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Gregg W. Downey
Editorial Director
& Publisher

gdowney@eschoolnews.com



Dennis Pierce
Editor

dpierce@eschoolnews.com



Laura Devaney
Managing Editor

ldevaney@eschoolnews.com



Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

mstansbury@eschoolnews.com

Sarah Langmead
Assistant Editor

slangmead@eschoolnews.com

eSCHOOL MEDIA INC.

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Editorial & Production

Editorial Director & Publisher

Gregg W. Downey
gdowney@eschoolnews.com

Editor

Dennis Pierce
dpierce@eschoolnews.com

Managing Editor

Laura Devaney
ldevaney@eschoolnews.com

Associate Editor

Meris Stansbury
mstansbury@eschoolnews.com

Assistant Editor

Sarah Langmead
slangmead@eschoolnews.com

Creative Director

Chris Hopson
chopson@eschoolnews.com

Advertising Sales

Eastern Region

Barbara Schrader
(800) 394-0115 x 163
bschrader@eschoolnews.com

Midwest Region

Patty Voltz
(813) 991-4099
pvoltz@eschoolnews.com

Western Region

Paul Turchetta
(310) 540-3344
prturchett@aol.com

Sales Administrator

Lee Calloway
lcalloway@eschoolnews.com

Circulation & Online Director

Nancy David
ndavid@eschoolnews.com

Online

Director of IT

Vincent Carlson
vcarlson@eschoolnews.com

Web Communications Specialist

Jeffrey Festa
jfesta@eschoolnews.com

Corporate Board of Directors

Chief Executive Officer

Rob Morrow
rmorrow@eschoolnews.com

President

Gregg W. Downey
gdowney@eschoolnews.com

Co-Founder Larry Siegelman
1954–2002

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7920 Norfolk Ave., Suite 900 • Bethesda, MD 20814 • Phone: (301) 913-0115 • Fax: (301) 913-0119

eMail: gdowney@eSchoolMedia.com • Home Page: www.eschoolnews.com

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Lawsuit targets ‘locator’ chips in student IDs

Texas family objects to use of high-tech student IDs

From wire service reports

To 15-year-old Andrea Hernandez, the tracking microchip embedded in her student ID card is a “mark of the beast,” sacrilege to her Christian faith—not to mention how it pinpoints her location, even in the school bathroom.

But to her budget-reeling San Antonio school district, those chips carry a potential \$1.7 million in classroom funds.

Starting this school year, the fourth-largest school district in Texas is experimenting with “locator” chips in student ID badges on two of its campuses, allowing administrators to track the whereabouts of 4,200 students with GPS-like precision. Hernandez’s refusal to participate isn’t a twist on teenage rebellion, but it has launched a debate over privacy and religion that has forged a rare like-mindedness between typically opposing groups.

When Hernandez and her parents balked at the so-called SmartID, the school agreed to remove the chip but still required her to wear the badge. The family refused on religious grounds, stating in a lawsuit that even wearing the badge was tantamount to “submission of a false god” because the card still indicated her participation.

A state district judge had been expected to decide Nov. 28 whether Northside Independent School District could transfer Hernandez to a different campus. But the family’s attorney said the hearing was cancelled after the school district asked that the case be moved to federal court.

A new hearing hadn’t been set as of press time.

“How often do you see an issue where the ACLU and Christian fundamentalists come together? It’s unusual,” said Chris Steinbach, the chief of staff for a Republican state lawmaker who has filed a bill to outlaw the technology in Texas schools.

The SmartID concept isn’t new, but it hasn’t exactly caught on nationwide. In 2005, the American Civil Liberties Union raised concerns about a similar initiative at a California school. That same year, a suburban Houston school district began putting the chips in its student IDs, and it served as the blueprint for Northside’s pilot program that began last fall.

Ronald Stephens, executive director of the nonprofit National School Safety Center, said he didn’t believe the technology to be widespread but predicted “it’ll be the next wave” in schools. The chips use radio-frequency identification (RFID) transmitters and only work on campus.



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The Northside school district spent roughly \$261,000 to equip students at one high school and one middle school with SmartIDs, a decision made with safety and efficiency in mind, said district spokesman Pascual Gonzalez. Imagine quickly accounting for students in the event of a lockdown, he said, or cafeteria lines moving faster as scanners instantly identify who's picking up that lunch tray.

Yet the biggest motivation was financial. In Texas, school funding is based on daily attendance. The more students seated in home-room when the first bell rings, the more state dollars the school receives. If a student is lingering in the hallway or the library when roll is called, the marked absence hurts the school's bottom line.

But with the locator chips—the district doesn't like to call them “tracking”—a clerk in the main office can find out if a student is elsewhere on campus, and if so, include the student in the school's attendance count. Every student found amounts to another \$30 in funding, based on the school's calculations. In that way, those moving red dots that represent students on the clerk's computer screen are like finding change in the couch cushions.

Gonzalez said the district has estimated another \$1.7 million in funding if the program delivers on expectations, somewhat lessening

the sting of losing \$61.5 million after state lawmakers cut public school funding in Texas by nearly \$5 billion last year.

“Nobody is sitting at a bank of monitors looking for the whereabouts of 3,000 students,” Gonzalez said. “We don't have the personnel for it, nor do we have the need to do that. But when I need to find [a student], I can enter his random number and I can find him somewhere as a red dot on that computer screen. ‘Oh, there he is, in Science Room 22,’ or whatever. So we can locate students, but it's not about tracking them.”

Hernandez's family isn't convinced. Nor is a Virginia-based civil rights group, the Rutherford Institute, which took up Hernandez's cause and filed the lawsuit against the district.

The lawsuit cites scriptures in the book of Revelation, stating that “acceptance of a certain code ... from a secular ruling authority” is a form of idolatry.

Yet despite the lawsuit, proposed legislation, and concern from outside groups, there are no signs of a groundswell of opposition in San Antonio from parents whose children have the chips in their campus IDs.

Gonzalez said that of the 4,200 students, the Hernandez family is the only one who has asked out of the program. 📍



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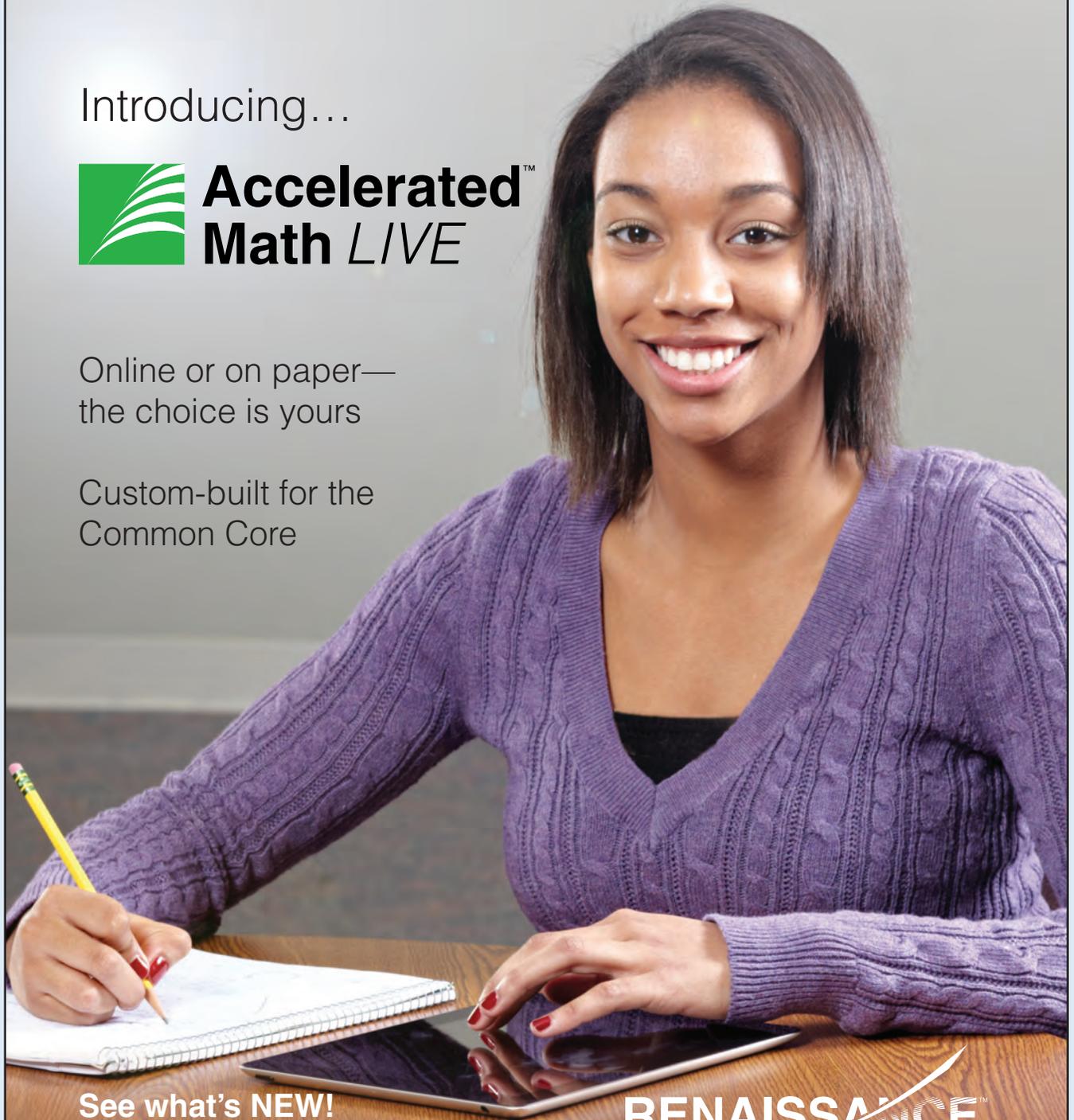
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A ‘bar exam’ for teachers?

Union proposal calls for a new national certification test

From wire service reports

School teachers should have to pass a stringent exam—much like the bar exam for lawyers—before being allowed to enter the profession, one of the nation’s largest teachers unions says.

The American Federation of Teachers called for a tough new written test to be complemented by stricter entrance requirements for teacher training programs, such as a minimum grade point average. It also called for a more “systemic approach” to preparing future teachers.

“It’s time to do away with a common rite of passage into the teaching profession, whereby newly minted teachers are tossed the keys to their classrooms, expected to figure things out, and left to see if they and their students sink or swim,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten, calling that system unfair to students and teachers alike.

The proposal, released Dec. 3 as part of a broader report on elevating the teaching profession, calls for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to take the lead in developing a new test. The nonprofit group currently administers the National Board Certification program, an advanced, voluntary

teaching credential that goes beyond state standards.

There is no single, national standard for teacher certification, although the federal government does ask states to meet certain criteria to be eligible for federal funding.

The proposal by a major teachers union to impose tougher requirements on its own members might signal a shift in tone for a profession facing heightened scrutiny. In recent years, unions such as the AFT have resisted calls to end tenure and to tie teachers’ evaluations to their students’ test scores.

But by embracing more rigorous certification standards, the union hopes to raise the status of the teaching profession, which could reap future rewards when it comes to compensation and other benefits. In its report, AFT drew comparisons between teaching and other professions that require advanced professional training, such as medicine and law.

The proposal also calls for making entrance into teacher education programs more competitive. Candidates should be required to have a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade point average, the AFT said, in addition to formal interviews and 10 hours of field experience.

“If you impose that kind of restriction, that means you’re signaling to society at large that not everybody can be a teacher. You’re saying it’s hard to get in. It’s hard to be good,” said Arthur McKee of the National Council on Teacher Quality, which supports the proposal.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan, too, commended the proposal, describing it as part of a broader push to raise the bar for teachers 

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and enable schools to predict a teacher's potential for success in the classroom.

"Too many new teachers enter our schools feeling unprepared. We shouldn't tolerate that in a profession so important to our country's future," he said in a statement.

The union's executive council will consider whether to approve the report at a February meeting. Other teachers unions, including the National Education Association, have yet to weigh in on the proposal as of press time. 



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Five states to increase class time in some schools

From wire service reports

For thousands of public school students, school is about to get quite a bit longer: Five states announced Dec. 3 that they will add at least 300 hours of learning time to the calendar in some schools starting in 2013.

Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Tennessee will take part in the initiative, which is intended to boost student achievement and make U.S. schools more competitive on a global level.

The three-year pilot program will affect almost 20,000 students in 40 schools, with long-term hopes of expanding the program to include additional schools—especially those that serve low-income communities. Schools, working in concert with districts, parents, and teachers, will decide whether to make the school day longer, add more days to the school year, or both.

A mix of federal, state, and district funds will cover the costs of expanded learning time, with the Ford Foundation and the National Center on Time & Learning also chipping in resources.

In Massachusetts, the program builds on the state's existing expanded-learning program. In Connecticut, Gov. Dannel Malloy is hailing it as a natural outgrowth of an education reform law the state passed in May that included about \$100 million in new funding, much of it to help the neediest schools.

Spending more time in the classroom, education officials said, will give students access to a more well-rounded curriculum that includes arts and music, individualized help for



Five states will add at least 300 hours of instructional time in 2013.

students who fall behind, and opportunities to reinforce critical math and science skills.

“Whether educators have more time to enrich instruction or students have more time to learn how to play an instrument and write computer code, adding meaningful in-school hours is a critical investment that better prepares children to be successful in the 21st century,” Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in a statement.

The project comes as educators across the U.S. struggle to identify the best ways to strengthen a public education system that many fear has fallen behind other nations. Student testing, teacher evaluations, charter schools, and voucher programs join longer school days on the list of reforms that have been put forward with varying degrees of success.

The report from the center, which advo-



cates for extending instruction time, cites research suggesting students who spend more hours learning perform better. One such study, from Harvard economist Roland Fryer, argues that of all the factors affecting educational outcomes, two are the best predictors of success: intensive tutoring and adding at least 300 hours to the standard school calendar.

More classroom time has long been a priority for Duncan, who warned a congressional committee in May 2009—just months after becoming education secretary—that American students were at a disadvantage compared to their peers in India and China. That same year, he suggested schools should be open six or seven days per week and should run 11 or 12 months out of the year.

But not everyone agrees that shorter school days are to blame. A report last year from the National School Boards Association's Center for Public Education disputed the notion that American schools have fallen behind in classroom time, pointing out that students in high-performing countries like South Korea, Finland, and Japan actually spend less time in school than most U.S. students.

The broader push to extend classroom time could also run up against concerns from teachers unions. Longer school days became a major sticking point in a seven-day teachers strike in September in Chicago. Mayor Rahm Emanuel eventually won an extension of the school day but paid the price in other concessions granted to teachers.

Just over 1,000 U.S. schools already operate on expanded schedules, an increase of 53 percent over 2009, according to a report released Dec. 3 in connection with the announcement by the National Center on Time & Learning. The nonprofit group said more schools should follow suit but stressed that expanded learning time isn't the right strategy for every school.

Some of the funds required to add 300 or more hours to the school calendar will come from shifting resources from existing federal programs, making use of the flexibility granted by waivers to No Child Left Behind. All five states taking part in the initiative have received waivers from the Education Department. 



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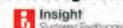


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Comparing the leading classroom observation tools

From staff reports

Policy makers in states from coast to coast are demanding more rigorous teacher evaluations that lead to real improvements in instruction—and school systems are changing their practices as a result.

Central to this effort are software tools that help school leaders record their observations during classroom walkthroughs and share this information with teachers to foster their professional growth.

Many programs include free apps for conducting walkthroughs using a mobile device—though not all solutions can be used both online and offline. Other features to compare include the software's flexibility (can it be customized to meet each school's needs?) and what sharing and reporting capabilities it includes.

To help school leaders compare some of the leading options, we've assembled this handy guide.

eCOVE Observer

Platform: Runs on Windows and Macintosh laptops and netbooks; each computer license includes a free license to an iOS or Android app.

How it works: The system can be used in walkthroughs, sit-downs, and in-depth observations. Evaluators can create objective data collection tools, plus checklist and scale tools. Observers can take notes or check off from a



Software tools are central to schools' efforts to improve teacher evaluation.

checklist.

Sharing: Users can print or eMail reports to teachers and other stakeholders.

Customization: Users can choose from a number of add-on tools for further customization.

Cost: Each license for a computer-based eCOVE edition includes one complimentary syncing license for an iPad, iPhone, or Android device; licenses for additional devices syncing to the same computer are available. A single license for the basic edition is \$189, with bulk licensing available.

<http://www.ecove.net>

eWalk (Media-X)

Platform: Web-based, with free offline clients for iOS, Android, Kindle Fire, Playbook, Mac/Windows laptops, Palm, BlackBerry, and Windows Mobile.

How it works: Users can collect data



through web-based forms or use a handheld device to perform walkthroughs, assessments, building audits, and more. An authoring system allows users to create their own data collection templates for observations or surveys. The system includes more than 15 question types, such as rubrics, checklists, drop-downs, and a selection of pre-built counters and timers. Built-in graphs, charts, and dashboards can be updated and aggregated instantly.

Sharing: Data collection templates can be shared across an entire district or with individual schools and users. Users can attach photos as part of an observation, or attach a PDF or other files.

Customization: Yes; see above.

Cost: Varies; contact Media-X for details.

<http://www.media-x.com>

iObservation (Learning Sciences International)

Platform: Web-based, with offline functionality available for buildings and locations without wireless access.

How it works: iObservation is a complete instructional and leadership improvement system. It provides content and video resources that elevate classroom walkthroughs above traditional observation checklists—including electronic access to Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, Robert Marzano’s Art and Science of Teaching Observation and Feedback Protocol, and Douglas Reeves’ Leadership Performance Matrix. The system can be used to conduct informal classroom walkthroughs, teacher observations, instructional rounds, and teacher self-assessments.

Sharing: Feedback can be sent to teachers immediately following the classroom visit for a transparent and effective process.

Customization: Able to be customized based on school or district needs.

Cost: Varies; contact the company for details.

<http://www.iObservation.com>

Observation 360 (School Improvement Network)

Platform: Web-based, with apps for both iOS and Android devices.

How it works: Administrators can use Observation 360 to conduct observations on almost any mobile device. They can use the software’s standard observation templates and evaluation rubrics, which are based on a framework developed by educational consultant Harvey Silver, or they can create their own. In this way, the system supports virtually any framework or methodology. Users also can attach an unlimited number of prescribed resources to any template, including links, videos, and courses.

Sharing: Once an observation is finished, it can be sent immediately to the teacher who was observed, as well as other administrators who should have access. Teachers receive observations with prescribed content (videos, links, files to download, or lesson plans) attached by the observer based on the observation results. The dialogue created by the observation then continues, as the system tracks the educator’s use of the prescribed content, as well as the continuing conversation between the teacher and observer during this learning loop.

Administrators also can grant access to determine which templates are used by which specific observers (and in which schools). For example, all third-grade math teachers in an entire district can be observed with the exact same template, while all the science teach-



...continued

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ers can be observed using a different one. This ensures confidentiality, compliance, and consistency throughout a district.

Customization: Observation 360 is built to customize. Observations can include any number of data points, with a choice of nine different ways to record the observation information (multiple choice, check box, open ended, etc.).

Cost: \$1,995 per site, including an unlimited number of individual licenses. Observation 360 also is included within School Improvement Network's educator effectiveness system.

<http://www.schoolimprovement.com/products/observation-360>

Observe4success

Platform: Web-based only.

How it works: The system is fully customizable; forms can include any categories with any look-fors that the user enters. Users can customize the way they collect data as well: with checkboxes, open-response questions, point scales, timers, and/or drop-down menus. Users can create as many custom forms as they'd like, at no additional cost. Once an observation has been logged, a user can upload any type of file and attach it to the observation, including audio, video, photos, and lesson plans.

Sharing: The system is intended to create opportunities for face-to-face conversations and collaboration between teachers and administrators. Observations can be eMailed to teachers, downloaded as PDFs, or exported to Excel files. All of the data are aggregated for a given teacher, specific grade level, school department, and schoolwide to identify trends over time. These trends are displayed graphically, making them easy to understand.

Customization: Observe4success' biggest differentiator is its ease of use and customiza-

tion, the company says. Its interface is simple, clean, and user-friendly, allowing any administrator to jump in and start the observation and feedback process.

Cost: \$1,200 per school site for a single school. Districts get bulk discounts based on the number of schools purchasing.

<http://www.observe4success.com>

Teacher Compass (Pearson)

Platform: Web-based, with support for mobile devices both online and offline.

How it works: Part of Pearson's Compass suite of software, Teacher Compass contains a flexible rubric builder that enables districts to use any framework for which they have rights. The software enables traditional, self, and peer observations; walkthroughs, instructional rounds, formative observations, and summative evaluations; and differentiated professional development. School leaders can use a variety of rating scales, checklists, open responses, and artifacts (videos, documents, and images).

Sharing: Teachers and administrators have the ability to upload and rate artifacts such as lesson plans, student work, and classroom videos, and administrators can make automatic recommendations of relevant professional development. In addition, teachers can provide their own response to a given observation prior to submission.

Customization: Able to be customized based on school or district needs.

Cost: Site and individual pricing is available; contact the company for details.

<http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PS1sBo>

Teachscape Reflect

Platform: Web-based service, available on handheld wireless devices (iPhone, iPod

Touch, BlackBerry, Android), tablets (iPad), and laptops. Apps can be used to collect data even when there is no internet connectivity.

How it works: Teachscape Reflect is a complete teacher observation and evaluation system. Users can observe and assess the quality of instruction through informal walkthroughs, formal teacher observations, and evaluations. Standard look-fors incorporate the research of Robert Marzano (High Yield Strategies), Benjamin Bloom (Bloom's Taxonomy), Phillip Schlechty (student engagement), Charlotte Danielson (Framework for Teaching), and Carol Ann Tomlinson (differentiating instruction). The system allows districts to integrate multiple measures of teaching, including student growth data; student, parent, and peer surveys; teacher self-assessments; and lesson plans and other artifacts. Longitudinal reports combine data from multiple observations to provide a view of teaching practices over time.

Sharing: Users can eMail results to the teacher and any administrator; plan and schedule observations and post-observation conferences; and invite the teacher to include artifacts, lesson plans, and self-assessments. What's more, learning coaches can use video to augment their lesson analysis—and teachers can view their own teaching, along with observer and coach feedback, online.

Customization: Districts can configure evaluation processes and workflows according to their own processes; add and edit rubrics and surveys for walkthroughs and observations; and set their own formulas and weighting rules to calculate summative evaluation scores.

Cost: Priced per user; contact the company for details.

<http://www.teachscape.com/products/reflect> 

New spec could improve educational web searches

Efforts to tag instructional resources to make them easier to find move forward

Laura Devaney, Managing Editor

A major effort to help publishers tag educational content using a new specification could help teachers quickly find age-appropriate resources online.

The Learning Resource Metadata Initiative (LRMI), which is co-led by the Association of Educational Publishers (AEP) and Creative Commons, is an effort to tag educational content to make it easier to find in internet searches.

The first version of the LRMI specification was released in June, and publishers have been working on a proof-of-concept pilot project that involves tagging resources for middle school math. Now, phase two of the project—which expands the focus to include English and language arts—has begun as well.

The LRMI spec will work with Schema.org, a web metadata framework. Major search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, and Microsoft Bing announced the Schema.org project last year, creating a universal framework for tagging web-based content to make internet searches faster and more accurate.

Google Shopping and Google Recipes are prototype examples of how metadata can improve search results under Schema.org.

With Google Shopping, for instance, when web users enter a search term—say, “Harry Potter”—a list of criteria to help them narrow their search appears in the left-hand margin of

the search page. Online shoppers can choose to see only those results that are available in stock nearby, that offer free shipping, or that are new. They can specify the type of product they’re looking for (books, DVDs, toys, video games, costumes), the price range they’re looking to spend, or a particular store they’d like to buy from.

With the LRMI specification in place, educators will be able to narrow their search results in a similar fashion. When teachers search for an educational term or resource—say, “teaching fractions”—a list of criteria will appear that lets them further define the search by age range, standards the resource aligns to, publisher, and more.

Before this happens, two things need to occur. First, Schema.org has to formally approve the LRMI specification as part of its framework. As of press time, a decision on this was expected soon.

Once Schema.org approves the spec, search engines such as Google and Bing have to build it into their systems for delivering search results. The timetable for this to happen is up to the search engines themselves, meaning users of one search engine might experience the benefits of LRMI’s efforts faster than users of another.

How well the LRMI specification improves educational web searches also depends on how many publishers tag their content according to the spec.

The effort is a highly technical undertaking, but AEP marketing manager Dave Gladney 

...continued

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said his organization is holding several webinars and other information sessions to help publishers learn more about the project and how they can participate. The day-long meetings immerse attendees in LRMI details and help them learn more about the content tagging process.

By creating a standard tagging framework and establishing best practices to use when tagging content according to this framework, AEP and Creative Commons hope educators will be able to find valuable resources more easily. In fact, one of the most often-cited barriers to the use of open educational resources and other online content is that educators frequently are overwhelmed when searching for and assessing the validity of resources.

“They’re all driving toward a vision of personalized learning—being able to use data to

deliver the products or resources that students need, right at the time they need them,” Gladney said.

AEP and Creative Commons are in the process of creating a detailed adoption and implementation guide for content developers who want to tag their resources using the LRMI spec, and Gladney said that guidance from the project’s newest phase should be published sometime in early 2013.

Classroom Inc., Federal Reserve Bank New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Learning Media, LearningStation, Pearson Education, Rosen Publishing, PCI Education, Saddleback Educational Publishing, William H. Sadlier, Inc., Super Duper Publications, Utah Education Network, and Virtual Nerd all are participating in the second phase. 📍



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Survey: School web filtering can impede learning

One in 5 librarians says requests to unblock sites can take more than a week

Laura Devaney, Managing Editor

More and more students are bringing personal mobile devices to school, but a new survey from the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) finds that internet filtering often prevents students from taking advantage of learning's social potential.

School librarians report that web filtering programs have had varied effects in their schools and on school library programs. Fifty-two percent said internet filters have impeded student research when topics or keyword searches are filtered. Half said web filtering has decreased the number of potential distractions, while 42 percent said it discounts the social aspects of learning.

Roughly one-third said internet filtering has lessened the need for direct supervision, 25 percent said it has prevented continued collaboration outside of face-to-face opportunities, and 23 percent said web filtering allows research curriculum to yield more relevant results.

Many schools let students bring and use their mobile devices, and roughly half of survey respondents said their school has a filtering mechanism in place to control content that students view on their devices.

Of those that do have filtering in place for student devices, 48 percent implement an accompanying acceptable use policy and 47 percent make students log on through school



Does filtering curb social learning?

networks. Twenty-nine percent do not allow internet connectivity on personal devices, and 28 percent limit their use to a classroom teacher's discretion.

Permitted mobile devices include eReaders (53 percent), cell phones (49 percent), laptops (39 percent), MP3 players (36 percent), net-books (32 percent), and portable game players (16 percent).

The filtering report is a supplement to AASL's 2012 "School Libraries Count!" and included 4,299 responses to 14 questions covering a variety of filtering issues.

All of the respondents said their school or district filters online content. Ninety-four percent use filtering software, 87 percent have an acceptable use policy, 73 percent supervise students while they use the internet, 27 percent limit access to the internet, and 8 percent allow students to access the internet on a case-by-case basis.

The most popular filtering software is



URL-based (70 percent), keyword-based (60 percent), and based on blacklists (47 percent).

A large majority of schools (88 percent) filter content for staff as well as for students. Just more than half (56 percent) use the same level of filtering for staff as they do for students, and 73 percent use the same level of filtering for all grade levels.

When it comes to what content is filtered, respondents indicated:

- Social network sites (88 percent)
- Instant messaging or online chatting (74 percent)
- Gaming (69 percent)
- Video services such as YouTube or SchoolTube (66 percent)
- Personal eMail accounts (41 percent)
- Peer-to-peer file sharing (40 percent)

- File transfer protocol used to download large files (32 percent)
- Newsgroups (17 percent)
- Professional development tools such as eBinders and Google Docs (9 percent)

Most often, the decision to “unblock” a site is made at the district level (68 percent), and it is made less frequently at the building level (17 percent).

Thirty-five percent of librarians said their requests to unblock sites take between one and two days, while 27 percent said such a request is answered immediately or within a few hours. Seventeen percent said it takes more than two days, but less than a week, to unblock a site, and 20 percent said it takes more than a week to block a site. 📧

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The Science of the Sudden School Turnaround



"The biggest advantage of PD 360 is its availability. It puts professional development at my fingertips, which is an ideal option for busy teachers. I can use it anytime and anywhere, even at home, without missing classes to attend conferences and workshops."

I love the interactive learning community on PD 360. It is refreshing and supportive to find other teachers who are like me with similar interests and concerns. I am now exchanging great ideas with colleagues at over 100 schools."

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"I am a better teacher because of PD 360. The high-quality instructional strategies programs have made me more conscious of my teaching techniques and the differentiated instruction programs have made me more aware of my students' learning differences. And because PD 360 continues to add new content, I stay current on the latest ideas and strategies."

READING
SCIENCE
HISTORY

New research helps to unveil the science of the school turnaround, revealing that improving schools dramatically isn't about working miracles, it's about having the right tools and the right focus.

Administrators today carry higher expectations on their shoulders than any generation before. With so much at stake, many school leaders question how they can possibly accomplish what's being asked—to not only raise student achievement, but in some cases to double, triple, or quadruple student success rates.

However, research conducted by Dr. Steven Shaha of the Center for Public Policy and Administration shows that new innovations developed by education company, School Improvement Network make it possible to elevate student assessment scores by as much as 20% in a single year. The numbers tell a story of dramatic, lasting improvement in student achievement being made every day, all over the country.

ELEVATE STUDENT ASSESSMENT SCORES BY AS MUCH AS

20%
IN A SINGLE
YEAR

Dr. Shaha's research is compiled in a study called "Predictors of Success" where student outcomes in 734 schools in 211 districts across 39 states were analyzed year over year to measure the impact of School Improvement Network's educator effectiveness system on student learning and educator effectiveness.

The results show that whenever educators used the tools effectively in the educator effectiveness system, student test scores increased many times over, year after year.



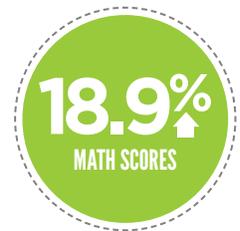
Improved Student Performance: Reading

Research shows that all schools using School Improvement Network's educator effectiveness system improved reading assessment scores significantly, with higher frequency users raising assessment scores by 18%, or at nearly four times the rate of improvement compared to their districts.



Improved Student Performance: Math

As in reading, all schools using the tools in School Improvement Network's educator effectiveness system achieved improved math scores, with higher frequency users improving by 18.9%—over 30 times the rate of improvement compared to their own districts.



Fewer Dropouts

Dropout rates decreased by 20% in schools that frequently used the tools in School Improvement Network's educator effectiveness system.



More Students College Bound

The number of students who said they planned on attending college increased by 9.6% in schools with a higher frequency of use.



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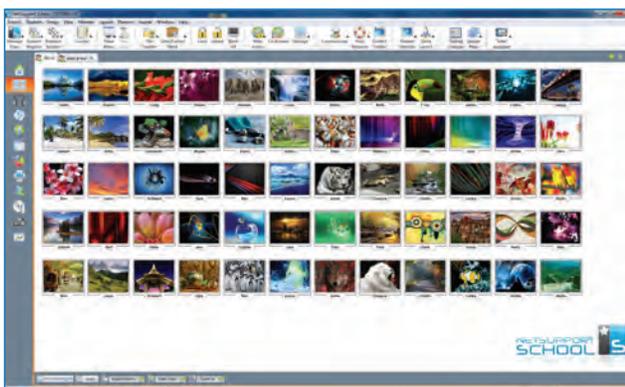
Best Practices in School Technology

Encourage Greater Interaction And Engagement With Classroom Management Software

NetSupport School is the leading classroom management software solution, providing teachers with the ability to instruct and visually/ audibly monitor, as well as interact with their students, individually, as a pre-defined group or to the whole class.

Rising to the challenge and requirements of today's modern classroom, NetSupport School provides the ability to deliver lesson content, simultaneously monitor all student PCs, and work collaboratively ensuring that complete student attention and focus is maintained at all times. There are no hidden extras; all features are included as standard including a customized testing suite, dedicated technician console, digital student revision aids, lesson planning tools and the option for teachers to reward students for good effort.

Stanford Elementary School in Kentucky states, "Since using NetSupport School, we are able to keep the students more focused on their task during the short time frame that we have them each week. When they come in, I have the Computers locked down so that I have their full attention while giving them instructions for their daily lessons. Then when I unlock them, I can monitor them from one central location without the fear of them going off track. NetSupport has also been a great resource for being able to demonstrate from my computer to theirs on new lessons and activities. This also helps in time management when the students don't even have to look away from their monitors to get instruction. One of the most valuable assets I feel is the ability to control each individual student's computer. This is great for individual help with a student or to be able to control that off task student. There are many other great features such as the test module and lesson plan module. This is a great asset that I would highly recommend to anyone in a computer lab situation."



The latest version of NetSupport School v11 further extends the product's ability to help teachers continually and instantly assess student progress. Features such as instant Student Surveys and the customizable Test Designer are joined by a new and unique Question and Answer module, built around current teaching practices for continual assessment of learning. This module allows teachers to verbally ask questions to the whole class, gauge student answers and understanding, introduce new questioning styles to the lesson, develop peer assessment opportunities as well as track rewards against both the individual and where appropriate teams.

According to Vicksburg Community Schools, "...the quiz/survey feature was extremely important to us. Once we had used it in the demo version, we knew it was something we did not want to be without. Also, NetSupport School is extremely easy to learn for non-technology related teachers. Lab teachers are ecstatic with the possibilities of NetSupport School. For the first time, they feel like they are really in control of the lab and student work."

Extending its capabilities further as well as proving its relevance to the latest technological trends; NetSupport School v11 includes support for not only Google Chrome OS and Windows 8, but also tablet and Smartphone technology for teachers and teaching assistants. NetSupport School's new Tutor Assistant app is compatible with Apple iOS, Android Tablets and Smartphones as well as the Kindle Fire, meaning that teachers can now continue to monitor and collaborate with their pupils while having the flexibility to move around the classroom.

NetSupport School can be used on any Windows computer and is designed to work flawlessly over both wired and wireless networks. Increasingly, schools are also embracing new PC technologies and NetSupport School works happily in terminal server, shared resource, virtual desktop and thin/zero client computing environments.

Version 11 Highlights

- **NEW** - Question and Answer module for continual assessment in the classroom.
- **NEW** - Tutor Assistant app for Apple iOS and Android devices.
- **NEW** - Support for Google Chrome OS netbooks.
- **EXTENDED** - Tech Console includes additional system management tools.
- **NEW** - Apply school-wide policy restrictions without the need for a dedicated server.
- **PLUS** - Over 200 other new and enhanced features.

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Web-Based Helpdesk	Download a free classroom trial at www.netsupportschool.com

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Acer ICONIA W510 combines versatility and affordability in one device

How do you prepare students for the real world, right from the classroom? With the Acer ICONIA Tab W510, that's how. This revolutionary tablet gives you access to the latest tools, technology, and interactivity to help students thrive academically now and in the future. And because it's optimized for Windows 8, you can effortlessly and vibrantly bring learning to life.

The ICONIA W510 tablet gives students the ability to fully immerse themselves in the learning process. Take, for example, the intuitive multi-touch panels. Students can click, touch, and experience the web with rich, hands-on interactivity. And thanks to the attachable keyboard, the ICONIA W510 instantly transforms from tablet to notebook in just one step. Looking for more battery life? The keyboard also stores an additional eight hours of power, providing a total of 16 hours of surfing, streaming, and learning, right at your fingertips.

With the ICONIA W510, there's no limit to what you can bring into the classroom. It's the best of usability, versatility, and affordability all in one tablet, and all starting at \$499.

<http://www.letthetouch.com>

Oops! Experience complete protection with Cyber Acoustics iPad cases

With schools nationwide adopting the iPad as a learning tool, educators everywhere are discovering that with the increased number of iPad devices in the classroom comes the increased need to protect their investment. Students are notoriously tough on technology, and accidents do happen—an iPad can fall off a desk, out of a locker, or even down the stairs.

Luckily, Cyber Acoustics has pioneered a line of leather cases that keep the iPad safe from a variety of disasters. The case uses a four-corner chassis system that cradles the



iPad, protecting it from drops. It's the most reliable choice on the market for iPad safety, and best of all, it's priced affordably.

A variety of cases are available for purchase, and Cyber Acoustics also offers customization options, including colored leather and silkscreening your school's logo on the exterior. Whatever case you choose, you can be confident that you're keeping your investment safe and protected.

<http://www.cyberacoustics.com/k-12>

Insight 360 allows for mobile, continuous formative assessment

Insight 360™ was designed for constant



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assessment during instruction for more frequent feedback that helps strengthen instructional strategy and student understanding and fosters better student progress.

The devices included with Insight 360™ allow teachers to move around the classroom for more interaction with students and give



them the power to facilitate lessons from anywhere in the room.

Mobi 360 offers all the functionality of an interactive whiteboard, plus a personal touch screen to control your lesson content and receive instant reports of student understanding, all with total mobility.

Mobi 360 for the iPad offers all of the benefits of Mobi 360, plus remote desktop capability—a feature that allows you to see and control your computer's desktop right from your iPad.

Insight 360's Pulse 360™ and Spark 360™ student response pads encourage every student to answer every question. Now, students will see feedback on their answers instantly on the LCD screen, so they know what was correct and what wasn't. Students can easily navigate self-paced tests that are automatically graded by the system. Students also can use their student response pads to respond to teacher-directed impromptu or prepared questions, allowing all students to answer the same question at the same time.

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Hypernet portal is a complete data management solution for K-12 education. Using single sign-on technology, Hypernet portal manages a suite of solutions that include Learn, the most complete learning management solution on the market, with state standards and collaboration tools for engaging all stakeholders in student success built in; SIS, a full student management system with state reporting, scheduling, and grade reporting; and Communicate, a tool that allows for teachers to send SMS, eMail, VoIP, social media, and conferencing to parents and students securely within the portal. What's more, Hypernet Portal also manages your other external data sources, including library, food service, and transportation.

Data-driven insights are presented graphically through individually tailored, analytical dashboards—giving users the flexibility to see relevant data at their fingertips in a colorful, pleasing way. Common Core standards and assessments, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top are adding new layers of accountability, requiring trustworthy data to improve student success. Look for our amazing January special: no start-up and no first-year costs. Visit our website or call today.

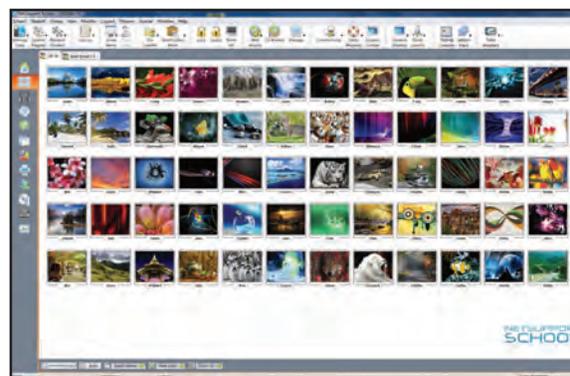
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NetSupport School helps teachers keep tech-using students on task

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NetSupport School is a single software solution for the instructor that delivers visual and audible monitoring of student PCs, encourages group collaboration, reduces teacher workload, and provides students with a unique digital reminder of vital lesson content.

Designed to work flawlessly across wired or wireless networks in a Windows, Mac, or Linux environment, NetSupport's classroom management solutions deliver a powerful combination of monitoring, real-time presentation, and collaboration tools that are guaranteed to enrich any IT lesson while simultaneously reducing instructional technology costs.

Extending our capabilities further, NetSupport School v11 now includes an all-new Tutor Assistant app for Apple iOS and Android devices, as well as support for Google Chrome and a unique Question & Answer module to aid the continual assessment of learning.

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STAR assessments not only provide information about students' math and reading ability and progress, they let you know if students are on track to reach proficiency on state tests. They inform you if students are on track to master Common Core State Standards. What's more, STAR assessments are the only interim assessments to report Student Growth Percentile (SGP). This enables you to compare students' progress to students of similar achievement levels.

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New Accelerated Math Live brings personalized practice to life

With today's introduction of Accelerated Math Live™ software, math teachers across the country have every reason to look forward to a very happy new year.

At the heart of Accelerated Math Live is the Core Progress™ learning progression. New content has been built from the ground up specifically designed to meet the spirit and intent of the Common Core State Standards, with new content libraries from kindergarten through high school.

With Accelerated Math Live's new online program, students can see and answer math problems using computers, laptops, or tablets—or use paper and pencil. The choice is yours. Working online, students' work is scored instantly, and teachers can monitor progress and guide instruction more quickly than ever.

Students will become more self-directed with assistance from Accelerated Math Live's instructional resources—worked examples, related math glossary terms, and other tools linked to the problems they are working. Teachers will have more options to teach in an interactive, engaging classroom environment—a flipped classroom, peer-assisted learning, think-alouds, small group discussions, or one-on-one instruction.

With Accelerated Math Live, teachers can easily tailor their instruction to the personal needs of each student. They'll have more options than ever to help propel students to college and career readiness. To see Accelerated Math Live in action, watch the short video at the link below. You'll love how easy personalized learning can be.

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How to help today's wired students learn to focus

Larry Rosen, Contributor

A recent Pew Internet & American Life Project report surveyed 2,462 middle and high school Advanced Placement and national writing project teachers and concluded: “Overwhelming majorities agree with the assertions that today’s digital technologies are creating an easily distracted generation with short attention spans, and today’s students are too ‘plugged in’ and need more time away from their digital technologies.”

Two-thirds of respondents agree with the notion that today’s digital technologies do more to distract students than to help them academically. Mind you, we are talking about teachers who typically teach the best and brightest students—and not those who we would generally think of as highly distractible. So, what can be done about this problem?

Recently, my research team observed 263 middle school, high school, and university students studying for a mere 15 minutes in their homes. We were interested in whether students could maintain focus and, if not, what might be distracting them. Every minute we noted exactly what they were doing, whether they were studying, if they were texting or listening to music or watching television in the background, and if they had a computer screen in front of them and what websites were being visited.

The results were startling, considering that the students knew we were watching them and most likely assumed we were observing how well they were able to study. First, these stu-



Today's tech-laden teens are driven to distraction.

dents were only able to stay on task for an average of three to five minutes before losing their focus. Universally, their distractions came from technology, including: (1) having more devices available in their studying environment, such as iPods, laptops, and smart phones; (2) texting; and (3) accessing Facebook.

Other researchers have found similar attention spans among computer programmers and medical students, and in those studies technology provided the major sources of distraction.

We also looked at whether these distractors might predict who was a better student in [→](#)

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general. Not surprisingly, those who stayed on task longer and had well-developed study strategies were better students. The worst students were those who consumed more media each day and had a preference for switching back and forth between several tasks at the same time.

One additional result stunned us: If the students checked Facebook just once during the 15-minute study period, they had a lower grade-point average. It didn't matter how many times they looked at Facebook; once was enough. Not only did social media negatively impact their temporary focus and attention, but it ultimately impacted their entire school performance.

So, what was going on with these students? We have asked thousands of students this exact question, and they tell us that when alerted by a beep, a vibration, or a flashing image, they feel compelled or drawn to attend to that stimulus. However, they also tell us that even without the sensory intrusions, they are constantly being distracted internally by thoughts such as, "I wonder if anyone commented on my Facebook post," or "I wonder if my friend responded to the text message I sent five minutes ago"—or even "I wonder what interesting new YouTube videos my friends have liked." Three-fourths of teens and young adults check their devices every 15 minutes or less, and if not allowed to do so, they get highly anxious. And anxiety inhibits learning.

I am convinced that learning to live with both internal and external distractions is all about teaching the concept of focus. In psychology, we refer to the ability to understand when you need to focus and when it is not necessary to do so as "metacognition," or knowing how your brain functions. In one recent study, we found a perfect demonstration of metacognition,

albeit totally by accident. In this study, we showed a video in several psychology courses, which was followed by a graded test.

Students were told that we might be texting them during the videotape and to answer our text messages. In fact, one-third did not get a text message, one-third got four texts during the 30-minute video, and the other third got eight texts—enough, we guessed, to distract them and make them unable to concentrate on the video. One other wrinkle was that we timed the text messages to occur when important material was being shown on the videotape that was going to be tested later.

We were right that the students who got eight texts did worse—they averaged a "D" on the test—but the students who received four texts and the students who did not receive a text message during the video got a "C" on our test. However, a mistake in our instructions told us more about what was going on inside the students' heads when the text arrived. We told students to reply to our text messages, but we did not tell them when to reply. Those students who manifested a knee-jerk reaction to their vibrating phone and answered our texts immediately were the ones who got the lower test grades. Those few students who opted to wait a few minutes to respond got the highest scores in the class.

After the study, when asked why they did not respond immediately, they told us that they were waiting for a time when the videotape material seemed less important and not likely to be on the test. Those students were using their metacognitive skills to decide when was a good time to be distracted and when it was important to focus.

How do we teach focus in a world that is constantly drawing our attention elsewhere? One strategy that we are using in class-



rooms around the world is called “technology breaks.” Here’s how it works: In many classrooms, students are allowed to use their smart phones, tablets, or laptops as tools to search the web, access social media, or perform other activities that promote learning. In such classrooms, teachers often report that in between times that students are using their devices for schoolwork, they are checking their eMail and text messages, tweeting, or accessing social media.

A tech break starts with the teacher asking all students to check their texts, the web, Facebook, whatever, for a minute and then turn the device on silent and place it upside down on the desk in plain sight and “focus” on classroom work for 15 minutes. The upside-down device prohibits external distractions from vibrations and flashing alerts and provides a signal to the brain that there is no need to be internally distracted, because an opportunity to “check in” will be coming soon.

At the end of the 15-minute focus time, the teacher declares a tech break and the students take another minute to check in with their virtual worlds, followed by more focus times and more tech breaks. The trick is to gradually lengthen the time between tech breaks to

teach students how to focus for longer periods of time without being distracted. I have teachers using this in classrooms, parents using it at the dinner table or at a restaurant, and bosses using tech breaks during meetings with great success. So far, though, the best we can get is about 30 minutes of focus, thanks to Steve Jobs (and others) for making such alluring, distracting technologies.

Technology is not going to disappear from our world and, in fact, it is only going to get more appealing as screens become sharper, video becomes clearer, and touch screens become the norm—all of which attract our sensory system and beckon us to pay attention to them rather than schoolwork or the people in front of us.

With more electronic social connections in our lives, internal distractors are also increasing—and tech breaks can be used to train the brain to focus without worrying about what we might be missing in our virtual social world.

Larry Rosen is a professor of psychology at California State University and author of five books on the “psychology of technology.” He wrote this for The Free Lance-Star in Fredericksburg, Va. (c) 2012, The Free Lance-Star; distributed by MCT Information Services.



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Experts share keys to success with blended learning

Laura Devaney, Managing Editor

As blended learning programs grow in popularity, proponents of the approach—which involves a combination of computer-based learning and face-to-face instruction—say there are a few key considerations that school leaders should keep in mind as they set up blended learning models.

Alabama's Mountain Brook Schools is in its third year of a blended learning program.

"Education is really changing, and we've got to change with it—and in order to do that, we've really been working hard to ... customize the learning of each one of our students," said Missy Brooks, the district's director of instruction, during a recent Consortium for School Networking webinar.

"Blended learning is not all about the technology—it really is a blend of technology and instruction, so that the two work hand-in-hand so that we can meet the needs of our students," she said. The district's leaders bear in mind that blended learning is facilitated by an effective combination of face-to-face classroom methods and computer-based activities.

For blended learning to be successful, Brooks said, teachers must be mindful of their intentions and should be purposeful about the work they design for students: They should be able to articulate exactly why they are using blended learning in a particular instance. And the more teachers come to know their students, the better they are able to tailor instruction to students' needs and interests.

While many agree on the basics of blended

learning, Brooks pointed out that blended learning is not...

- Simply putting a digital device in the hands of teachers and students.
- Scanning worksheets and uploading them for students to print and complete.
- Sharing digital versions of class notes.
- Thinking of students as being simply information consumers.

That last point is especially important, Brooks said. "We have to think of students differently," she said: "as creators, researchers, investigators, and even designers."

The district took several important steps to ensure that its blended learning program would succeed.

First, leaders adjusted school board policy to permit students to bring their own devices to school. This prompted a review of the district's infrastructure and available bandwidth, which were upgraded to handle the demands presented by an influx of internet-ready devices.

Teacher professional development received an overhaul, too.

"One of the things we found is that teachers are really good at collaborating among their colleagues, but when you ask them to collaborate with students and make students a part of that, you deal with control and teachers giving up control," Brooks said, adding that the district has done a great deal of work teaching students and teachers how to collaborate with one another, as well as teaching students how to collaborate with each other in appropriate ways.



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The California Learning Resource Network (CLRN), a state-funded effort, gives educators a place to review and select supplemental electronic resources—a valuable resource if educators want to use electronic resources in their blended instruction. California educators must meet certain qualifications and then complete a rigorous training program before they are qualified to review materials.

CLRN identifies and reviews supplemental electronic learning resources, including courses, software, video, Web 2.0 tools, and mobile apps. It also identifies learning units aligned with resources and state standards. Its interactive website offers a searchable database with links to help educators find what they're looking for.

About two-thirds of districts in California are using online or blended learning this school year, said Brian Bridges, CLRN's director.

Bridges said schools must use strategic planning and a needs analysis to determine what their “customers”—students, teachers, and other stakeholders—need from a blended learning program. Identifying deficiencies, such as potential network weaknesses, will help as well, he said. Getting input from stakeholders, identifying possible blended learning models, and then piloting a selected model are key steps.

Most schools with successful blended learning programs “don't jump in whole-hog; they pilot a few models, collect data from that, and at the end, determine whether or not the pilot needs to be expanded or changed in some aspect,” he said.

Selecting reputable and well-designed resources and courses can help a blended learning program succeed, he added, because students are working with high-quality materials. 



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Ed tech should be ‘about verbs, not nouns’

For shifting the focus from the device to the learning process, Indiana’s Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School is our ‘eSchool of the Month’ for January



Jen LaMaster

From staff reports

At Indiana’s Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School, the focus at all times is on student creativity and collaboration. This “bring your own technology” (BYOT) school emphasizes technology as a tool for active learning—enabling deeper instruction, understanding, and real-world application of lessons. Educators can follow blogs about the school’s experience at <http://40ishoraclereflections.blogspot.com> and <http://geekreflection.blogspot.com>.

For these reasons and more, we’ve chosen Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School as our “eSchool of the Month” for January 2013. Here, Jen LaMaster, the school’s director of faculty development, discusses some of its ed-tech accomplishments and the keys to its success. (*Editor’s note: To nominate your school or district for this award, and to read about past winners, go to <http://www.eschoolnews.com/eschool-of-the-month>.*)

How does your school use technology to advance student learning?

We are the first one-to-one BYOT high school in Indiana. All students are required to have a device at all times for creation, collaboration, and communication. We support six operating systems. We specifically use Bring Your Own Technology because we think beyond the device. Students and faculty have access to all

sorts of tools and resources—from Google Apps for Education to Edline LMS; from Edmodo to Twitter. Our learning objective going into one-to-one was that students would be able to access tools for learning, evaluate the effectiveness of individual tools for their personal needs, and use these tools effectively.

The school’s Genocide and Holocaust class uses Edmodo for discussions. Teacher will post video, and students comment for use in class discussions. PollAnywhere is great warm-up tool in English classes. As students enter the classroom, a question such as, “What was up with Hamlet in last night’s reading?” is on the screen, accompanied by a code to enter a response via personal devices. It’s a great way to get students thinking of the topic of the day.

Have you noticed an increase in student performance and/or motivation as a result?

Technology is no longer a passive process. Students are actively engaged in the choice and use of tools. For example, our Computer Application students are exploring Alice programming on their devices. Because they have access to the tool 24/7, the depth of their experience exceeds previous years. Our Religion students and English students are



...continued

researching and writing beyond our school walls. The depth of experience across the board exceeds our expectations.

How do you use technology to streamline school administration and aid in decision-making?

Our faculty and administration have been one-to-one for about eight years. Outlook Exchange and Google Docs for collaborative document creation and calendaring have vastly improved communication. This year, instead of creating the master calendar on sticky notes, we are using a shared Google Calendar. We use BlackBaud Raisor's Edge and Financial Edge for all our advancement and financial record keeping. We use Rediker Administrator's Plus and Admissions Plus Pro for academics and admissions. Student files have been replaced by electronic portfolios in Administrator's Plus.

Have you realized an increase in efficiency, a savings in administrative costs, or some other tangible benefits as a result of this technology use?

Access to information—student records, financial reports, and accounts payable—is more efficient. Communication between school and home is improving with one-to-one and other electronic environments. For example, all course registration, re-enrollment, permission forms, and health forms were done electronically. Our students are high performers. However, giving them the tools to be the kind of student they want to be has been great. Their transition into college and the work world will be much more fluid with their experiences with personal computing, digital citizenship, online systems, eMail communication, and general technology troubleshooting.



BYOT has allowed Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School to focus less on the devices and more on the learning that results from their use.



The school's focus is on learning both inside and outside the classroom.

How have you financed your technology initiatives?

We are an eRate school. We also shifted IT budgets away from purchasing technology that was locked away in a cart most of the time, and toward student financial aid. [We made] much better use of funding by putting devices directly in students' hands, [instead of keeping them] locked in a cart.

What ed-tech initiative are you most proud of, and why?

We are very proud that we can successfully support student choice. BYOT has been a great experience.

What have been your biggest ed-tech challenges, and why? How have you overcome these challenges?

Updates by software companies! We suffer for a day or two for every major Apple update.

What's your best or most useful ed-tech advice for your colleagues?

It's about verbs, not nouns. Letting go of the obsession over the device turns the conversation back to education and the learning objective. The device is just a tool. 📱

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[eSchoolNews.com](http://www.eschoolnews.com), the companion website to *eSchool News*, has launched a new “user profile” feature that allows readers to create their own customized news page on the site.

“Readers now can tailor how we deliver content to fit their own interests,” said Dennis Pierce, editor-in-chief of *eSchool News*. “We’re very excited to provide readers with more efficient and personalized access to our news.”

Registered members of the site can customize their news by selecting from more than a dozen different topic areas in higher education. These categories include Community Relations, Curriculum, Funding, IT Management, Libraries, Online Learning, Policy, Professional Development, Safety & Security, School Administration, Special Education, Technologies, and Top News. Readers also can choose how many topics and how many articles they want to see on their personal news page.

What’s more, this new customization feature

improves the search navigation on the site. Users can search the site by keyword, or browse by subject area.

To create a customized news page, or to register as a new user, go to:

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‘Projecting’ success

A new way to measure color brightness, easier ways to share content from mobile devices with the whole class, and the emergence of interactive projectors that don’t have to be tethered to a computer: These are some of the game-changing A/V innovations described in a new digital publication that’s available from eSchoolNews.com free of charge.

In “Projecting Success,” the editors of *eSchool News* have compiled the best articles we’ve published about digital projectors in recent months. Inside this special digital publication, you’ll learn about:

- A new way to measure and compare the color brightness of projectors.
- New projectors that make any wall an interactive environment—without even needing a computer.
- iPad-ready projectors: How to share content from mobile devices with the whole class easily.

To download this free digital publication, go to:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/11/14/projecting-success>



How to succeed with BYOD; extend learning beyond the classroom

At [eSchoolNews.com](http://www.eschoolnews.com), you can download a number of free white papers full of ed-tech industry advice. Here are just a few of the latest white papers available to readers:

How to turn BYOD into productivity

One of the most overlooked aspects of the “bring your own device” phenomenon isn’t just connecting the users to the network, but how to manage them once they’re there. This white paper will take you through the necessary connectivity and productivity requirements to ensure your network is truly ready for the mobility explosion.

How a wireless LAN can expand learning opportunities beyond the classroom

Officials at the Rowan-Salisbury School System needed to accommodate an influx of Apple iPads, iPod Touches, laptops, and other popular Wi-Fi-enabled mobile devices on their network. Learn how they deployed a Wireless LAN that allowed students to use the same device in the classroom as they use at home—providing an enriched learning experience for students.

To read these and other ed-tech industry white papers, go to:

[http://www.eschoolnews.com/
whitepaper-library](http://www.eschoolnews.com/whitepaper-library)

Share your ed-tech stories, successes ... and lessons learned

We’re always looking for contributions from eSchool News readers: success stories from individual districts, or advice from school leaders to their colleagues.

Submissions are accepted for consideration only if they have not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Stories usually range in length from 700 to 1,200 words, but they can be a bit shorter or longer depending on the author’s needs.

Articles should be objective and should focus on school technology challenges and solutions. Submissions from educators or administrators are preferred, but we do accept submissions from company executives—provided they do not advocate on behalf of a particular company or its products.

Authors should submit a headshot and a one- or two-sentence bio for inclusion at the end of the story. Any other relevant photos or images are welcome as well.

To learn how you can contribute to *eSchool News*, go to:

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Schools eye Obama's second term

Loose ends to drive the president's education agenda—but a divided Congress stands in the way

From staff and wire reports

Thorny partisan issues that have dogged prior attempts to move forward on education await President Barack Obama's attention in the new year. Making matters more challenging, the president continues to face a divided Congress as his second term begins.

After a bruising campaign season in which education was largely an under-the-radar issue, Obama rolled to a second term as president in the Nov. 6 election, vanquishing former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney by a 303 to 209 margin in electoral votes.

But with the U.S. House of Representatives staying under Republican control and the Democrats maintaining a Senate majority that is too small to overcome the threat of a filibuster, it's unclear how much of Obama's education agenda will be implemented in the next four years.

Obama campaigned on a platform to provide another \$25 billion in federal funding to keep more teachers in the classroom; create a new, national STEM Master Teacher Corps to help mentor educators in STEM subjects; and expand children's access to high-quality early learning programs, among other initiatives.

Romney's plans centered on providing parents with more choices. He would have



Obama and House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, look for common ground.

required states to adopt open-enrollment policies for students receiving Title I and IDEA funds, and to eliminate caps on charter and digital schools.

His running mate, Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan, proposed a federal budget that would sharply cut spending on discretionary programs, including education. With Republicans controlling the House, this sets up a showdown between two very different approaches to federal spending in Obama's second term.

For schools and their students, the stakes are high—especially as administrators continue to grapple with budget cuts amid a still-sluggish economy.

In Congress, both parties agree that college costs are spiraling out of control, but there's not much the government can do to control that. What it can control is student aid, and student loan interest rates—capped at 3.4 percent for new subsidized Stafford loans—are set to double July 1, the expiration date for

...continued

a stopgap solution that Congress passed last year. Pell Grants, the main source of federal aid for low-income students, face the same type of crisis as entitlements such as Medicare and Social Security: a cost curve that has become difficult to contain as more people take part.

When it comes to K-12 education, the prospects increase for a tug of war between Obama and Congress.

Lawmakers are more than half a decade overdue to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Education Department has been copiously granting waivers to No Child Left Behind, the Bush-era iteration of the act, giving states more flexibility in exchange for meeting performance targets.

There's bipartisan agreement in Congress that the law should be fixed and reauthorized. "While the administration's efforts to grant waivers are helpful for states operating under the tenets of No Child Left Behind, these fixes are temporary and piecemeal," said Sen. Tom Harkin, the Democrat who chairs the Senate committee responsible for education.

But the Obama administration has shown little desire to put the policy back in lawmakers' hands. Education Secretary Arne Duncan didn't mention reauthorization in a lengthy speech in October laying out his agenda.

"Waivers are not a pass on accountability, but a smarter, more focused and fair way to hold ourselves accountable," Duncan said in that speech.

Lawmakers are also eager to reclaim control of Race to the Top, the multibillion-dollar grant competition program that Obama created in 2009 to prod states into changing their laws and raising standards. The administration opened the competition to school districts this year, but with stimulus funds exhausted, the

size of the program shrank dramatically.

"With Race to the Top, and then these conditional waivers, [the Obama administration] is bypassing Congress and the process we're supposed to have, adding to uncertainty," said Republican Rep. John Kline, the House Education and the Workforce Committee chairman.

Lawmakers from both parties might be more timid next term about embracing the Common Core State Standards, a set of uniform benchmarks for math and reading adopted by almost every state, after the defeat of Tony Bennett, the Indiana schools superintendent whose surprise loss in the November election was largely attributed to his support for the curriculum.

Teacher assessments are at the heart of another potential flashpoint. Chicago teachers walked off the job for more than a week in September, largely over demands that their evaluations be tied to student test scores. Teachers unions enthusiastically backed Obama's re-election, but Obama's Education Department stayed neutral on the strike, and his former chief of staff, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, led the fight against striking teachers.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said there's a fixation on top-down, testing-based evaluations that marginalize teachers while holding them responsible for the effects of budgetary decisions far beyond their control.

"If all those things happen at the same time, then we'll have the problems we had in Chicago," Weingarten said. "If we're serious about working together to help all kids succeed, giving them the coursework and wrap-around services and great teachers they deserve, then it will be different."

Meanwhile, a number of states had ballot 

measures with important implications for education. Washington state will move forward with charter schools as a result of the Nov. 6 election, while voters in Idaho rejected that state's education reform plans, including laptops for every high school student and an emphasis on online learning.

Maryland voters approved a measure allowing illegal immigrants to pay in-state college tuition, provided they attended a state high school for three years and can show they filed

state income tax returns during that time.

About a dozen other states have similar laws, but Maryland's is the first to be approved by voters.

In Oklahoma, voters approved a Republican-backed measure that wipes out all affirmative action programs in state government hiring, education, and contracting practices. Similar steps have been taken in Arizona, California, Michigan, Nebraska, and Washington. 



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Schools ask parents to insure iPads for students

From wire service reports

Covering textbooks with paper grocery bags isn't going to cut it anymore when it comes to protecting learning materials in public schools.

Districts across the country are putting expensive technology in students' hands to replace textbooks, workbooks, and even paper and pencils. Devices worth hundreds of dollars now often leave school buildings and go home with students.

"We need to protect those investments," said Carl Colmark, finance director in Farmington, Minn., schools, a district planning to put an Apple iPad tablet computer in the hands of every student by the end of the school year.

Farmington is one of a growing number of school districts turning to insurance policies from companies like the Stillwater, Okla.-based Worth Ave. Group for electronic devices issued to students and employees.

Insurance for expensive personal technology such as smart phones and tablets is a growing business, and many of Worth Ave.'s clients are school districts, said Quang Ha, sales director. The company has more than 1,000 clients in the education field, making it the nation's largest provider of this type of insurance.

"The market has been growing tremendously in the last few years, and we expect it will continue to grow," Ha said. "We figure in the next five to 10 years, over 90 percent of schools will have some type of digital technology."

Farmington is on the leading edge of that



Schools are buying insurance policies for digital devices issued to students.

trend, and school board members approved an 11-page iPad Loan Agreement in November that includes insurance and outlines how the devices can be used by students. The district expects to spend about \$3 million over four years to provide iPads to students.

Other districts using iPads, including West St. Paul and Lakeville, require parents to take financial responsibility if the digital devices that come home with students are lost, damaged, or broken. South St. Paul also offers insurance.

Parents of Farmington students taking iPads home, typically fourth- through 12th-graders, can buy a \$28-a-year insurance policy through the district to cover damage. The insurance fee is capped at two devices per household.

If families decide to opt out, they must agree to pay for the devices if they are damaged. →

The district will pay roughly \$50,000 to insure iPads for students who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals, a federal indicator of poverty.

Farmington's current insurance policies were not a good way to cover individual iPads, Colmark said.

Worth Ave. plans are specific to devices like the iPad. The company takes care of any claims, so the district doesn't have to deal with repairing or replacing damaged devices, Ha said: "A lot of districts don't want to deal with the claims process. Can you trust an 8- or 9-year-old to take care of technology? Things are bound to happen. We manage the whole repair process."

The agreement approved by Farmington board members also included detailed rules about how students can use the devices in and out of school to help prevent damage. There are guidelines for home internet use, what applications students can download, even

where they should store their devices.

To ensure every student has an iPad by the end of the school year, board members have approved a lease deal for more than 3,500 iPads. The devices are key to a districtwide initiative for personalized instruction that leaders believe will improve student achievement.

Fourth- through 12th-graders will take the tablets home, while younger students will leave them at school.

Besides protecting Farmington's investment, Colmark said he believes the insurance and loan agreements will encourage students to be more responsible with their new tablets.

"Part of it is the replacement factor and the budget consideration," Colmark said. "And part of it is, I think it will bring a greater level of responsibility for both parents and kids."

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The key skills today's employers desire

Students today need a different set of qualifications than in past generations, experts say—and schools should change their approach to instruction as a result

Laura Devaney, Managing Editor

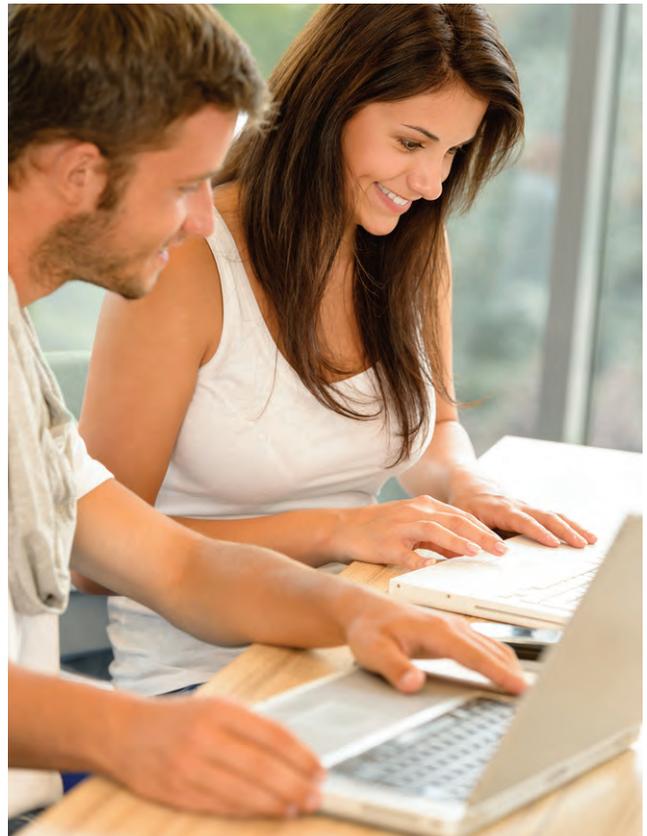
Education stakeholders are quick to champion students' need for so-called "21st century skills"—but what do employers say they want students to learn? And, how should schools adapt as a result?

Shifting workplace structures have led many companies to covet a new kind of employee, said Ken Kay, CEO of EdLeader21.

In the 1950s through the 1970s, workplaces were more authoritarian, and employees were taught loyalty and obeyed management's direction. But as workplaces have changed and "flattened," eliminating several management positions, employers are seeking workers who are self-directed, able to solve problems, and can manage their time and productivity, Kay said.

"This issue of self-direction is absolutely essential," he said. "The culture of education today is such that ... only the most cutting-edge learning environments are really teaching and allowing kids to be self-directed. That's a real misfire today."

Jobs of the 21st century are fundamentally self-directed, and education—pedagogy in particular—must change in response to that, Kay said. He added: "We are going to need an educational system that encourages self-direction."



Critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity—along with self-direction and global understanding—will serve students well.

Many high school and higher-education instructors focus on their role as content experts, but Kay said that "institutions have to be sensitive to their customers, and they need to be sensitive to employers. They need effective, entrepreneurial people."

Some institutions are breaking the mold by forming industry partnerships that create a [→](#)

combination of content education and internships, he noted.

The ed-tech movement has struggled largely because it hasn't been part of a larger movement to redefine educational outcomes, Kay said. Technology is an enabling tool, but if educators use a computer screen to replace flash cards and simply stick with a "drill and kill" pedagogy, not much changes.

"We need to redefine the outcomes for education," Kay said. "Beyond content mastery, what else does a student need to be able to do? What capabilities do [students] need to have? Once you know the answer, it really opens up the technology side."

Pedagogy plays a key role in ensuring that students develop important 21st-century skills.

"At the end of the day, what really matters is whether we're going to change pedagogy," Kay said. "The real issue is how we are teaching in classrooms, and whether each student is being taught differently [in order] to create outcomes other than just content mastery."

And changing pedagogy requires changing school culture, he added.

"There needs to be a culture of change, of leadership change, and of teachers who begin to model these skills," Kay said.

The '4Cs'

Many people ask how they know if they are in a 21st-century classroom, and Kay said such classrooms and schools feel different, because school leaders and teachers are constantly seeking new ways to improve their instruction as they emphasize student learning.

"The 21st-century classrooms are modeling the practices of the 21st-century workforce," Kay said.

Kay said the "4Cs"—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity—in

combination with self-direction and global understanding are six skills that make for an in-demand employee.

"I think they'd be ready for almost any job in the 21st century," Kay said of students who exhibit these skills.

One change that schools are making to emphasize these skills is a shift to a project-based learning approach, in which students take responsibility for their own learning.

At Asa Clark Middle School in Pewaukee, Wis., a program called Academy 21 allows participating seventh- and eighth-graders to study English, science, social studies, and math through independent projects while overseen by two full-time advisers. The lab space is set up like a professional office for kids, complete with small cubicles that students decorate with photos and calendars.

Instead of going to traditional classes, students work with advisers to design their own projects that meet state curriculum standards. Students do six hours of Academy 21 every two days, including utilizing the math lab for help if they need it, and they rejoin their peers for traditional classes such as physical education and Spanish.

Students have project management schedules—deadlines to hit, a learning log, and a digital portfolio of work to accomplish. All of it is spelled out in Google documents shared between the Academy 21 advisers and students.

One of those advisers, Scott Roehl, used to teach five conventional science classes each day. Now, his days are spent conferencing with students and teaching them one-on-one when they hit a concept for which they need direct instruction.

"So much of this is about rethinking education and our educational philosophy," Roehl 

said.

“This works for students who want to take ownership of their learning. They create a task analysis and outline what skills they need to accomplish—it mirrors what the private sector has been asking us to do for years.”

How to implement 21st-century learning

In pursuit of the 4Cs is EdLeader21, a professional learning community (PLC) that aims to help school district leaders enhance student learning of these skills in their schools.

Education leaders can follow seven steps in pursuit of that goal, Kay said:

1. Adopt a vision of 21st-century outcomes and lead the implementation of this vision.
2. Create a community consensus around this vision.
3. Align the system’s efforts in pursuit of this vision.
4. Build the professional capacity of teachers and school leaders to support this vision.
5. Embed the 4Cs into curriculum and assessment.
6. Support teachers in the classroom.
7. Improve and innovate.

EdLeader21 offers resources to help with 21st-century skills implementation in schools, including a blog, monthly columns by education leaders, self-assessment tools, and professional development webinars.

What’s more, EdLeader21 consultants meet with school districts to fine-tune a strategy that will help each district meet its individual challenges as it aims to focus on 21st-century learning.

In 2009, a report from the National School Boards Association’s Center for Public Education defined a 21st-century education, as well as the skills that are needed in a changing

workplace. According to the report, changes in the workplace that will require a different approach to instruction include...

- **Less hierarchy and supervision:** Fewer supervisors now oversee more people, owing to companies eliminating unnecessary management positions.
- **More autonomy and responsibility:** Work hierarchies are changing, and employees are expected to take a bigger lead in managing their own work.
- **More collaboration:** Teams of people work together on different projects and initiatives, both locally and globally.
- **Less predictability and stability:** Employees have to adapt to new and changing demands, and 21st-century skills can aid them as they apply their knowledge to solving problems.

“In a lot of ways, the education that kids need in the 21st century is the same that our top students were getting in the 20th century,” said Patte Barth, director of the Center for Public Education. “Content still matters; content is still core to whatever it is we do.”

But what receives more scrutiny now, Barth said, is a set of skills that demonstrate students’ ability to think critically, write persuasively, and collaborate in teams—“all of those things that we know are important in this century.”

Those skills were developed by proxy in the past, but now educators and policy makers must address them in particular.

“We need to make them explicit and make sure all students develop them,” Barth said. “Technology has a key role to play, but it’s not about learning [how to use] technology—it’s about using technology to help develop these skills, and deliver content in exciting ways.”

She added: “Our challenge is to teach high-level content and high-level skills to all stu-

dents; we're likely not going to be able to do that unless we're able to marshal the power of technology."

Many of the skills students need are the same whether students enroll in a four-year college or university, attend a community college, or enter an apprenticeship or technical program, Barth said.

For instance, Barth said, math skills are necessary for students who want to major in humanities and also for students who want to learn auto mechanics and earn a technical certificate.

"Businesses are looking for the ability to collaborate, communicate well, and think critically and creatively," Barth said. "But they also want you to show up on time, understand hard work and how the workplace operates. They still want those abilities." 

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Tech classes correlate with better achievement

Findings in a Florida study might have implications nationwide, researchers say

Laura Devaney, Managing Editor

High school students in Florida who took at least one technology course and industry certification exam had higher attendance rates and GPAs, on average, than students with similar backgrounds who did not, a new study finds.

Just what this means is unclear, but the researchers who conducted the study surmise that students who take technology classes preparing them with real-world skills might be more engaged in school.

While the findings apply to Florida students in particular, the researchers say they could have implications for career and technical education (CTE) programs in schools nationwide.

The study, "Student Performance in Career and Technical Education," was conducted by Grunwald Associates with support from Adobe.

"We think the findings are probably relevant nationally, given the size and makeup of the population in Florida," said Peter Grunwald, president of Grunwald Associates.

In 2007, Florida legislators passed the Career and Professional Education Act, which aimed to strengthen college and career readiness. The legislation mandates that Florida districts offer rigorous academic courses that meet, or exceed, state subject-area standards, lead to industry certification, and result in post-secondary credit where possible.

Now, the achievement of students who took technology courses leading to industry certifi-

cations suggests that Florida's efforts are headed in the right direction.

The report examines the attendance and achievement of high school students who took at least one technology course leading to industry certification in the baseline 2007-08 school year (when the legislation passed), and in the 2008-09 school year (when Florida's 67 districts began efforts to deliver those CTE courses).

It found that Florida high school students who took at least one technology course had an average GPA of 2.92, compared to an average GPA of 2.55 for students of similar demographics.

The higher average GPA for students who took technology classes represents their grades in other classes, because in Florida schools, technology courses that lead to industry certification are pass/fail courses.

"This finding counters any notion that the GPAs of students who took technology classes were inflated by the inclusion of grades in courses that some still perceive as 'easy' or less academically challenging than courses in other subjects," the report notes.

Researchers also found that students who took a technology course and an industry certification exam attended, on average, almost 17 more days of school.

"Attendance is one way that schools gauge student engagement in learning—and increased attendance can be seen as a necessary ... condition for improved GPA.

Furthermore, attendance is of critical



importance to school districts whose state funding may be dependent on average daily attendance,” the report says.

The report notes that this positive relationship is correlational and not necessarily causal, but “given that attendance, GPA, and admission to four-year colleges and universities are important measures of high school success ... this relationship warrants attention and further exploration.”

What’s more, the similar rates of admission into four-year colleges for students who completed at least one technology course and students who did not “could help to dispel lingering perceptions that students who take CTE courses are less likely to go to four-year colleges and universities than other students, that

these courses do not prepare students for college, and that these courses are less rigorous than other courses,” the authors write.

Most students who took technology courses were male (66.8 percent), English-speaking (77.6 percent), and white (57.9 percent).

“While it may not be surprising that boys are more interested in technology than girls, it’s good news that these courses engage boys—a population that some see as disaffected in school,” the authors note. “At the same time, districts and schools might have an opportunity to engage more girls, English language learners, and minorities in technology courses, given the high demand for underrepresented populations in technology-related careers.”



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Some states preserve penmanship despite tech gains

From wire service reports

The pen might not be as mighty as the keyboard these days, but California and a handful of states are not giving up on handwriting entirely.

Bucking a growing trend of eliminating cursive from elementary school curriculums or making it optional, California is among the states keeping longhand as a third-grade staple.

The state's posture on penmanship is not likely to undercut its place at the leading edge of technology, but it has teachers and students divided over the value of learning flowing script and looping signatures in an age of touch pads and mobile devices.

Some see it as a waste of time, an anachronism in a digitized society where even signatures are electronic, but others see it as necessary so kids can hone fine motor skills, reinforce literacy, and develop their own unique stamp of identity.

The debate comes as 45 states move toward adopting national curriculum guidelines in 2014 for English and math that don't include cursive handwriting, but require proficiency in computer keyboarding by the time pupils exit elementary school.

Several states, including California, Georgia, and Massachusetts, have added a cursive requirement to the national standards, while most others, such as Indiana, Illinois, and Hawaii, have left it as optional for school dis-

tricts. Some states, like Utah, are still studying the issue.

Whether it's required or not, cursive is fast becoming a lost art as schools increasingly replace pen and paper with classroom computers—and instruction is geared to academic subjects that are tested on standardized exams. Even the standardized tests are on track to be administered via computer within three years.

Many experts say manuscript, or printing, might be sufficient when it comes to handwriting in the future.

"Do you really need to learn two different scripts?" said Steve Graham, an education professor at Arizona State University who has studied handwriting instruction. "There will be plenty of kids who don't learn cursive. The more important skill now is typing."

Cursive still has many proponents who say it benefits youngsters' brains, coordination, and motor skills, as well as connects them to the past—whether to handwritten historical documents like the Constitution or to their parents' and grandparents' letters.

Longhand is also a symbol of personality, even more so in an era of uniform eMails and texting, they say.

"I think it's part of your identity and part of your self-esteem," said Eldra Avery, who teaches language and composition at San Luis Obispo High School. "There's something really special and personal about a cursive let-



ter.”

Avery also has a practical reason for pushing cursive—speed. She makes her 11th grade students relearn longhand simply so they’ll be able to complete their advancement placement exams. Most students print.

“They have to write three essays in two hours. They need that speed,” she said. “Most of them learned cursive in second grade and forgot about it. Their penmanship is deplorable.”

For many elementary school teachers, having children spend hours copying flowing letters just isn’t practical in an era of high-stakes standardized testing.

Third-graders might get 15 minutes of cursive practice a couple times a week, and after the fourth grade, it often falls off completely because teachers don’t require assignments to be written in cursive. When children write by hand, many choose to print because they’ve practiced it more.

Dustin Ellis, fourth-grade teacher at Big Springs Elementary School in Simi Valley, said

he assigns a cursive practice packet as homework, but if he had his druthers, he’d limit cursive instruction to learning to read it, instead of writing it. Out of his 32 students, just three write in cursive, he noted.

“Students can be just as successful with printing,” he said. “When a kid can text 60 words a minute, that means we’re heading in a different direction. Cursive is becoming less and less important.”

At St. Mark’s Lutheran School in Hacienda Heights, Calif., cursive remains a core subject. Students are required to write in cursive through middle school so they become fluent at it, as well as work on computers, but increasingly transfer students arrive without longhand skills, said Linda Merchant, director of curriculum and instruction. They’re given a book to study and practice at home.

“We’re pretty committed to keeping it,” Merchant said. “There’s always going to be situations when you’re going to have to present your own writing.” ☺

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Next step for MOOCs: Help with remedial math

UW-La Crosse developing free online math course to boost students' proficiency

From wire service reports

A free online math course being developed by the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse could dramatically reduce the need for students to take remedial math when they start college and put them on a faster, less expensive track to graduation, the UW System announced.

A growing number of freshmen in the UW System and elsewhere need remedial math when they start college. As of 2007—the latest data available—21 percent of UW System freshmen did not have the necessary skills to succeed in college-level math. Among under-represented minority students, the percentage was significantly higher (40 percent).

Nationally, about 25 percent of high school graduates require remedial math in college, according to the UW System.

With a \$50,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, UW-La Crosse is leading the development of a new Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) designed to quickly boost students' math proficiency.

The free, six-week online math course will be available to both high school students who want to assess their college readiness and nontraditional students who either are preparing to return to college or who want to improve their math skills to advance career goals, according to the UW System.

At UW-Milwaukee, 44 percent of new freshmen this fall required remedial math, according to Chancellor Michael Lovell, who spoke about his concerns during a recent UW System Board of Regents meeting. It was part of a discussion about positioning the UW System to be an engine for economic development.

“Unless we can solve the math problem we have in this state, we’re never going to get past this,” Lovell told the regents. “We have to get students math-ready.”

The skills and concepts covered in the new online math course are found on key gateway exams, including the ACT, SAT, and college placement exams. The course content was developed to align with many of the Common Core State Standards needed for college readiness, according to Jennifer Kosiak, a professor of mathematics education at UW-La Crosse.

To study the effectiveness of the learning format, the course development team will work with a partner, Desire2Learn, to design a high-quality student experience and to ensure that useful analytical data are collected.

The concept already has been tested with promising results, UW System officials said.

Using start-up funding provided by the UW System, UW-La Crosse launched a “Fast Track” pilot program in July involving 38 students whose test scores showed a need for developmental math instruction.

After the six-week online course, participants' scores on the math placement exams increased significantly, according to the UW System. All 

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but one of the participants improved to the point where they could enter college-level math and science courses.

The award from the Gates Foundation will help project leaders prepare for the large number of students the new online math course is intended to support. Teams of online tutors will be trained, and learning materials will be expanded.

“For many first-generation college students and those from lower-income families, the need to repeat high school-level work in remedial courses is unnecessarily frustrating and demoralizing,” UW-La Crosse mathematics

professor and project leader Robert Hoar said in a statement.

“Even when they persist, those extra classes cost time and money,” Hoar said. “While most MOOCs available today cover the kind of information you’d find in upper-level courses, we believe this teaching-and-learning model can help many students prepare for and succeed in general education math classes, which are required by every major or program.”

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Math software game scores points with students

From wire service reports

Fourteen- and 15-year-olds can be a tough crowd—especially when it comes to math. But featuring the unpopular subject in an interactive video game and turning it into a competition managed to transform hundreds of freshmen at Waipahu High School in Hawaii into a pretty boisterous bunch.

“I was impressed,” said teacher Amelia Cook, who coordinated the algebra-focused competition that riled up more than 450 students. “I couldn’t even hear myself” because of all the cheering.

Four of the school’s seven Small Learning Communities for freshmen packed the cafeteria from 8:15 to 11:45 a.m. on Dec. 7 to compete in the school’s first-ever DimensionU House Cup Championship Tournament, Cook said. DimensionU, formerly Tabula Digita, is a company that produces multiplayer educational video games.

“It’s good they’re having fun learning something important,” said Carl Matsumoto, the school’s assistant principal. “This is the first time we had such a large competition, so it was exciting.”

The game’s setting is reminiscent of the “Halo” video game series, without the violence. The object is for a player, working alone or on a team, to overcome obstacles and answer multiple-choice math questions to earn points. The player or team with the most points after a number of timed rounds wins.

“It’s really helped them out, because the kids are so good with games and technology,”

algebra teacher Sue Cheung said. “To be a serious gamer you have to answer the question correctly, so your math has to be there. And if you don’t answer correctly, you might be playing, but you’re not going to be the high scorer.”

Cook, who recently left her traditional teaching position to become the school’s math coach, said she first used the virtual game in her classroom four years ago. She hosted her own class competitions over the years and decided to turn the game into a learning community competition for the first time this year, modeled after the House Cup competition in the Harry Potter series.

“This tournament is just to help the kids come together as one and kind of have pride in their ‘house’—in their smaller learning communities—and just support each other in math,” she said.

Cook said she’s seen students become more interested in learning class material because of the game, and it can make a difference in the grade book.

“I’ve seen students who come to class like, ‘I don’t want to be here; why am I here?’ ... then [get] to a point where [they] are [saying], ‘OK, Miss, what do I need to learn in order to be successful in the game?’” she said. “I’ve tried it where I focused on one topic ... and then I tested them after, and I’m going to say about 95 percent of the students scored ... better than they would [have before].”

Cook said she thinks the game is an effective teaching tool, because it combines the

modern conceptual teaching approach with the familiarity that comes from repetition.

“When I was growing up, it was just drill-and-kill math,” she said. “We’re trying to shift into more conceptual learning, more application, but we still have to balance the two.”

The Dec. 7 competition covered a range of topics such as fractions, decimals, and percents; inverse operations; solving linear equations; and order of operations.

A virtual game room, as it’s called, can accommodate up to 16 players. Four students from each learning community were chosen at random to compete in the first six rounds. The final round featured the best four players from each team, as chosen by their peers.

“It was fun, but it’s kind of scary because all the other houses are watching you play, and then you’re challenging other people,” said freshman Brycen Lee, a member of the winning house, Invictus.

Before the House Cup was awarded, students stood on cafeteria tables and chairs

screaming and chanting for their house’s name to be called. A drum roll on the tables rattled through the room, and Invictus was crowned with the coveted title.

Jumping and hugging each other, the students gathered around the House Cup, which features blank nameplates around the square base waiting to be engraved with the names of future winning teams.

Cook said she hopes to hold the event again in March or April, so students and teachers can have more time to prepare and learn the ins and outs of the game.

“We rarely see support in math, so ... that’s why we’re going to try to continue this for many years,” she said. “At least they have something [to make them think], ‘I’m going to train now for this, you know, we’ve got to win now; we’ve got to beat Invictus.’”

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Learning Leadership



What U.S. schools can learn from Russia

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School texting policies all over the map

Sampling of Ohio districts shows how diverse school leaders' thinking is on the issue

From wire service reports

At a time when many school districts are crafting stricter regulations about teachers text messaging with students, the Franklin Local Schools district in Ohio is embracing texting as an effective means of engaging students.

District officials sent permission slips home to parents of Franklin students this year asking if they would allow teachers to text message directly with their child on matters pertaining to class assignments, sports, or other extracurricular activities. Franklin High School principal Dave Riegle said the district wanted to give teachers a way to reach their students if they needed to, while allowing for transparency with the students' parents.

"Most of the situations involve extracurriculars, coaching situations, the fall play or somewhere along those lines," Riegle said. "We wanted there to be full transparency when a student and an adult need to communicate in that way, so that the parents were aware that they communication was going on, and there wouldn't be any questions raised about the conduct of our staff members."

School districts and lawmakers around the country have been developing policies on social media interaction and text messaging. Because of a number of scandals where teachers have committed or been accused of misconduct with a student using electronic

communications, many school districts have erred on the side of caution.

With school districts in Ohio, it's a mixed bag. Some districts don't allow teachers to interact with students through social media or text messaging. Meanwhile, others have policies similar to Franklin's, where parents must first sign a permission form.

Text messaging has become the mode of communication many teens feel most comfortable with. A 2011 study done by the Pew Research Center showed teens send an average of 60 text messages per day. That number was up from 50 texts per day in 2009.

"It's not just young people, I think it's the way that our society communicates now," Riegle said. "And if we want to be current and be able to communicate with our students, then that's one tool that we can use."

Byron McCauley, a senior director of public relations with Cincinnati-based Knowledge Works, said anytime technology can enhance the student-teacher experience, it's a good thing.

Madison school officials initially banned teacher-to-student texting in 2008 when a high school social studies teacher and girls softball coach was charged with sending inappropriate texts to and engaging in an inappropriate relationship with one of his players. The teacher/coach served a three-year prison sentence for sexual battery.

The district's current policy allows students to text with their teachers, but only with parental permission. Madison's policy also



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allows for teachers to respond to “Cries for Help” messages in cases related to child abuse or perceived threats of bodily harm, but those incidents must be reported to the building principal within 24 hours of receiving the message.

Hamilton’s cell phone texting agreement outlines appropriate uses: Keeping content school-related, reporting any inappropriate messages the teacher might receive from the student, and using the medium sparingly so as not to run up a student’s phone bill, for instance. And the agreement lists inappropriate uses as well: Messages that are sexual in nature, or that contain disparaging or inappropriate language.

Fenwick High School follows the policy that was written by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati,

which disallows teachers from texting students. However, school officials said they do allow some coaches to text a broad message to students such as “practice is cancelled” or alerting team members that “practice has been moved to another venue.”

Monroe’s policy states that staff members “shall only engage in electronic communication with students via eMail, texting, social media, and/or online networking media ... when such communication is directly related to curricular matters or ... extracurricular [events] with prior approval of the principal.”

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Schools use Gallup to predict teacher success

From wire service reports

The three largest school systems in Georgia, tasked with screening avalanches of job applicants, are using a high-tech tool that's supposed to identify people with a passion for teaching.

Gallup Inc., the polling firm, says its TeacherInsight service can predict the likelihood of success of future educators, although some question that assertion.

Gwinnett and Cobb counties' school systems have used the Gallup service for several years, and DeKalb County came on board last year and recently renewed its contract. Between them, the three school districts employ more than 20,000 teachers, so Gallup's online test for job candidates is helping to shape the next generation of teachers in metro Atlanta.

In Cobb County, applicants outnumber available teaching positions by 30 to 1, said Tim Baker, executive director of employment. "You just get inundated."

The Gallup test measures "talent" and whether a prospective teacher is "engaging" and can connect with children, Baker said.

Gallup says its test can measure motivation, relationship building, creativity, and organization, but the company basically says "trust us" on that: Its methods, computer models, and data are proprietary and confidential.

Applicants answer about 100 questions online, and the software generates a numerical score and bar charts that rate them on various qualities. Gallup has been assessing aspiring

teachers for decades, developed the online test in 2005, and has rated more than 2 million teacher candidates and nearly 1 million principal candidates at 300 school districts, said Tim Hodges, director of research for Gallup's educational arm in Omaha, Neb.

The test probes for "recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that can be productively applied in teaching," Hodges said. "It's not a reading test, it's not a logic test. It's about getting to the talent you have," he said. "We're really trying to get at who is this person at the core."

Gallup measures the predictive power of its questions by comparing the test results against the job performance of test takers who get hired.

There is no one way to use the data. Some school systems send their principals only the top-scoring candidates. Others just send the scores and let principals decide how to use them. Principals are thus armed with information in addition to the traditional measures, such as college degrees and work experience.

Cobb has been using the service for several years at an annual cost of about \$80,000, Baker said. DeKalb signed on last year, and in October renewed its \$112,400 annual contract for both the teacher service and a similar one, PrincipallInsight. Gwinnett has been using the teacher service since 2003 and pays \$89,300 a year, and in 2004 added the principal screening service, which costs another \$30,600, spokesman Jorge Quintana said.

Gallup provides "a fast, effective way to



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source and assess a large volume of applicants,” Quintana said.

The secrecy surrounding a tool that is shaping the public teacher workforce is troubling to Sharon Robinson. As president and chief executive officer of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, she defends the traditional way of measuring teachers: by their academic performance.

Moreover, she could find no independent research to verify Gallup’s predictive claims. “I am dubious about the predictive validity of

this,” Robinson said, adding that if schools are going to rely on the service, they owe it to the public to conduct their own validity studies or to push Gallup to support independent research.

Baker, Cobb’s employment director, said the district doesn’t use the Gallup scores to limit its candidate pool. Instead, it lets principals decide how to use the data when weighing whether a prospective teacher can connect with students.

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How effective are student surveys in teacher evaluations?

Researcher claims link between survey results, teacher quality is weak

Laura Devaney, Managing Editor

Student surveys about their classroom teachers have merit and could be useful, but school leaders should take care to not be too influenced by student feedback, according to a new review of a large-scale study of teacher effectiveness.

A report from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's "Measures of Effective Teaching" (MET) Project gives advice on administering and using information from student surveys to evaluate teachers and provide feedback to them.

"Asking Students about Teaching" aims to learn whether student surveys are a valid tool to help evaluate teachers. The report also offers guidance and best practices for using student feedback surveys.

The MET Project uses a student survey system called Tripod, developed by a Harvard University professor and administered by Cambridge Education.

According to the "Asking Students about Teaching" report, benefits to student surveys include:

1. Feedback. Results point to strengths and areas for improvement.

2. "Face validity." Items reflect what teachers value.

3. "Predictive validity." Results predict student outcomes.



Camburn's advice: Proceed with caution.

4. Reliability. Results demonstrate relative consistency.

5. Low cost. Expense of administration is minimal.

"For a survey to be predictively valid, it means that, on average, the teachers who get the most favorable survey responses are also those who are helping students learn the most. If students perceive differences among teachers, those differences should generally predict student outcomes," the report notes.

During MET Project analysis, researchers found that teachers who were ranked in the top 25 percent (according to Tripod results of students who gave favorable responses in each Tripod category) had students who learned about 4.6 months more of math than students whose teachers were ranked in the bottom 25 percent of survey results.

"Tripod's predictive power accounts for less than half as many months difference when



it came to gains based on state English language arts (ELA) tests (a common finding among many measures), but a clear relationship was found nonetheless,” according to the report.

However, a new review finds that the MET Project report doesn’t provide sufficient justification for many of its conclusions.

Professor Eric Camburn of the University of Wisconsin-Madison reviewed “Asking Students about Teaching” for the Think Twice Think Tank Review Project. The review was published by the National Education Policy Center, housed at the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education.

Camburn’s own research focus is on instructional improvement, particularly in urban schools, and he has studied the use of survey methods to measure school improvement outcomes.

Camburn said he agrees that student sur-

veys could be beneficial and that the report “contains many practical pieces of advice that are sensible and worth putting into practice.”

He cautioned, however, that the report’s claims of a strong relationship between student survey results and teacher effectiveness are not supported by evidence in the report itself.

Camburn further warns that a “broader limitation of the report is that many of the findings and conclusions are presented too uncritically and without sufficient justification.”

“Developers of the MET Project embrace the idea that multiple measures of teaching effectiveness are needed to represent such a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon,” he said.

“However, in discussing the potential uses of student surveys, this report’s stance is lopsided, placing too much weight on the strengths of student surveys and not enough weight on their weaknesses.”



What U.S. schools can learn from Russia

By Daniel A. Domenech

There is a tendency to beat up on our public schools based on the performance of American students on international tests. The impression that is created is that our schools are not as good as those in the rest of the world. Let me tell you, that's a crock.

I've had the opportunity to travel extensively throughout the world, and generally our schools are the envy of other countries. Conclusions based on international test results compare apples and oranges. Finland is a wonderful country with a great school system—but it's the size of Montana, with a population of five million. Singapore is even smaller than Finland, and last I heard, Shanghai is a region of China, not a country. Those comparisons are just not valid or productive.

There are, however, many things that we can learn from other countries. When I travel and visit schools in other parts of the world, I am not looking to establish our superiority. I am looking for things they do different or better than us—practices we might learn from and, if applicable, adopt here in the U.S.

Recently I traveled to Russia with a delegation of school superintendents and board members sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators and the People to People Ambassador Programs.

Many of the people in Russia still lament the

dissolution of the Soviet Union some 20 years ago. This is particularly the case when it comes to education. They believe that the educational system in Russia has gone downhill and promises to worsen. The current government regards the system as a “bloated bureaucracy” that has to be brought under control and made more cost-effective and efficient. That's a point of view that is shared by many people here in America relative to our system.

A new law passed by Russia in July threatens to cut funding for education and would pay for just the basic subjects, thus requiring schools to subsidize their programs by charging parents more fees for services—a practice already in place for co-curricular activities. The fear is that by reducing support for the schools, many children will simply get a basic education and not the enriched curriculum that is part and parcel of high-quality instruction. We fear the same here when management groups and private firms run charter schools on public dollars that come out of school district budgets.

By comparison to the United States, Russia's schools are very traditional—and that, by the way, is true of most schools around the world. What do I mean by traditional? The schools we visited, regarded as among the best in that country, are still defined by classrooms where children sit in rows and the teacher stands in the front of the room lec-



turing. This is the “sage on the stage” view of the teacher’s role. The children are well disciplined and polite and generally are homogeneous relative to income and ethnic diversity.

In contrast, America’s elementary classrooms feature desks in different configurations to facilitate small group discussions and interaction among a diverse group of students. Our classrooms also feature centers where children can work on computers, read, or do independent work. Our teachers are being trained to function as directors of learning who individualize instruction.

It is not surprising that a recent survey conducted by the Russians found their students do acquire knowledge, but they want the opportunity to do more independent work and be creative. Interestingly enough, those of us who have traveled to countries like China, Japan, and many European nations come away with the same conclusion: Their students are more disciplined and better behaved and full of rote knowledge and information that comes in handy when being tested—but they lack the independent thinking and creativity that we try to foster in our students and is a hallmark of our system of education.

Perhaps unintentionally, we are destroying that critical element in our schools. Much of the problem we face in America today is an overemphasis on testing that is the byproduct of our love affair with accountability. The standardized tests that we have become so enamored with do not measure independent thinking or creativity. They measure cognitive skills at the lowest levels—recall and knowledge. Our



“Those of us who have traveled to [other] countries come away with the same conclusion: Their students are more disciplined and full of rote knowledge that comes in handy when being tested—but they lack the independent thinking and creativity that is a hallmark of our system of education.”

accountability obsession has fostered a “teach to the test” mentality that has led to a loss of emphasis on the subject areas that are not tested, has inspired cheating scandals in our schools, and—most recently—has led to a misguided attempt to evaluate teachers using those same tests in what appears to be a mission to fire our way to good teaching.

Russian educators are equally concerned with teacher quality, but they prefer to approach it from the teacher development side. Teacher salaries are low in Russia. They are paid on an hourly basis and thus must work long hours in order to make enough money →

to make ends meet. Their pensions are also pitiful, paying only 15 percent of salary at retirement age. Consequently, Russian teachers stay on the job longer, and the average teacher's age is 51.

We were very impressed with the fact that preschool is offered to all children in Moscow on a voluntary basis. It is not totally free; parents pay about 20 percent of the cost, which comes to about \$25 per month. More than 60 percent of the parents enroll their children in preschool, so that in Moscow, half of the student population in the city schools is preschoolers.

This is presenting a huge challenge for the system, as they must find space and staff to accommodate all the children. However, the practice is paying off in terms of student achievement. Since the preschool expansion was implemented, scores have increased significantly for fourth graders, the first grade level where students in Russia are tested.

We know that here in America, preschool programs yield the best return on the education dollars spent. We should borrow a page from the Russian playbook and offer all three and four year olds the opportunity to attend a preschool program. It would cut back significantly on the dollars we will have to spend

later in remediation and support programs.

Russia also offers a free college education, but admission is competitive, and only 10 percent of applicants get to fill the seats at the country's universities and colleges. We have been reading recently about the high cost of a college education in America and the mounting debt that students are incurring in loans. A country that wants every student to get a college education will never be able to subsidize the entire system, but we should certainly be working toward making the costs more manageable.

Similar to our country, Russia is experiencing that a younger generation of parents has a different expectation for the nation's schools. We need to break with traditions and move toward a system of education that utilizes technology to individualize instruction for our children, allows children to progress at their own pace, and groups students by ability rather than age. We are further ahead than most countries in that regard, and we have the chance to become a true leader in world education reform. 🌐

Daniel A. Domenech is executive director of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

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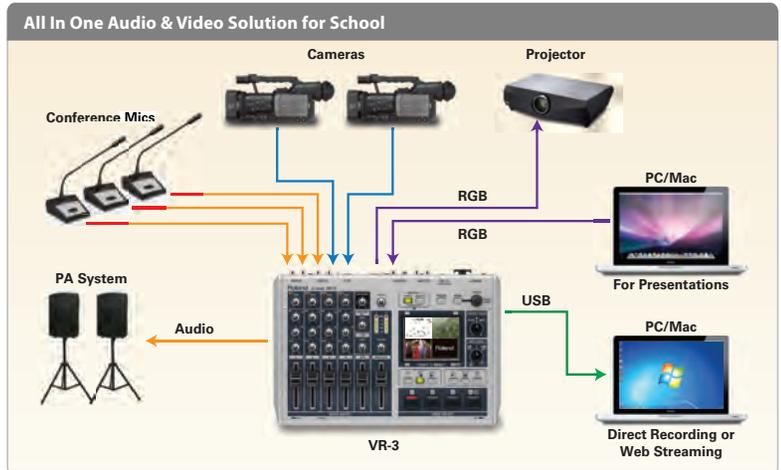
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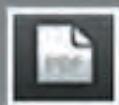
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