham Public Schools in Georgia and the West Morris Central High School District in New Jersey. Both districts have received multiple TAH grants and have been recognized at national conferences for their work.

The Savannah-Chatham County Public School System is a five-time recipient of TAH grants. The district's first grant employed a successful local teaching and learning model that utilized Savannah's 2.2-square-mile historic district – which also is a national landmark – as a catalyst for exploring history and architecture. That first grant, "History Is Monumental," provided teachers with unique opportunities to learn American history, using one of the nation's largest historic districts as a laboratory. Project directors Candy Lowe and Leah Colby note that the approach of "linking local monuments to the broader scope of American history fosters a greater appreciation and understanding of the significance and relevance of local history and the connections to American history."

Savannah traces its history to 1733, a year after Georgia became the 13th English colony in North America. Evidence of its past appears virtually everywhere, offering teachers and visitors the opportunity to delve into history and examine its contribution to the American experience. Savannah's historic squares and the monuments that adorn them serve as focal points for a comprehensive study of American history through the use of artifacts and other primary sources.

In addition to its partnership with the Georgia Historical Society, headquartered in Savannah, the school district collaborated with local museums and historic sites to enable teachers to investigate significant issues, episodes, individuals, and turning points in American history. The grant program also utilized Massie Heritage Center, a district-owned teaching museum for history and architecture.



Massie Heritage Education teacher Carol Stalvey conducts a program called "History is Monumental" with students from White Bluff Elementary School.

Massie's student programs, which serve 15,000 students each year, use Savannah's historic resources to explore local history. But Massie is an incredible resource itself. Before closing its doors in 1974, Massie served as Savannah's first free public school, educating youth since 1856. The school's rich history includes serving as a Union hospital during the Civil War occupation of Savannah and as a Freedmen's Bureau school for newly-emancipated slaves. The building is an architectural treasure designed by prominent architect John Norris, who planned both luxury homes for the wealthy and functional buildings such as schools, offices, and retail and residential spaces. Subsequent TAH grants in Savannah have incorporated the resources and lessons of this first grant.

In New York City, Students Learn About Immigration

The West Morris Regional High School District in rural Chester, N.J., received TAH grants in 2001 and again in 2005. Both grants have incorporated travel to historic sites into the professional development offered to American history teachers. During the summer of 2003, the project directors took a group of teachers to New York City as part of their professional development training. The topic of study was immigration and the featured historian was Ken Jackson, a professor from Columbia University.

This professional development opportunity not only provided engaging lectures and extensive reading in history, it took teachers out of the classroom and on to the streets and waterways of New York City. Jackson led a walking tour of Manhattan's Lower East Side and guided a journey along the East River to retrace the course taken by German immigrants aboard the General Slocum boat, which tragically caught fire and led to the deaths of many aboard.

Even though the teachers lived in New Jersey, a short distance from New York City, Jackson introduced them to sites that many of them had never seen. Roseanne Lichatin, a teacher from West Morris who went on Jackson's walking tour, used her experiences and learning to plan a field trip and collateral assignments for her class. She noted "Jackson inspired me to think about how I could share these places and experiences with my students." She secured district funds for a trip to the Lower East Side of Manhattan, including taking the train and subway, and walking across the Brooklyn Bridge to get to their destination. Many of Lichatin's students had never been on a train or a subway, and some had never been to that part of Manhattan.

Before the field trip, Lichatin had her students read about life in New York City with a particular focus on late 19th and early 20th century immigration. In order to get a perspective on the early American dream, students studied J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur's famous letter, "*What Then is the American?*" Students read and discussed several other documents, including Emma Lazarus's poem "*The New Colossus*," excerpts from immigration laws that impacted the period, political cartoons, and analyzed the engaging photographs of Jacob Riis that vividly illustrate tenement dwellings and the faces of New York City residents at the turn of the century.

Lichatin noted, "Students walked away with a better awareness of the diversity of New York City neighborhoods and a greater appreciation of early tenement life that necessitated legislative action during the early 20th century. They returned from this academic journey with a sense of appreciation of the value of historic places in the study of our nation's past and perhaps, an awareness of how important preservation is to our nation's memory."

There are more outcomes as well. Lichatin recalls, "Students created a museum display on the topic of immigration, some participated in a debate on current immigration policies, others created a family tree that explores [their] own history, and still others contributed to an editorial that argues for the value of historic preservation." Due in part to the TAH grant, Lichatin learned to be a true historian, and she brought this to her students who learned to conduct research and apply it.

Studying the Past Outside the Classroom Walls

Teachers who infuse the curriculum with historic preservation are seeing that students are becoming more deeply engaged with history. During the 2007-2008 school year, 40 students from West Morris Central High School and Frederick Douglass Academy, a high school in Harlem, N.Y., traveled together by bus to visit Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma, Ala. These students traveled some of the same routes as the original "Freedom Riders" did 47 years earlier. They also studied the civil rights movement through documents, lectures, and films on their own "freedom ride," and their bus became a moving classroom.

Students visited the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the Voting Rights Museum, the Civil Rights Memorial, and the Rosa Parks Museum. In addition, they heard the very moving and powerful stories of "foot soldiers" who challenged segregation laws during this challenging, yet fascinating period in American history. The highlights of the trip, as noted by students, included a visit with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, a hero of the Civil Rights era in Birmingham, and walking hand in hand across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. This use of historic place to teach the civil rights movement was

one that the teachers gained knowledge of through the TAH projects, and students who benefited say that they will never forget it.

In 2005, Lichatin was named the Preserve America History Teacher of the Year. As she has noted, “The value of ‘knocking down classroom walls’ and taking the study of our past outside where history happened is a powerful way for students to learn. I have always believed that students should see the ‘stuff’ of history, that is, the documents and primary sources that are part of our nation’s legacy. But, they should also see the places that played a pivotal role in our past and walk in the footsteps of ordinary Americans who helped shape our nation’s memory.”

Key Resources

- [OII Teaching American History Program](#)
- [Preserve America](#)
- [National Assessment of Education Progress, U.S. History Assessment](#)
- [Savannah-Chatham Public Schools TAH programs](#)
- [Directory of Savannah Museums](#)
- [Massie Heritage Center](#)
- [Press release on West Morris, NJ students’ “Freedom Ride”](#)

What’s New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings [visited](#) the Gary and Jerri-Ann Jacobs High Tech High School in San Diego, Calif., to learn how the school is challenging students with innovative teaching strategies and rigorous curriculum, particularly in the high-demand fields of science and math. She participated in an education policy roundtable discussion with students, teachers and administrators and discussed how the federal government can build on successes such as those at High Tech High School to support academic gains in classrooms nationwide and to prepare every child with grade-level skills or better as called for under NCLB. (June 17)

Secretary Spellings [delivered](#) a speech at the opening of the Air Force One Discovery Center at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. She noted, “It was 25 years ago that a report called *A Nation At Risk*, commissioned by the Reagan Administration, alerted the nation to stark realities facing our education system. That report was one of the things that first hooked me on public policy and education.” (June 9)



Secretary Spellings joined former First Lady Nancy Reagan at the new interactive Air Force One Discovery Center in the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. Photo by Jen Edney

In a recent syndicated AP editorial, (i.e., [Salt Lake Tribune](#)) Secretary Spellings explained how and why the federal Reading First program came about, and what the program means to the 1.6 million students it serves. The program is based on the report of the nonpartisan National Reading Panel, created in 1997, which examined more than two decades of research to determine the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching reading. The Secretary notes that Reading First has been effective in many schools (see below), and concludes, “We need more Reading First, not less.” (June 7)

At Alan Shawn Feinstein at Broad Elementary School in Providence, R.I., students are well on their way to achieving No Child Left Behind's goal of having every child reading on grade level by 2014. Thanks to NCLB's Reading First program, Feinstein and schools across the country are using research-based methods to teach reading, and as a result, are seeing big gains in student achievement.

Since 2003, Feinstein has used grant funds to successfully implement a research-based approach to improve reading instruction. Reading First builds on a solid foundation of scientifically based research and provides struggling students in the nation's neediest schools with the necessary resources to make significant progress in reading achievement.

Feinstein enrolls a diverse population of students with over 90 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. Just five years ago, most students were not reading on grade level. Reading First has made a huge difference by focusing on what happens in the classroom and using data to drive instruction.

Reading First funds have enabled Feinstein teachers to work with coaches and other professionals to plan and implement the school's 90 minutes of daily reading instruction, which focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Colleen Driscoll, a second grade teacher, finds that the support is very useful. "I feel these professional development hours have been invaluable. I'm a first-year Reading First teacher, so for me, to get all the help I've been getting in the embedded instruction, and the common planning time where other teachers are showing me how to do different aspects of it, it's really influenced my teaching and helped my children to improve."

At Feinstein, in Providence, and all across the country, Reading First is working to improve the quality of reading instruction and helping our youngest students learn to read. Reading scores for America's fourth graders are higher than they have ever been in the history of the Nation's Report Card. In Providence, scores have improved nine points over the past year. And since 2005, Feinstein's reading scores have increased by 21 percentage points.

Secretary Spellings [announced](#) new awards under two discretionary grant programs administered by the Department's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. First, she presented \$24 million in grants to 92 school districts in 34 states to help enhance and fortify readiness and emergency management plans. Then she made \$5.78 million in [grants](#) available to 49 districts and other entities in 20 states to develop, implement, or expand school-based drug testing programs for sixth through 12th graders. (June 4)

The Department of Education's Institute of Educational Sciences [released](#) a [report](#), "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Two Years," which reaffirmed parental satisfaction and academic gains among the scholarship participants. The report said that reading achievement improved for three large subgroups of students, comprising 88 percent of participating students. Their gains put them about two to four months ahead of their peers who did not receive a scholarship. In 2008, families received \$14.8 million in scholarships to cover tuition, fees and transportation expenses to attend the participating private elementary or secondary school of their choice. (June 2008)



The final *Education News Parents Can Use* broadcast of the 2007-2008 season showcased the work of the U.S. Department of Education, the USA Freedom Corps, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and other federal, state, local, private, and philanthropic programs devoted to creating a culture of service and responsible youth citizenship. The broadcast spotlighted notable young volunteers who have shared their time and talents to benefit those in need. The broadcast also featured a special segment on reading during the summer, highlighting the Department's Reading First program. More information about the June broadcast is [online](#). Click [here](#) to watch the archived Web cast. (June 2008)

Secretary Spellings and U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson [discussed](#) a four-part [plan](#) designed to improve the functioning of the student loan marketplace and to ensure that all qualified students have access to federally insured loans for the coming school year. The plan includes a loan purchase commitment under which the Department agrees to purchase new federal loans originating in the 2008-2009 school year. (May 21)

The Department's National Center for Education Statistics released its annual report on the condition of education in the United States. [The Condition of Education 2008](#) includes 43 indicators in five major areas. Among the findings: in 2009-2010, public school enrollment is expected to top 50 million students for the first time in history; in 2005-2006, about one-third of African-American students and one-third of Hispanic students attended high-poverty schools, compared with four percent of white students; and, since 1970, women's undergraduate enrollment has increased more than three times as fast as men's. (May 29)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

The latest book in the [Innovations in Education](#) series, *Evaluating Online Learning: Challenges and Strategies for Success*, will be released via a live webcast on July 2 from 1:30-2:30 p.m. (CDT), from the 2008 National Educational Computing Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Seven evaluations that address a broad spectrum of online learning options are highlighted in the new book. The webcast will feature a panel of representatives from several featured programs and will be moderated by Tim Wagner, director of the Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology. Registration for the webcast is [online](#). An archived version of the webcast will also be available for those who miss the live event. (June 2008)

Assistant Deputy Secretary Doug Mesecar and staff from the Parental Options and Information Office of OII participated in the [National Charter Schools Conference](#) in New Orleans, La., and presented information on charter school funding and related programs and services from the Department of Education. The eighth-annual conference, which is sponsored by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, featured general session addresses from Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal and Geoffrey Canada of the Harlem Children's Zone. (June 2008)

American History

The Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies offers "[Smithsonian Source](#)," an online resource for teaching American history. The site includes instructional strategies for using primary sources in the classroom, information about various history topics, lesson plans, and primary source materials such as artifacts, documents, and photographs. (June 2008)

Arts Education

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has [announced](#) the five "dream teams" that will create strategies to strengthen their state's arts education policies and programs at the next NEA Education Leaders Institute, held from July 15-17. (May 22)

Mathematics and Science

The latest iteration in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's series of reports on secondary school reform and redesign, [Rethinking High School](#), highlights three high schools that have successfully implemented programs to prepare all students for college mathematics. The profiled schools include Interlake High School in Bellevue, W. Va.; Granby High School in Norfolk, Va.; and Fenway High School in Boston, Mass. (2008)

Raising Student Achievement

An average of 70.6 percent of students who started high school four years earlier graduated nationally in 2005, the year for which the most recent data are available, up slightly from the prior year, according to *Education Week's* annual [Diplomas Count](#) report. The rates, however, vary widely by state with just 45.4 percent of Nevada students earning diplomas while more than 83.3 percent of New Jersey students do so. For the first time, the report also breaks down the graduation rates for each U.S. congressional district and Washington, D.C. (June 5)

The National Geographic School Publishing and Literacy Achievement Research Center will host its [2008 Literacy Institute](#), aimed at connecting science and literacy to promote student success, on July 9 and 10 at the National Geographic Society Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Registration materials are online. (June 2008)

Contributions collected by the [United Way of America](#) – the nation’s largest nonprofit organization – will go in part to the organization’s new goal of halving the high school dropout rate within the next decade. Brian A. Gallagher, the United Way’s president and chief executive, stated, "For years and years and years, folks saw us as a fundraising organization ... but the issues we care about weren't getting better. So the change here is to put a stake in the ground on the issues that drive improving social conditions." (May 15)

A new [report](#) from the Southern Regional Education Board calls for states to align their career and technical curriculum with college-readiness standards, conduct end-of-course assessments, and establish panels consisting of college faculty, high school teachers, school officials, and employers to create curriculum frameworks and course syllabi. The report also encourages states to provide incentives for districts and high schools to work together with two-year colleges, technology centers, and employers to design coursework. (May 2008)

[Raising Graduation Rates in an Era of High Standards: Five Commitments for State Action](#), a report from *Jobs For the Future*, provides state policymakers with a framework to help all students graduate from high school and thrive in college. The report also highlights states that are successfully raising standards and graduation rates. (2008)

Teacher Quality and Development

Faced with a chronic shortage of mathematics and science teachers, [Bridgeport Public Schools](#) in Connecticut has initiated a three-year recruiting program to hire qualified teachers from India. In keeping with the district’s motto, schools are “expecting great things” from these international recruits. (June 2008)

Eighty percent of new teachers report feeling “very prepared” or “somewhat prepared” to head their respective classrooms, according to a new [survey](#) of first-year teachers from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda. The report also finds, however, that many new teachers feel quite under-prepared for dealing with the ethnic and racial diversity in their classrooms. (2008)

Technology

“[Arcademic Skill Builders](#)” is a nonprofit Web site that features educational activities inspired by arcade games. The site aims to engage students using a new approach for learning basic mathematics, language arts, and vocabulary skills. (June 2008)

Innovations in the News

Charter Schools/ Choice

New Orleans school children entering kindergarten through the third-grade will have a chance to go to private schools at taxpayer expense this fall under a bill given final passage in the state House that marked a major victory for Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal. According to the AP, Jindal placed \$10 million for the voucher program in the proposed state budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1. The program and the price tag are expected to grow as the first-year participants progress in school and others join the program. [More—[Education Week](#)] (June 19) (*paid subscription required*)

A second round of [results](#) comparing high school graduation figures for Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and a group of private schools in the district’s publicly funded scholarship program echoes results from a report released in January. The latest report finds that students who attend participating private schools are more likely to graduate than those who attend MPS. *Graduation Rates for Choice and Public School Students in Milwaukee* was released and funded by School Choice Wisconsin, a school choice advocacy organization, which is the oldest of its kind in the country. [More—[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#)] (June 7)

A new [study](#) from Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes examines the effectiveness of student reward programs in charter schools. Researcher Margaret Raymond surveyed 186 charter schools and collected achievement data from 47 of them to determine whether incentives for academic and behavioral excellence (such as certificates of merit, college fund contributions, and cash) helped to improve student achievement. Although results were mixed, the study finds that incentive systems positively and significantly correlated with student achievement in reading, but not in mathematics.

[More—[International Business Times](#)] (May 27)

Raising Student Achievement

Concerned about the decline of middle school students' interests in mathematics and science, Raytheon encourages its engineers to volunteer their time in middle schools in the Andover, Mass., area to counter that trend. Volunteers share their passion for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The effort is centered on an interactive Web site, mathmovesu.com that "features virtual worlds that pertain to students' interests in music, fashion, and sports." Also included is an online resource center called "MathMovesUniversity" that provides both help to students and content for teachers. [More—[Boston Globe](#)] (May 29)

As the number of college engineering graduates diminishes, Lockheed Martin, the Bethesda, Md.-based aerospace company, has partnered with a nonprofit group, [Project Lead the Way](#), to bring professional engineers into eight K-12 schools located near Lockheed Martin facilities. "Essentially you create a pipeline within the public school system," said Jim Knotts, Lockheed Martin's director of corporate social responsibility. "And what we're really doing is sowing the seeds today with these students that we hope to reap in about four or five years." [More—[BusinessWeek](#)] (May 20)

When is an "F" not a "D?" In one Las Vegas, Nev., high school, the principal's recent decision that teachers could not issue a failing score of less than 50 met with a protest from the teachers and was overturned. This instance is representative of a current debate in other schools and districts concerning "how and whether to reform grading systems to give failing students a better chance to catch up." Some proponents of "setting a floor" for failing grades, such as 50, indicate that it cannot necessarily be done without other efforts in place "to determine why a student is not doing work and to change that behavior." [More—[USA Today](#)] (May 19)

School Improvement

Educators in the Sarasota County School District in Florida are expanding a program that allows high school students who are at risk of not graduating to set their own schedules and take the time needed to comprehend content in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, leading to graduation with their peers. The Performance-Based Diploma (PBD) program also includes a 12-week mentoring component that provides academic credit toward graduation. Begun in a single school in 2005, PBD is now operating in five county high schools. [More—[Herald-Tribune](#) (Fla.)] (June 1)

Teacher Quality and Development

New Jersey's alternate route to teaching program, the oldest in the country, is responsible for 40 percent of the new teachers hired annually, and is helping to staff hard-to-fill teaching positions in science, mathematics, and special education according to a state-commissioned study. In place for 23 years, the pioneering program and others like it in 49 states, are responsible for an estimated one-third of all new teachers, according to one of the study's authors. The report also cites areas of the program in need of improvement, such as providing new recruits with adequate preparation before they enter the classroom. [More—[New York Times](#)] (June 9)

The latest [data](#) (*requires Microsoft Excel*) on highly qualified teachers under NCLB indicates that 94 percent of the nation's classrooms in the 2006-2007 school year were staffed by teachers meeting the standard in core academic subjects. In high-poverty schools, however, the percentage of highly qualified teachers is lower than in low-poverty schools, a difference of five percent nationally. Overall, "there was an increase of seven percentage points in the total number of highly qualified teachers nationwide ... since 2003-04." North Dakota was the only state to meet the 2006-2007 goal of having a highly qualified teacher in every core-subject classroom. [More—[Education Week](#)] (June 6) (*paid subscription required*)

Arizona schools are taking a page from the higher education guidebook with the state's new Adjunct Teachers Initiative, a pilot program that will recruit professionals, such as engineers and scientists, to teach classes in calculus and algebra. The volunteers will receive 36 hours of teacher training before entering classrooms and will spend their first semester paired with a licensed teacher. [More—[Associated Press](#)]

(*Arizona Daily Star*) (May 18)

Book study groups, long recognized and used to increase teachers' awareness of the need for change in their practice, is increasing in use as a professional development strategy. Two trends – teachers' obligation to improving their skills and school-based efforts to improve practices that engage teachers as colleagues – are moving book study “far up the list” of how teachers are applying their professional development energies. According to Stephanie Hirsch, executive director of the National Staff Development Council, book study, “promote(s) deeper understanding of concepts and actual transfer of ideas to practice.”

[More—[Education Week](#)] (May 16) (*paid subscription required*)

Technology

To learn more about how technology in schools can raise student achievement and better prepare students for the real world, Secretary Spelling hosted the last of four technology roundtables held nationwide over the past 14 months, at Qualcomm. The roundtables engaged leaders in education, technology and investment on topics ranging from computers and cellular phones to electronic textbooks and teacher training.

[More—[San Diego Union Tribune](#)] (June 17)

High fuel prices are prompting schools to use virtual field trips as cost-effective ways to broaden students' learning experiences beyond their community, state, and even country. Helping to fuel a rise in these alternatives to leaving the classroom are increases in broadband access, decreases in the costs of acquiring the necessary technology, and a wider array of options for virtual excursions. One “broker” of the trips, the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration in Indianapolis, reports that more than 1.1 million students participated in trips organized by the Web site as of last month. The site is home to more than 150 virtual field trip destinations. [More—[Christian Science Monitor](#)] (June 6)

All is not lost for 100 students who did not make it into the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics (NCSSM). These “runners-up” from across the state in the Durham residential school's annual selection of students are being offered online classes that may eventually lead to a diploma from the school. For some of the students, particularly those from rural and otherwise underserved parts of the state where advanced mathematics and science courses are not offered, the online option is meeting a critical need. NCSSM hopes to enroll a second class of students for the online option next year. [More—[News & Observer](#)] (June 5)

As high schools increase efforts to raise graduation rates, online courses that provide missing credits are increasing in popularity. In the past several years, technology-based options to recover credits needed for graduation are “a huge area of growth,” according to Susan D. Patrick, president and chief executive officer of the [North American Council for Online Learning](#) (NACOL), a trade association for online schools. NACOL is expected to publish a white paper on promising practices in credit recovery later this year. (See [Innovator](#), February 2008, for more information on online learning.) [More—[Education Week](#)] (May 20) (*paid subscription required*)

The University of Central Florida (UCF) has a high-tech twist on the ritual of student teaching: a classroom of virtual students to put prospective teachers through their paces, complete with distinctive personalities that are either programmed by computer or created in real time by a student actor in an adjacent room wearing an electronic bodysuit that allows for speech and movements. The virtual classroom is a product of UCF's Institute of Simulation and Training, which received help from the technology and aeronautics company Lockheed Martin that has its own simulation lab in Orlando, Fla. [More—[Orlando Sentinel](#)] (May 15)

The number of K-12 students taking online courses now exceeds 1 million and, according to a new paper by the Hoover Institute, is expected to increase to the point that one-half of all courses in grades nine through 12 will be delivered online by 2019. With this growth come increasing questions about how best to judge and ensure the quality of electronic course taking. Among the issues for which there are calls for increased insight and accountability are interstate credit for advanced course taking and standards for attendance and course completion. [More—[Christian Science Monitor](#)] (May 14)

Purpose

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

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

Contributors

John McGrath
Doug Herbert
Executive Editors

Sherry Schweitzer
Editor-In-Chief

Christine Miller
June Feature Writer

Cynthia Cabell
Senior Production Editor

Dramon Turner
Production Editor

Emily Fitzpatrick
Copy Editor

Pamela Allen
Virginia Gentles
Doug Herbert
Stacy Kreppel
Todd May
Christine Miller
Kelly Rhoads
Tiffany Taber
Peggi Zelinko
Issue Reviewers

Doug Herbert
Todd May
Tiffany Taber
Article Submissions

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