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Editor's Note

About to begin its third year, the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship program is making a valuable contribution to the U.S. Department of Education by helping to connect federal education policy to the classroom and by developing a cadre of teachers whose interest in policy can help to improve K-12 education. In this month's feature, you'll meet a number of the Teaching Ambassador Fellows and learn about some of their accomplishments in both the Nation's Capital and across the country.

Feature

Teaching Ambassador Fellows: Helping to Connect Policy and Practice

The Teaching Ambassador Fellows have been valuable partners at the U.S. Department of Education. We truly value their voices in our national conversation about education reform, including how to best recruit, prepare, recognize, and support teachers for the hard work of ensuring all students are prepared for success in college and careers.

— Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

In March 2010, when the Department of Education released its plans to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), efforts began to engage critical K-12 education stakeholders – from students, parents, and community members to local, state, national, and federal leaders. Certainly the nation's 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers are one such critical group of stakeholders. The support and involvement of teachers, Secretary Duncan has said, is "crucial to the success of the national movement to reform American education." An on-going challenge, however, has been the significant gap in communication and trust that exists between teachers and policy makers.

Bridging the Gap

To help span this gap, the Department has engaged in a variety of efforts to reach out and communicate with teachers about its policies, including last fall's [Listening and Learning Tour](#), which informed the Department's "[Blueprint for Reform](#)." Another innovative strategy designed specifically to reach out to teachers is the Department's Teaching Ambassador Fellowship (TAF) program. The goal of TAF is to improve education for students by involving teachers in the development and implementation of national education policy. The Fellowship does this by:

- creating a community of teacher leaders who share expertise and collaborate with policymakers and leaders in the federal government on national education issues;
- involving teachers in developing policies that affect the classroom; and
- expanding teacher policy leadership at the national, state, and local levels.

Fellows spend a year gaining greater knowledge of the content of key federal education programs and policies as well as understanding the context and process by which they are designed and implemented. The Fellows share their expertise with federal staff members and provide outreach and communication about federal initiatives to other educators on behalf of the Department. In addition, they facilitate the involvement of teachers in developing and implementing these efforts at the federal, state, and local levels, which improves the likelihood of success of these policy efforts. TAF does this through two

yearlong tracks: the **Washington Fellowship** is a full-time appointment at the Department's headquarters in Washington, D.C., and the **Classroom Fellowship** allows teachers to participate on a part-time basis (10-15 hours a month) in addition to their regular work with students.

In both programs, the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship allows participants to gain knowledge of both the language of policy and the way policy is developed. Fellows develop relationships and create lines of communication with key policymakers, providing the Fellows with opportunities for input, and they undertake outreach to other educators to both share knowledge and create avenues for more teachers' input.

Washington Fellows are assigned to offices within the ED for the year, which gives them in-depth knowledge of Departmental policies and procedures. In turn, the Fellows provide their perspectives to senior-level staff, including the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, the director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, and senior advisors to the Secretary, including those who are working with the national teacher unions.

The Washington Fellows also employ their school and classroom experiences in communications with internal and external audiences and facilitate discussions among their educator colleagues about policy. This includes welcoming other teachers to the Department, moderating discussions at forums such as the National Teachers of the Year and Blue Ribbon Schools events, as well as meeting with educators from around the world who visit the Department to learn about American education. Recently, the Fellows launched a blog – [Teacher to Teacher](#) – to broaden these discussions and to engage more teachers.

Classroom Fellows are provided time to learn about important ED initiatives and to communicate with state and local leaders about how these initiatives are being implemented in the states and regions. They work with Department staff to gather and share information with constituencies in their respective regions, using opportunities such as professional association conferences, school board meetings, and convenings of parents and community organizations. The Classroom Fellows also periodically share relevant school and classroom experiences with internal and external audiences, including encouragement to high-achieving students to become future teachers or insights for school district leaders about what it takes, from a teacher's perspective, to turn around low-performing schools.

Michelle Bissonnette, a 2009-2010 Washington Fellow, has spent the year with Jo Anderson, a senior advisor to Secretary Duncan on teacher outreach. In her role at the Department, Bissonnette has looked closely at progressive labor and management relationships and has helped to negotiate agreements that have been critical to dramatic reform in districts across the country. A highlight of her year was a visit to her home state of California to accompany Anderson in meetings with districts from across the state experimenting with innovative contract agreements. "One of the most valuable aspects of this year in D.C., is, unequivocally, the opportunity to realize how much I didn't know about policy at the state and federal levels," Bissonnette recently noted. "As a teacher, the focus is on the immediate world in which you live and work," she said, "getting students to achieve at high levels and all the layers of responsibility that accompany that tremendous charge."

At the beginning of her 2009-2010 fellowship year, Classroom Fellow Carol Halter Waider, of Meade School District in South Dakota, accompanied ED senior official Greg Darnieder to Listening and Learning sessions in tribal communities outside of Rapid City, S.D., where they learned about alarmingly high dropout and suicide rates among Native American youths. Despite the proximity of these same communities to her own hometown, Waider was not aware of the severity of the challenges her local educator colleagues faced. Since October, she has worked collaboratively with local tribal educators and leaders to share information about federal resources that could be used to improve teacher preparation in these communities. Waider believes that "every student deserves to have the best and brightest teachers in front of them." To accomplish that goal, Waider believes that teacher preparation programs must train teachers for the school where they will begin their career. "I knew that I had information from my own experiences that would inform policymakers," she says.

It's the President Calling!

There are opportunities in the Nation's Capital to give advice, and then there's the rare opportunity to give advice to the President. When President Barack Obama decided to deliver his historic [back-to-school address](#) to America's school students last fall, the Teacher Ambassador Fellows were asked to share their perspectives on what today's students most needed to hear from the President. They responded to the request with personal examples of how they inspire students, including two that President Obama highlighted in his speech. In March, 13 Fellows had the opportunity to meet with First Lady Michelle Obama's staff to give input on the then developing plans for the [Set's Move Campaign](#). The Fellows were able to share both insights on childhood obesity from their own classrooms and strategies that they and their colleagues have used to address the issue.



Washington D.C. 2009 Teaching Ambassador Fellows José Rodríguez, Michelle Bissonnette, and Jason Raymond.

For the Washington Fellows, opportunities to provide input can happen daily. Working in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Jason Raymond has had the “opportunity to see the specifications for the Administration’s ESEA proposals as they developed and to red-line them like everyone else working [directly for the Assistant Secretary].” Indeed, all of the Washington Fellows have had the relatively unprecedented opportunity to serve on the in-house working groups and committees that were instrumental in shaping important education policies and proposals this past year.

Sharing newfound knowledge of policy with other educators and gaining their input is a strategic advantage of the Classroom Fellows, as they take time from their classrooms to listen, learn, and inform on behalf of the Department in their home communities. For example, Washington, D.C.-based Classroom Fellow Matt Kostecka organized a conference, called Teacher Leaders in Urban Education, with 20 other teachers to discuss some of the Administration’s strategies targeted at turning around the most challenged schools. He was joined by Classroom Fellows Elaine Romero from Albuquerque and Xian Barrett from Chicago, and Washington Fellow Jason Raymond, all of whom teach in turnaround schools. The discussion, modeled on a similar teacher-to-teacher policy outreach effort initiated by four 2008-2009 Fellows, was designed to inform teachers and to begin dialogue with them about turning around challenging school environments. “Often teachers and students feel like reform happens to them. As urban educators, we want to be proactive and be a part of the solution, because we know our students and their needs best,” said Kostecka.

Looking to the 2010-2011 Fellows Class

Though the selection of the third cohort of Teaching Ambassador Fellows is just now being completed and the first two years have not been without challenges, the program’s leadership is excited at what has been accomplished. The Fellows consistently talk about the ways that they have gained knowledge of the language of policy and how it will continue to serve them as leaders in the field to improve schools. They have developed relationships and communication avenues with key policymakers in order to provide ongoing input not just for their one year as official Fellows, but well into the future.



Members of the 2008 and 2009 Teaching Ambassador Fellowship program at the Department of Education headquarters.

As an example, 2008-2009 Classroom Fellow Cheri Isgreen, a Colorado art educator who focused her first year on developing a paper on best practices in art education in consultation with art educators across her state, returned to the Department last month to launch an exhibit of art work by students from nine Colorado districts. Finally, the input from both the Fellows and the teachers with whom they communicate is consistently appreciated by staff from across the Department. Indeed, the Teaching Ambassador Fellows have emerged not only as voices in the national dialogue about education policy, but also as conduits to teachers across the country. As Secretary Duncan says in this [message to](#)

[teachers](#), “We hope all teachers will have a voice in this ongoing discussion.”

The Teaching Ambassador Fellowship program is a key example of the President Obama and Secretary Duncan’s unprecedented efforts to collaborate with educators at all levels of teaching and school administration. Teachers are on the forefront of the battle to get America’s students on a competitive level with students from other countries, and all Teaching Ambassador Fellows past and present have added a wealth of information and ideas to achieve this critically important national goal. The TAF program is showing that perspectives from America’s teachers have a vitally important role in creating and sustaining education policy that works.

What’s New ?

Special Report: Promise Neighborhoods Launched

We need to take an all-hands-on-deck approach to lifting our families and our communities out of poverty. ... Promise Neighborhoods will support a number of different services and educational reforms to help improve the lives of our young people from birth through childhood, from college through a career.

— President Barack Obama

The Office of Innovation and Improvement recently launched [Promise Neighborhoods](#), the first federal initiative that puts education at the center of comprehensive efforts to fight poverty in urban and rural areas. The program will support up to 20 organizations to plan for the implementation of cradle-to-career services designed to improve educational outcomes for students in distressed neighborhoods.

"The Promise Neighborhoods program brings all of the Department's strategies together – high-quality early learning programs, high-quality schools, and comprehensive supports to ensure that students are safe, healthy, and successful," U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said. "These services must be comprehensive, and schools must put education at the center."

The Promise Neighborhoods program is based on the experience of programs such as the [Harlem Children's Zone](#), which serves a nearly 100-block area in New York City with parenting classes, early learning centers, and health and social service programs and has boosted students' academic outcomes dramatically.

Nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education that are representative of the community are [eligible](#) to [apply](#) for grants under Promise Neighborhoods. Faith-based nonprofit organizations may also apply. Applicants are encouraged to establish partnerships with school districts, local and state governments, and other groups. Applicants must demonstrate commitment from key partners to the Promise Neighborhood plan through a memorandum of understanding and a 50-percent funding match from the public or private sector. For rural and tribal communities, the funding-match requirement is 25 percent. **5 applications are due on June 25.**

For this first year of the Promise Neighborhoods program, Congress appropriated \$10 million. With these funds, ED will award one-year planning grants of up to \$500,000 each for projects in approximately 20 distressed communities. The grants will support the development of a continuum of cradle-to-college-to-career solutions designed to result in positive outcomes for children within those neighborhoods. The President has requested an additional \$210 million for implementation grants and a new round of planning grants next year.

Promise Neighborhoods is part of the Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students section in President Obama’s FY 2011 Budget proposal and the [Blueprint for Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#).

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, as part of the Department's celebration of [Teacher Appreciation Week](#) (May 4-7), acknowledged his favorite teacher, Darlene McCampbell, in a [video](#) in which she joins the Secretary to discuss the impact teachers have on student success. Mrs. McCampbell was Secretary Duncan's high school English teacher at the University of Chicago Laboratory School. "It wasn't easy work," explains Duncan. "But there was never talk of limits, or ceilings, or what you can't do. As good as you thought you were, she was always pushing you to the next level." During the Appreciation Week, the Secretary also visited a number of schools to [congratulate](#) outstanding and award-winning teachers in the D.C. metropolitan area. (May 2010)



President Obama and Secretary Duncan acknowledge 2010 Teacher of the Year Sarah Brown Wessling in a White House Rose Garden ceremony.

President Barack Obama and Secretary Duncan honored Sarah Brown Wessling, the 2010 National Teacher of the Year, in a White House Rose Garden [ceremony](#). Wessling is a tenth through twelfth grade English teacher at Johnston High School in Johnston, Iowa, who believes that teachers must "recognize the importance of teaching that marries content to skill." She puts this into practice in her classroom, creating a balance by "stepping far outside the five paragraph essay and into the world of surveys, songs, film storyboards, and public service announcements," according a [news release](#) from the Council of Chief State School Officers, the sponsor of the National Teacher of the Year Program. (May 2010)

Secretary Duncan sent a [letter](#) to Congressional leaders to urge support for emergency funding legislation to help states and school districts save jobs in the upcoming school year. As reported in last month's *Innovator* edition, the Secretary has voiced serious concern about the hardships that educators, students, and schools would face if emergency funds do not become available quickly. Recognizing the difficulty of improving the quality of education while losing teachers, raising class sizes, and eliminating programs, the Secretary is urging Congress to include \$23 billion in supplemental appropriations to preserve education jobs, with an additional \$1 billion to protect early childhood education jobs and \$2 billion to support public safety. (May 2010)

The 141 outstanding high school seniors selected as the 2010 Presidential Scholars were [announced](#) by Secretary Duncan in anticipation of their recognition in the annual ceremony and series of related events being held June 19-22 in Washington, D.C. Each year, 141 students are named, including at least one young man and woman from every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and American families living abroad. Another 15 students are chosen at large, and 20 students are scholars in the arts. Over 3,000 candidates qualified on the basis of significant ACT or SAT scores or nomination through the national youngARTS competition of the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts. The Commission on Presidential Scholars, appointed by the President, chooses the finalists. (May 2010)

President Obama announced Kalamazoo Central High School in Kalamazoo, Mich., as the [winner](#) of the first annual Race to the Top High School Commencement Challenge. More than 1,000 high schools competed for the honor of having the President as a graduation speaker. The applications, consisting of short videos and essays showing dedication to academics at all levels, were narrowed down by the Department and the White House Domestic Policy Council to six finalists and, between April 26 and April 29, over 170,000 people voted online. The President selected the winner from among the three finalists with the highest average ratings. The White House was looking for a school that would serve as a model for preparing students for college. Kalamazoo Central's application focused on the Kalamazoo Promise, a scholarship program providing up to 100-percent college tuition for graduates. (May 2010)

In his address to the 51-delegate [Mom Congress](#), Secretary Duncan [encouraged](#) parents to work with teachers, principals, counselors, and other key stakeholders as advisors and decision-makers. "When parents demand change and better options for their children, they become the real accountability backstop for the educational system," he said. Organized by *Parenting* magazine, the Mom Congress gathered some of the most passionate parent involvement advocates from across the county to discuss how to effect meaningful change in American education and to mobilize millions of parents to become more involved in

meaningful change in American education and to mobilize millions of parents to become more involved in their children's learning. (May 2010)

Secretary Duncan joined Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner to [recognize](#) high scoring students in the National Financial Capability Challenge, which is designed to increase the financial knowledge and capability of high-school-aged youths across the U.S. More than 76,000 students and 2,500 educators participated in the Challenge this spring. The average score on the challenge was a disappointing 70 percent, for which Secretary Duncan noted, "... we've got a lot more work to do to get our students where they need to be." Going forward, he expressed hope that "teachers, school leaders, and local officials will work together to make financial literacy a priority in every school district in America." (April 2010)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

The Office of Innovation and Improvement received 1,669 applications requesting funding from the [Investing in Innovation](#) (i3) Fund by the May 12th submission deadline. In the coming weeks, the Department will make a substantial amount of information available to the public about each i3 applicant and the funding process. This will include detailed information on the applicants, partners, priorities, budgets, and descriptions of the i3 applications. A new user-friendly platform will allow the public to run customized reports on the application pool. Announcement of i3 grant awards is expected to occur in September 2010. (May 2010)

Twelve national foundations have committed \$500 million in 2010 to leverage the Department's \$650 million i3 Fund aimed at similarly aligned investments, making more than \$1 billion available to help expand promising innovations in education. The [foundations' investments](#) are a continuation of long-standing efforts to foster the education innovation sector. Those efforts include programs that revamp educator training, spur integrated technology tools for teaching and learning, and create capacity for alternative high schools. While each foundation will maintain independence in determining which programs to fund, the combined resources available to non-profit organizations, state and local education agencies, traditional public schools, and public charter schools will catalyze and grow cutting-edge ideas. (April 2010)

From the Institute of Education Sciences

"Teachers' Use of Educational Technology in U.S. Public Schools: 2009," a "[First Look](#)" [report](#) from the National Center for Education Statistics, part of the Institute of Education Sciences, includes information on the following topics: the use of computers and Internet access in the classroom; the availability and use of computing devices, software, and school and/or district networks by educators; students' use of educational technology; teachers' preparation to use technology for instruction; and technology-related professional development activities. (May 2010)

"[Educational Technology in U.S. Public Schools: Fall 2008](#)," prepared by the National Center for Education Statistics, presents new data on the availability and use of educational technology, including information on computer hardware and Internet access, the availability of staff to help integrate technology into instruction and provide timely technical support, and perceptions of educational technology issues at the school and district level. (April 2010)

American History

The National History Education Clearinghouse (NHEC) completed a major redesign of its Web site. [Teachinghistory.org](#) offers a range of online primary sources and multimedia, videos of teachers in action, lesson plan reviews, guides to teaching with technology or historical places, weekly quizzes, and much more. "Our central goals for the clearinghouse are to provide quality resources and materials and a learning community for K-12 U.S. history educators," noted NHEC's co-director Kelly Schrum. "The redesign focused on making the site easy to navigate so all Web site visitors can find what they are looking for (and more!) quickly." New features include a Bookmark Backpack that allows users to save their favorite resources, videos such as "What is Historical Thinking?", and Quick Links for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. (May 2010)

Since 1996, the Gilder Lehrman Institute has presented eminent historians discussing major topics in American history. Now you can hear these [lectures](#) on your computer or on a portable media player. The Institute's archive contains more than 70 podcasts, all available for free. Downloading only requires that users register at the Web site. (April 2010)

Arts Education

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Rocco Landesman [announced](#) the NEA's latest round of funding for fiscal year 2010 in [Learning in the Arts](#), as well as several other program categories. The Arts Endowment will distribute \$8,425,000 through 255 grants to not-for-profit national, regional, state, and local organizations nationwide to strengthen American educational opportunities by providing children with focused arts instruction, exposing them to legendary artists, and introducing children to artworks of the highest quality. (April 2010)

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and Crayola are the national partners behind a new [art education initiative](#), the Champion Creatively Alive Children program, which will award up to 20 mini-grants to help educators improve art education in their classrooms. The grants include a \$2,500 monetary award and \$500 of Crayola products, and are specifically aimed at helping NAESP members implement and document innovative arts education projects. Applications must be submitted by August 15. (April 2010)

The [Professional Institute for Educators](#) (PIE) empowers educators across disciplines to advance their teaching skills continually to improve learning for all students. Through graduate courses, PIE develops innovative and creative educational programming to serve the professional development needs of K-12 teachers in and through the arts. Through ArtsWeek, elementary and secondary school educators take graduate courses in the visual arts and new media, then apply these techniques to their teaching. ArtsWeek is offered in three Pennsylvania locations: the Wayne Art Center in Wayne (June 28–July 2), the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts in Reading (July 12–16), and at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia (August 9–13). (April 2010)

Raising Student Achievement

[America's Future: Latino Child Well-Being in Numbers and Trends](#), a report from the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and the Population Reference Bureau, provides analyses of data gathered between 2000 and 2008 and based on 25 factors such as demographics, citizenship, family structure, access to health care, education, and other indicators of Latino child well-being as compared to that of black and white children. A disproportionate number of Latino children in the U.S. live in poverty, drop out of school, and have encounters with the juvenile justice system, according to the report. Data for the report were drawn from federal sources including the Census Bureau, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Department of Education. (April 2010)

In a [survey](#) of more than 2,000 managers and other executives, a majority of respondents supported combining the four Cs (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity) with the three Rs in order to ensure that America's workforce is fully equipped to compete in a global marketplace. The survey, conducted by the American Management Association, in conjunction with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, also found that 80 percent of the respondents thought that the three Rs and four Cs should be fused in the education of K-12 students for them to be better prepared to enter the workforce. (April 2010)

Reading

The [2010 Reading Institute](#), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, is scheduled for July 19-21, in Anaheim, Calif. For the first time, the Department is partnering with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute for Literacy to offer a separate Early Learning and Development Strand at the Institute. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has said, "It is time to transform early learning from a system of uneven quality and access into a system that truly and consistently prepares children for success in school and in life." The Early Learning Strand will promote that goal by offering sessions on

developmentally appropriate practices in language and literacy for children from birth to third grade, and on planning and building comprehensive early learning systems and infrastructure. There is no registration fee, and all federally-funded grantees, educators, state and local decision makers, and other stakeholders in early learning are invited to attend. The deadline for [registration](#) is July 5.

STEM

Innovator readers will remember that [National Lab Day](#) (NLD) – the [March edition's feature](#) – is more than a day. But for one day, many NLD initiatives across the country focused laser-like on hands-on learning in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Helping students to do this were Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and NLD founder Jack Hidary in [Washington, D.C.](#), and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and Professor Benjamin Davis of The Cooper Union College in [New York City](#). At Martin Luther King Elementary School in D.C., Secretary Duncan's question, "Who wants to be America's next great scientist, engineer, mathematician, or designer of solar cars?," got lots of enthusiastic replies of "me!" On Capitol Hill, members of the Creative Coalition and NLD officials sponsored a Congressional [luncheon](#) to make the point that "the same tools used in drama and arts classes can be applied in STEM education." "We share a common goal to create a holistic learning environment in schools across the country," said Robin Bronk, CEO of The Creative Coalition. (May 2010)

Innovations in the News

Charters/Choice

Charter schools will soon outnumber traditional schools by two to one in the New Orleans Recovery School District (RSD). The district expects to have 47 charter schools at the start of the next school year, while the number of traditional schools shrinks to 23. As the number of charters continues to increase, the RSD is also strategically shifting from opening new, start-up charter schools to ones that are replacing traditional schools. Next school year, for instance, six of the 10 charters slated to open will be traditional school conversions. In addition, RSD Superintendent Paul Vallas sees the impetus for future charter conversions coming from community groups, as opposed to the central office. [More—[The Times-Picayune \(New Orleans\)](#)] (May 5)

The Harlem Children's Zone's Promise Academy, thanks to a new \$100 million investment from both the public and private sectors, will expand to 1,300 students in the fall of 2011, when it opens a new charter school in the St. Nicholas Houses neighborhood. The school, which presently serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade and grades nine and 10, will eventually be open for grades K through 12. The school will also open its building to the community for after-school and adult learning programs. [More—[New York Daily News](#)] (May 4)

Early Childhood Education

Early-education programs are not immune from cutbacks due to the sagging economy, according to an annual survey of state-funded programs by the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University. "This year [2008-09] we saw the pace of growth in enrollment slow and spending per child decrease after two years of increases," noted the Institute's co-director, W. Steven Barnett. Falling family incomes played a significant role in the reported declines, coupled with shrinking state pre-K budgets that are restraining needed growth in the capacity of state-supported programs to serve increasing numbers of eligible children. [More—[Education Week](#) /The Hechinger Report] (May 4)

Parents: Don't just worry that too much television will turn your children into couch potatoes. Worry as well that the ill effects also include poor performance in math, decreased interest in learning, and even being bullied by their school peers. These are the findings of a study of more than 1,100 Quebec children, ages 29 months to 53 months, whose television viewing habits were tracked as part of the Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development Main Exposure. The passive activity of watching television led to passive habits eight years later, resulting in higher body mass and less preference for physical activity, as well as their teachers rating them as "less persevering, less task-oriented, and less autonomous." The study appears in the May issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. [More—The [Toronto Star](#)] (May) **AD**

A study of Latino children reveals that a majority of them enter kindergarten with the same social skills as middle-class white children. Another finding showed that Latino kindergarten-aged children from low-income households possess stronger social skills than their low-income African-American peers. Researchers at the University of Maryland Baltimore County used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study database to compare the social skills of children from several ethnic and racial groups as they began kindergarten. “We need to get beyond this myth that low-income parents always raise disadvantaged children,” noted Bruce Fuller, a University of California, Berkeley, professor who co-edited several articles generated by the study. [More—[Education Week](#)] (May 3)

All eyes of textbook publishers for pre-kindergarten education are presently on Texas. More than a dozen such publishers are vying for selection of their materials in a \$48.5 million adoption under the state’s review panel meeting this summer. The selected materials will be in the state’s pre-kindergarten classrooms in the 2011-12 school year. Recently adopted early education standards in Texas cover a range of subjects – math, science, social studies, arts, and technology – as well as social and physical development. [More—The [Houston Chronicle](#)] (May 3)

Financial Literacy

Only a handful of states require a full semester of personal finance as a free-standing course and 18 others, including Texas, require that it be taught as lessons about financial literacy in other subjects, which is not enough, according to officials with the First Command Education Foundation. The Fort Worth-based nonprofit organization offers a free curriculum on personal finance to Texas schools. This year, the Foundation distributed 20,000 copies and is expecting to reach closer to 200,000 students in the metropolitan areas of Texas next year. [More—The [Dallas Morning News](#)] (May 5)

Utah is one of the few states requiring a financial literacy or personal finance course for graduation, a legislative move prompted earlier this decade by the state’s dubious status as the leading state in personal bankruptcy filings at the time. The effort appears to be reaping dividends, as students from Utah scored the fifth-highest in the country on this year’s National Financial Capability Challenge [see the “What’s New?” article on the Challenge in this month’s edition]. More than 750 Utah students participated in the voluntary test, posting an average score of 76.8 percent, beating the national average by nearly seven percentage points. [More—The [Salt Lake Tribune](#)] (May 4)

“You’re never too young to start” is true of financial literacy as well as many other second-grade subjects for 17 students in Janice Belcuore’s classroom at the Irene E. Feldkirchner School in New Jersey. What these second-graders will need to later know about banking, investing, paying the rent and utility bills, and shopping of course, they learn about in developmentally appropriate ways. Students are issued Belcuore bucks (they have the teacher’s face on them), rotate through a series of jobs with varying salaries, and even issue personal year-end “annual reports” to compare their new understanding of spending and saving lessons with their parents. [More—[MyCentralJersey.com \(Somerville, N.J.\)](#)] (May 3)

Raising Student Achievement

Researchers at New York University are gaining insights about effective practices in single-sex schools for Latino and African-American boys from data being compiled for a future quantitative study of seven single-sex public schools. The smaller, qualitative study stands to enlighten this growing segment of K-12 education. A general finding of the researchers is that “in order for the young men to succeed, the schools’ interventions need to be primarily directed towards creating nurturing environments that provide alternative messages to what black and Latino boys have received in traditional public schools.” [More—[Education Week](#)] (May 5)

Students of teachers who received increased amounts of coaching from literacy coaches experienced greater learning gains, according to findings of a study developed by the Literacy Collaborative at Ohio State University. The research involved more than 700 schools nationwide that employ literacy coaches trained by

the Collaborative who work one-on-one with their teaching colleagues. The program was implemented in grade K-2 classrooms in 17 schools, using a stratified sample of more than 8,000 students. The first year, students' reading skills increased 16-percent beyond predicted levels, and by the end of year three, skills levels were at 32-percent above the predicted levels. A report detailing the study's findings will appear in *The Elementary School Journal* later this year. [More—[Education Week](#)] (May 4)

School Improvement

Starting next year, schools statewide in Indiana will receive letter grades, from A to F, based on their students' performance on standardized tests. The effort, approved by the State Board of Education this month, separates the new letter grades from the "adequate yearly progress" nomenclature under federal policies. Public input will be invited concerning the criteria behind the new letter grades, which are expected to be in place by September. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett expects the new system to be "clear, transparent, (and) easy-to-understand." [More—[The Indianapolis Star](#)] (May 6)

Students in the Milwaukee Public Schools are keeping score in hallways and classrooms rather than just in the gym or on sports fields – the scores are for behavior and are part of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, a behavior management system in use in a number of districts throughout the U.S. that is being piloted in more than 30 Milwaukee schools this year. Termed "check in, check out," it puts the emphasis on teachers enforcing a commonly held set of expectations for all students as they score adverse behaviors, but also have students take ownership of the rules they break in order to remedy low marks they receive. The change was prompted by a report from the Council of Great City Schools that recommended finding ways to lower Milwaukee's high suspension rate. [More—The [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#)] (April 25)

Teacher Quality and Development

Boston Student Advisory Council members learned a valuable lesson in public policy compromise. After a two-year push to gain approval by the Boston School Committee for student input on teacher performance, the Committee approved a "constructive feedback" survey, which provides for anonymity for both teachers and students, but accomplishes much of what the students wanted. After initial objections from local union officials to a more official degree of input, student advisory council leaders declared victory with the survey's approval, feeling it will be a helpful tool for the district's teachers. [More—[The Boston Globe](#)] (May 6)

Marsha Ratzel, a National Board-certified middle school math and science teacher, offers a Top 10 To-Do List for new teachers about to find themselves teaching in the "tween" grades come August. Here's a sampling: Look over last year's yearbook – a "great place to see the kinds of activities that are important to your new school community;" make appointments with important specialists in your building; and be sure to "decide where and when you will fight your battles with the kids." Forgotten pencils used to be a constant battle for Ms. Ratzel. "Now I just buy about 1,000 of them during the Back to School supply sales for \$5.00. It's the best \$5.00 I could ever spend," she counsels. [More—[Teacher Magazine](#)] (May 5) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)

A blue-ribbon panel of scholars, having reviewed available data concerning the effects of traditional and non-traditional teacher certifications, concluded that there's insufficient evidence to determine advantages or disadvantages for the estimated 20 to 30 percent of new teachers annually who an alternative route over the traditional one. In a report from the National Research Council, the panel suggested that instead of seeking further comparisons of traditional versus alternative-route certification programs, efforts be undertaken to compare selected aspects of both models, such as timing of student field experiences and selection processes of the programs. [More—[Education Week](#)] (April 29) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)

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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