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Editor's Note

The Education Innovator welcomes our new [U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and his staff](#). In his confirmation hearings, Duncan called education "the most pressing issue facing America," adding that "preparing young people for success in life is not just a moral obligation of society" but also an "economic imperative."

The recent passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides educators with a historic opportunity to make things better for our nation's children and to stimulate the economy both in the short- and long-term. The act provides more than \$100 billion over the next two years to both save and create hundreds of thousands of jobs at risk due to state and local budget cuts and to lay the foundation for a generation of education reform, innovation, and opportunity.

In the coming months, we plan to bring our readers stories and updates about the act's implementation and impact, as well as to continue our longstanding effort to share information about innovation and excellence in our nation's schools and communities.

Feature

Blue Ribbon Charter School Inspires Excellence Through the Arts

Not long ago, on the western shores of Lake Erie, a student jazz band was the featured entertainment at the local zoo's winter celebration. The group played a few sets and educated families about jazz and the concepts of that musical genre. Across town, other students made programs for a university's theatre production. Students who were selected to perform for the local community theatre's presentation of the "Lion King" held a rehearsal, while still others worked to design and print their own tee-shirts, book appearances for their bands, or organize CD release events. All of this artistic activity occurs on a daily basis in Toledo, Ohio, where young entrepreneurs are enrolled in the Toledo School for the Arts (TSA), a public charter school where personal enrichment and academic success is inspired through a challenging arts-based curriculum.

TSA enrolls sixth- through 12th-grade students. Founded in 1999, its mission is to focus on the visual and performing arts, providing a traditional education in a non-traditional environment. Ohio's charter schools, commonly referred to as "community schools," operate under three core principles fundamental to the charter school movement: accountability, choice, and autonomy. Similar in scope to the other 4,300 charter schools across the country, TSA serves as a laboratory for innovation, attracting pioneering educators focused on new approaches designed to improve student learning and success. The school's college-preparatory curriculum provides students with opportunities to both master an arts discipline and deepen their understanding of other academic subject matter through artistic content and skills. The school also prides itself on an additional focus on community service. As a charter school, TSA is held to high standards of accountability and, it has measured up, earning a 2008 Blue Ribbon School award from the U.S. Department of Education.

Creative Teaching and Learning Through the Arts

The school's faculty consists of outstanding teaching artists from all over the country who create innovative curricula aligned with Ohio's academic content standards. Recently, a science unit—"Teaching Science: Art and Soul," which was developed by two TSA teachers—was featured at an annual meeting of the National

Science Teachers Association. As part of the unit, students learned principles of chemistry by making their own chalk and crayons, which they then used to create drawings and sketches. Another example of innovative arts integration featured the school's 10th-grade teachers, who combined American studies and literature from the 1860s to the present. History, visual art, and English teachers worked together to coordinate lessons on topics such as the history and process of making Native American pottery, understanding the relationship between literature and its historical periods, and appreciating how writers represent and reveal their cultures and traditions.

Currently, on the third floor of TSA, there is a gigantic, student-constructed, three-dimensional tetrahedron. Students are able to walk in and out of it as they learn about geometry in both abstract and concrete ways. A mathematics class developed the blueprints, the stage construction class built the structure, and the dance company plans to choreograph a performance around it. According to Principal Howard Walters, "TSA uses the arts to learn what other traditional schools might use reading to learn. We pair similar concepts associated with academic and arts subjects as a means to further students' understanding."

In addition to this recent installation, the school's walls and public spaces are filled with art displays and murals—even handmade puppets make frequent appearances.



Resident artists worked with visual arts students on a giant "procession" puppet workshop.

The school also includes a gallery devoted to professional artwork from the Toledo Museum of Art. A courtyard often displays sculptures created by visiting artists. Music students, who practice vocal and instrumental music, add to the sounds of learning that echo through the hallways as students move between classes.

The current school year is an exciting one for staff and students because TSA recently completed a \$1 million, 22,000-square-foot renovation project, funded by the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority and Local Initiatives Support Corporation. The renovation, which took nine weeks to complete, resulted in a new dance studio, 10 new classrooms, a theater, a gallery, a technology lab, and a new roof. The overhaul allows all middle school students to be housed separately from the high school students, and provides space for an additional 20 students across each grade level.

TSA Under the Spotlight

In addition to providing students with a high-quality, arts-based curriculum, TSA's mission is to encourage students to become "life-long learners and productive members of society with appreciation, and competence in the arts." In order to help achieve this responsibility, TSA connects students with professional artists, hires artists to work as teachers, and helps students find work as artists in the community.

One of TSA's programs that capitalizes on these community connections is called "ARTnerships." "Artners" are community partners that commit their resources and expertise to help students realize their dreams. For example, last year, more than 20 TSA students were mentored by the Toledo Symphony Orchestra's string players. The symphony's associate conductor also provided a master class for advanced students.



TSA music students wage an Art Attack on downtown Toledo to celebrate the school's academic and artistic achievements.

TSA students also regularly receive docent-led tours at the Toledo Museum of Art, and several area restaurants serve as venues for students' concerts and performances. One of these restaurants, Mickey Finn's, hosted the TSA Pop Combo concert series and was the site for Artapaloosa, a student-driven arts fair. In recognition of TSA's presence there, new sandwiches named for TSA teachers and students were added to the menu.

TSA Draws National Attention

Since students enter TSA from 13 different school districts throughout northwest Ohio, not all are up to grade level when they arrive. Yet, TSA makes a commitment to help all students reach their full potential. To ensure their success, TSA regularly assesses students throughout the year to check for development on specific curriculum benchmarks. Struggling students receive regular tutoring and other interventions.

Recent assessment results on the Ohio Graduation Test, especially in reading and mathematics, validate the school's work to align and pace its curriculum. During the 2006-2007 school year, 93 percent of students were proficient in mathematics and 97 percent were proficient in reading. According to Principal Walters, "In math, success is achieved because our staff is about more than computation and procedure. At its core, math is a technical language. In order to comprehend it, one needs an understanding of the relationships expressed by equations and graphs and the ability to describe mathematical concepts in words." By focusing on the forms of expression, Walters said that students are able to build an understanding of mathematics that goes beyond routine calculations and assignments, enabling students to become real problem solvers.

TSA encourages students to succeed whether they are auditory, visual, or symbolic learners. Staff members use a variety of instructional methods while incorporating the arts into the subject matter. "We employ traditional lecture, group, and partner-based work, and discovery learning techniques. At times, we use calculators and graphing technology extensively, while at other times we expect the students to rely on their computational abilities and number sense. This willingness to employ a blend of approaches allows us to choose the one method that is the most appropriate and effective for a given topic," Principal Walters explained.

Academically, the school excels in the Toledo community it serves. TSA was [rated 'Excellent'](#) for the past three years by the Ohio Department of Education. In 2008, it was named a [U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School](#). And later that year, it was designated as a bronze medalist on [U.S. News & World Report's](#) list of American's best high schools. TSA also was presented with the state superintendent's "School of Promise" award for showing a commitment to high expectations for every student, while establishing a "caring, high-achieving school environment."

March marks the annual observance of national "Arts in Our Schools Month" and TSA will celebrate it in style with their fourth annual "Steppin' Out Live and Silent Auction." The money that students and staff will raise will support not only the arts, but also an outstanding charter school that most students feel privileged to attend. As Principal Walters noted, "We very much believe in and utilize a collaborative culture to help others, and to grow ourselves in our pursuit to be the best school possible."

Key Resources

- [Toledo School for the Arts](#)
- [Blue Ribbon Schools](#)
- [National Alliance of Public Charter Schools](#)
- [US Charter Schools](#)
- [Arts Schools Network](#)
- [Americans for the Arts' Arts Advocacy Day](#)
- [Theatre in Our Schools Month](#)
- [Music in Our Schools Month](#)
- [Youth Art Month](#)

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

After the President delivered his Inaugural Address, the Senate [confirmed](#) Chicago Public Schools Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan as the ninth U.S. Secretary of Education. Secretary Duncan graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1987, majoring in sociology. He was co-captain of the university's basketball team and was named a first team Academic All-American. From 1987 to 1991, he played professional basketball down under in Australia, where he also worked with children who were wards of the state. In 1992, he returned to Chicago to direct the Ariel Education Initiative, which seeks to create outstanding educational opportunities for children on the city's South Side. He was also part of the team that later started a new public elementary school around a financial literacy curriculum. In 1998, he joined the Chicago Public Schools, and, in June 2001, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley named him CEO. (January 2009)

Secretary Duncan [called](#) the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) a "historic opportunity to create jobs and advance education reform." Duncan emphasized the urgency of distributing the funds to states on an aggressive timetable in order to avert layoffs. The ARRA provides more than \$100 billion in education funding and college grants and tuition tax credits, as well as billions more for school modernization. Budget tables are available to [view](#) showing the amounts available for the Education Department, preliminary state allocations of ARRA funds, and preliminary ESEA Title I LEA allocations of ARRA funds. (Feb. 19)

Secretary Duncan [visited](#) Arlington, Va., Public Schools' Wakefield High School and used the occasion to urge swift passage of the economic stimulus legislation. He praised the bill's "historic level of one-time education funding that will not only save or create jobs but also will lay the groundwork for a generation of education reform and progress." (Feb. 10)

In their first trip to a public school since the Inauguration, President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama [visited](#) Capital City Public Charter School in northwest Washington, D.C. There, they read *The Moon Over Star*, by Dianna Hutts Aston, to a second-grade class and met with fifth-graders who told them about their learning expedition on voting rights. "We're very proud of what's been accomplished at this school, and we want to make sure that we're duplicating that success all across the country," the president said. "Nothing is going to be more important than this." (Feb. 4)

Secretary Duncan [introduced](#) First Lady Michelle Obama to U.S. Department of Education employees. She delivered brief [remarks](#) and honored long-serving Department of Education employees. "I am a product of your work," Michelle Obama told employees. (Feb. 2)

The February edition of [Education News Parents Can Use](#) introduced Secretary Duncan, who discussed the president's education plan, which aims to set all Americans on track to achieve lifelong success through education. Policymakers, educators, and parent-leaders talked about the movement to offer parents and communities greater choices in education, yet hold all stakeholders accountable for improved results. (Feb. 17) (You may watch archived webcasts [online](#).)



The U.S. Department of Education is now accepting applications for the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship (TAF) Program for the 2009-2010 academic year. Currently practicing, state-certified pre-kindergarten to 12th-grade public school teachers and instructional specialists/coaches with at least three years of teaching experience are eligible to apply through March 16, 2009. More information and application materials may be found [online](#). (February 2009)

Each new academic year brings renewed goals and fresh challenges to U.S. schools—while each new calendar year brings the latest round of exams through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). From January 26 to March 6, NAEP will be administered in mathematics, reading, and science to students in the fourth, eighth, and 12th grades. More than 7,000 NAEP staff will administer the exams to over one million students in approximately 19,000 public and private schools nationwide. To learn more about why participation in NAEP this year is so important, visit the Nation's Report Card at its [Web site](#). (February 2009)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

The [Teaching American History](#) program is currently accepting grant applications for the fiscal year 2009 funding cycle. This program supports projects that aim to raise student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of traditional American history. Awards assist districts—in partnership with entities that have extensive content expertise (such as institutions of higher education, history and humanities organizations, libraries, and museums)—to develop, evaluate, and disseminate innovative models of professional development. The application deadline is March 9, 2009. (January 2009)

Arts Education

Since 1998, the [NAMM Foundation](#) has been conducting its "Best Communities for Music Education" survey, a nationwide search for communities that house programs exemplifying a strong commitment to music education. To review and complete the survey on behalf of your community, please visit the NAMM Foundation Web site. The survey closes on March 13, 2009. (February 2009)

The current edition of [Principal](#), the quarterly magazine written for K-8 principals from the [National Association of Elementary School Principals](#), focuses on arts education. Some topics covered in this edition include decorating school walls with art for an impact on the whole-school curriculum and educating the whole child through arts-based learning. (January/February 2009)

A new [study](#) reported in the journal *Social Science Quarterly* reveals that students who take music lessons, especially during high school, and attend concerts with their parents, score better in math and reading than their nonmusical peers. Using two nationally representative data sources (ECLS-K and NELS:88), researchers at Ohio State University analyzed patterns of music involvement and their possible effects on academic achievement for both children and adolescents. Their findings also indicate unequal participation in music by adolescents of varying socio-economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, which has "major implications for federal, state and local agencies," according to the authors. (February 2009)

American History

The year of Lincoln has begun! The [Gilder-Lehrman Institute](#) will celebrate the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth throughout 2009 with special podcasts, historical lectures, featured primary-source documents, online exhibitions, and other useful resources for educators. (February 2009)

For the sixth consecutive year, the Gilder-Lehrman Institute will select and honor outstanding history teachers. Each state winner will receive \$1,000 and an archive of primary-source instructional materials that

will be presented to his or her school library. The national winner will receive an additional \$1,000 and a trip to New York City for the awards ceremony. Nomination deadlines may vary state to state. Please contact your state coordinator for more information. To find the coordinator for your state, please visit the institute's [Web site](#). (February 2009)

In honor of the Lincoln Bicentennial, the Library of America has developed five *Lincoln in American Memory* booklets. The paperbacks feature excerpts of essays, speeches, poems, plays, and nonfiction material relating to the 16th president of the United States. To order these free resources, please visit the Library of America's [Web site](#). (February 2009)

The [American Academy of Arts and Sciences](#) has created a new set of statistical data about the state of humanities in America. The "[Humanities Indicators](#)" aim to provide educators, policymakers, and the public with information regarding the effectiveness, impact, and needs of the humanities field. (January 2009)

Charter Schools

A University of Indiana [study](#) suggests that students who start out academically underperforming make more progress over the course of a year at charter schools than do their peers at traditional public schools. The author asserts that this latest study does not contradict a previous university report that revealed charter schools perform no better on state tests than the districts from which their students originated. Rather, the two reports look at different ways of measuring learning. (Jan. 7)

A new [study](#) indicates that Boston charter schools are significantly outperforming traditional schools in the district. Research in *Informing the Debate* also questions the quality of Boston's experimental "pilot schools," which in many cases posted disappointing or ambiguous results. Pilot schools are similar to charter schools, but are managed by the district. Authors of the study recommended that the state identify what works at charter schools and determine how to transfer those strategies to other underperforming public schools. (January 2009)

Higher Education

The [Alliance for Excellent Education](#) and the College Board have collaborated to produce the latest issue in the alliance's [Facts for Education Advocates](#) series of informational bulletins. This issue examines the price of college and financial aid. (January 2009)

The state of the national economy is causing many students and families to experience anxiety about affording college at a time when more Americans than ever before are saying that a college education is essential to life success. A [survey](#) from [Public Agenda](#) and the [National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education](#) reveals a dramatic shift in public attitude regarding higher education. In 2000, 31 percent of people surveyed stated that a college degree is necessary, compared to 55 percent in 2008. Forty-seven percent said most people who are qualified for college do not have the opportunity to attend in 2000, while 67 percent reported feeling that way in 2008. (2009)

Mathematics and Science

A [study](#) of college freshmen in the U.S. and China published in the journal *Science* reveals that Chinese students know more science facts than their U.S. counterparts, but that neither group is particularly good at scientific reasoning. Lei Bao, associate professor of physics at Ohio State University and lead author of the study, asserts that the research defies the conventional idea that teaching science facts will improve students' reasoning ability. "Because students need both knowledge and reasoning, we need to explore teaching methods that target both," Bao notes. (Jan. 30)

Raising Student Achievement

Bill Gates, co-chairman of the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), has released his first [annual letter](#) on the work of the foundation and its goals for the future. On U.S. education, Gates notes progress among many high schools that now send 100 percent of their low-income students to college. He also commits to replicating foundation-funded school models that are working the best—almost all of which have been charter schools. (January 2009)

[Quality Counts 2009](#), the 13th edition of [Education Week's](#) annual series of reports on state education policies and performance, places a special emphasis on examining English language learners. Readers will learn about the policy challenges that this diverse group of students poses to states and school districts as well as the rights of ELLs and how immigration is changing local communities. The report also offers state-by-state analysis of various student outcomes. (January 2009)

Learn how to build, strengthen, and expand summer programs at the annual Conference on Summer Learning hosted by the [National Center for Summer Learning](#). Workshops will cover topics such as expanding participation and access, using innovative instructional approaches, and planning strategies for seasoned program managers. The conference runs from April 16-17 in Chicago, Ill Registration materials are available online. Return to the center's Web site in the coming months to learn about the annual "Summer Learning Day," to be held this year on July 9. (February 2009)

Reading

For the first time in its 26-year history, the annual *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* shows that literary reading (defined as reading any novel, short story, poem, or play) has risen among adult Americans. A new [report](#) from the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) examines this survey, and also finds that while the absolute number of book-reading adults grew from 2002 to 2008, the number of book-reading adults as a *percentage* of the U.S. population declined. (January 2009)

Teacher Quality and Development

A [study](#) from the Louisiana Board of Regents suggests that, on average, novice teachers in the state who were trained through an alternative program called [The New Teacher Project](#) (TNTP) (see [Innovator](#), Nov. 17, 2003 and Sept. 18, 2008) outperformed experienced teachers in helping students make gains in various academic subjects. Some educators point out, however, that value-added measurements of student growth can favor programs like TNTP, in which teachers tend to work with students who are far behind grade level and, consequently, are more likely to show rapid growth. (Dec. 3)

[Rethinking Human Capital in Education: Singapore as a Model for Teacher Development](#) analyzes the teacher preparation and support system in the small Asian country with a centralized National Institute of Education and revered teaching ranks. Author Susan Sclafani asserts that the United States would do well to closely examine Singapore's approach, which includes the strategic use of financial resources for education, a strong sense of teacher professionalism, high standards in teacher recruitment and preparation, deep support for new candidates, and career management for continuing teachers. (2008)

Innovations in the News

Charters/School Choice

A new generation of county magnet schools born out of New Jersey's former vocational school system is outperforming more affluent suburban high schools, according to the state's annual school report cards for 2007-2008. Based on SAT scores for the verbal, mathematics, and writing sections, the top nine schools are county magnet schools, topping schools such as Princeton High, whose SAT scores placed as number four in the statewide ranking a decade ago. The county magnets have evolved in that decade from vocational schools to ones that "focus on fields like engineering, medical sciences, and...the performing arts." [More—[New York Times](#)] (Feb. 6) (*free registration required*)

The growing network of KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) schools, long recognized for its success with middle-grade students, is adapting its approach to serve four- and five-year-olds. Schools (such as the KIPP Raices Academy, the first elementary school in the charter's network in Los Angeles) are working to "strike a balance between having high expectations and the developmentally appropriate environment" for younger students, according to Amber Young, principal of Raices Academy. Six other KIPP elementary schools are located in Houston, New Orleans, and Washington, D.C., and plans include opening a number of early childhood and kindergarten sites that will become elementary schools. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Feb. 22) (*paid subscription required*)

Raising Student Achievement

A new report from the National Early Literacy Panel on early-reading research indicates that teaching the alphabet and letter sounds in preschool are important to later reading success, based on a meta-analysis of 500 quantitative studies. A concern for some early childhood experts is the panel's conclusion that other less quantifiable features of early literacy environments—such as background knowledge, oral language, and vocabulary—are of lesser importance to later reading development. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Jan. 8) (*paid subscription required*)

The Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE) is focused on increasing the Native American graduation rate by working to make courses more relevant and engaging for Native American students. A way to provide these students with the means of succeeding, according to Willard Gilbert, a past president of CHSE and professor at Northern Arizona University, is "to incorporate Native Language into the curriculum, along with Native oral history, legends and greater involvement of Native elders in the classroom." With support from the National Science Foundation, a recent program with Arizona tribal students incorporated Native language in science instruction, which resulted in a "significant increase in academic scores as well as improved attitude toward science," according to Gilbert. [More—[Yuma \(Ariz.\) Sun](#)] (Jan. 13)

In San Diego, 200 teachers are partnering with some of their students, working side-by-side in science labs in a unique professional development effort. Known as "Bio-Bridge," the partnering students serve as classroom leaders, helping other students in the lab to understand the lessons. The teacher-student teams receive training together and time on Saturdays to plan the labs. The initiative began in the 2006-2007 school year with the support of faculty and staff of the University of California, San Diego. This year, teams in four San Diego-area districts are involved in Bio-Bridge and more than 200 teachers and as many as 1,000 student-leaders have been involved in the program. Funding sources include the U.S. Department of Education and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Jan. 21) (*paid subscription required*)

"Real Men Read!" —at least in Houston, they do. A pilot program, aptly named Real Men Read, is training Houston men to read with elementary and middle school students. The effort, based on a similar one in Chicago, gets underway this month in 31 schools. In Chicago, the program doubled the number of men mentors, from 300 to 600, and the number of schools involved went from 39 to 84 in two years. About 4,500 students in Houston will participate in the Real Men Read pilot. [More—[Houston Chronicle](#)] (Jan. 27)

In St. Paul, Superintendent Meria Carstarphen recently announced a \$1.4 million strategic investment from the Travelers Companies, Inc. that will assist the district in expanding programs focused on college preparation and developing leadership skills of principals. Travelers is the latest in a series of similar donations from other private-sector partners, including 3M, Ecolab, and the McKnight Foundation, that have agreed to make the St. Paul district a "strategic partnership priority," aligning their investments with the district's strategic priorities. Additional partnerships with similar announcements are expected soon. [More—[Minneapolis Star Tribune](#)] (Jan. 29)

The strategic plan of the Carlsbad Educational Foundation, committed to improving both music and science instruction in the Carlsbad, Ca., schools, wants more schools in the district to be like Jefferson Elementary with its robust music program that includes band, choir, and violin instruction. Jefferson Elementary, located in one of the lowest-income neighborhoods of Carlsbad, is making music instruction an integral part of its school programs by committing Title I funds to music as well as other core subjects. The Foundation's aim is to "boost music and science instruction throughout the district." A third target for its support is educational

innovation, including a high school student-run television program. [More— [San Diego Union-Tribune](#)] (Jan. 30)

School Improvement

At least three nonprofit organizations and foundations see the need for smart managers as a key to education improvement, and each is taking slightly different approaches to this element of human capital within K-12 schools. The most widely known of the three, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, has placed professionals from law, management, and public policy in schools districts for two-year periods in 29 cities since 2003. In Oakland, Calif., Education Pioneers places graduate students in the areas of business, law, education, and public policy in high-need schools, districts, and other education organizations during the summers. In Indianapolis, the Mind Trust is fielding a second year of applicants for its “education entrepreneur” fellowships, intended to “incubate the best and brightest education improvement ideas.” [More—[Education Week](#)] (Feb. 2) (*paid subscription required*)

Four New England states have joined forces to tackle the challenge of remaking high school. The New England Secondary School Consortium, consisting of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Rhode Island, plans to create high schools that are “flexible, borderless, multidimensional community learning centers” that will incorporate 21st century skills and allow students to study at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. Supporting the initiative are the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, each providing \$500,000 to support the initial 18 months of the consortium’s efforts. Three of the four states’ governors, accompanied by leaders from the education, legislative and professional sectors, announced the plans last December. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Jan. 7) (*paid subscription required*)

Two recent reports indicate that Maryland’s six-year investment to implement its *Bridge to Excellence Act* has paid dividends, to the point of making the state’s schools the best in the country. An evaluation by Editorial Projects in Education, publisher of *Education Week*, ranked Maryland first among the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The study examined such factors as accountability standards, readiness for college, and school financial support. Another report from MGT of America found that “proficiency levels statewide have improved dramatically for all students.” [More—[Washington Post](#)] (Jan. 8) (*free registration required*)

A report from the Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University finds that the current assemblage of public schools in New Orleans “significantly out-performs the Orleans Parish School district’s pre-Katrina results.” According to the report, the district’s pre-Katrina performance score for all schools (56.9) would have increased by 15 percent to 66.4 today. While the report authors point out that direct comparisons are not possible, Cowen Institute’s research manager Michael Schwam-Baird pointed to increases in test scores between 2007 and 2008 as an encouraging sign. [More—[New Orleans Times-Picayune](#)] (Jan. 26) [Education Week](#)] (Feb. 2) (*paid subscription required*)

Teacher Quality and Development

In Duval County, Fla., teachers who might have left the profession because of life-style changes have been paired in job-sharing arrangements since 2007. By splitting the benefits—one gets health benefits and both earn retirement benefits—there is little added cost to the district. Each teacher earns half of his or her normal full-time salary. The pairs work with their principals to determine how best to split their responsibilities, and both teachers see the same students all week. [More—[Florida Times-Union](#)] (Jan. 26)

“States can help districts do much more to ensure that the right teachers stay and the right teachers leave,” according to Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality. This and other findings concerning states’ hiring and firing of teachers were released in a report from the council, a Washington, D.C.,-based nonpartisan group, last month. States were given letter grades for their policies and practices, with them earning a D-plus on average. The highest mark went to South Carolina, earning a B-minus, for its efforts to enable ineffective teachers to be fired. [More—[The Washington Post](#)] (Jan. 29)

Technology in Education

The Dallas Independent School District (DISD), with the help of a \$3.8 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, continues to develop a mega-database that will provide its educators with instant access to important student information. Principals will have online dashboards that will include data on academic progress, budgets, and alerts when students are in need of academic assistance. The dashboards are being piloted in 20 district schools; plans call for them to be available to all schools in DISD within the next year. The Gates Foundation helped DISD begin the data system in 2006 with a \$5 million donation to the Dallas Education Foundation. [More—[Dallas Morning News](#)] (Jan. 22)

New Jersey education officials have rethought a possible requirement that every student complete at least one online course to graduate high school. Originally included in an ambitious redesign of the state's public high schools, the online requirement raised concern about the cost of mandating an online course during difficult fiscal times. The state department of education, according to a spokesperson, "wants to ensure that online courses based in other states align with [New Jersey] curriculum standards." Presently, Montana and Alabama require that high school students take either an online course or have an online educational experience as part of graduation requirements. [More—[New York Times](#)] (Jan. 30) (*free registration required*)

Purpose

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

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