



Feature

- Key Resources

What's New ?

- From the U.S. Department of Education
- From the Office of Innovation and Improvement
- Arts Education
- Charter Schools/School Choice
- Higher Education
- Leadership
- Mathematics and Science
- Raising Student Achievement
- Reading
- Teacher Quality and Development
- Technology
- Writing

Innovations in the News

- Charter Schools/School Choice
- Pre-Kindergarten Education
- Closing the Achievement Gap
- School Improvement
- Technology in Education

Purpose

Contributors

Disclaimer

Feature

Stimulus to Help Meet the Changing Needs of Today's Students and Communities

Siding for school buildings, exterior paint, energy efficient windows, ceiling tiles, roof repairs -- these are just some of the tasks needed to make decades-old schools conducive to learning. Thanks to the \$100 billion from the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's](#) (ARRA) investment in education, states will share in a historic influx of federal funds designed to upgrade school and college facilities, save and create hundreds of thousands of key education jobs, offset cuts in critical education programs and initiatives, and improve education for current and future generations of Americans. Funds that states and districts receive from the \$53 billion designated for the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund -- an important part of the education investment made by the ARRA-- may be used for modernization, renovation, and repair of public school and college facilities. Still another part of the ARRA provides states and local governments with the ability to issue up to \$22 billion in a new type of credit bond for construction, rehabilitation, or repair to school facilities or for acquisition of land for construction of school facilities. Together, these provisions will create jobs in construction and related industries. The question for many state and local education decision makers will be, "How can we make wise decisions about the best use of these unprecedented resources—spend them on renovations and revitalization or create new school facilities?"

ARRA's Help With Long-term Financing

The health of the economy in most communities depends in part on the quality of education offered the children who live there. For Vernonia, Oregon, where two major floods in 11 years have all but wiped out the school buildings, there is no question about what to do. "People will stay or leave our community based on the health of our education system," said Tony Hyde, Columbia County Commissioner and former Vernonia mayor. "Our community has a lot of issues due to two floods, but everyone understands that the school is the number one project—everyone agrees we need to move quickly and that is the plan. The stimulus money and building the school will put a lot of people back to work. We have a very talented labor force and they would like to work right in their own backyards, on their own time."

Hyde estimates that to build the new school facility they will need approximately \$35 to \$50 million, and the plan is to construct the "greenest" and most sustainable school ever built. Residents know their economy depends on rallying around this common cause, and that will mean passing a very large bond. The ARRA's School Construction Tax Credits, a new type of tax credit bond, could potentially ease the situation in Vernonia and communities in similar circumstances.

A school construction bond available under the federal stimulus package is basically "a no interest loan for new construction," said Jonathan Eckert, a member of the U.S. Department of Education's team working on ARRA. However, he added that details about the qualified school construction bond program are not yet available, and it is a process that will entail adding a section to the Internal Revenue code. "The guidance will be written by the U.S. Department of Treasury," Eckert said. The existing [Qualified Zone Academy Bonds](#) (QZAB), which is a debt instrument created by the U.S. Congress in 1997 to help eligible schools raise funds to renovate and repair buildings, invest in equipment and up-to-date technology, develop

challenging curricula, and train high-quality teachers, will receive an increase of \$2.8 billion under ARRA, and can reduce school borrowing costs by allowing the borrower to pay back only the principal amount.

Information Sources about School Facilities

Whether or not a school or school district receives modernization funds or tax credits, there is no question that there is a movement to improve school environments to make them more energy and resource efficient and healthy, comfortable, and productive places to enhance student learning. Several recent studies demonstrate the financial, environmental, and other benefits of using green technologies in schools, and the public is beginning to recognize that schools can serve as community-based organizations that can be open evenings and weekends and serve as a community hub.

One of the resources to help plan, design, and construct school facilities is the [National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities](#) (NCEF), a Web site funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education with oversight by the [Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools](#). The Web site offers information and resources on more than 150 school facilities topics, and includes descriptions of books, studies, reports, and journal articles, as well as links to online publications and other Web sites. It also contains regularly updated information on the school funding stimulus package with explanations of how ARRA funds can be used.

“The heart of the Web site is under the heading ‘Resource Lists’ on the top of the homepage,” according to Judy Marks, Associate Director of NCEF. “This is where our collection resides. It will help someone assess their facility, and it is arranged in sections that follow the way things are built. Our site contains 18,000 records in the database. It is down-to-earth information that can really help.”

For 10 years, NCEF has been a primary source of information for people who want to be involved in all aspects of school construction, financing, or maintenance. The site can help people at all stages of their project. “People may want to become familiar with what it really means to be a 21st century learning environment. Or they may want to look into state-of-the-art building design, or they know their school has been well maintained and is clean, but acoustics and lighting are something they have never upgraded, so now with the stimulus funds they may have the opportunity to think about how they are meeting the needs of today’s students,” said Marks. Since the stimulus funding has been mentioned, the traffic to their site has increased considerably. “We created a special page for people who may want to use the stimulus money. We are tracking the news and finding sources of information to help people—people who have their hopes up—from school construction industry people to the maintenance offices with long punch lists to school board members and facilities managers.”

Within the NCEF Web site there are links to resources concerning a wide range of issues associated with effective and innovative learning environments, such as facilities design, environmental soundness, energy efficiency, and educational technology. The information is available for a wide audience, and it ranges from concise overviews to links to long discussions on energy efficiency. The “[Case Studies—Community Use of Schools](#)” and the “[Impact of Schools on Learning—Academic Research Studies](#)” have sections containing numerous reports about schools that have opened their facilities and grounds to use by the community and research that supports investment in critical school infrastructure and green school design as a worthy investment for improving schools and the community.

Schools as Community Hubs

Designing schools to support a variety of learning styles, examining the association between student achievement and the physical environment of green school buildings, integrating technology to enhance learning, creating schools as centers of community, and engaging the public in the planning process—these are some of the components that public, private, and civic sector leaders are investigating as they examine the costs and benefits of changing America’s school environments.

The [American Architectural Foundation \(AAF\)](#) issued a 2006 Report from the National Summit on School Design that looked at the components of successful school design in the 21st century, and concluded that the creative design of a school can help to revitalize an entire neighborhood. Furthermore, AAF and the

KnowledgeWorks Foundation have partnered to create a video case study and discussion guide that will educate local leaders and residents about the benefits of creating “ [Schools as Centers of Community.](#)” Education [Secretary Arne Duncan](#) has been a long-time advocate for using schools in these creative ways, saying that schools can serve as community beacons in which they become the “heart of the community” where “parents and students learn together.” And President Obama’s 2010 budget proposal calls for “Promise Neighborhoods” that would improve the lives of children living in poverty. Promise Neighborhoods are envisioned as neighborhood collaboratives centered around the school that would provide programs to meet the educational, health, and social-service needs of residents in specific communities.

Furthermore, in 2004, the KnowledgeWorks Foundation launched the Richard Riley Award – Schools as Centers of Community: A National Search for Excellence. This initiative was part of an effort to support school districts and communities that make school facilities more conducive to learning and more accessible to the entire community. The [Web site](#) describing the award and winning schools features case studies and videos about the national trend of building schools as centers of community. One such school, [Rosa Parks School](#) at New Columbia Community Campus in Portland, Oregon, the 2007 award winner, was singled out not only for innovative energy-saving design and for making a variety of services available to the whole community, but also for the innovative use of new market tax credits to finance the construction of the school.

As states begin to benefit from the much-needed stimulus support and modernize our nation’s infrastructure and energy independence, schools and communities can also address the challenges of educating children and citizens to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Key Resources

- [Education Department: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#)
- [Qualified Zone Academy Bonds \(QZABs\)](#)
- [National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities](#) (NCEF)
- [American Architectural Foundation](#) (AAF)
- [Richard Riley Award – Schools as Centers of Community](#)
- [NCES: Public School Principals Report on Their School Facilities: Fall 2005](#)
- [OII General School Facility Resources](#)
- [OII Charter School Facilities Resources](#)

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

In his first major speech devoted solely to education, President Obama delivered remarks to the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. His address challenged the entire nation—parents, teachers, community leaders, and entrepreneurs alike to step up and promote greater accountability and excellence in education. The President said that “Secretary Duncan will use only one test when deciding what ideas to support with your precious tax dollars: It is not whether an idea is liberal or conservative, but whether it works.” (March 10) [Click [here](#) to view his entire speech online.]

In early March, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan [announced](#) that \$44 billion in stimulus funding from the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act](#) (ARRA) will be available to states in the next 30 to 45 days. [PHOTO] The first round of funding will help avert hundreds of thousands of estimated teacher layoffs in schools and school districts while driving crucial education improvements, reforms, and results for students. (March 7) [[More](#) press releases on ARRA can be found on the Department’s Press Room Web site.]



Education Secretary Arne Duncan said stimulus funds will be distributed as quickly as possible to save and create jobs and improve education.

Secretary Duncan and Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, held a panel discussion with students at Miami Dade College to [exchange](#) ideas on improving the nation's higher education system and the importance of community colleges in job creation. (March 6)

The U.S. Department of Education [posted](#) on-line, state-by-state [estimates](#) of new education revenues included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan vowed to release a significant share of the \$100 billion in funding in time to avert teacher layoffs. [Photo] He made the [announcement](#) at Explore Charter School in Brooklyn where he was joined by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten. (February 19)

In his first visit to a public high school, Secretary Duncan used the occasion to [urge](#) swift passage of the stimulus legislation. He made his [remarks](#) (*watch video*) at Arlington Public Schools' Wakefield High School, accompanied by U.S. Congressman James Moran, Arlington Superintendent Robert G. Smith, and a number of national and local education and civic leaders. Duncan noted that the Wakefield High building, first constructed in 1953, is slated to undergo renovations. (February 10) [see *Innovator* feature in this issue]

[I Have a Dream](#), an intervention program that encourages students from low-income communities to complete high school and pursue college, is the focus of a What Works Clearinghouse dropout prevention [report](#). The program offers students tutoring and mentoring, primarily from members of the local communities in which affiliates operate. (March 10)

To commemorate 20 years of setting policies and frameworks for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the [National Assessment Governing Board](#) convened a conference in which discussants addressed achievement gaps, the future of NAEP, and measuring students' preparedness for college and careers. [Podcasts](#) featuring the discussions are available online. (March 4)

A "[Statistics in Brief](#)" report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 to determine how the number of credits earned by high school students relates to course credit accrual and dropping out. Findings indicate that high school dropouts earned fewer credits than did on-time graduates within each year of high school, and that the cumulative "course credit accrual gap" increased each subsequent year. (February 10)

A new [practice guide](#) from the What Works Clearinghouse offers five specific recommendations to help educators identify struggling readers and implement evidence-based strategies to promote reading achievement. Teachers and reading specialists can utilize these strategies to implement "Response to Intervention" and multi-tier intervention methods. Some of the strategies in the guide include screening students for reading problems, designing a multi-tier intervention program, adjusting instruction for struggling readers, and monitoring student progress. (February 2009)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

Speaker presentations from an OII-sponsored conference held in Washington, D.C., for project directors and evaluators with the [School Leadership Program](#) are now available on the conference [Web site](#). (Feb. 25)

Arts Education

A new [resource](#) intended for arts educators and school administrators from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the state board of education analyzes how the Tar Heel State's K-12 arts education standards relate to and reinforce 21st century skills. The document focuses on interdisciplinary themes such as global awareness; civic understanding; and economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy through the lens of arts instruction. (March 2009)

The Government Accountability Office has issued a [report](#) using surveys, interviews, and research from the U.S. Department of Education and other sources that shows most elementary school teachers—about 90 percent—state that instruction time for arts education has stayed the same between the 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 academic years. The percentage of teachers that reported that instruction time had stayed the same also was high across a range of school characteristics. The GAO, however, identified statistically significant differences across school characteristics in the percentage of teachers reporting that time spent on the arts had decreased, with teachers at schools identified as needing improvement and those with higher percentages of minority students more likely to report a reduction in time spent on the arts. (February 2009)

Charter Schools/School Choice

[Inside Urban Charter Schools](#), a new book from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, profiles five high-performing charter schools in Massachusetts and examines the elements that make these schools successful. Interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations inform each of the case studies and provide an intimate glimpse into daily life at these schools of choice. Copies of the book may be purchased online. (March 2009)

The [Alliance for School Choice](#) and [Advocates for School Choice](#) have issued the second-annual [School Choice Yearbook](#). The yearbook includes an array of graphs and charts on the broad school choice sector as well as specific data on vouchers and tax credits. For example, according to the authors an estimated 171,000 children are participating in 11 voucher programs and seven scholarship tax credit programs throughout 10 states and Washington, D.C. (2009)

Higher Education

The National Association of Manufacturing—the largest industrial trade association in the U.S.—along with four other industry groups, is supporting a nationally portable [certification system](#) for individuals in the manufacturing workforce. The groups hope that community colleges will begin helping more students earn these credentials in addition to traditional academic degrees. The association also recommends that all high-school students should have the opportunity to earn a "[National Career Readiness Certificate](#)," which has been developed by ACT, Inc., to complement their diplomas. (March 2009)

Making Opportunity Affordable has launched a new [Web site](#). The project is a multiyear effort focused on increasing productivity within the U.S. higher education system, particularly at two-year and four-year public colleges and universities. Making Opportunity Affordable aims to use dollars invested by students, parents, and taxpayers to ensure that more students graduate from college. The project is supported by Jobs for the Future and Lumina Foundation for Education. (February 2009)

Leadership

Melissa Shindel has been named the [National Association of Secondary School Principals'](#) 2009 Assistant Principal of the Year. The association noted Shindel's efforts in planning learning fairs and instructional workshops and launching peer tutoring programs and mentoring workshops at Patuxent Valley Middle School in Jessup, Md. Shindel will receive a \$5,000 award that she can use for her school or for personal professional development. (March 2009)

Mathematics and Science

"Novo Mondum," a city of the future designed and engineered by students from Bexley Middle School in Bexley, Ohio, has earned top honors at the [2009 National Engineers Week Future City Competition](#). The students—Abby Sharp, 14; Wyatt Peery, 13; and Tom Krajnak, 14—joined their teacher, Peg Englehardt, and an engineering mentor from a local corporation, Mark Sherman, to create the winning design. The annual competition is sponsored in part by the National Engineers Week Foundation, a consortium of professional and technical societies, and major U.S. corporations. (Feb. 18)

According to a [study](#) from researchers at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and the Universities of Virginia and Texas, high-school students who study fewer scientific concepts but who delve into them with greater depth perform better in college science classes than their peers who cover more science topics, but in less detail. The researchers noted that state science tests, which seek to measure knowledge about many topics, may fail to capture the knowledge gained by those who study a few key concepts in detail. (December 2008)

Raising Student Achievement

A new [state report card](#) on child homelessness reveals that one of every 50 U.S. children experiences homelessness and that most states have inadequate plans to address the problem. The report, from the National Center on Family Homelessness, estimates that in 2005-2006, 1.5 million children were without homes. The report's state rankings reflect issues in four areas: child homelessness per capita, child well-being, risk for child homelessness, and state policy and planning efforts. Nineteen recommendations for government action also are included in the report. (March 10)

The [International Baccalaureate \(IB\) Organization](#), a nonprofit education group with more than 2,500 member schools around the world, has selected Montgomery County, Md., as the location of a new "global center" for the IB Americas region. The center will manage operations and assessments for nearly 1,500 schools in 28 countries and territories. The center's opening is part of the organization's plan to expand over the next 12 years, serving 2.5 million students and 10,000 IB programs worldwide. (Feb. 24)

The latest [research brief](#) from the Massachusetts nonprofit Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy details how certain districts and schools in the state are using academic and social interventions to encourage students to graduate from high school. The brief details five common practices among successful districts and schools: (1) using data to identify at-risk students; (2) offering targeted interventions; (3) connecting high school content to college and careers; (4) providing alternatives to traditional high schools; and (5) forming collaborative relationships with education stakeholders. (February 2009)

The majority of states have made progress toward setting expectations for high school graduates that are in line with the requirements of college and the workforce, according to [Closing the Expectations Gap](#), Achieve's fourth annual report on the progress of high school reform. The report examines the ways in which many states have raised standards, adjusted graduation requirements, implemented P-20 data systems, and devised assessment and accountability systems to meet the expectations of colleges and employers. In a majority of states, the report shows progress toward making the high school diploma more meaningful, though the authors note that there still is considerable work to be done. (February 2009)

Reading

More than 45 million readers curled up with a good book on March 2 for Read Across America Day, sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA). March is designated as National Reading Month, so this was a good time to celebrate and experience the joy of reading. Reading resources are available on the NEA [Web site](#), along with information about the NEA's "[Cat-a-Van](#)" tour, which brought Dr. Seuss' "The Cat in the Hat" character and more than 20,000 books and free reading materials to cities across the country. (March 2009)

Teacher Quality and Development

The [National Commission on Teaching and America's Future](#) (NCTAF) is [partnering](#) with the education company, [Pearson](#), to launch an online learning community designed to support prospective and novice teachers. The partnership will build on NCTAF's "Teachers Learning in Networked Communities" program through which the schools of education at the Universities of Memphis, Colorado, and Washington first implemented a pilot version of the new and expanded online learning community. (March 2009)

An Illinois high school teacher, Joseph Fatheree, has earned the [NEA Foundation's](#) Member Benefits Award for Teaching Excellence. During the foundation's annual "Salute to Excellence in Teaching" gala, Fatheree shared the stage with Cookie Monster, Elmo, and other Sesame Street characters. Known as the "Academy Awards of public education," the foundation recognized the nation's top public educators, presenting more than 50 awards. (Feb. 7)

[The New Teacher Project](#) recently [reviewed](#) the school staffing and teacher evaluation processes in San Francisco, Calif., finding that inflexible policies and a flawed performance assessment system are causing dissatisfaction among teachers and school principals. (February 2009)

Robin Chait of the [Center for American Progress](#), and Michele McLaughlin of [Teach For America](#), have penned a [report](#) examining how state policies can support alternative certification programs for new teacher candidates. Chait and McLaughlin offer three specific recommendations to rectify the fact that many alternative certification programs currently do not offer an expedited route to the classroom. The authors argue that states must minimize participant burdens, ensure program quality, and encourage innovation and growth through changes to the current system. (February 2009)

Technology

Education Sector has released a new [report](#) penned by chief operating officer Bill Tucker, which asserts that technology has the potential to dramatically improve current assessment practices, classroom instruction, and student achievement. As the name of the report implies, *Beyond the Bubble: Technology and the Future of Student Assessment*, argues that states can and should transition their assessments from fill-in-the-bubble test score sheets to more high-tech, nuanced examinations of what students know and are able to do. (Feb. 19)

The [Sloan Consortium](#) examines trends in online learning in a follow-up to a [2007 study](#) by the same authors. In the [2008 iteration](#) released this year, Anthony G. Picciano and Jeff Seaman reveal that more than a million students are involved in completely online or blended classes offered in conjunction with classes in brick-and-mortar schools. This number represents a 47 percent increase from two years ago. (January 2009)

Writing

In a new [report](#), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) defines writing in the 21st century, acknowledging that people now write as never before, both in print and online. Former NCTE president Kathleen Blake Yancey cites the challenges that educators face today, which include developing new models of composing, designing a new curriculum supporting these models, and creating new pedagogies enacting that curriculum. (March 2009)

Innovations in the News

Charter Schools/School Choice

The mayor and civic leaders of Rockford, Ill., are hoping that the city's first charter school, approved recently and slated to open in August 2010, will breathe new life and hope for achievement into an education system known for high dropout and truancy rates. Zion, a local development corporation, has teamed up with Chicago International Charter School, which operates 12 schools in Chicago, to create Rockford's first charter school. The Rockford School Board has approved a second charter school and is considering a proposal for a third. [More—[Wall Street Journal](#)] (March 2)

In Harlem, charter schools have been increasing in number for nearly a decade, earning Harlem the nickname “a mecca of a national educational reform movement.” Charter schools there number 24, presently serving 6,000 students. A recent education fair in Harlem drew more than 5,000 students and parents shopping for charters or traditional public schools. There is a strong demand for access to excellence, according to Eva S. Moskowitz, a former City Council member and organizer of the fair. [More—[New York Times](#)] (March 2) (*free registration required*)

The Denver Public Schools (DPS) is projecting a growth spurt for this fall, attributed to increasing enrollment in its charter schools. While 1,053 new students are expected to attend the district's charters, enrollment in the traditional schools will decline by almost 700 students. Charter schools in Denver experienced a 300 percent enrollment increase between 2000 and 2006. Aside from the increasing enrollment at Denver's charters, the biggest impact on the traditional schools' enrollment decline is being caused by another DPS school—the Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy—slated to open next fall. [More—[Rocky Mountain News](#)] (February 11)

Pre-Kindergarten Education

As the state of New Jersey makes plans to expand public preschool statewide, the Bergen Family Center in Englewood is hosting its second Reggio Emilia conference to familiarize more than 300 educators from 100 schools from across the country to the Reggio Emilia philosophy and instructional approach to pre-kindergarten. The Englewood district sponsors the state's only public Reggio preschool, serving 125 children. The Reggio instructional approach is “a rich, collaborative way of learning,” according to Roseanne Regan Hansel, a specialist with the New Jersey State Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Education. Half of the public school kindergarteners in Englewood are graduates of the Center's program, which “...helps kids learn essential vocabulary for early reading and school learning,” according to Englewood's superintendent, Richard Segall. [More—[New York Times](#)] (February 27) (*free registration required*)

Closing the Achievement Gap

Youth Challenge, which serves more than 7,000 teens each year who would otherwise not complete high school, is evidencing positive results, based on the early findings from a national study of the program. Founded by Congress in 1993 and run by the National Guard, Youth Challenge operates camps where high school dropouts gain self-discipline, complete 50 hours of community service, and prepare to take the General Educational Development diploma tests. According to the national study's early results, participants were three times more likely to attend college than similar youths in control groups. [More—[New](#)

[York Times](#)] (March 9) (*free registration required*)

Stand up. Move. Go outside. Studies are pointing to all three as ingredients for student engagement and possibly increased achievement. In Charleston, S.C., PE4Life is overhauling former physical education classes to “focus on fitness and wellness rather than old-fashioned sports competitions.” Similar programs in Illinois, Missouri, and Pennsylvania schools have reported academic improvements using “action-based learning.” In Minnesota, university researchers are considering the effects on students using adjustable-height school desks, “looking for differences in physical activity and academic achievement.” And, in a study published in the journal *Pediatrics*, researchers found that “play and down time may be as important to a child’s academic experience as reading, science and math.” [More—[NPR](#)] (Feb. 26); [New York Times](#)] (Feb. 25); and [New York Times](#)] (Feb. 24) (*free registration required*)

Outreach to parents to familiarize them with their children’s math curriculum is increasing nationwide. Knowing from the findings in last year’s report by the National Mathematics Advisory Panel that parents’ attitudes toward math can influence their children’s own attitudes and reduce or increase anxiety toward the subject, school districts such as Prince William County, Va., are sponsoring math workshops for parents. At Northview Elementary School in Eagan, Minn., math family nights twice annually have been in place for a decade, attracting up to 80 elementary students accompanied by parents, grandparents, and sometimes older siblings. [More—[Education Week](#)] (February 23) (*paid subscription required*)

Students in Iowa now have a statewide core curriculum that combines essential concepts and skills in literacy, math, science, and social studies with 21st century learning skills. The new requirements will be in effect in high schools by the 2012-13 school year. Among the new learning skills are literacy in civics, finances, technology, health, and employability. Iowa Department of Education director Judy Jeffrey has asked “...everyone who touches the lives of young Iowans – teachers, parents, grandparents, coaches, mentors, employers – to set high academic expectations” for the state’s youth. [More—Iowa’s [Quad City Times](#)] (February 12)

School Improvement

A nationwide program sponsored by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is generating not only students’ interests in science, but in the process that scientists and engineers go through to patent their inventions. The InvenTeams Initiative, run by the Lemelson-MIT program, awards grants of up to \$10,000 each to schools that are interested in teams creating inventions. While not all of the 16 teams that compete annually apply for patents, the Coyote Inventors Club at Clarksburg High School in Maryland is strongly considering it. And just in case they do, the “how” behind their Torch Cord, designed to light up and make it easy to find among the tangled wires attached to computers, is known only to the Coyote team members. [More—[Education Week](#)] (March 4) (*paid subscription required*)

Denver Public Schools (DPS) leaders are revamping their program that provides bonuses to principals and assistant principals, now requiring that schools “must be near the top in academic growth in the district and among top performers on the district’s new assessment tool.” The move, which is funded in part by a U.S. Department of Education grant, is expected to help attract top educators to Denver schools, according to DPS officials. Under the new bonus plan, a quality component will be added for principals of “hard-to-serve” schools, requiring them to make a difference in order to earn the bonuses. [More—[Denver Post](#)] (February 22)

The Arlington Career Center, located in Northern Virginia, is among six that house the state’s first Career and Technical Academies, which are transforming former tech education programs to “align instruction in science, technology, engineering and mathematics with 21st-century workplace and postsecondary expectations,” according to Virginia Governor Timothy Kaine’s office. Virginia is one of six states to receive grants from the National Governors Association to transform career education programs. The Arlington Career Center offers coursework in 23 fields and, through a partnership with Northern Virginia Community College, is arranging for its graduates to earn a high school diploma in four years and an associate’s degree in five. [More—[Washington Post](#)] (February 12) (*free registration required*)

Parents and community members in Baltimore City have gained increased formal input in local school governance in the district's latest phase of reorganization under schools chief Andrés Alonso. Under a new parent and community engagement policy, each school must have an organized parent group that meets several times a year and maintains a corps of active members. Other new requirements include creation of School Family Councils as the governing bodies of schools and training for parents to increase support of their children's education. [More—[Baltimore Sun](#)] (February 11)

Technology in Education

A class of fifth-graders in the Keller Independent School District in Texas is joining students in North Carolina and Singapore in an experiment to see if smart phones might be a replacement for computers. The 53 students at Trinity Meadows Intermediate School are unable to use the phones for calls and sending text messages, but special software allows them to access the Internet, create sketches, record videos or take photos, and share information with one another. A teacher at the school came up with the idea after attending a technology conference, and found local donors to equip the students with phones. "While every kid does need a computer," noted Elliot Soloway, a University of Michigan professor who created the phones' software, "the computer that will happen on will be cellphones." [More—[Dallas Morning News](#)] (February 20)

Starting next fall, the Nevada Virtual Academy, founded two years ago, will serve students in grades kindergarten through 12. Currently, the Academy, which is a statewide tuition-free public charter school, serves 950 students in kindergarten through ninth grade. The Academy director, Mike Kazek, expects enrollment to grow by about 50 percent next year. Students access lessons via the Internet and instruction is delivered by state-licensed teachers. The same accountability standards apply to the Virtual Academy's students as their peers in regular schools. [More—[Las Vegas Sun](#)] (February 13)

A partnership between the National Association for Music Education and Nintendo is providing 60 music teachers nationwide with the Wii Music game and allowing them to integrate it into their music curriculum. According to the teachers, such as Eileen Jahn, who instructs music in Newark, NJ, the students' "aural skills are improving with every lesson, and they have developed rhythmic and improvisational skills as well." Unlike other music video games, Wii does not focus on matching beats, but allows students to experiment with more than 60 virtual instruments, and they can improvise musically as well as perform in an ensemble. [More—[MSNBC.com](#)] (February 11)

While virtual field trips are not intended to replace valuable, in-person encounters between students and local or even occasionally distant museums, parks, and other cultural or historic destinations, they are increasing in number and sophistication. At Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., the university's education department has been developing electronic trips for more than a decade, and now offers 67 free or low-cost trips for local schools. An average of 20,000 students participate in each of the trips, which have taken students from the Grand Canyon to study fossils to the Indianapolis Speedway to see Newton's law of motion in action. [More—[Education Week](#)] (February 10)

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.

Contributors

John McGrath
Doug Herbert
Executive Editors

Sherry Schweitzer
Editor-In-Chief

Cynthia Cabell
Senior Production Editor

Dramon Turner
Production Editor

Emily Archer
Copy Editor

Pamela Allen
Doug Herbert
Dean Kern
Stacy Kreppel
Todd May
Kelly Rhoads
Issue Reviewers

Doug Herbert
Todd May
Tiffany Taber
Article Submissions

Disclaimer

The Education Innovator contains links to Web sites and news articles. We believe these links provide relevant information as part of the continuing discussion of education improvement. These links represent just a few examples of the numerous education reference materials currently available to the public. Some of the news items may require both paid and unpaid subscriptions. The opinions expressed in any of these articles or Web pages do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OII or the Department. The inclusion of resources should not be construed or interpreted as an endorsement by the Department of any private organization or business listed herein.

Please send questions, comments, and suggestions to [The Innovator Webmasters](#).