

# Education Matters

May 2010

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation

## Who me?

**Yes, you can use technology to individualize instruction and open new horizons for students.**

By Jane Kinser

**T**onya Wilson, a sixth-grade teacher at Hartville Elementary School, Hartville, Missouri, thinks the long nights of writing the request for a grant from the Enhancing Missouri Instructional Network Teaching Strategies (eMINTS) program in 2004-2005 were wellspent.

The eMINTS National Center is an independent business unit of the University of Missouri. It offers professional development programs created by educators for educators. Its instructional model provides a research-based approach to organizing instruction and can be implemented in any subject area at any level.

Wilson has become a proponent for implementation of the technology. She began using eMINTS technology (computers for teacher and students; printer and scanner; SMART Board and projector; and digital camera) in a junior high math classroom. A transfer to a self-contained sixth-grade classroom and eMINTS training propelled her use of technology into high gear.

### **Technology allows flexibility**

She especially appreciates the ability to use technology to differentiate instruction for the varied needs of her students. "Working in an eMINTS classroom really makes differentiating instruction so much easier for a teacher," she says. She believes that working on WebQuests research or other tasks on the computer allows her students to go as deep as they want. "Some students can get just the required elements, while other students can dig deeper and learn more, especially about what interests them."

Wilson, along with other eMINTS teachers in her school district, has explored a plethora of ways that technology can facilitate individualized instruction. One benefit she sees from using classroom technology is having more time to work with students who require more individualized instruction. With advanced



students working independently and researching sites to keep themselves engaged, she is free to spend time with those who need more individualized instruction. She takes the precaution of making a list of appropriate sites for her students to surf. She has instructed them how to go to her online bookmarks to find something to do when finished with assignments.

An eMINTS classroom is not a requirement for using technology for differentiated instruction. Any teacher with a computer and Internet access can find resources to enhance the technology in place in his or her classroom.

Although school subscription is required, a good Internet resource for students and teachers is [www.studyisland.com](http://www.studyisland.com). This site features traditional assessments and interactive games aligned to state academic standards and grade-level expectations. Following subscription by the school, students can log in to the site and complete lessons at their own pace. The program generates reports on the student's progress, thus facilitating differentiated instruction.



Do you think your students are too young to work independently on the computer? Teachers can adapt the technology for differentiated instruction to any age level. Hartville kindergarten teacher Charisse Coy's classroom Web site (see resource links) is an example of what can be done. It includes links to sites with fun learning activities, accessed simply by clicking on pictures. Coy also has posted sight word lists on her Web site. These activities allow even nonreaders to work at their own pace while the teacher is providing individualized instruction to other class members.

### Partnering with parents

Do you need better communication with parents? Many Hartville teachers use their class Web sites to communicate detailed information about curriculum; academic and behavioral expectations; and other school policies. The bonus for the teacher is that with students and most parents having access to these pages, time that might have been spent reiterating policies by phone or e-mail may be more effectively used for instructional purposes.

Class Web sites may also include information that parents can use in helping students at home. For example, first-year teacher Kayla Kroese has a D'Nealian handwriting chart on her Web site for parents of her kindergarten students. Many parents of young children want to help their children with proper handwriting at home but may be unfamiliar with the D'Nealian method. Having the chart available online allows students to improve their handwriting at their own pace by practice at home with parental guidance.

Having suitable links posted on a classroom Web site can also provide learning activities for indoor recess. This can free the teacher to work with individuals who need more help with a specific assignment. The links to learning activities and projects also ensure that indoor recess is of educational benefit.

### Differentiation without the Internet

You can have differentiated instruction without even using the Internet. The exploratory keyboarding classes in Hartville Junior High have full inclusion of all students. Differentiated instruction in these classes occurs in the form of the teacher giving

individual assistance to students who need it, as well as when work is graded by the teacher.

To avoid embarrassment to students with special needs, a sample of the assignment is graded as a form of modified assignment. All students are encouraged to exchange previously formed bad habits for proper keyboarding technique. All students also are instructed in the basics of Microsoft Word. Following this exposure, many who struggle with writing an assignment find it to be much easier and faster to type it.

Students are encouraged to explore various means of organizing information to see what best fits their personal learning style. The last week of each semester the junior high students put their Word skills to work by designing and completing their own assignments.




While many teachers use WebQuests for differentiation of instruction, third-grade teacher Lana Arnall has developed her own "Cool School WebQuest." The group activity teaches acceptable computer use for third graders. The students work in small groups, and their finished product showcases a variety of computer techniques. Since peer tutoring can often be a beneficial means of differentiating instruction, group members are instructed to "teach the others" in the group what they have learned.

Your students may know more about technology than you do, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. As a junior high teacher, I have learned much about technology from my students. Together we have learned that there may be many avenues to reach the same technological destination.

Regardless of how individual teachers may feel about the use of technology as a teaching tool, it is here to stay. It can be an exciting means of reaching all learners. ■

*Jane Kinser retired from Hartville Junior High at the end of the 2008-2009 school year after 34 years as an eMINTS elementary and junior high teacher. The eMINTS National Center is a collaborative program developed by the University of Missouri, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Missouri Department of Higher Education. This article originally printed in School & Community, a publication of the Missouri State Teachers Association (MSTA). Reprinted with permission.*

### Great Web Sites for Learning

-  <http://starfall.com>
-  <http://pbskids.org>
-  <http://noggin.com/games>
-  <http://kids.nypl.org>
-  <http://coolmath.net>
-  <http://primarygames.com>
-  <http://www.brainbashers.com>



# Ironic Standards

## College Readiness Standards fall short of making students ready for college

By Ze'ev Wurman and Sandra Stotsky

It began as an admirable idea. Develop a set of national K-12 English and math standards states could sign onto voluntarily to help reduce race- and class-based achievement gaps, ensure high standards for all public school students, and help make the United States more competitive in the global economy.

But just a year later, national standards are looking far less admirable. President Obama just announced that signing onto once-voluntary standards would be a condition for receipt of federal funding, even though the standards aren't even complete and recent drafts are woefully deficient.

In short, the Common Core College Readiness standards wouldn't get you into college. Our review of a recent draft finds that they fail to meet the requirements of almost all the nation's state colleges and universities.

The standards are not benchmarked against those in high-achieving countries. As a result, requirements at higher grade levels lag one to two years behind academic standards in those countries.

The math drafts cover too few topics to adequately prepare students for college. The standards place topics in the wrong grades and dumb down critical stepping stones to college success.

High school math teachers will look in vain for course standards in Algebra II, pre-calculus, or trigonometry. The drafters deem algebra, which the prestigious National Math Advisory Panel identified as the key to higher math study, as an outdated organizing principle.

The English language arts standards are no better. They often show little increase in difficulty from grade to grade and contain almost no substantive requirements.

Neither the so-called top-level college- and career-readiness ELA standards nor the tests to be based on them would require students to demonstrate familiarity with the major authors and works of American and British literary history. That

familiarity is what allows them to be educated readers of the nation's seminal political documents.

Fundamentally, what have been produced are content-free generic skills, not academic standards.

### State-demonstrated failures

Some states, like Connecticut and West Virginia, have implemented standards similar to these drafts, with predictable results. Rather than improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps, they've had exactly the opposite effect. In recent years, Connecticut reversed course and adopted standards modeled on Massachusetts' content-rich curriculum frameworks.

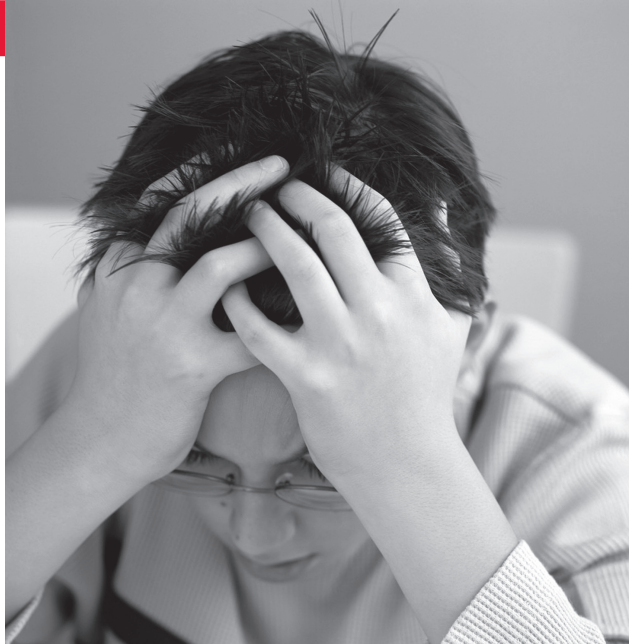
States like Massachusetts have the most to lose. Its model standards are one of the major reasons for Bay State students' unprecedented performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the Nation's Report Card. Yet the national standards haven't sufficiently drawn on them.

A thoughtful, deliberative process was used to develop strong state standards. The process by which draft national standards have been developed leaves the distinct impression that the U.S. Department of Education, National Governors Association, and the Council of Chief State School Officers knew they had something to hide when they formed the Common Core State Standards Initiative. For months, no membership lists were available for the standards development committees, even though their work was proceeding.

### A rush to judgment

Rather than giving this important topic the deliberation it deserves, the process is being rushed. Standards are to be developed and implemented in less than a year, and this important work is being undertaken by people who lack the necessary qualifications for writing K-12 math and ELA standards. Recently we learned that only three weeks will be allowed for public feedback before the standards would be finalized.

Many of us were pleased when President Obama used the carrot of federal Race to the Top grant money as an incen-



tive to get states to lift arbitrary charter school restrictions. But that success seems to have created the dangerous precedent of using federal money to dictate state education policy.

State and local governments foot more than 90 percent of the bill for public K-12 education. Recognizing this, the Obama administration should eliminate the adoption of national standards as a criterion for receipt of Race to the Top grants.

There may be merit to the goal of national academic standards. However, recent drafts are third rate, and the process by which they have been developed severely wanting. It's time to take a step back before we adopt standards that would leave American students less ready for authentic college coursework in mathematics and English than they are now and damage the nation's economic competitiveness. ■



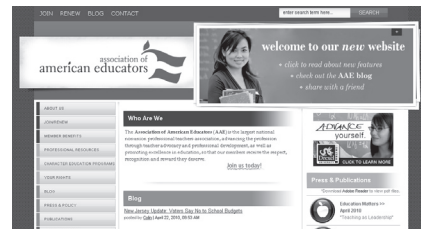
*Ze'ev Wurman, a high-tech executive in Silicon Valley, was active in developing California's standards and assessments in the mid-1990s. Sandra Stotsky is a member of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.*



- ▶ Read expanded versions of material from the old Web site, including Member Benefits, the AAE Code of Ethics for Educators, Professional Resources, Character Education Resources, Your Rights, and much more.
- ▶ View [aaeteachers.org](http://aaeteachers.org) on your iPhone or Blackberry because the new Web site is smartphone friendly.

There are also other exciting additions to the Web site scheduled later this year:

- ▶ Starting this summer, apply online for an AAE scholarship or classroom minigrant and receive up to \$500 if selected.
- ▶ The new AAE video will premiere on the Web site soon; be sure to share with your friends and colleagues.
- ▶ Later this year, members will be able to log into their user profile to update their membership information, contact information, payment information, and to download and print membership materials.



## AAE Launches Redesigned and Upgraded Web Site

AAE is proud to announce the launch of our newly redesigned and upgraded Web site, [aaeteachers.org](http://aaeteachers.org). The site offers a sleek and colorful design, smarter navigation, expanded resources, and new blog. This year-long redesign is not just a cosmetic facelift but rather a comprehensive overhaul to create a user-friendly and members-driven resource enriched with expanded features and functionality.

Head over to the Web site to:

- ▶ Keep up with current education issues by following AAE's one-of-a-kind education blog and subscribe to our RSS feed. Be sure to share your opinion in the comments and check back regularly for new posts.
- ▶ Share Web pages and other resources with your friends and colleagues on Facebook, Twitter, by email or dozens of other ways by using the "ShareThis" button found on nearly every page.
- ▶ Check out the new cycling banner found at the top of every page. (You may want start your visit by clicking on the "Welcome" image.)
- ▶ Join AAE or renew your membership via our secure online application.
- ▶ Explore this month's issue of *Education Matters*, as well as eight years of easily accessible newsletter archives and three years of press release archives.
- ▶ Print popular pages to share with others in a colorful PDF format.

We are eager to hear what you think of the new design, new features, new functionality, and the new blog, so please let us know—email our Webmaster: [colin@aaeteachers.org](mailto:colin@aaeteachers.org). Remember to check the Web site regularly to follow the AAE blog and learn about other exciting new additions to the Web site.

Also, while you are checking out the new [aaeteachers.org](http://aaeteachers.org), connect with AAE at [facebook.com/aaeteachers](https://www.facebook.com/aaeteachers) and [twitter.com/aaeteachers](https://twitter.com/aaeteachers) and join over 7,000 of your fellow teachers who are already following. ■



### \$500 for AAE Members

#### Tuition Grants available for AAE Teachers

AAE is pleased to announce a new partnership with American College of Education to provide \$125,000 in Tuition Grants to AAE members. A total of 250 Tuition Grants will provide \$500 each so members can earn an advanced degree in an online accelerated instructional program.

The program was developed by educators to provide real world instruction designed to increase student achievement. American College of Education

is a regionally accredited college that offers AAE teachers the opportunity to pursue an affordable, accessible, high-quality master's degree in one of five education programs.

This highly engaging online coursework will help you improve your teaching practice, increase career opportunities, and move up the salary schedule. Go to <http://www.ace.edu/AAE> for more information on how to take the next step in your career.



# Teacher's diary



While teachers are often willing to share their knowledge through casual meetings with their colleagues, many are now turning to the Internet. One group of first-year teachers did just this by starting their own Web-blog, [www.teachersdiary.com](http://www.teachersdiary.com).

It is here where these resourceful educators, under complete anonymity,

can share their accounts of frustration and success in the classroom.

They employ this site to not only share their experiences and knowledge but also to gain insight from other teachers willing to share their stories.

In a recent posting on the Teacher's Diary site, one writer takes a moment to reflect on her commitments:

*I feel I have become a teacher. I have experienced the frustrations and joys of teaching, as well as fallen into many of the pitfalls of being in front of a classroom of eager children. Now that I know what my strengths and weaknesses are, I am ready to make resolutions for the coming year. In 2010, as a teacher, I would like to:*

1. Captivate students at the start of the lesson by giving an interesting motivation at least every other class.
2. Stay on top of grading and make sure to pass work back within a week, if not sooner.
3. Develop more classroom procedures to keep things flowing smoothly.
4. Catch up! Don't let students fall behind, and make sure they have enough material to do well in the class.
5. Avoid planning only one day ahead. Try to plan whole units, at least with aims for each class, if not lesson plans.
6. Develop stronger relationships with students in the middle range, not only in the bottom or top.
7. Stay positive. Try to record one good thing about every day and every student over the course of the semester.
8. Do not talk over students. Develop strategies for managing talkative students and classes.
9. Be a better team player, by making more time for co-teacher and co-workers.
10. Have more fun, both inside and outside the classroom.

Take a moment to browse through some of the postings on [www.teachersdiary.com](http://www.teachersdiary.com).



## The Market Speaks!

Recently, the *Albuquerque Journal* editorialized that the state legislature's budget plans were too heavy on the tax increases and too light on the spending cuts. This so outraged American Federation of Teachers (AFT) New Mexico that it issued a press release announcing "more than 200 teachers and school employees have told the union they will drop their subscription to the paper because of the editorial."

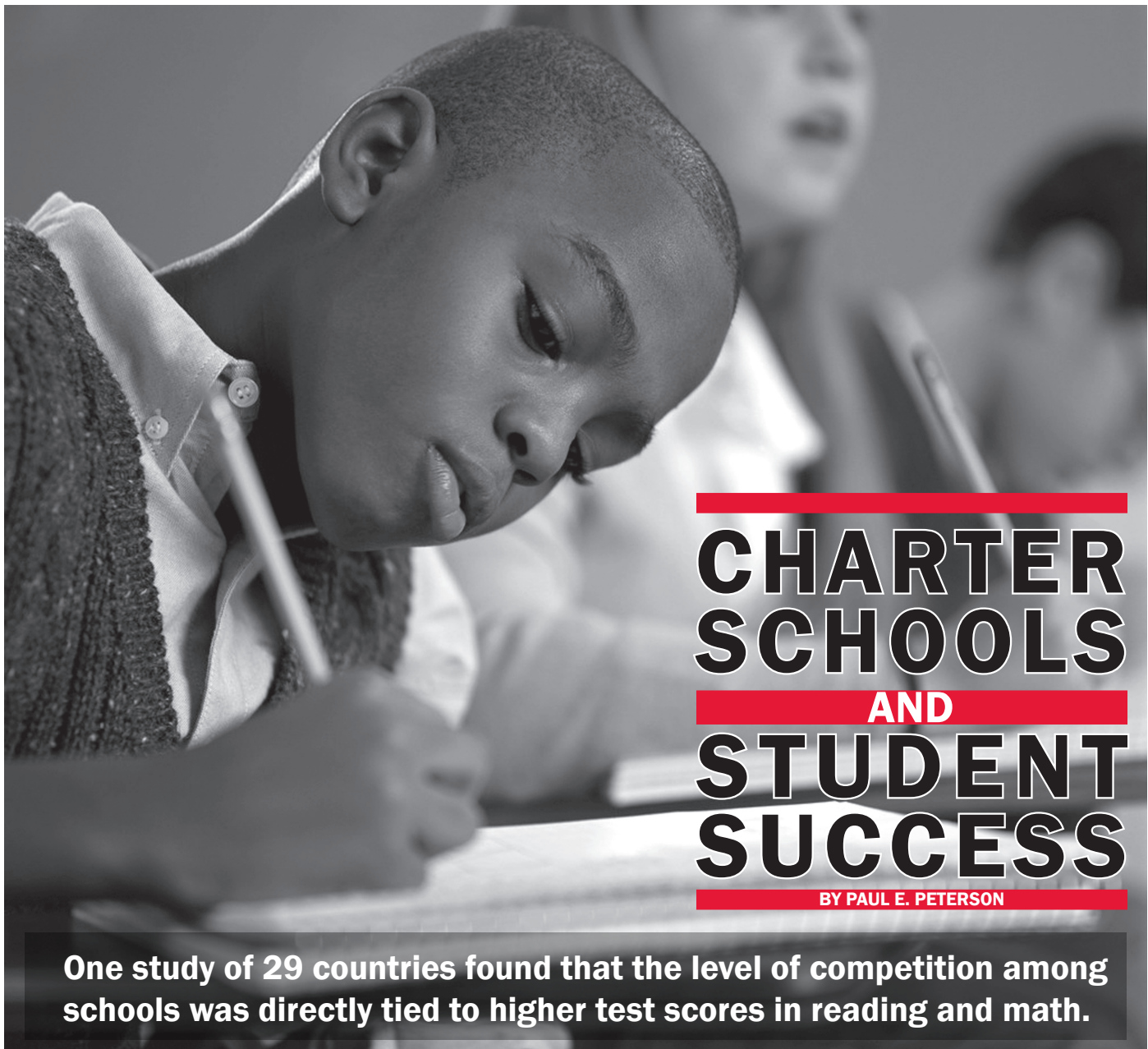
Leaving aside the question of why you would call your union when you're dropping your newspaper subscription, it's good to know that at least in some aspects of American life, you can take your business elsewhere when you're not satisfied with a product or service. If the real world were run like the world of teacher unions and the disgruntled AFT New Mexico members decided to buy a rival newspaper every morning, they would still have to pay for the *Albuquerque Journal*, even if they didn't read it.

Source—Intercepts, *Education Intelligence Agency*, [www.eiaonline.com](http://www.eiaonline.com).

## In the News



AAE's Director of Education Policy and 1993 National Teacher of the Year Tracey Bailey was recently interviewed by CNN's American Morning about the phenomenon of student texting.



# CHARTER SCHOOLS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

BY PAUL E. PETERSON

**One study of 29 countries found that the level of competition among schools was directly tied to higher test scores in reading and math.**

On a recent Saturday, President Obama delivered a radio address on education and he didn't shrink from saying that American high school students are trailing international averages. He sketched out details of a bill his administration is now pushing to revise the No Child Left Behind Act. He proposes to preserve testing requirements but create a better measuring stick, require teachers be evaluated by performance (not credentials), and use carrots instead of sticks to encourage progress.

But nothing in the speech or his proposed legislation hints at the need for school choice and competition. Charter schools went unmentioned. One worries that his view of markets in education differs little from the one offered by Diane Ravitch in her new book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. In that book, she offers a naïve and static view of markets: "It is in the nature of markets that some succeed, some are middling, and others fail," she wrote.

Twentieth-century economist Joseph Schumpeter saw it another way. In his view, it is in the nature of markets that middling firms are "creatively" destroyed by good firms, which are themselves eventually eliminated by still better competitors. Ignoring this basic economic principle, critics of charter schools and other forms of school choice see no hope for competition in education. These critics ask us to leave public schools alone, apart from creating voluntary national standards—speed zones without traffic tickets, as it were.

## **Understanding markets**

Few doubt that public schools today are troubled, as the president noted. What the president left out is that the performance of American high school students has hardly budged over the past forty years, while the per-pupil cost of operating the schools they attend has increased threefold in real dollar terms. If school districts were firms operating in the market place, many would



quickly fall victim to Schumpeter's law of creative destruction.

Ms. Ravitch and other critics of school choice reverse causation by blaming the sad state of public schools on events that occurred long after schools had stagnated. They point, for example, to President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (enacted in 2002), mayoral governance of schools recently instituted in some cities, and the creation of a small number (4,638) of charter schools that serve less than 3 percent of the U.S. school-age population.

### Hindrances to improvement

To uncover what is wrong with American public schools one has to dig deeper than these recent developments in education. One needs to consider the impact of restrictive collective bargaining agreements that prevent rewarding good teachers and removing ineffective ones, intrusive court interventions, and useless teacher certification laws.

Charters were invented to address these problems. As compared to district schools, they have numerous advantages. They are funded by governments, but they operate independently. This means that charters must persuade parents to select them instead of a neighborhood district school. That has happened with such regularity that today there are 350,000 families on charter-school waiting lists, enough to fill over 1,000 additional charter schools.

According to a 2009 *Education Next* survey, the public approves of steady charter growth. Although a sizable portion of Americans remain undecided, charter supporters outnumber opponents two to one. Among African Americans, those who favor charters outnumber opponents four to one. Even among public-school teachers, the percentage who favor charters is 37 percent, while the percentage who oppose them is 31 percent.

A school can have short-term popularity without being good, of course. Union leaders would have us believe that charter popularity is due to the "motivated" students who attend them, not the education they provide. But charters hold lotteries when applications exceed available seats. As a result—and also because they are usually located in urban areas—over half of all charter students are either African American or Hispanic. More than a third of charter school students are eligible for the federal free or reduced lunch program.

### Lotteries and studies

To identify the effects of a charter education, a wide variety of studies have been conducted. The best studies are randomized experiments, the gold standard in both medical and educational research. Stanford University's Caroline Hoxby and Harvard University's Thomas Kane have conducted randomized experiments that compare students who win a charter lottery with those who applied but were not given a seat. Winners and losers can be assumed to be equally motivated because they both tried to go to a charter school. Ms. Hoxby and Mr. Kane have found that lottery winners subsequently scored considerably higher on math and reading tests than did applicants who remained in district schools.

In another good study, the RAND Corp. found that charter high school graduation rates and college attendance rates were better than regular district school rates by 15 percentage points and 8 percentage points, respectively.

Instead of taking seriously these high-quality studies, charter critics rely heavily on a report released in 2004 by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The AFT is hardly a disinterested investigator, and its report makes inappropriate comparisons and pays insufficient attention to the fact that charters are serving an educationally deprived segment of the population. Others base their criticism of charters on a report from an ongoing study by Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (Credo), which found that there are more weak charter schools than strong ones. Although this report is superior to AFT's study, its results are dominated by a large number of students who are in their first year at a charter school and a large number of charter schools that are in their first year of operation.

Credo's work will be more informative when it presents findings for students in charters that have been up and running for several years. You can't judge the long-term potential of schools that have not amassed a multiyear track record.

To identify the long-term benefits of school choice, Harvard's Martin West and German economist Ludger Woessmann examined the impact of school choice on the performance of 15-year-old students in 29 industrialized countries. They discovered that the greater the competition between the public and private sector, the better all students do in math, science, and reading. Their findings imply that expanding charters to include 50 percent of all students would eventually raise American students' math scores to be competitive with the highest-scoring countries in the world.

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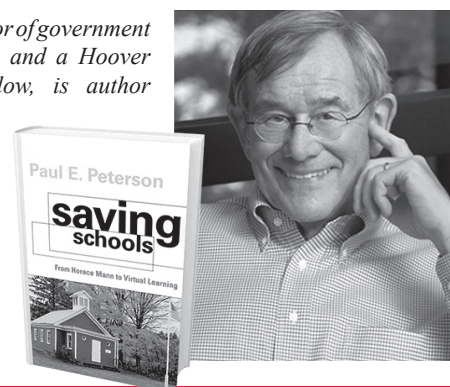
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### The need for innovation

What makes charters important today is less their current performance than their potential to innovate. Educational opportunity is about to be revolutionized by powerful notebook computers, broadband and the open-source development of curricular materials. Curriculum can be tailored to the level of accomplishment each student has reached, an enormous step forward.

If American education remains stagnant, such innovations will spread slowly, if at all. If the charter world continues to expand, the competition between them and district schools could prove to be transformative. ■

*Mr. Peterson, a professor of government at Harvard University and a Hoover Institution senior fellow, is author of the forthcoming book Saving Schools: From Horace Mann to Virtual Learning (Belknap/Harvard University Press).*





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# Teaching Students to Show Compassion

## Rachel's Challenge Educator Summit Scheduled for June

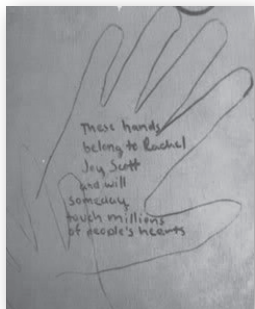
The first Rachel's Challenge Educator Summit, a training event for teachers, administrators, and community leaders from across the country, will be held at the Denver Marriott Tech Center June 23-26, 2010. The Summit will offer a series of workshops on engaging students to improve their own learning environment, antidotes to bullying and violent behavior, turning difficult students into creative participants, and building a culture of caring and compassion.

Rachel's Challenge was started by Darrell Scott after his May 29, 1999 address to Congress following the Columbine High School tragedy. The response from leaders and educators was overwhelming. The text of that address is still widely circulating on the internet.

The core of Rachel's Challenge comes from writings and drawings Rachel left in her journals and school assignments. Scott and a team of speakers now present Rachel's Challenge in elementary, middle and high schools across the country and internationally. The presentation has been heard by over twelve million people in five countries. Documented results after the presentations consistently show reduced behavioral problems and thousands of students participating in projects serving their schools and communities.

Plans for the June Summit grew from repeated requests from teachers and administrators who saw the positive results of the school programs. They asked for an opportunity to learn more about making these dramatic cultural changes permanent. The Rachel's Challenge planners drew from the many educational leaders who share the goals of the program to assemble the Summit lineup.

The image to the right is a photograph taken of the back of one of Rachel's old pieces of furniture. Rachel had a habit of writing in unusual places throughout her life. Here, she traced her hands and wrote: "These hands belong to Rachel Joy Scott and will someday touch millions of people's hearts."



changes on school campuses. Darrell Scott, father of Rachel Scott, the first student killed at Columbine High School in 1999, will host the event and address the participants. Other featured speakers include Cor Suijk, personal assistant to Otto Frank and

CEO Emeritus of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam; Ron Clark, a Disney American Teacher of the Year and subject of the movie *The Ron Clark Story*; and Deborah Phelps, middle school principal, author, and mother of three athletes including world-champion Michael Phelps.

Additional presenters include Dr. Stephen Sroka, international speaker and media commentator; Christian Moore from Why Try? who overcame incredible poverty and social challenges; and Erahm Christopher, award-winning film producer and co-creator of Teen Truth. Also presenting workshops are Dr. Richard Ramsey, Dr. Gene Bedley, Dr. Neila Connors, and others.

The conference will also feature exhibits from educational resource providers and other supporting organizations. ■

Registration for the Summit is open online at [www.rachelschallenge-summit.org](http://www.rachelschallenge-summit.org). Group discounts are available. For more information, contact Sarah Branion at Rachel's Challenge (303) 470-3000 or email [sarah@rachelschallenge.org](mailto:sarah@rachelschallenge.org).



### What is Rachel's Challenge

**"I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion then it will start a chain reaction of the same." - Rachel Scott**

Powerful video/audio footage of Rachel's life and the Columbine tragedy holds students spell-bound during a one-hour school presentation that motivates them to positive change in the way they treat others.

This is followed by an interactive 45-minute training session involving both adult and student leaders that shows how to sustain the momentum created by the assembly. The assembly creates the "want to" or desire for positive change. The training session teaches the "how to" and ensures that the positive impact will continue.

That evening the Rachel's Challenge speaker conducts a powerful session with parents and community leaders showing them how they can reinforce the decisions their youth are making.