

Archived Information



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Editor's Note

The Education Innovator is conducting a brief online customer satisfaction [survey](#). We value your opinion. Please tell us how we are doing. [Click here](#).

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.

Feature

New Haven Voluntary Public School Choice: Expanding Options, Improving Achievement

Dean Kamen, inventor of the "Segway" personal transport device, has said, "An innovation is one of those things that society looks at and says, if we make this part of the way we live and work, it will change the way we live and work." If we take Kamen's definition of innovation - that is, a transforming, revolutionary idea - and apply it to the field of education, one example might be public school choice.

A powerful engine for change and improvement, public school choice is being embraced by many school districts across the nation, thanks in part to the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). The law's [Voluntary Public School Choice program](#) (VPSC) was created to find new ways in which school districts can establish and expand intradistrict, interdistrict, and open-enrollment public school choice options for parents of students attending low-performing schools.

Now in its sixth year, VPSC supports innovative efforts in more than a dozen school districts and states around the country to expand choice options through strategies such as: tuition transfer payments (making payments to public elementary or

secondary schools to which students transfer through the program); expanding the number of seats available in high-performing schools of choice; and carrying out public information campaigns to inform parents and students about opportunities for school choice. The program supports partnerships among school districts, state education agencies, higher education institutions, and other for-profit and nonprofit organizations, which are vital for creating and expanding choice options.

Before NCLB was enacted, New Haven, Conn., one of the earliest planned communities in the United States and home to Yale University, had already experienced success in creating a range of educational options available to parents and students. The city has a 38-year history of fostering school choice, beginning in 1970, when it opened its first two magnet schools. The choice movement there grew gradually until the end of the 1980s, when the state's efforts to create new opportunities for students dramatically increased. The genesis of the statewide effort was the 1989 landmark *Sheff v. O'Neill* case that originated when 18 Hartford area schoolchildren sued the state, claiming that their education was not equal to those of students in surrounding suburban towns. As a result of the ruling, New Haven has dramatically increased its commitment to public school choice and to reducing racial isolation by giving students the opportunity to attend higher performing schools.

[New Haven Public Schools](#) (NHPS) recently received its second five-year VPSC grant to expand its robust public school choice program - specifically targeting students attending Title I schools in need of improvement in the New Haven metropolitan area. As one of the 14 grantees funded in 2007, NHPS will work in partnership with 16 school districts in the "metro" region to enhance and expand its VPSC program through a multi-faceted approach.

The program has five goals, which are to: 1.) grant priority to students in low-performing schools in the lotteries for available choices including charter and magnet schools; 2.) create new interdistrict magnet schools with more racially and socioeconomically diverse populations; 3.) create more high-quality schools of choice and increase their capacity to better meet the needs of students who choose them; 4.) increase available seats in all NHPS choice programs; and 5.) encourage all students and families to consider their public school options through increased recruitment and dissemination of information.

Choosing Among Many Options

There are many choice options in New Haven, including "Project Choice," an urban-suburban transfer program involving 16 school districts; "Suburban Interdistrict Magnets," which offer high-quality curriculum with a range of themes and teaching philosophies; "Lighthouse Schools," neighborhood elementary (mainly K-8) schools started under the first VPSC grant that provide a themed approach and an emphasis on strengthening literacy instruction; and charter schools, including the high-performing Amistad Academy and Elm City College Preparatory School. As a result of these programs, parents are better informed and empowered to select schools that best meet their children's interests and needs, and schools are becoming more racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse, and high-performing. Additionally, the interdistrict approach has enabled New Haven students to select schools in other districts and has attracted more suburban students to the inner city due to the array of NHPS magnet school opportunities.

David Kikoler, the local evaluator contracted by the district for the NHPS program, said, "We do a lot of evaluations with many programs, but the innovations in New Haven are impressive because of a couple of dimensions... there are lots of choices, and they have a superintendent, Dr. Reginald Mayo, with a vision, who has expanded choice consistently."

A key innovation is the NHPS Lighthouse Schools' concept created under the first VPSC grant cycle. These are high-performing schools that are located in neighborhoods near Title I schools that receive additional resources and encouragement to enroll as many struggling students as possible in an attempt to improve overall student achievement. Additional resources provided to these schools often include professional development for teachers, literacy programs, and direct support for students such as tutoring, after-school programs, and enrichment activities.

Each school offers students a specialized curricular theme, two hours of literacy-based instruction, supplemental after-school programs in mathematics and reading, and extended-day extracurricular programs. The six Lighthouse Schools currently operating serve as a transfer option, a valuable school improvement effort, and a promising and replicable choice strategy. Furthermore, they are on the path to becoming magnet schools, and eventually an interdistrict magnet option, so students from the suburbs will be able to apply to them.

Bob Canelli, a lifelong educator and project director for the NHPS grant, said Lighthouse Schools build capacity to assist low-performing schools and better serve children by catering to their interests and learning styles. "I'm excited because everyone involved is excited. The principals are anxious to get started. It's an opportunity for us to work with kids who are low-performing - to move them to another level and to do it in a creative way," he said.

Many of the recent additions to the cadre of Lighthouse Schools build on existing school themes, focus on core academic subjects, and develop essential skills for students' success. For example, one of the newest schools is a mathematics and science academy that offers students state-of-the-art laboratories and tutors. These tutors work with small groups of students who are considered lower-performing based on their Connecticut Mastery Test scores. Another new school focuses on literacy and reading. In line with this theme, administrators plan to rename the school, hire three part-time reading tutors for classrooms, expand after-school programs, and enhance professional development opportunities for teachers. The third is a

program called "HOT," an acronym for Higher Order Thinking. "It's a very high-performing school that started as the result of a six-year grant," said Canelli. The emphasis on higher-order thinking skills is three-fold, incorporating a special focus on the arts. For example, the program contains an "arts integration" component in which the arts are woven throughout the subject areas. There is a "strong arts" component in which the arts are emphasized independent of other subjects. Finally, the program also includes a "democratic practice" component through which students take on leadership roles in the school community. According to Canelli, "The school has editorial boards, art boards, work is critiqued, shared, and displayed. The school also brings in people from colleges... A poet was brought in for 18 weeks and an American Indian artist was brought in to work with the kids. It's a very creative environment."



Local VPSC program evaluator David Kikoler poses with Bob Canelli, project director for New Haven's VPSC grant program.

Program Effectiveness and Achievement Outcomes

An extensive evaluation component helps New Haven determine the effectiveness of school choice programs like the Lighthouse Schools. By identifying whether students significantly increase their achievement levels after transferring to higher performing schools, the district is tracking its efforts at education reform. Kikoler explains, "We track where the students are and where they're going... We are trying to compare individual students... We look at the attrition rate. The preliminary findings have been positive... the schools are doing a nice job, getting hundreds of applications. They are a real success story."

Evaluations indicate that students who transfer under VPSC have tended to outperform those remaining in lower-performing schools, regardless of the students' ethnicity, gender, or access to supplemental education services. "Reading scores are up [across the board], and math scores are up for many students. We hope that the final analysis will show consistent results," said Kikoler.

The percentage of students who are eligible to transfer to a higher-performing public school through NCLB's Title I provision and who have participated in the New Haven VPSC program has ranged annually from 6.6 to 15.3 percent. This percentage is significantly higher than the national average, and over the course of the program's first four years, over 1,400 students have moved to higher-performing schools. New Haven's goal for its most recent five-year VPSC grant is to increase the percentage of eligible Title I students who take advantage of public school choice from 15 to over 40 percent each year.

Voluntary public school choice has become part of the culture in New Haven. Lighthouse Schools may become permanent NHPS magnet schools, and traditionally under-performing students are raising their test scores by enrolling in the district's spectrum of school choice options. In New Haven and across the country, school choice programming ensures that parents are empowered to make decisions for their children's education and that no child is left behind.

Key Resources

- [Voluntary Public School Choice Program](#), Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII)
- [New Haven Public Schools](#) Web site

What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings joined President Bush in Chicago, where he [addressed](#) guests at Horace Greeley Elementary School. The President charged Spellings with traveling the country to discuss how the Federal government can work together with states to help them move forward under No Child Left Behind. Spellings marked the sixth anniversary of NCLB in Tallahassee, Fla., the next day, where she met with legislators, educators, and students to [highlight](#) students' academic gains in the Sunshine State and across the country. She underscored the progress of education reforms since NCLB's enactment and called for continued support from states. (Jan. 8)



Secretary Spellings with a student at Sabal Palm Elementary School in Tallahassee, Florida. The Secretary visited Tallahassee and met legislators, educators, and students to mark the sixth anniversary of *No Child Left Behind*.

Secretary Spellings began the New Year with a [major address](#) at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., where she highlighted states' progress on core principles of NCLB and explained her policy goals for 2008. She also released a new tool, known as "[The Dashboard](#)" to show how states are doing on key indicators of success such as high school graduation rates and closing achievement gaps. (Jan. 10)

To continue her national tour, Secretary Spellings and Washington Governor Chris Gregoire [hosted](#) an education policy roundtable with state legislators, educators and business leaders at Roosevelt Elementary School in Olympia, Wash. Spellings praised the state's successes under NCLB and challenged them to build on their momentum if they want to continue to lead in industries such as aeronautics, high-tech and bio-tech in today's globally competitive world. (Jan. 16)

The following day, Secretary Spellings [met](#) with the Oregon State Board of Education and Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction Susan Castillo to discuss gains made by students in Oregon and across the country. She also visited Auburn Elementary School and hosted a roundtable discussion with local Hispanic leaders at the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber in Portland, Ore. (Jan. 17)

Secretary Spellings finished her West Coast tour with a stop in California where she [joined](#) Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on a visit to Otay Elementary School in San Diego. The Secretary and Governor toured classrooms and hosted a roundtable with educators to discuss how NCLB holds schools accountable and helps raise student achievement. The Secretary emphasized the need to work in partnership with states to equip every child with a high quality education to prepare them for the demands of college and the workforce. (Jan. 18)

The Department's Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative is accepting nominations for the 2008 [American Stars of Teaching](#) until March 31. Parents, students, colleagues, school administrators, and others can nominate an exemplary teacher who meets the program's criteria. For more information and nomination materials, please visit the [Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative](#) Web site. (January 2008)

Secretary Spellings [announced](#) another round of School Improvement Grants to help turn around low-performing schools, bringing the total awarded to date to over \$90 million in 41 states. The awards will help states take a greater role in developing and delivering comprehensive technical and leadership assistance to help reform schools and districts that are not making adequate yearly progress. (Jan 16)

In celebration of the sixth anniversary of NCLB, the January edition of *Education News Parents Can Use*, answered the question, "How do we know that NCLB is working?" by showcasing three NCLB Blue Ribbon

Schools. These schools have been effective in using the law's emphasis on accountability and parental involvement, and doing what works to close academic achievement gaps and help all students succeed. The show featured video stories of the schools' classrooms in action as well as conversations with the principals and other education experts about having high expectations for all students, analyzing student data to track progress, identifying individual student needs to improve instruction, providing a rich curriculum aligned with state standards, and using professional development to improve teachers' skills. The program featured U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Raymond Simon and a panel of educators, policymakers, and practitioners. To find out more about the program, visit www.ed.gov/edtv. The archived webcast of the show may be viewed [online](#). (Jan. 15)



From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

The latest [book](#) in the *Innovations in Education* series, ***Connecting Students to Advanced Courses Online***, was released in December 2007. The book highlights six providers of academic coursework that deliver advanced courses to students through Internet technology. School district and other education decision-makers, who are looking for ways to give their students greater access to advanced course work, may benefit from obtaining a copy. A companion [webcast](#) can be viewed on the Department's Web site. (January 2008)

OII's Professional Development for Arts Educators (PDAE) and Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination (AEMDD) programs are recruiting peer reviewers for their upcoming grant competitions. PDAE grants support the implementation of high-quality professional development model programs in music, dance, drama, media arts, or visual arts, including the folk arts, for K-12 arts educators and other instructional staff of grades in high-poverty schools. AEMDD grants enable LEAs and organizations with arts expertise to further create materials or to replicate or adapt current approaches for integrating the arts into elementary and middle school curricula. Reviewers should have expertise in arts or arts education, professional development, curriculum development, and/or education partnerships. Interested persons should e-mail a request for a reviewer checklist to Artspd@ed.gov for PDAE or to Artsdemo@ed.gov for AEMDD. (January 2008)

Charter Schools

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools will host the 2008 National Charter Schools Conference from June 22-25 in New Orleans, La. Interested individuals may register for the conference [online](#). Attendees will learn and share best practices, discuss national and state policy issues, and have the opportunity to volunteer at local charter schools. (January 2008)

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools recently introduced the *Charter School Law Deskbook, 2007 Edition*. This publication is a complete reference guide for those working on initiatives related to charter school law and includes a comprehensive catalog of both federal and state resources along with a wide-ranging question-and-answer section, all in one volume. The individual state sections include the applicable laws and regulations for each state. A useful 50-state chart allows for comparison from state to state. Copies are [available](#) to purchase online or by calling 800-533-1637. (December 2007)

The Low Income Investment Fund, a grantee of OII's Credit Enhancement for Charter Schools Facilities program, released its November [Report to the Community](#). *Charter Schools Facilities Requirements: A Guide for Developers, Brokers and Landlords*, focuses on charter school fundamentals, economics, and facilities requirements in support of strong relationships among all invested entities in charter school development. (November 2007)

Education Reform

[National Entrepreneurship Week](#) (Feb. 23-March 1), sponsored by the Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education, focuses on the importance of helping students of all ages find their own entrepreneurial opportunities. This weeklong observance was inspired by the House of Representatives' *Resolution 699* of 2006, which supports the goal of reminding Americans "of the contributions of entrepreneurs... so that educators are encouraged to reflect on how entrepreneurship education can improve the performance of their students." (January 2008)

Leading nonprofit organizations and business leaders have launched "[America Forward](#)," a national coalition that will "challenge presidential candidates of both parties to adopt a fresh vision of government that supports new, innovative 'outside-of-Washington' solutions in education and other issues facing the country." Plans include highlighting innovative solutions in the nonprofit sector such as Citizen Schools, which feature after-school apprenticeships for middle school students. (December 2007)

Higher Education

The nonprofit [Institute for Higher Education Policy](#) has released *From Aspirations to Action: The Role of Middle School Parents in Making the Dream of College a Reality*. The [report](#) finds that while 87 percent of parents expect their children to go to college, 63 percent hadn't started saving money and 45 percent hadn't begun planning for college. The authors assert that middle school is a crucial stage at which students and their parents must begin to plan for higher education. (December 2007)

Mathematics and Science

Challenging the belief that students in the U.S. score substantially above students in other countries in fourth and eighth grades, but then fall drastically below average in the 10th grade, a new [study](#) by the American Institutes for Research says there may be a steady decline, not a sudden drop, in performance in science. The study compares the U.S. to 12 similar industrialized countries and offers clues as to what may lead to the differences and declines in performance. (December 2007)

Raising Student Achievement

Quality Counts, an annual report by *Education Week*, grades states in six categories: teacher policies; standards, assessments and accountability; school funding; K-12 achievement; school transition and alignment policies; and a child's chances for success in life. The main focus of the [2008 report](#) is teaching policy, which includes accountability for quality; incentives to attract, allocate, and retain talented people; and initiatives to build and support effective teaching. (Jan. 9)

A [study](#) of a Texas program suggests that Advanced Placement (AP) course work can be a vehicle for promoting improved college preparation and a more rigorous high school experience for low-income students. The study found that a program that offered cash incentives to teachers and students who passed AP exams in disadvantaged high schools resulted in gains in student achievement and higher college-going rates. (December 2007)

New York State has [received](#) a total of \$6.2 million from the [Bill and Melinda Gates](#) and [Wallace](#) foundations to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps in the state. The Gates and Wallace Foundations have focused on increasing the number of children who graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college and the workforce. (December 2007)

The decision to create smaller, more independent public high schools in Baltimore, Md. over the last five years has resulted in better attendance and academic results, according to an Urban Institute [study](#). Students at these schools scored an average of 14 to 30 points higher on standardized tests than students in the city's more traditional schools. Authors of the study note, however, that these "innovation schools" tend to attract fewer students with academic challenges. (Dec. 16)

In its first-ever listing of "[America's Best High Schools](#)," *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked Fairfax County, Virginia's Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology as the best in the country. Rankings were based on students' scores on state tests as well as participation in AP course work and achievement. (Nov. 29)

After two years, disadvantaged students who regularly attend high-quality after-school programs end up academically far ahead of their peers who spend more out-of-school time in unsupervised activities, according to findings from an eight-state study of promising after-school programs. The [study](#) examined 35 programs serving 2,914 students in 14 communities from Bridgeport, Conn., to Seaside, Calif. (October 2007)

A [study](#) by the [Educational Testing Service](#) asserts that in order for the nation to reach its ambitious academic goals, more attention needs to be paid to America's smallest school: the family. The study outlines the family and home conditions that affect children's cognitive development and school achievement, and shows how early gaps in learning can persist throughout life. (Oct. 29)

Reading

Former second-grade teacher Jon Scieszka - author of the popular *Time Warp Trio* series and *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* - will help the [Library of Congress](#) encourage students to read more. As the library's National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, Scieszka will travel throughout the country to promote reading among youth. Scieszka is known not only for his books, but also for his efforts to encourage boys to read more. He runs a nonprofit literacy program called *Guys Read* and has edited an anthology called *Guys Write for Guys Read*. (Jan. 3)

Teacher Quality and Development

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) has [selected](#) Pamela Bell of Virginia, Deirdra Grode of New Jersey, Julie Kasper of Arizona, and Vincent Riveroll of California as finalists for the ASCD 2008 [Outstanding Young Educator Award](#). ASCD created the award in 2002 to recognize teachers and administrators under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the lives of children. (January 2008)

The [Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation](#) is [creating](#) a program that it hopes will transform teacher education in the United States by luring the nation's top college graduates into teaching. The program will offer about 33 national fellowships per year, with \$30,000 stipends, to enable students to attend graduate education programs at four universities. Another part of the program will provide fellowships in select states. (Dec. 20)

U.S. middle-school mathematics teachers are less knowledgeable about algebra, geometry, and other advanced mathematical topics as compared to teachers in countries where students score better on international tests. These findings are included in a new Michigan State University [study](#). (Dec. 11)

Ohio, which requires that every new teacher receive some form of mentoring, appears to be doing better than most states in retaining new educators. About 28 percent of novice teachers in the state leave the profession after five years compared with 46 percent nationwide. A [research brief](#) by the [New Teacher Center](#) at the University of California, Santa Cruz shows that with teacher support programs for every \$1 spent on recruiting and training novice teachers, districts can save \$1.66 after five years due to low turnover. (Fall 2007)

Technology

A new [center](#) named for *Sesame Street* producer Joan Ganz Cooney will examine how educational Web sites and other technologies can be used to improve literacy, critical thinking, and other skills in children. The center's inaugural [report](#) examines elementary-school aged children who are learning in a digital age, and a new study called [D is for Digital](#) analyzes mass marketed learning products for children aged three to 11. (Jan. 8)

Innovations in the News

Charter Schools

Many of the charter schools in Tarrant County, Texas, are helping students most at risk of dropping out to achieve and stay in school. While the charter schools tend to struggle with less experienced teachers and financial difficulties, the Texas Center for Educational Research compared schools serving students with the same demographics and found some positive news such as "low-performing students enrolled in charter schools earned higher 2006 TAKS math scores than comparable students enrolled in traditional public schools." [More - [Fort Worth Star Telegram](#)] (Jan. 13)

In Michigan, enrollment in the state's 230 charter schools topped 100,000 this year, according to a report by the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. The report also indicated that more than 10,000 children are on waiting lists for charters. Student achievement gains were most significant in Detroit, where enrollment in the city's 79 charter schools grew by more than 2,000 students. [More - The [Detroit News](#)] (Dec. 12)

Raising Student Achievement

826 Valencia, a nonprofit tutoring center named for its San Francisco address and co-founded by writer Dave Eggers, author of the memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, has expanded to New York City, Los Angeles, Ann Arbor, Seattle, Chicago, and Boston. Free tutoring is available to children between ages six and 18 by a corps of more than 3,200 volunteers that includes professional writers. Eggers, according to the program's other cofounder, Ninive Calegari, a former public school teacher, "knew writers with free time, and I knew teachers who were desperate." [More - [Forbes](#)] (Dec. 31)

Gateway to College, part of the Early College High School initiative supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is expanding in the Massachusetts area. Holyoke Community College is one of five institutions selected this year to replicate the high-school dropout prevention model that began in Portland, Ore. Holyoke is one of three Massachusetts community colleges taking part in the 2008 program. The goal of the national initiative, also supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Ford Foundation, and the W.K. Wallace Foundation, is to establish 250 early college high schools by 2010. [More - [Springfield Republican \(MA\)](#)] (Dec. 1)

School Improvement

Accompanying the release of yearly performance data for the Milwaukee Public Schools, Superintendent William Andrekopoulos announced plans to alter the ways in which student suspensions are administered. Based on an analysis of the district's suspension practices by the Council of Great City Schools, Andrekopoulos observed that the Milwaukee Public Schools may have the highest suspension rate in the country. Changes in the district's approach are expected to involve a combination of strategies, including altered instruction, more counseling for students, and more in-school suspension alternatives. [More - [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#)] (Jan. 6)

School leaders in Mississippi intend to cut the state's dropout rate in half by the 2011-2012 academic year, and are engaging more than 1,000 students, principals, and teachers from the state's 247 high schools in a teen summit to "encourage peer-to-peer communication about the importance of staying in school," according to state Superintendent of Education Hank Bounds. A similar summit for business and community leaders, faith-based organizations, and parents is planned in February. Experts from the Education Commission of the States are helping with the effort. [More - [The Clarion-Ledger \(Jackson, Miss.\)](#)] (Jan. 2)

A former teacher has created a Web site to provide classrooms with support for a wide range of needs, from pencils and paper to computers and field trips. Charles Best, who taught in the Bronx, N.Y., knew firsthand that teachers often use their own funds to purchase supplies and other items for their classrooms. A study by Quality Education Data puts the outlay by the average teacher at \$500 annually. Using Best's [DonorsChoose](#) Web site, teachers can post proposals for help with classroom projects. "Then, anyone who wants to be a donor can visit the site, select a project, and fund it for as little as \$10," according to Best. In the seven years since DonorsChoose was established, nearly 900,000 students have benefited from more than \$17 million in funding. [More - [ABC News](#)] (Dec. 20)

With \$17.5 million from a group of private funders, a trio of school improvement initiatives in New Orleans

will recruit and train highly qualified teachers and school leaders and create new, innovative public charter schools. New Schools for New Orleans, Teach For America, and New Leaders for New Schools are benefiting from the investments by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, the Doris and Donald Fisher Fund, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The combined investments are "a huge boost for the children of New Orleans and reflect a growing, long-term national commitment to education in this city," said Jon Schnur, founder of New Leaders for New Schools. [More - [The Bayou Buzz](#)] (Dec. 14)

Eighteen schools in Memphis, Tenn., are piloting strategies for teaching and school management as part of the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) program. EPIC is an initiative of New Leaders for New Schools, which trains educators in urban public schools to become principals. Memphis teachers and principals will document strategies their schools use to increase student achievement, and case studies and videos will be available to teachers and administrators nationwide. Similar programs are planned in Washington; Denver; and Prince George's County, Md. Most of the funding comes from a \$13.8 million U.S. Department of Education grant, combined with support from national and local partners. [More - [The Memphis Commercial Appeal](#)] (Dec. 4)

Teacher Quality and Development

Linda White, a member of the All-USA Teacher Team, addresses state standards in music as well as other academic subjects with her elementary students at Haycock Elementary School in Falls Church, Va. White, after attending the Creating Opera Program of the Metropolitan Opera Guild in 1990, has worked with Haycock faculty and students each year to present school wide productions that bring a range of subjects and curricular themes to life. Second-graders, for instance, perform a Veterans Day program, while a recent fifth-grade production focused on the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay. *USA Today* sponsors the All-USA Teacher Team, and winners each share \$2,500 with their schools. [More - [USA Today](#)] (Jan. 7)

A new survey by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) has both good and bad news about prospective teachers. The profession is attracting better-qualified candidates, as evidenced by higher scores on SATs in high school and higher college grades for those taking state teacher licensing exams between 2002 and 2005. "We're seeing a pretty big jump in qualifications," said ETS's Drew Gitomer, who led the study. On the other hand, prospective teachers are a homogeneous group, overwhelmingly white and female, at a time when the proportion of public school students nationwide who are black, Hispanic, or are identified as another racial or ethnic minority are nearly half and rising." [More - [The New York Times](#)] (Dec. 12)

UTeach, a teacher preparation program at the University of Texas at Austin, has become a model for overhauling the teaching of mathematics and science. Its supporters report that the program offers enrollees a challenging curriculum that gives them early and frequent experiences in the classroom and a firm grounding in mathematics and science content. [More - [Teacher Magazine](#)] (Dec. 5)

Technology

The Texas Virtual Academy at Southwest, the first virtual public school in the state and in its first year of operation, is being closely watched by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). According to Kate Loughrey, TEA's distance-learning director, the state is examining the school to "learn what we can [do] to support and enable quality online learning." The Academy serves up to 750 students in grades three through eight from the Houston/Galveston, Dallas, and Fort Worth areas. [More - [The Dallas Morning News](#)] (Jan. 7)

The demonstrated success of the Connections Academy, an online school in Oregon whose student population has grown to more than 1,800 K-11 students in three years, is prompting interest in establishing more statewide cyber schools. Present state policies limit such efforts, but the state board is preparing to decide in early 2008 if that policy should change to permit additional schools. [More - [The Oregonian](#)] (Dec. 28)

Nearly 3.5 million college students were enrolled in online courses this past semester, according to the 2007 Sloan Survey of Online Learning, which surveyed more than 2,500 schools. As many as 100 colleges and universities operate exclusively online and more than two-thirds offer online courses. Another part of the

Sloan report findings estimates that 700,000 public school students in grades K-12 enrolled in at least one course in the 2005-2006 academic year. [More - [USA Today](#)] (Nov. 28)

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