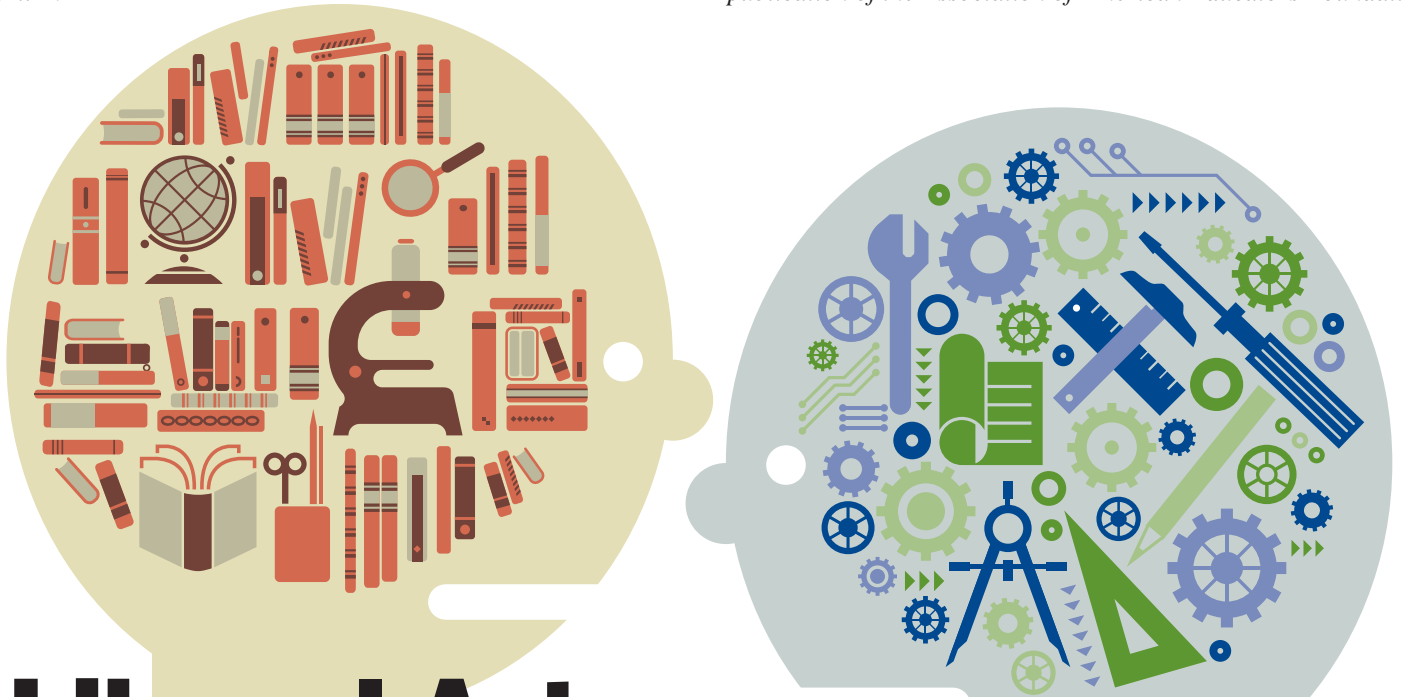


Education Matters

April 2012

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Liberal Arts **vs.** Technical Training

21st century VocEd could be key to future economic prosperity

By Chester E. Finn Jr.

I'm a huge fan of high-quality liberal arts education for everybody and really do think it would go far to prepare better citizens, neighbors, and consumer/transmitters of America's cultural heritage and democratic underpinnings. I'm also an acolyte of E.D. Hirsch and his core point that everyone—especially poor kids—needs to be culturally literate as well as equipped with the three Rs (though he emphasizes that his focus is K-8, not high school).

That said, I'm also becoming convinced that the future of our *economy* and the acquisition of *good jobs* will hinge as much on well-developed *technical prowess* as on Aristotle, Shakespeare, Darwin, Rembrandt, and Mozart.

Recent weeks have brought multiple reports of U.S. jobs going unfilled, or being outsourced to distant lands because too few American workers have the requisite skills to perform them well.

On January 21, for example, the *New York Times* explained why Apple has its iPhones, iPads, and such manufactured in China.

Among the multiple reasons, not all of them praiseworthy, this one stuck with me:

Another critical advantage for Apple was that China provided engineers at a scale the United States could not match. Apple's executives had estimated that about 8,700 industrial engineers were needed to oversee and guide the 200,000 assembly line workers eventually involved in manufacturing iPhones. The company's analysts had forecast it would take as long as nine months to find that many qualified engineers in the United States. In China, it took fifteen days.

Further evidence turned up in *The Washington Post*, with employers in several states lamenting the dearth of technically qualified workers for decently paid jobs now going unfilled:

[A]s the 2012 presidential candidates roam the state offering ways to "bring the jobs back," many manufacturers say that, in fact, the jobs are already here. What's missing are the skilled workers needed to fill them.

As such reports make plain, somewhere along the education continuum, America in 2012 needs to prepare thousands more people for jobs that do exist. The skills they call for, by and large, are technical and do not seem to require much of a liberal arts background, even if citizenship does. Many do not entail sitting at a desk or wearing a white lab coat. Rather, they involve today's version of what used to be called "blue collar" and "foreman" work, and the educational preparation for succeeding in them does not look much like what the "everyone should complete college" crowd seems to have in mind.

Recall the provocative Pathways to Prosperity report from the Harvard education school a year back, observing that just 30 percent of the jobs in 2018 will require a bachelor's degree and arguing for a "multiple pathways" approach to K-12 reform. This didn't get the attention it deserved—and still deserves. For it demands not only rethinking the "college for all" mantra but also launching a bold makeover of America's vocational high schools (and kindred postsecondary institutions), bringing them into the twenty-first century rather than either jettisoning them or retaining them unchanged.

In sum: Somewhere between the dead-end of old-style vocational high schools and the fashionable but ill-advised "college for everyone" campaign is a course of action that will actually equip young Americans for both successful citizenship and the real economy that they will inhabit.



Chester E. Finn Jr. is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and chairman of the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education. He is also president and trustee of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Previously, he was professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, senior fellow of the Hudson Institute, founding partner with the Edison Project, and legislative director for Senator Daniel P. Moynihan. He served as assistant US education secretary for research and improvement from 1985 to 1988.

Education is no zero-sum game

By Peter Meyer

“Wouldn't you want your plumber to be able to quote Shakespeare?” I posed the question to our veteran math teacher, thirty years in the trenches, and he said, succinctly and without hesitation, “No.”

At first, I was taken aback, but, as we chatted, I realized that he saw it as a zero-sum question. He had nothing against Shakespeare; he simply wanted his plumber to be a good plumber and considered the Bard a distraction.

I understand. We want our auto mechanics to know the difference between a brake line and a muffler, our carpenters to appreciate the importance of a plumb line and the use of a hammer—oops, nail gun.

But it is not a zero-sum game. And knowing the foibles of Macbeth does not mean you must be useless with a soldering gun.

And therein lies the conundrum. Had I posed the question this way—Would you like your plumber to be as quick in thought and as creative in action as Shakespeare?—he may have had second thoughts about his no. Would he want his plumber to be able to identify the lead pipes in his 1850s house? To know that his cranky fifty-year-old copper pipes can be replaced with plastic? To know that the state legislature was considering a bill to ban PVC?

This is the skills dilemma.

The *Washington Post* suggests that our manufacturing resurgence is being hampered by the lack of “skilled” workers. What skills?

I attended an economic development seminar recently and listened to the CEO of our local hospital, one the largest employers in the region, talk about the lack of skilled workers. She didn't mean doctors and nurses, though. She meant janitors and bed-pan assistants. “Our biggest problem is finding people who can read and write and show up on time,” she said.

A friend of mine, a Princeton history grad who went on to become a homebuilder and now teaches carpentry at a VocEd school, says he constantly lectures his would-be hammerers about the importance of basic math and communications skills. And he notes that VocEd, which has been “a dumping ground for dumb kids,” is changing. His school has introduced three new standards for admission. First, a student must write a short essay about why he or she wants to be in a particular class. “You'd be amazed how many kids that eliminates,” says my friend. The school is also looking at a student's reading scores and discipline record. “These won't disqualify you, but the flags go up,” he explains. “And we deal with them. But these three things have been a huge step forward.”

We need more flags and we need to reconsider our definitions of skills. We can no longer afford to see VocEd as a refuge for the academically unprepared because today's economy—including its industrial sector—is far too dynamic and demanding. The point of a liberal arts education—and I include math and science in that education—is to teach some eternal verities so that, when the surface world changes, as it tends to do, we have citizens who possess the most important skill of all: the ability to adapt. As old Willie would say, “Now all the youth of England are on fire, and silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies: Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought reigns solely in the breast of every man...” Including the lathe operator?



Peter Meyer is a former News Editor of *Life* magazine and the author of numerous nonfiction books. Since 1991 Meyer has focused his attentions on education reform in the United States, an interest joined while writing a profile of education reformer E.D. Hirsch for *Life*. Meyer subsequently helped found a charter school, served on his local Board of Education (twice) and, for the last eight years, has been an editor at *Education Next*.

Free iPad App Designed for Educators and Students

In December, iSWiFTER Learn, Inc., the company that developed the world's first cloud-based streaming platform for mobile devices, unveiled Rover, the first free iPad browser that gives educators and students unprecedented access to Flash-based educational content on the iPad.

Due to the overwhelming correspondence from school administrators and teachers eager for a secure, controllable way to leverage the potential that iPads bring to the classroom, Rover was developed with educators in mind.

As school districts are rapidly deploying iPads in the classroom, educators and administrators can now use Rover to access educational content on the iPad from a variety of partners including Discovery Education, the leading provider of high quality digital content to more than half of U.S. schools; FunBrain, part of Family Education Network; and 3P Learning, providers of the popular Mathletics program.

Rover app ensures that teachers are no longer locked out of valuable online learning content due to browsing compatibility. For the first time ever, teachers can now use the iPad to develop



and customize lesson plans that incorporate non-Flash as well as Flash content already created for classrooms.

As the first iPad app compliant with schools' firewalls, Rover makes it possible for educators to access the same Flash-based online learning content already used on classroom PCs. The app is also compliant with content filtering regulations through an open web browser that meets the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). This allows users to safely leverage iPads at home and in the classroom while preventing access to undesirable content or sites.

With Rover, educators have the ability to develop and customize lesson plans that deliver both Flash- and nonFlash-based content on the iPad, crucial for a dynamic and interactive classroom. In addition to accessing the content at schools, students and parents can now access the same school-approved content on their iPads at home.

This app is free for educators: Visit www.itunes.apple.com to download it today! ■



Sign of the Times:

Leaders of Las Vegas teachers union cash in while members await layoffs

Your raise or your job. That's the choice facing members of the Clark County Education Association (CCEA), the union that represents teachers in Nevada's Clark County School District (CCSD).

The district is facing a \$78 million deficit for the 2011-13 budget cycle, and needs to freeze teachers' pay in order to avoid laying off 1,000 teachers by April.

While most people would choose their job over a pay raise—as CCSD support staff and administrators have done—CCEA members have refused. An arbitrator will soon decide whether all teachers will take a pay freeze, or if some members will get paid raises while others get pink slips.

Union members have consistently argued “overpaid” administrators should be the ones to do with less—not teachers. But an investigative report from the Las Vegas *Review-Journal* reveals it's CCEA leaders who have been out-earning everyone else.

“According to IRS reports from 2009, the most recent year available, the union paid more than one-third of its \$4.1 million budget toward the salaries of nine leaders, with the lowest paid official making almost \$140,000,” the *Review-Journal* reports.

That's well above the 3 to 7 percent an average union spends on administrative compensation. John Jasek, CCEA's executive director at the time, “was paid almost \$209,000, but received about \$424,000 in compensation from two affiliated organizations, pushing his total pay past \$632,000,” which was \$274,000 more than CCSD's superintendent earned, the paper reports.

The head of the Teachers Health Trust, a health insurance company owned and operated by the CCEA,

earned \$546,133 during 2009, according to the *Review-Journal*. (Ironically, teachers might not be choosing between raises or jobs if they had agreed to switch to a comparable, less expensive health insurance plan. But too many union friends were making too much money for that concession to be seriously considered.)

“We have no justification for the fact that former Executive Director Jasek was able to triple dip, earning additional and excessive salaries,” CCEA President Ruben Murillo Jr. writes on the union's website. He claims to have taken steps to ensure the practice doesn't happen again.

Union officials have refused to provide the *Review-Journal* with current salary information but claim “the salary/compensations of CCEA staff is standard.”

The *Review-Journal* summed up the situation in a recent editorial:

“...[T]eachers who don't find value in the union's services don't have to pay dues because Nevada is a right-to-work state. But the union and its members no longer have any credibility in arguing that school administrators are overpaid. ... Is the union's leadership overpaid? That's for teachers to decide. If they weren't aware that their union leaders are among the Valley's highest earners, they are now.”

That should give teachers something to think about as they await the arbitrator's decision.

In fact, that should give teacher union members all across the country something to think about. Because when it comes to union greed, what happens in Vegas... happens everywhere. Teacher unions control public education. ■

Remember ABCTE? Perhaps you should

AMERICAN BOARD
for Certification of Teacher Excellence

A little over a year ago, a report surfaced showing teachers trained in a Florida college or university were no more effective than other teachers in that state who hadn't gone through formal training.

Now, as we sift through the gold mine of Florida data, researchers have unearthed even worse news for champions of traditional teacher prep. Teachers entering the profession via the fastest track of all, the **American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE)**, swamp their fellow new teachers, at least when it comes to teaching math.

The difference in effectiveness between new ABCTE teachers and their traditionally trained counterparts is so pronounced, it's even bigger (50 percent greater, in fact) than the substantial increase in effectiveness typically seen between rookie and second-year teachers.

That's big news for the once highly controversial pathway into the profession, so threatening that the suggestion of its adoption in any state was met with throngs of pickets and overwrought speeches delivered on the floors of state legislatures. Bring up ABCTE now and most people aren't even aware it still exists.

But people looking for proof that alternate routes are on the whole better than traditional teacher prep will still be disappointed. In comparing three major alternate routes into the teaching profession in Florida (district-run preparation programs [by far the largest], and programs run by community colleges and ABCTE), the results are apparent. District-run preparation program grads are a tad less effective than grads from traditional programs. Community college program grads are significantly less effective. Only the ABCTE teachers, notable for their SAT scores which are higher than those of any teachers in the other groups, outperformed the grads from Florida's schools of education. ■

Beating Teacher Fatigue

By Elena Aguilar



I'm tired. There's too much going on outside of work, too much work inside of work. February is a much longer month this year. And there's another six weeks before spring break. (Mine is not a school district that has a February break).

I'm reaching the tired that obliterates memory of antidotes.

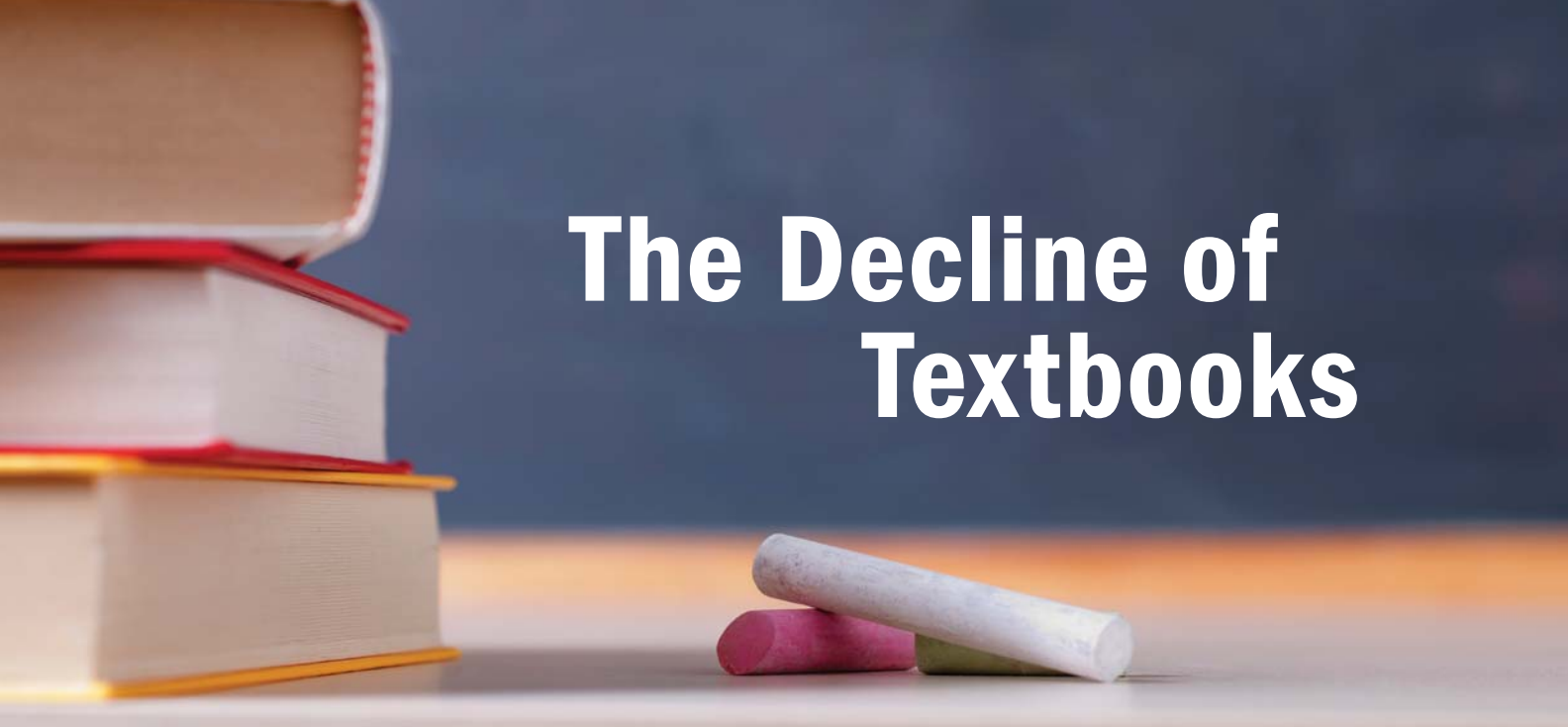
So I'm going to brainstorm a list of what helps to prevent plunges into fatigue:

- #1 Take a 10-minute walk. They say I'll feel the energetic benefits from a 10-minute walk for the following two hours.
- #2 Blend frozen blueberries with almond milk, or even water. Always keep several bags of blueberries in freezer.
- #3 Stop reading anything related to education for a week. Or cut down by 90 percent.
- #4 Notice the moments in the day when I'm not tired. They do exist but when my overall state is tired, I miss all the other moments.
- #5 Fantasize about the next school year. I find this energizing and revitalizing. There is a future beyond the immediate fatigue.
- #6 Eat raw kale. I feel an almost caffeine-like rush of energy. Chop it up really small and add to salad or blueberry-smoothie. It also balances out the jellybean consumption that increases with tiredness.
- #7 Work in 45-minute time blocks. While the timer is on, don't divert attention for anything—no checking email, clipping cuticles, or organizing bookshelves. Forty-five minutes of intense focus (set the timer) and then a 15-minute break. Take a walk during the break. Right now. Take a walk. I'm going to take my own advice. Now.
- #8 Listen to music, really loud (can be combined with walking). And sing along. Janis Joplin just did wonders for my energy level.
- #9 Take ten slow, long, deep breaths. Inhale. Hold for the count of five. Exhale, slowly.

- #10 Pet a furry creature. There's science behind this: Petting an animal decreases blood pressure and increases endorphins.
- #11 Limit the intake of news of any kind, even turn off NPR; listen to music. And sing. Bob Marley is good, too.
- #12 Sniff fresh mint. Or mint tea. Or mint-extract. The smell is supposed to wake up the brain. (It can't hurt.)
- #13 Take a walk with a friend who does not work in education and talk about trivial matters or reminisce about wild college days.
- #14 Give your eight-year-old boy permission to tell you bathroom jokes. It's not the jokes that are funny, it's the fact that you've given him permission and the way his body contorts into peels of laughter; his joy is infectious and laughter is all about deep breathing and so there's a science behind it, too. It helps.
- #15 Look for other jobs. This either makes me really appreciate my job or it reminds me that there might be something else out there. Usually, however, I am happy to return to my work.
- #16 Ask for support from those around you, especially if they are getting fed up with you being so tired. Declare your intentions and then beg them to remind you of this one: "I am never, ever going to write a book again! Even if I get all excited about some other project, remind me not to do it." Those others can also make you tea, or squeeze your shoulders (which are beginning to inch into your ears).
- #17 Take naps. Sleep a little extra. Those eight hours are not to be messed with.
- #18 Make lists like this, reminding myself of what helps when I'm really tired.
- #19 If all else fails, watch your favorite tv show. (I do like *Breaking Bad* except for the fact that there's a distant connection to education which I try to ignore.)
- #20 Ask others for advice and tips. ■



A former teacher and instructional coach, Elena Aguilar is now a transformational leadership coach in the Oakland Unified School District.



The Decline of Textbooks

Teachers in the classroom today all remember being issued their textbooks in grade school year after year. Decades-old charts and graphs, accompanied by the occasional pencil drawing, have been standard issue for generations.

Currently the textbook business is a \$4 billion-a-year industry; however, with the dawn of new technologies and new insight into their true effectiveness, paper textbooks are on the fast track to possible extinction.

The trend is deeper than one may think. According to Beverlee Jobrack's new book, *Tyranny of the Textbook*, textbooks as we know them today are not just easily outdated but are direct contributors to the country's mediocre education performance. As experts and policymakers strive to set higher standards and increase outcomes, textbooks themselves are holding students back. Jobrack claims that textbooks sell based on design and superficial features, not because they are based on the latest research on how children learn and how well they promote student achievement.

A former education publisher, Jobrack contends that with only three companies publishing 75 percent of the K-12 educational materials, there is little competition. "Those three companies are producing similar programs with the same instruc-

tional strategies, none of which require teachers to change their practices significantly." After spending her career trying to change the industry, Jobrack's new book seeks to provide insight and solutions into creating a system that works.

Complaining about textbooks is nothing new. School critics often point out the books' mistakes yielding embarrassing results. Just last year, a Virginia textbook falsely suggested thousands of African Americans fought willingly for the Confederacy. This and countless other stories of mistakes and agenda-pushing have become the norm in the industry.

With regard to the technology issue, the Obama administration recently set its sights on promoting digital content in lieu of traditional textbooks. Just last month, Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Federal Communications Commission chairman Julius Genachowski challenged schools and companies to get digital textbooks in students' hands within five years. The goal comes on the heels of Apple's

announcement that it will start to sell electronic versions of a few standard high-school books for use on its iPad tablet.

Digital learning environments have been embraced in Florida, Idaho, Utah, and California, as well as in individual schools and districts such as Joplin, Missouri, where laptops replaced textbooks destroyed in a tornado. According to the 2011 AAE Membership Survey, member educators are supportive of the move. With 85 percent of AAE member teachers incorporating technology into their lesson plans at least some of the time; another 58 percent of survey respondents agree with a policy that would phase out textbooks with digital content, including interactive and adaptive multimedia. The practice could be an innovative solution to updating content and after the initial investment, prove to be lower cost.

Taking into account the AAE Scholarship and Grant program, the demand for implementing technology and innovative tablet computer hardware is increasing exponentially. Still, despite the push to phase out textbooks, the process will be a serious undertaking. With schools facing budget shortfalls and broadband issues, the investment to transition to digital content may take longer than expected. ■

Federal Update

By Alexandra Schroeck

Department of Education Unveils RESPECT Initiative

Included in the Obama administration's 2013 proposed budget is a new \$5 billion competitive program to challenge states and school districts to work with various stakeholders in an effort to comprehensively reform the field of teaching. Entitled RESPECT, the proposal seeks to touch on every aspect of teaching, from training and tenure to compensation and career opportunities.

RESPECT is an acronym that stands for Recognizing Educational Success, Professional Excellence and Collaborative Teaching. The program builds on President Obama's State of the Union plans of reforming education and teacher preparation.

"Our goal is to work with teachers and principals in rebuilding their professions and to elevate the teacher voice in federal, state, and local education policy. Our larger goal is to make teaching not only America's most important profession but also America's most respected profession," Secretary Duncan said in promoting the program.

Details of the program will be developed through budget negotiations with Congress and the competition process itself.

School Crime and Safety News

A new report issued jointly by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics examining crimes occurring in schools was released to the public. Entitled "Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2011," the report covers topics such as victimiza-

tion, bullying, school conditions, fighting, weapons, and availability and student use of drugs and alcohol.

According to the report, the number of violent deaths declined to 33 during the 2009-10 school year. While this number may seem high, it is the lowest number on record since the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice began collecting data in 1992. According to the data, during the previous school year, there were 38 deaths linked to public school violence. Similarly, major thefts and nonfatal violent crimes declined from 1.2 million in 2008 to 828,000 in 2010.

Overall, while violent crimes in the nation's schools have declined in recent years, cyber bullying and youth suicides have risen. Experts contend the data gives a false sense of security, as many of the "crimes" have shifted to the Web in a new age in technology.

Department of Education Supports New STEM Initiative

In celebration of National Engineering Week in February, and to highlight the Obama administrations call for highly skilled science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) teachers, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan launched a new public/private partnership with the 100Kin10 organization last month. The 100Kin10 initiative is both a privately and publically funded organization working to help meet President Obama's goal of recruiting and training 100,000 world-class STEM teachers within ten years.

Duncan pointed out at the launch that there is a chronic shortage of highly skilled STEM teachers in our schools, particularly in hard-to-staff schools like rural and poor urban areas. The problem

is said to only get worse, as half of our nation's teachers are set to retire in the next ten years.

Secretary Duncan noted that the 100Kin10 initiative is "a public/private partnership at its best." Currently, the project 2013 budget flags more than \$2.5 billion in competitive funds designed to prepare highly qualified STEM teachers.

Committee Supports House K-12 Proposed Legislation

The House Committee on Education and the Workforce, chaired by Congressman John Kline (R-MN), last month held a legislative hearing on the Student Success Act (H.R. 3989) and the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act (H.R. 3990). The two pieces of legislation represent the next chapter in Republican efforts to rewrite elementary and secondary education law and are the House's version of a No Child Left Behind overhaul.

Among the many provisions, the bills focus on fostering innovation on the state and local levels. Clearly, with more than thirty states considering education reform laws last year, flexibility and encouragement are needed on the state level. Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna called the reforms happening at this level an "education renaissance" in his testimony supporting the legislation.

The Student Success Act will also call on each state to implement its own accountability system that considers the challenges and opportunities facing local schools and more accurately measures student achievement. In supporting this provision, Colorado State Board of Education Chairman Bob Schaffer said that states should be trusted to create their own systems. Each "level of account-



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★ *Federal Update continued*

ability and the immediacy of response is far quicker, greater, and more meaningful when we move authority away from Washington and back to the neighborhood.”

Finally, in promoting teacher effectiveness, the bills plan to direct states and school districts to develop and implement their own teacher evaluation systems based on student learning, rather than on a system based on seniority and tenure. The bills have left committee and are yet to arrive on the schedule for a full House vote.

Reaction: Ten States Receive NCLB Waivers

Last year, after several failed attempts to reform the No Child Left Behind Act, the Department of Education introduced a waiver system that would allow states to apply for regulatory waivers to bypass NCLB provisions in favor of education reforms backed by the administration. Hailed as a compromise by education reformers, thirty-eight states have applied for the waivers so far, with ten states receiving special waivers last month.

While many states have seen the waiver process as beneficial, congressional leaders have claimed the policy circumvents congressional approval and is another top-down effort to promote President Obama’s education agenda.

In a recent speech at the American Enterprise Institute, Congressman John Kline (R-MN) said, “Leaders of all political persuasions agree the status quo is unacceptable. Secretary [of Education] Arne Duncan... acknowledges that No Child Left Behind has significant flaws... but rather than work with us to get it changed, he and the president have decided to issue waivers in exchange for states adopting the policies he wants them to have... The idea that Congress is an impediment to be bypassed I find very troubling in many ways.”

Despite the criticism, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan praised the waivers plan as a needed solution. “Rather than dictating educational decisions from Washington, we want state and local educators to decide how to best meet the individual needs of students.”

Regardless of the controversy, states across the country are applying weekly for waivers and instituting their own plans for reform. ■



Alexandra Schroeck is AAE’s Manager of Communications and Legislative Affairs. She has served in a communications capacity for a Washington, D.C.-based trade association and on Capitol Hill for the then-

ranking member of the House Congressional Committee on Education and the Workforce.



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