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Editor's Note

The 2009-2010 school year is underway and *The Education Innovator* is returning after a summer break with an important feature that will introduce readers to both the new Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement and the i3 program, a critical component of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Forgive us for pushing the limits a bit over previous editions in the "What's New" section, but the two-month hiatus resulted in no shortage of important developments to share with you. In OII, we look forward to the year ahead and welcome your feedback on how this newsletter can best serve you.

Feature

***Hopes for the i3 Fund and OII: A Conversation with OII's New Assistant Deputy Secretary***

[James H. Shelton III](#) became deputy assistant secretary of the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) this past March, where he manages a portfolio that includes most of the Department's competitive teacher quality, school choice, and learning technology programs, as well as programs in the arts, American history, and parental involvement. Shelton was previously a program director for the education division of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, where he managed the Foundation's national programs and work in the northeast region of the United States. He has also been a partner in the NewSchools Venture Fund and co-founded LearnNow, a school management company that later was acquired by Edison Schools. Shelton holds a bachelor's degree in computer science from Atlanta's Morehouse College as well as master's degrees in business and education from Stanford University.

The Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) is the home for the Department's Investing in Innovation initiative, known more commonly as i3, a \$650 million fund authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This initiative will award grants in 2010 to local education agencies and nonprofit organizations, and is intended, in the words of Secretary Arne Duncan, to "create robust incentives to expand what works, invest in promising practices, and boldly

innovate."

In the interview that follows, Jim Shelton discusses the key tenets of the new i3 fund and shares his perspective on the role of innovation in schools and the role of OII in fostering and supporting innovation.

*Innovator*: Secretary Duncan, in his speech, "[From Compliance to Innovation](#)," last month said the i3 program will help to build a framework for innovation for the future and help us to realize the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity we have to accomplish real reform in education. How specifically will i3 accomplish that?

Shelton: It will do it in two ways. First, by the original name that it was given in the legislation, "Invest in What Works *and* Innovation," i3 grantees will be working simultaneously at several points on an innovation continuum. In the competition and the awards we make, we'll create space for things that have really strong evidence of success and are ready for replication or adaptation elsewhere. There will also be support for programs in need of more evidence or perhaps the capacity of the innovator to take it to scale. And, finally, there'll also be space for new ideas, ones that need greater substantiation of their outcomes, to be tried. Specifically, the three levels are:

- The smallest grants of up to about \$5 million dollars will be for promising ideas that should be tried.
- Medium-size grants of up to roughly \$30 million will help programs that need to build a research base or organizational capacity to succeed at a larger scale.
- The largest grants that will go as high as \$50 million for proven programs that are ready to grow and expand.

The operating premise behind the amounts at the three levels is that grants for proven programs should be larger than those for promising but largely untested programs.

Second, we'll ask applicants to think differently about how they scale their impact. We are going to be pushing people by asking, "How can you take what you have and figure out how it could impact hundreds of thousands, even millions, of children, as opposed to the thousands it may be touching right now?"

*Innovator:* What deliverables do you see from the investments that the i3 program will make in innovation?

Shelton: We envision as many as five, ranging from demonstrating, validating, and codifying promising, evidence-supported models to expanding proven and scalable models both regionally and nationally, depending on the individual work of the grantees in the three-tiered structure of the program.

*Innovator:* Do you then foresee innovations going to scale not just within a single district but across districts and other jurisdictional lines?

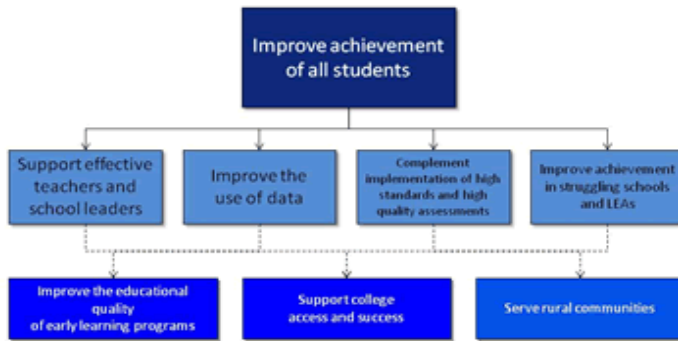
Shelton: Absolutely. Whether it's a 200,000-student district or one with just 2,000 students, the most important thing for them to consider is, "How will what I am doing here today, if effective, really impact the broader field?" In fact, the 2,000-student district may even have an advantage in this circumstance because there are a lot more 2,000-student districts than there are 200,000-student districts. But it means they have to really think, "What are we doing that's going to produce knowledge or tools and resources that can have a broad impact on the field?"

*Innovator:* It's also the case that the i3 program will put a premium on partnerships between the public and private sectors, and bring in strategic investments of resources from foundations alongside the federal, state, and local education funds behind these new projects. Having come from the nonprofit foundation realm, you must have thoughts on how schools and districts can successfully search out private-sector partners.

Shelton: I do and, in fact, am working with some of the OII staff to create a virtual space where the public can submit and comment on ideas to improve education and also look for potential partners from the public and private sectors. The ideas and search for partners can certainly be focused on plans to apply to the i3 fund, but we intend for the site to serve the broader, longer-term purpose of catalyzing innovation whether or not direct federal support is involved.

*Innovator:* What role will the four assurances, the core reforms embedded in ARRA, play in the i3 fund?

Shelton: We will be looking, although not exclusively, for projects that will advance the four core reforms. We also plan, however, for the i3 program to bolster efforts in other important areas of the President's education agenda, most notably improvement in early learning, college readiness, and better serving schools and students in rural districts. We also hope to see expanded efforts to make better use of the school day and year.



*Like other core components of ARRA, the i3 fund will focus on the four assurances, but also three additional areas important to the goal of improving achievement for all students.*

*Innovator:* Like Race to the Top (RTT), the public can weigh in on the i3 guidelines before they are finalized and applications are solicited. How will that work?

Shelton: A notice of proposed priorities, requirements, definitions, and selection criteria for i3 will be published in the *Federal Register* in the coming weeks and, as it was with RTT, the public has 30 days to provide the Department with comments. We really want to hear from folks who are involved with education innovation from the school and district levels, researchers and program evaluators, private foundations and nonprofits involved in preK-12 education, and other stakeholders. We want to get this right, but because the i3 grants need to be announced next year, we apologize for the relatively short comment period.

*Innovator:* Beyond the impact that you hope i3 will have in the next five years, what do you think needs to happen in education innovation that will enable the transformational change that Secretary Duncan has called for in K-12 education?

Shelton: I have to go back to the Secretary's metaphor when he spoke about this at the America's Choice Superintendent's Symposium. He likened this time of extraordinary opportunity created by ARRA to education reform's moon shot – the one chance in a lifetime to make fundamental changes throughout the K-12, actually pre-K to 16, system nationwide.

I'm encouraging all the districts and states to forget about the i3 and Race to the Top funds for a second and think about several essential questions: How do we leverage the core stimulus dollars as investment dollars for transformation? What kind of systems are we going to need four years from now to meet the new expectations that come with educating children and youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as the ones that have bedeviled us for far too long, such as high dropout and lagging achievement levels and declining graduation rates? And, to complicate the challenge even more, how can we achieve this transformation with even fewer resources? I say that because state and district leaders in many instances are looking ahead and not seeing dramatic increases in revenues; in some cases, what they foresee are continued declines in budgets. That's why we all have to strategically use the stimulus dollars as a one-time investment for transformation. If not, we run the risk of putting ourselves, not even four years from now, at the edge of a cliff, finding that we need to do transformative work and having no money to do it.

*Innovator:* While i3 is rightfully getting lots of attention presently, you're now managing an important collection of competitive grant programs that constitute OII. What's your perspective on these programs and your hopes for OII?

Shelton: OII has a really broad mandate. I would define our objectives in two categories. One is that we want to invest in the creation of breakthrough models that are going to change outcomes for students,

teachers, and productivity. And we'll do that through all the funding instruments that we have, from the new work supported by i3, to pushing on the charter front to get more innovation in that growing part of the field, to teacher quality and teacher recruitment grants. I also see us looking to our arts and financial-literary programs for opportunities to push the envelope and really craft solutions that drive a different level of academic achievement and school performance. The second major objective is to make systemic changes to foster innovation in education. We want to lead, along with our partners at the Institute for Education Sciences and the rest of the department, and also work in partnership with folks on the outside, to transform the education ecosystem in order to foster, in a short period of time, a systemic approach to innovation.

*Innovator:* Your professional background combines several areas that are strategically linked to the things you see that need to be done and also to stakeholders in both the public and private sectors you think need to be partners in getting the work accomplished. How do you see your past experiences informing your new role in OII?

Shelton: I'm feeling fortunate that a lot of things I've done are coming together nicely to support the work I'm doing now. Much of my current work is about best practices, new processes, and making tradeoffs as well as difficult decisions in changing environments. My work in both nonprofit and for-profit investing, in consulting with both public education and private enterprise, and even the computer systems development work I did at the beginning of my career – I find that I'm using all of it.

But what's so different is the combination of the potential to make a difference at a national level and the tremendous responsibility I feel in helping OII and the agency to realize that potential. On one of my first days on the job, someone had just talked to me about Idaho and Montana, and I realized that the future of all the kids in the United States and its territories are the concern of me, the OII staff, and all of us at the department. My job has gone from trying to have influence on this federal entity that's supposed to serve all these folks to being responsible for what can and should be a cutting-edge part of that entity. It's a weighty responsibility and a great challenge for me and the OII team. I feel really honored to be in this role.

#### What's New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

On September 8, President Barack Obama delivered a national address to the students of America. During the special address, the president spoke directly to the nation's children and youth about persisting and succeeding in school. The president challenged students to work hard, set educational goals, and take responsibility for their learning. The Department of Education's [Web site](#) offers educators ideas for classroom activities for grades preK-6 and 7-12 created by its teachers-in-residence, the Teaching Ambassador Fellows, to help stimulate classroom discussion about the importance of education. (Sept. 2009)



*President Obama and Secretary Duncan visited Wakefield High School where the president delivered his national address to school children of America.*

The Department also launched the "[I Am What I Learn](#)" video contest. Students can respond to the President's challenge by creating videos describing the steps they will take to improve their education and the role education will play in fulfilling their dreams. All students age 13 and older are asked to create and upload their videos to YouTube by October 8; entries may be in the form of video blogs, public service announcements, music videos, or documentaries. The general public will then vote on their favorites to determine the top 20 finalists. These 20 videos will be reviewed by a panel of judges, including Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The panel will select three winners, each of whom will receive a \$1,000 prize. (Sept. 2009)

President Obama released his [Strategy for American Innovation](#), which calls for investment in building blocks that will ensure the American economy has all the necessary tools for successful innovation. Among them is reforming public schools to deliver a complete and competitive education. (Sept. 2009)

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Jim Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement, addressed district superintendents and nonprofit leaders on August 20 about the importance of innovation in education. The Secretary [discussed](#) the historic role of innovation and the need for new ideas to support the Department's moon shot goal – producing the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the end of the next decade. (August 2009)

Secretary Duncan will be joined by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and civil rights leader Rev. Al Sharpton on a four-city [tour](#) to highlight the Obama administration's efforts to reform public education, spur innovation, and discuss challenges facing America's school systems. An outgrowth of their meeting with President Obama last spring, the tour will include school visits, stakeholder meetings, and media briefings, and is expected to stimulate discussion and community engagement around issues of education reform. Tour sites include Philadelphia on Sept. 29, New Orleans on Nov. 3, and Baltimore on Nov. 13. More stops, including a rural site, will be added as the tour progresses. (August 2009)

The latest release of the International Assessments of Student Achievement, the [Programme for International Student Assessment](#) (PISA), results are "another wake-up call that our students are treading the waters of academic achievement while other countries' students are swimming faster and farther," according to Secretary Arne Duncan. "Our students have stagnated educationally, putting our long-term economic security at risk." In his [statement](#), the Secretary specifically pointed to the fact that math scores of America's 15-year-olds now lag behind those of 31 countries, and that American eighth graders' science scores are now trailing those of their peers in eight countries. "We've never settled for second best," Secretary Duncan observed, "and now we're in another race of sorts – a race to the top tier of the world's students whose academic achievement is the best and the brightest." (August 2009)

Despite busy schedules and summer heat, many Cabinet members and senior administration officials joined Secretary Duncan for "[Read to the Top!](#)" the Department's weekly reading initiative, during June, July, and August. For 12 weeks, Secretary Duncan and 15 Cabinet members and other senior administration officials brought books to life for the more than 1,200 children who gathered under shady trees on the Department's plaza to listen to the stories and ask questions. Even the "First Grandmother" of the United States, Marian Robinson, stopped by to read to the children who had many questions for her. (August 2009)

On August 18, Secretary Duncan addressed several thousand arts education advocates via a [teleconference](#) that focused on the role of the arts in a complete education. The Secretary expressed his concerns about access to arts education in U.S. public schools and noted several ways that K-12 arts programs can be supported in the future. The nationwide call followed the release of a [letter](#) to school and education community leaders about the arts in schools. "The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines the arts as a core subject," the Secretary wrote, "and the arts play a significant role in children's development and learning process." (August 2009)

Secretary Duncan continued his "[Listening and Learning](#)" tour on September 15 with a special town hall meeting to begin the new season of the Department's "Education News Parents Can Use" television broadcast. In this "America Goes Back to School" edition of the show, Secretary Duncan engaged parents from across the nation in a live, interactive discussion via telephone, e-mail, and video. The Secretary has visited more than half of the states to date, meeting with hundreds of students, parents, teachers, principals, education support staff, superintendents, professors, higher education administrators, and community leaders, and has engaged them in a conversation about federal education policy in anticipation of the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. To watch the archived broadcast, go to <http://www.connectlive.com/events/ednews>. (Sept. 2009)



The National Center for Education Statistics' Back to School [Forecast](#) notes more students are entering and returning to America's schools and colleges than ever before. In fall 2009, a record of nearly 49.8 million students will attend public elementary and secondary schools. Of these, almost 35 million will be in prekindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 14.8 million in grades 9 through 12. (Sept. 2009)

#### From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

And the winner is...children's literacy by way of innovative television programs supported by OII's [Ready To Learn](#) Partnership. [Between the Lions](#), a multimedia educational initiative for children ages three to seven, and [WordWorld](#), which empowers preschoolers to read, won a combined four top awards at the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Daytime Emmy Awards ceremony. Now in its ninth season, *Between the Lions* won Emmys for both Outstanding Pre-School Children's Series and Outstanding Writing in a Children's Series. *WordWorld*, launched in July 2007, was honored for both Outstanding Children's Animated Program and Outstanding Writing in Animation. Sesame Street received a [Lifetime Achievement Award](#) as well as four other Emmys, including one for New Approaches in the Daytime Children's category that recognizes the use of new media such as Web sites and interactivity. Cookie Monster, helping to accept the Lifetime Achievement Award, declared it both an honor and delicious as he devoured the golden statue. (August 2009)

#### American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called on the nation to turn around thousands of underperforming schools. In announcing [draft requirements](#) for \$3.5 billion in Title I School Improvement grants, the Secretary joined U.S. Senator Harry Reid at Harley Harmon Elementary School in Las Vegas. "If we are to put an end to stubborn cycles of poverty and social failure..." according to Secretary Duncan, "we must address the needs of children who have long been ignored and marginalized in chronically low-achieving schools." (August 2009)

In early August, Secretary Duncan [announced](#) the availability to states of \$11.37 billion in Title I, IDEA, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funding as part of ARRA, which was 30 days ahead of schedule and in response to President Obama's direction to Cabinet members to pick up the pace of the Recovery Act implementation. (August 3, 2009)

The Council of Chief State School Officers, on behalf of the National Center for Education Statistics, is hosting a series of WebEx information [sessions](#) for states planning to apply for [Statewide Longitudinal Data System \(SLDS\) grants](#). The last of the series of three sessions is scheduled for October 5, 2009, from 12:00-1:30 p.m. (EST). Participants will receive an overview of the FY09 SLDS competition and opportunity for questions and answers. (August 2009)

## American History

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation presented its [Award for Federal Preserve America Accomplishment](#) to the National Park Service for its integral role in the service learning project, *Of the Student, By the Student, For the Student*, at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. The Park Service combined efforts with the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership and the Harpers Ferry Middle School to help students to create six vodcasts that provide a middle-school perspective on the John Brown Raid. Walking in the footsteps of the raiders, and using the places where the raid occurred and primary historic documents, students interpreted the significance of the John Brown Raid to their peers. The vodcasts will be seen by visitors to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. (August 2009)

## Arts Education

[MusicianCorps](#), a domestic "musical Peace Corps," sponsored by the nonprofit Music National Service, is up and running in four cities. Talented musicians are recruited, trained, and placed in under-resourced schools, low-income communities, and health care settings, where they will provide music learning and mentoring experiences for at-risk youth. The inaugural cities are New Orleans, the San Francisco Bay area, Seattle and Chicago. Musician Corps Fellows receive a modest living stipend, professional development, and health care in return for their full-time service commitment. (August 2009)

The Kennedy Center's Education Department launched [Any Given Child](#) to assist communities nationwide in strengthening and expanding arts education opportunities for students. The goal is to ensure that all young people in the community have access to a complete, affordable arts education. Participating communities will begin by assessing existing arts resources in the schools as well as programs offered by local organizations and then develop long-range plans for arts education in each community. The Center plans to bring its staff and consultants to work with community leaders and school administrators.

## Charter Schools/Choice

Nearly two-thirds of Americans favor charter schools, according to the latest [Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll](#), which sampled more than 1,000 adults on a wide range of education topics that included both their support for public charters and their understanding of several specific characteristics of charter schools. A majority of respondents, for instance, wrongly assumed that charter schools charge tuition and 71 percent didn't know that charters have open enrollment policies. Other topics addressed in the annual survey include early childhood education, teacher pay, and high school dropouts. (Sept. 2009)

*Public School Choice News* provides links to research, policy, and tools for the implementation and improvement of public school choice. The e-newsletter, developed through [BuildingChoice.org](#), a Web site funded by OII, features news and information related to ARRA as well as a wide range of public school choice resources. To subscribe, visit the Public School Choice News [subscription page](#). (August 2009)

## Closing the Achievement Gap

The Aldine Independent School District (AISD) outside Houston won the 2009 [Broad Prize for Urban Education](#), the largest education award in the country, and as a result will receive \$1 million in college scholarships from [The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation](#). Aldine, where a majority of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals, has "shown some of the most consistent student achievement gains nationally in the last decade and has been recognized as one of the top five most improved urban American school systems in four of the last six years." Other finalist districts for the 2009 prize were Broward County Public Schools in Florida; Gwinnett County Public Schools outside Atlanta (see "Innovations in the News"); the Long Beach Unified School District in California; and Socorro Independent School District in Texas. (Sept. 2009)

A combination of educational and social barriers, including family care-taking responsibilities, poor academic preparation, and gender stereotyping, are causing Latina students to drop out of high school, according to a

new [study](#) by the [National Women's Law Center](#) and the [Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund](#). The two organizations used surveys, interviews, and focus groups to concentrate on high school issues encountered by Latinas. The study was prompted in part by an earlier law center report concerning girls' graduation rates that revealed disproportionately high dropout rates for Latinas. Researchers reported a substantial gap between Latinas' educational goals and their personal expectations about reaching those goals. (August 2009)

More than 1.5 million students in the class of 2009 took the SAT, the most college-bound students of any graduating class and the most diverse annual group of students to take the college admission exam, according to [the College Board](#). Forty percent of the 2009 SAT takers were minority students, a more than 10 percent increase in that group since 1999, when minority students constituted only 29 percent of the test takers. (August 2009)

#### Leadership

A [study](#) by New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy indicates that students in elementary and middle schools led by graduates of the city's Aspiring Principals Program made gains in English-language arts at a faster pace than students in schools headed by new principals who did not attend the program. Run by the New York City Leadership Academy, the program teaches turnaround strategies and has trained about 15 percent of the city's principal corps. (August 2009)

#### Teacher Quality and Development

The talents of great teachers appear to have a positive effect on their peers, according to a [study](#) in which researchers reviewed 11 years of North Carolina school data and found results suggesting that high-performing teachers' abilities not only resulted in better student performance in their classrooms, but in other classrooms at the same grade level. "If it's true that teachers are learning from their peers, and the effects are not small, then we want to make sure that any incentive system we put in place is going to be fostering that and not preventing it," said C. Kirabo Jackson of Cornell University, a co-author of the study. (Sept. 2009)

#### Innovations in the News

##### Charter Schools/Choice

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The mayor of St. Louis is looking for a few good schools that will address the unmet needs of students whose present schools are performing poorly. Based on the results of a recent study that compared performance of both district and charter schools by ZIP code, Mayor Francis Slay wants to strategically locate new charter schools in neighborhoods with the least access to good public schools. The mayor's office plans to invite local and national charter groups to propose new schools in six neighborhoods targeted by the study. [More—[The St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#)] (Sept. 1)

Nineteen organizations are proposing to open as many as 23 new public charter schools in Louisiana in the 2010-2011 school year. Twenty of the applications submitted last month to the Louisiana Department of Education are for traditional brick-and-mortar buildings and three are for virtual schools. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers will screen the applicants and make recommendations to the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education later this fall. [More—[The Advocate \(Baton Rouge, La.\)](#)] (August 31)

#### Raising Student Achievement

A committee of the National Science Board has convened to consider ways for schools to produce students with the ability to innovate in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. "Innovators are a bit of a different breed," according to Camilla P. Benbow, a science-board member, who said the committee will consider what the needs of innovators are, and how schools can address those needs. [More—[Education Week](#)] (September 2) (*paid subscription required*)

Urban Academy, one of five new alternative high schools in Newark, is offering potential dropouts a set of



possibilities for achieving their diplomas, including online courses, evening classes, and internships. The Academy is part of a network, the Alternative High School Initiative, which began six years ago with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the National League of Cities, and is also operating in Nashville and Indianapolis. The Urban Academy's new comprehensive program replaces the district's former Twilight program, which only provided night courses for dropouts. [More—[The Star-Ledger \(Newark, N.J.\)](#)] (Sept. 1)

Students attending the new City Polytechnic High School of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology in Brooklyn will be able to earn both their high school diplomas and college associate degrees in five years. The school, the first of its kind in New York City, operates on a trimester schedule and blends a career and technical education curriculum with advanced coursework that permits students to complete high school graduation requirements in three years. [More—The [Brooklyn \(NY\) Daily Eagle](#)] (August 31)

In Baltimore, students at risk of dropping out of high school now have a new option – the accelerator school, which provides a concentrated version of high school in two years. Students ages 14 to 21 are eligible to attend, but must participate in a lengthy interview process and agree to abide by a set of strict rules that include a ban on cell phones in school. The Open Society Institute provided a grant to help the new schools get underway. [More—The [Baltimore Sun](#)] (August 31)

Schools in Arizona and Florida's Brevard County have adopted two similar approaches to ensuring that students in as early as elementary school are setting their sights on and preparing for college. At the Kyrene de los Niños Elementary School in Tempe, Arizona, the college-prep culture is evident from the pennants that adorn the school's lobby to the visits by college students who share their experiences and advice on degrees and paying for college. Niños is part of the No Excuses University Network, which is based in California. Nine schools in Brevard County are part of AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, which focuses on seventh through 12<sup>th</sup> grades and includes courses at each grade level in college-success skills. Participating students are recruited in sixth grade and, with their parents, sign contracts that address expectations for their GPAs and homework. [More—The [Arizona Republic](#) and [Florida Today \(Melbourne\)](#)] (Sept. 1 and August 26)

Advanced Placement scores of students participating in the Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative (MMSI) increased by 39 percent, 11 times greater than non-participants. The program is supported by a national math and science coalition that includes ExxonMobil, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Dell Foundation. Twelve additional high schools in the state will join MMSI this school year, and the program is expected to involve nearly 100 schools and more than 37,000 students by 2013. [More—The [State House News Service \(MA\)](#)] (August 28)

Report cards for Miles Elementary School students in Kentucky will be dramatically different this year; A's and B's will be replaced by standards that are set by teachers and students. An example for second graders: In the first quarter of the year, students will be able to identify whether two- and three-digit numbers are odd and even. Students' performance will be rated in five categories, ranging from no progress to above standards, and teachers will judge progress and achievement using rubrics they developed as part of a professional development phase of preparing for the new countywide grading system. Parents have also been involved in the system's development. [More—The [Cincinnati Enquirer](#)] (August 24)

#### School Improvement

Researchers at the University of Illinois studied data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study concerning tenth graders at nearly 700 U.S. high schools, and found that "classroom disruptions and psychologically hostile school environments can contribute to a climate in which good students have difficulty learning and students who are behind have trouble catching up." Students' fear for their physical safety was relatively low, according to the researchers, but 70 percent of the students reported being negatively affected by classroom disruptions, and 20 percent reported being put down by peers. School environments that protect students from physical harm cannot be assumed to also protect them from emotional harm, the researchers reported. [More—[Science Daily](#)] (Sept. 2)

Cleveland’s “innovation” schools are celebrating a successful year in which, as a group, the eight schools earned impressive grades on their school report cards. The schools have either no or flexible admission requirements, and differ from other schools in Cleveland by virtue of their small size, autonomy to shape their curriculum and extend the school day, the ability of principals to hire from outside the city and ignore seniority, and agreements with the Cleveland Teachers Union that give the schools what the union calls management rights. [More—The [Plain Dealer \(OH\)](#)] (Sept. 1)

Wisconsin is replacing its longstanding statewide test with a system that will combine assessments at the state, district, and classroom levels, according to state superintendent Tony Evers. The move is applauded by the state’s associations of school districts and local school boards as well as the largest teachers union in the state. Recommended by a task force that studied statewide tests, the new set of tests will be computer-based and will provide multiple opportunities for gauging student progress throughout the year. [More—The [AP](#)] (August 27)

“Staying true to one program and giving it time to take root is the key,” according to Valarie Lewis, assistant principal at New York City’s Osmond A. Church School, which received a three-year, \$784,000 grant 10 years ago and used it to develop and carry out a comprehensive reform plan. Since that initial investment, the consistent use of a portion of Title I funds to support the school’s choice of Core Knowledge as the center of its reform, as well as avoiding fads and quick fixes, has led to success, including a national award from the Education Trust. [More—The [Christian Science Monitor](#)] (August 26)

Gwinnett Schools, Georgia’s largest school district, has used the flexibility given to it by the state in exchange for greater accountability to earn a finalist spot for the coveted Broad Prize (see “What’s New”), which recognizes urban school systems that demonstrate marked gains in student performance and reduction in the achievement gap among low-income and minority students. While Gwinnett school officials await word from the Broad Foundation, the district was named as a potential stop on a new national tour (see “What’s New”) by former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich and the Rev. Al Sharpton to showcase districts that are showing promise in school reform. [More—The [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)] (August 25)

#### Teacher Quality and Development

New teachers in Bridgewater, Mass., are feeling confident about their assignments thanks to the Teachers for a New Era Partnership that included a new teacher workshop led by veteran teachers and will be followed by seven two-hour mentoring opportunities during the school year. Bridgewater State College and Boston College, with support from the Carnegie Foundation, sponsor the Partnership, which also provides a graduate course for veteran teachers to help them become more effective mentors to new teachers. [More—[The Boston Globe](#)] (August 30)

In Washington, DC, teachers started the new school year with a detailed set of guidelines and strategies, the “DCPS Teaching and Learning Framework,” that specifies the expectations for highly skilled teachers. For example, a highly skilled teacher should, within 30 minutes of class time, respond to students’ correct answers by “probing for higher-level understanding” of the idea under discussion. A corps of “master teachers” will assist principals in assessing their teachers based on the new framework. [More—The [Washington Post](#)] (August 23)

#### Technology in Education

South Dakota, Maine, and Wyoming lead the nation in the percentages of their students that have one-to-one, or ubiquitous, computing programs in their schools, according to Project RED: Revolutionizing Education, led by a group of education technology researchers and market analysts. The national database compiled by Project RED reveals a national average of just over five percent of the nation’s schools with ubiquitous technology programs, affecting approximately four percent of American students. [More—[eSchool News](#)] (Sept. 1)

Students at Chesapeake High School in Maryland can now bring real-world situations in environmental

science and geometry into the classroom using 3-D simulations. The Johns Hopkins University's Center for Technology in Education, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman are partnering with the county schools in the creation of the \$2 million virtual laboratory. The laboratory is modeled in part on the Hopkins' Applied Physics Laboratory and students can communicate remotely with Lockheed and Northrop engineers. [More—The [Baltimore Sun](#)] (Sept. 2)

Despite the current economic climate and resulting school budget shortages, schools in Maine are expanding the state's commitment to providing laptops for every student. Begun in 2002, the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) initially targeted 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Now MLTI is expanding the effort to high schools, with state funding to install wireless-network infrastructures and school-level purchases of laptops. Half of the state's high schools are expected to participate in the first year of the MLTI expansion. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Sept. 2) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)

School leaders in Trussville, Ala., believe that more is better when it comes to students accessing the Internet, including the use of online social networking sites that most other districts declare off-limits for classrooms. "We know kids use these tools, so we really feel obligated to help kids use them right and prepare them for what they face in the world every day," said Trussville superintendent Suzanne Freeman. Access is incrementally expanded as students move through the grade levels and encounter the need for increasingly complex educational content. The approach is in line with advice from media experts and guidance from the American Library Association's Center for Intellectual Freedom. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Sept. 2) (*paid subscription required*)

#### Purpose

The purpose of the U.S. Department of Education's online newsletter *The Education Innovator* is to promote innovative practices in education; to offer features on promising programs and practices; to provide information on innovative research, schools, policies, and trends; and to keep readers informed of key Department priorities and activities. The Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) is responsible for the newsletter's research, writing, and production.

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