

# Education Matters

December 2008

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By Barbara R. Davidson

Everyone knows that this year's election was labeled the "change" election, and everyone also knows that our education system could benefit from some real change, too. So, for some real change, how about reinserting history and related subjects into the curriculum?

Every week, it seems, another study highlights how little knowledge our young people possess about history, civics, and geography. Earlier this year, Common Core found that half of the 17-year-olds polled didn't know whom Senator McCarthy investigated or what the Renaissance was, while the Bradley Foundation told us that most eighth graders couldn't explain the purpose of the Declaration of Independence. The list goes on. In 2006, *National Geographic* revealed that nearly two-thirds of 18- to 24-year-olds could not identify Iraq on a map of Asia, and fully 88 percent could not find Afghanistan—apparently refuting Ambrose Bierce's suggestion that "War is God's way of teaching Americans geography."

As an organization that believes in the power of standards and school accountability to boost student achievement, StandardsWork, looks first to see if faulty state standards are the culprit. Not surprisingly, we find that social studies standards are both more out-of-date (fully 20 percent are more than ten years old) and of poorer quality than the standards for any other subject. Generally, older state standards documents haven't benefited

from rising expectations for clarity, specificity, and rigor. The Fordham Foundation's most recent reviews of social studies standards gave states an average grade of D, with half receiving F's in U.S. history and almost as many F's in world history—far worse than in English, math, or science.

What about testing? Is it possible that assessments more than standards are driving good instruction by at least providing us with important information about what students know

and don't know?

Unfortunately, the picture here is, if anything, worse. In a recent analysis conducted by StandardsWork, fewer than half the states were found to test at all in social studies or in any of its constituent disciplines. Just eight states have tests specifically targeting history (whether U.S. or World) in any given grade. Only sixteen test social studies at the elementary level—and far fewer state assessments in this field carry any "stakes" or consequences.

While many are ambivalent about championing high-stakes social studies testing, there is clear evidence from the (now defunct) Council for Basic Education and from Martin West's analyses that social studies testing, where it occurs, has increased the amount of instructional time devoted to the subject. Perhaps this is reason enough to push for it?

Before embracing that solution, however, we ought to take a

## **With a National Mood for Change, How about Changing the Quality of Our Social Studies Education?**

hard look at what is on these tests. Consider some of the items we found (in states that will remain nameless):

#### From an 8th grade test

“Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of the social machinery.”

—Horace Mann, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, 1848*

In the excerpt above, Mann shows his support for:

- A. women’s suffrage
- B. prison reform
- C. public schools
- D. improved sanitation

#### From a 4th-6th grade test

The following question appears under an illustration of a boy at the beach, sitting behind a hot chocolate stand that he’s set up featuring a hand-written sign saying, “Sam’s hot chocolate—50 cents.” Sam is under a beach umbrella, as is a woman across from him in a bathing suit on a chaise lounge. Steam is rising from one of the cups already poured on Sam’s table.

Why is Sam having difficulty selling his hot chocolate? How might he solve his problem?

#### From a 5th grade test

Place these events on the time line in the correct order:

- 1803—Ohio becomes the 17th state
- 1763—Treaty of Paris is signed
- 1787—Northwest Territory is formed
- 1795—Treaty of Greenville is signed

If read to him, a second-grader could probably get the first one right; with a scribe, a kindergartener could surely answer the second; and assuming he was proficient in math, a third-grader should be able to nail the last one (since most state standards expect a child to compare and order numbers to 10,000 by third grade).

The bottom line is this: No matter how we measure our commitment to a subject—whether it’s the quality of state standards; the frequency, quality, or consequences of testing; the amount of instructional time; or the availability of curriculum tools (clearly a problem in many school districts where we’ve worked)—history and its kin, by whatever indicator, are the stepchildren of K-12 education today.

And while I worry about the consequences of low levels of civic literacy, a lack of knowledge about the country’s past, and the ability to make connections in a global way, I am most concerned by how schools squander the opportunity to capture the interest of students.

During Congressional testimony in 2006, historian David McCullough described how human beings have a natural interest in history and find it to be a source of pleasure. He went on to say that “to deny our children that pleasure is to deny them a means

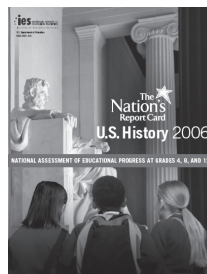
of extending and enlarging the experience of being alive.”

Worse, the squeezing out of social studies is felt hardest in elementary schools, particularly high-poverty schools that are under the gun to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Those are precisely the places where we’re wringing our hands trying to figure out how to increase student engagement.

That’s why my vote is for doing whatever it takes to put social studies back into our schools. Let’s not diminish our children’s experiences by denying them the passion of history and the pleasure of social studies. Let’s let them live big. ■

*Barbara Davidson, President of StandardsWork, Inc., is an experienced manager whose work in education spans 25 years. She has served in the U.S. Department of Education as White House Liaison, Executive Secretary, and Chief of Staff in the Office of Postsecondary Education.*

## Excerpted from The Nation’s Report Card on U.S. History



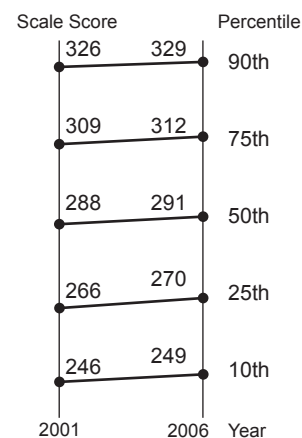
Twelfth-graders make some gains in their knowledge of U.S. history

Twelfth-graders’ average score was higher in 2006 than in either previous assessment years (1994 and 2001). Most of the gains seen for twelfth-graders occurred over the last five years.

Scores for all percentiles increased over the last dozen years, and scores for all but the highest performing students increased from 2001 to 2006.

A higher percentage of twelfth-graders performed at or above the Basic level in 2006 than in previous assessment years. The percentage of students at or above Proficient also increased.

#### Trend in twelfth-grade NAEP U.S. history percentile scores



To download the report, visit [www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov).

# Education R&D

## New Education R&D Lab Aims to Advance Innovations in Public Schools

A new education research and development laboratory at Harvard University will seek to identify and advance strategies to improve student achievement in America's public schools.

The goal of the Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard University (EdLabs) is to foster innovation and objective measurement of the effectiveness of urban K-12 school district programs and practices through rigorous research.

"The National Institutes of Health is the engine for scientific and medical research, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency develops innovations in technology and security, but K-12 education has had no R&D agency that identifies and researches the most effective innovations in our public schools," said Eli Broad, entrepreneur businessman and founder of The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundations that is a major funder of the program.

"There are pockets of innovation in K-12 public education today—innovations such as high-performing charter schools like KIPP and student incentives that increase academic performance," said Broad. "But we need to do more. In our nine years of working with school districts around the country, we have identified the need for robust research and development to fuel the work of reform-minded education leaders and advance innovative practices. We believe that EdLabs is the R&D entity that will fulfill that need."

To jumpstart the \$44-million three-year research and development initiative, EdLabs will partner with three of the largest urban school systems in the country: New York City Department of Education, Chicago Public Schools, and the District of Columbia Public Schools.

EdLabs will bring together top scholars from a broad range of academic fields and

connect them with its own R&D teams that will be embedded in these three school districts.

"America was built on innovation, yet there has been far too little of it in education even though we are not getting the results we need or that our children deserve," said New York City Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein. "EdLabs will encourage creative thinking to address the crisis in our classrooms and help us to understand what works and doesn't work when it comes to improving outcomes for our students."

The core work of EdLabs will include:

**1. BUILDING** a core database of student-level data to develop a detailed understanding of factors affecting student performance in Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C. EdLabs will use this new data to conduct rigorous empirical analyses to identify key leverage points for innovations.

**2. DEVELOPING** and implementing new ideas that will be piloted in schools in the three partner districts. EdLabs and the partner districts have already designed programs that will examine student motivation through student incentives. The programs are designed to investigate whether incentives change student behavior and attitudes toward academic achievement—and thus improve academic performance.

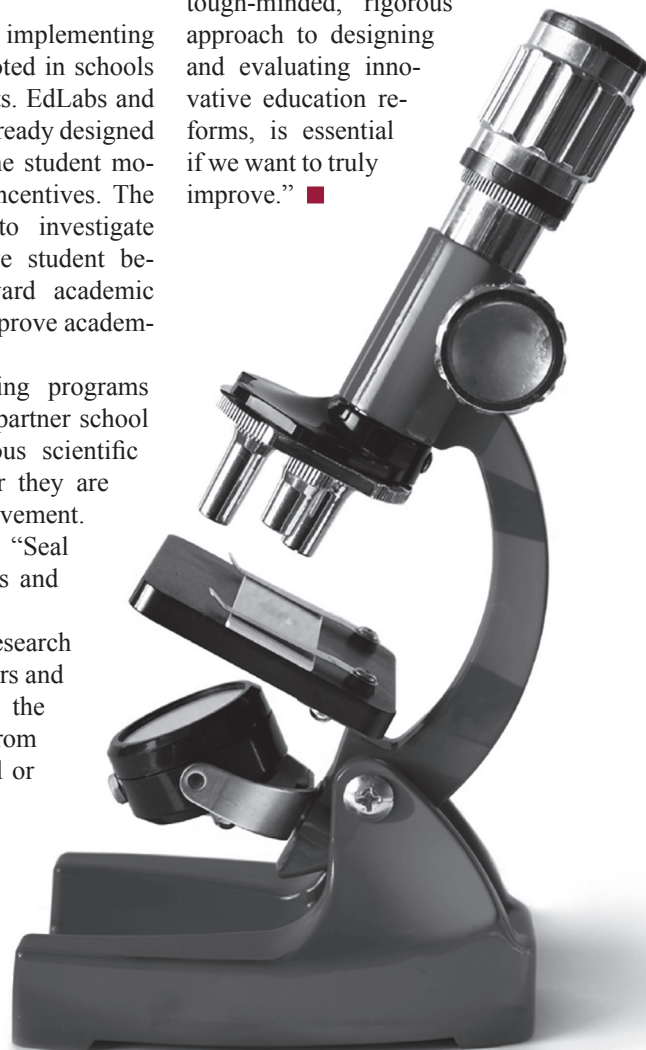
**3. EVALUATING** existing programs and practices in the three partner school districts through a rigorous scientific lens to determine whether they are improving student achievement. EdLabs will also award a "Seal of Approval" for programs and interventions that work.

**4. DISSEMINATING** research findings to key policymakers and educators and quantifying the expected "student return from an investment" in a school or a district to help leaders direct their limited resources into high-return programs and initiatives.

EdLabs will be headed by Roland G. Fryer, Jr., who will also serve as lead researcher. A 30-year-old Harvard economics professor

who is one of the youngest African-Americans to receive tenure at the prestigious university, Fryer has researched the issue of racial inequality for the past decade. He has published papers on topics such as the racial achievement gap, the causes and consequences of distinctively black names, and affirmative action. Fryer was recently featured on CNN's series "Black in America," and has been named by *Fortune Magazine* as one of America's "most influential minorities."

"If we aim to establish true equality of opportunity in education, we must be willing to take risks and explore innovative strategies," said Fryer. "The 'same-old' strategies have failed generations of students. There have been pockets of progress and beacons of hope, but not systematic changes in how we educate urban youth. Transformative thinking, along with a tough-minded, rigorous approach to designing and evaluating innovative education reforms, is essential if we want to truly improve." ■



For more information, visit [www.EdLabs.harvard.edu](http://www.EdLabs.harvard.edu).



# Man Power

## Solving the Crisis of a Shortage of Male Teachers

By Malik Russell

“Are male teachers the answer?” asked the *Jamaica Observer* newspaper in a February 2008 column. In a January column, a United Kingdom publication’s headline read “Christian leaders called for more black male teachers to address issues faced by black male students in that nation as well.”

For many, these questions being asked in other parts of the world mirror a process seemingly begun over a decade ago in the United States when the call for more African-American male teachers reached its height.

During the 1990s, fueled by numerous release of data showing the paucity of African-American male teachers relative to the population of black, and particularly black male students, newspaper headlines fueled the call for more black men to enter the teaching profession as well as the creation of all-male schools and separate classes.

### The Stark Reality

Nationwide, the percentage of black, male teachers is 2.4 percent, according to the National Education Association in 2007. Nationally, the teaching profession remains a “white” and majority female phenomenon. There are more than 2 million white female teachers in the public school system and the next largest populations are white males who represent almost 680,000 teachers.

After those two subsets of white teachers which comprise roughly 83 percent each of female and of male teachers, are African American women, who make up only 8 percent of the female teachers and slightly over 195,000 nationally. Next are African-American men who make up 7.67 percent of all male teachers and total roughly 62,000, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. This places African-American men ahead of Hispanic and Asian men who make up 5.9 and 1.3 percent of all male teachers, respectively.

So, looking at it from a perspective of the fact that according to NCES in 2004, African-American male teachers were at around 40,000 and now number over 62,000—progress is occurring. We could easily say that since African-American males

trailing only white teachers and black women in terms of overall teachers, maybe it doesn't look as bad? Maybe the question that we should be asking is why are more white individuals seeing teaching as a career option than African-American males and other groups of color?

Unfortunately, when analyzing the number of African-American students in the public school system compared to teachers, there is no way to look at it except dismally. While making up only 12 percent of the national population, African Americans make up 42 percent of the students attending public schools. These numbers rise to 80 percent of all students when you look at the nation's top twenty largest districts which enroll five million students.

The numbers of black teachers in general tend to rise in most urban areas, yet on a systemwide basis, these numbers rarely equal out. If we look at schools in central cities, over 70 percent of teachers are white, and they make up over 87 percent of all teachers in schools on the fringe of urban environments. Respectively, African-American teachers make up close to 15 percent of teachers in city schools and only 5.1 percent in urban fringe schools.

One general statement made by black males attending public schools is that "I can go from kindergarten to college without having a teacher that looks like me."

African-Americans tend to fare no better when it comes to leadership of school systems, as they only make up approximately 13,317 superintendents or roughly 2 percent of the total. NCES does see a rise in the number of African-American principals, which increased to 9.3 for 2003-04 up from 8.7 percent in 1993-2004.

The path towards leadership comes from the current teaching population, which, in turn, comes in large part from the college pipeline. Unfortunately, in this statistic as well, African-Americans must pick up the pace.

In looking at data from NCES's college graduates in 2005, it shows that of the 107,238 education degrees conferred, 91,279 were to white teachers nationally. African-Americans received 6,864 of those degrees, with only 1,693 going to African-American men.

Researchers point out that the teaching force includes graduates from different majors as well, yet these statistics for education majors sheds some light on the magnitude of the problem and whether it will abate any time soon.

## Help is on the Way

As we move into the twenty-first century, the crisis of "black male teaching shortages," on the surface level, has somewhat dissipated. While the problem still exists, for many it remains a national priority that institutions of higher education are now collectively beginning to address.

"Why is it a national obligation to increase the number of African-American male teachers?" asked Dr. Marilyn Irving, project director of the Ready To Teach program at Howard University. "I say that while all teachers need and benefit from effective role models, African-American males and females would particularly benefit from competent African-American male role models."

Howard University, perennially one of the nation's most pres-



tigious Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), was recently awarded a multimillion-dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education to increase the number of teachers in public schools, with a particular focus on black male teachers for its Ready to Teach (RtT) program. For more information, visit their website at [www.ReadytoTeach.org](http://www.ReadytoTeach.org).

The purpose of the program is to take college graduates and in one year, train, certify, and award a Master in Teaching Arts degree. These cohorts will teach English, mathematics, reading, science or special education in Chicago (IL); Clayton County (GA); Houston (TX); Prince George's County (MD); or Washington, D.C.

The Ready to Teach program seeks to diversify the nation's teaching ranks through recruitment, training, and retention of generally underrepresented teachers of color. It's open to everyone but has a specific focus on African-American males. The Ready to Teach program is ACTIVELY recruiting candidates for the 2008-2009 Cohort. Through this program, participants can earn a Master of Arts in Teaching degree and get teaching certification in one short year. RtT even provides scholarships and financial assistance to its candidates. The program is geared toward African-American males, but everyone is encouraged to apply.

Irving sees the role of mentorship and expectations in addressing some of the issues faced by African-American students and embracing the potential for positive impact that programs such as RtT can have on young people.

"African-American male teachers will have realistic and high expectations from their students that have the propensity to strongly encourage them to strive for higher education," Dr. Irving said.

"By providing African-American students with caring and competent role models, we believe that they will improve in academic achievement and increase their self esteem," she added.

Along with the program at Howard University, another program designed to bring more teachers of color into the schools includes the Call Me Mister program at Clemson University, which was bombarded by e-mails and calls, after a false Web

posting stated the program was free and available to any black male who wanted to be a teacher.

Schools from Livingstone College in North Carolina, Bethune Cookman in Florida, and many others are now established, and the ranks are growing. Their purpose is to increase the number of teachers of color, preferably black males.

More important than the implementation of new programs is the growth of a

#### Bachelor's degrees conferred in education 2005-06

Group	Ed Grads	Males
Whites	91,279 .....	18,950
Blacks	6,864 .....	1,693
Hispanic	5,196 .....	934
Asian/Pac. Islander	1,954 .....	397
Nat. Am./Alaskan	902 .....	197
Non-resident Alien	1,043 .....	277

Source: NCES

knowledge base, supported by studies that show that culture is an important aspect of teaching, as well as how a teacher determines his expectations of students and, in turn, how students respond and perform.

"Every teacher should be able to effectively teach all students. But, the reality is that most teachers need to develop higher levels of cultural competence to be effective with black male students who are all too often responded to stereotypically," said Jabar Mahiri, Associate Professor and Chair Language, Literacy, Society and Culture at the Graduate School of Education, University of California Berkeley. ■

*Malik Russell is a freelance writer based in Oakland, CA. This article first appeared in Teachers of Color magazine (www.teacher-sofcolor.com).*

## Tenurita

CONSIDER THIS: Mexican teachers have the right to sell their positions for cold hard cash (going prices have been as high as a teacher's starting annual salary—\$6,000) and to bequeath their classroom to a family member. (One teacher explained this outrageous practice thusly: "Throughout history, the sons of carpenters have become carpenters. Even politicians' children become politicians.

Why shouldn't our children have the same right?") The government is moving to reform some of this madness, leading to teacher strikes that have been wreaking havoc since August. Meanwhile, fall classes haven't even started in a number of places, leaving nearly 500,000 children in the lurch.

Source—Houston Chronicle



## Business and Education

While an overwhelming majority (81 percent) of academics and business executives believe the quality of the U.S. education system would improve if businesses took a more active role, the two audiences have opposing views on exactly how businesses can aid in the improvement process, according to the findings of the "Deloitte 2008 Business in Education" survey.

A mere 12 percent of educators think that businesses involvement in curricula development would definitely provide improvement, compared to 41 percent of business executives. Similarly, only 14 percent of educators say businesses should definitely help set national standards, versus 42 percent of executives who say so.

While academics and business leaders disagree on the role of business in education, the two groups do see eye to eye when it comes to education's impact on the economy. Over 66 percent of all respondents believe that the competitiveness of the U.S. economy will continue

to be seriously jeopardized if businesses do not take a more active role in improving the U.S. education system.

#### Other Findings:

- Seventy-one percent of all respondents believe that businesses should increase involvement in the education system.
- Interestingly, more business executives (52 percent) than educators (45 percent) say that the independence of our education system would be compromised if business were involved in education.
- Similarly, 61 percent of business executives think there would be less focus on liberal arts and other nonbusiness-oriented disciplines if businesses were involved in education, compared to 51 percent of educators.

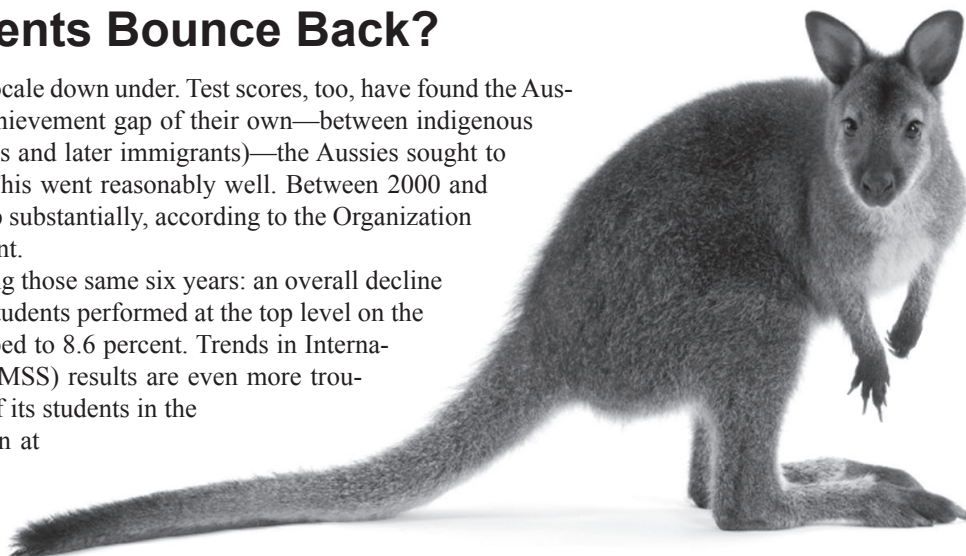
Source—Deloitte LLP. For more information, visit [www.deloitte.com](http://www.deloitte.com)

# Can Australian Students Bounce Back?

It seems the Outback isn't the only barren locale down under. Test scores, too, have found the Australian environment arid. Faced with an achievement gap of their own—between indigenous and nonindigenous students (i.e., aborigines and later immigrants)—the Aussies sought to bring their lagging performers up to par. This went reasonably well. Between 2000 and 2006, Australia managed to narrow that gap substantially, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

However, something else happened during those same six years: an overall decline in scores. In 2000, 17.6 percent of Aussie students performed at the top level on the PISA literacy test. By 2006, that had dropped to 8.6 percent. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results are even more troubling. Whereas Singapore has 44 percent of its students in the top performance level, Australia clocked in at 7 percent. Critics, including the estimable Jennifer Buckingham at Sydney's well-regarded Centre for Independent Studies, now worry that this recent drive for an adequate education may have sacrificed an excellent education in the process. So how do we help the students that need it most and encourage high-achievers to soar too? A timely and important question, particularly as Australia re-engineers its approach to primary-secondary schooling.

Source—The Australian



## Tips for Teachers

1. Don't tell a stuttering child to "slow down" or "just relax."
2. Don't complete words for the child.
3. Help all members of the class learn to take turns talking and listening.
4. Speak with the student in an unhurried way, pausing frequently.

5. Convey that you are listening to the content of the message, not how it is said.
6. Have a one-on-one conversation with the student who stutters about needed accommodations in the classroom.
7. Don't make stuttering a shameful thing.

Compiled by Lisa Scott, Ph.D., The Florida State University for The Stuttering Foundation ([www.stutteringhelp.org](http://www.stutteringhelp.org)).

## Rand Report

### Pain and Gain Implementing NCLB in Three States

The landmark No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires each state to create a standards-based accountability system including academic standards, assessments to measure student mastery of the standards, and incentives to improve performance. Are states meeting their goals?

To find out, RAND Corporation researchers collected survey and interview data from schools, administrators, and teachers in California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania from 2004-2006. The three states were chosen because of their differing geography, demographics, and their unique approaches to implementing NCLB.

The researchers examined NCLB implementation in math and science, and sought answers to four questions: How are schools and teachers responding to

state accountability efforts? What improvement strategies were used? How did accountability influence the curriculum and practice? What conditions hindered improvement efforts?

Among the report's key findings:

1. Educators generally agree that standards-based accountability is useful, particularly for school and classroom decision-making.
2. Many educators report that the system does not serve all students equally well. For example, 45 percent to 55 percent of teachers reported that high-achieving students were not receiving appropriately challenging curriculum as a result of the accountability system.
3. Differing standards for proficiency in math and science across states, along with different traditions in local control, lead to significant variations in how NCLB accountability standards are implemented.

"The findings indicate that educators are comfortable with the accountability process of setting clear goals, developing measures, and establishing consequences to encourage achievement," said Brian Stecher, the report's lead author and associate director of RAND Education. "But they're not as comfortable when federal requirements are inconsistent with their local needs. Getting more teacher input on standards-based accountability during the reauthorization process will help close this gap."

The report says lawmakers ought to consider future policies that provide more uniform standards while preserving discretion in how local school districts respond to low-performing schools.

The report, "Pain and Gain: Implementing No Child Left Behind in Three States, 2004-2006," was conducted by RAND Education and can be found at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org).

# LET FREEDOM RING!

President to Proclaim January 16 as Religious Freedom Day



Each year, the President declares January 16th to be Religious Freedom Day, and calls upon Americans to “observe this day through appropriate events and activities in homes, schools, and places of worship.”

The day is the anniversary of the passage, in 1786, of the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom. Thomas Jefferson drafted the legislation and considered it one of his greatest achievements. It stopped the practice of taxing people to pay for the support of the local clergy, and it protected the civil rights of people to express their religious beliefs without suffering discrimination.

Today, that protection is as important as ever. In too many instances, public school teachers tell students they cannot include their faith in their homework assignments or classroom discussions. However, the U.S. Department of Education has issued guidelines explaining students’ religious liberties. Students can pray, read their Bibles or other religious texts, and talk about their faith at school during school hours. They can organize prayer groups and announce their meetings. They can express their faith in their class work and homework.

Visit [www.ReligiousFreedomDay.com](http://www.ReligiousFreedomDay.com) and [www.Whitehouse.gov](http://www.Whitehouse.gov) for more information.

*The excerpts below come from the U.S. Department of Education’s document “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools” (February 7, 2003). See [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).*

## **1 Students can pray, read religious material, and talk about their faith at school.**

“Students may pray when not engaged in school activities or instruction, subject to the same rules designed to prevent material disruption of the educational program that are applied to other privately initiated expressive activities. Among other things, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray or study religious materials with fellow students during recess, the lunch hour, or other non-instructional time to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious activities.”

## **2 Students can express their faith in class work and homework.**

“Students may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such home and classroom work should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school. Thus, if a teacher’s assignment involves writing a poem, the work of a student who submits a poem in the form of a prayer (for example, a psalm) should be judged on the basis of academic standards (such as literary quality) and neither penalized nor rewarded on account of its religious content.”

## **3 Teachers can organize prayer groups with colleagues.**

“When acting in their official capacities as representatives of the state, teachers, school administrators, and other school employees are prohibited by the Establishment Clause from encouraging or discouraging prayer, and from actively participating in such activity with students. Teachers may, however, take part in religious activities where the overall context makes clear that they are not participating in their official capacities. Before school or during lunch, for example, teachers may meet with other teachers for prayer or Bible study to the same extent that they may engage in other conversation or nonreligious activities. Similarly, teachers may participate in their personal capacities in privately sponsored baccalaureate ceremonies.”



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