

CASN NEWS January 2010

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All of us at the Career Academy Support Network extend wishes for the joys of the season and for a splendid new decade rich in stories of success for our schools, students, educators, and communities.

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NEBRASKA GOVERNOR APPROVES INCREASED GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS
Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman signed rules that mark the first changes to the state's graduation requirements in 25 years; they are set to take effect with the class of 2015. The number of required credit hours will remain the same, but the rules mandate 40 hours of English and 30 each of math, science and social studies, as well as a more challenging curriculum overall. "The requirement is pretty

consistent with what most school districts require except we now require the highest level of rigor in the curriculum," the state's education chief said.

AS SCHOOL EXIT TESTS PROVE TOUGH, STATES EASE STANDARDS

A law adopting statewide high school exams for graduation recently took effect in Pennsylvania, with the goal of "ensuring that students leaving high school are prepared for college and the workplace." But critics say the requirement has been so watered down that it is unlikely to have major impact.

The situation in Pennsylvania mirrors what has happened in many of the 26 states that have adopted high school exit exams. As deadlines approached for schools to start making passage of the exams a requirement for graduation, and practice tests indicated that large numbers of students would fail, many states softened standards, delayed the requirement or added alternative paths to a diploma.

People who have studied the exams, which affect two-thirds of the nation's public school students, say they often fall short of officials' ambitious goals.

"The real pattern in states has been that the standards are lowered so much that the exams end up not benefiting students who pass them while still hurting the students who fail them," said John Robert Warren, an expert on exit exams and a professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

"The exams are just challenging enough to reduce the graduation rate," Professor Warren added, "but not challenging enough to have measurable consequences for how much students learn or for how prepared they are for life after high school."

(Source: New York Times)

SOUTHERN LEARNING CURVE: DIVERSE AND POOR

The South has become the first region in the country in which more than half of public school students are poor and more than half are minorities, according to a report by the Atlanta-based Southern Education Foundation. (Source: Atlantic Constitution)

SIGN OF THE TIMES?: TEACHER DISMISSAL POLICY BASED ON STUDENT TEST SCORES GAINS PRELIMINARY APPROVAL FROM HOUSTON SCHOOL BOARD

School board members in Houston gave preliminary approval to a policy giving administrators the authority to dismiss teachers whose students consistently perform poorly on standardized tests. Officials said the goal of the policy is not to fire more teachers, but to help improve teacher effectiveness as well as student

achievement. "Quite frankly, if we were that good, why do 100,000 of our kids read below grade level?" district Superintendent Terry Grier said.

RECESSION BRINGS GREATER SOCIOECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN OUR SCHOOLS
Parents and educators across the country say the recession has brought subtle changes to the culture of many public schools as some families, forced by finances to switch from private to public education, seek the personal attention they received at their former schools, reports USA TODAY. "We ask a lot of questions -- we follow up on things," says one former private-school parent in the Chicago area. "We contact the school board... We'll challenge teachers, we'll challenge coordinators." New York University education professor Pedro Noguera is starting to see the effects on the public system in New York City as affluent parents in parts of Brooklyn switch their children from private to public schools and in the process push the public schools to improve. "College-educated parents are not going to subject their kids to second-class education," he says. Their influx "absolutely has a huge impact," whether it's by volunteering in classrooms or campaigning for more funding. Says another former private school parent in Baltimore: "You come with a certain sense of, 'This is my school, it should be working for me.' I've heard parents say, 'That principal is my employee. I pay her salary.' " As Noguera points out, the shift in demographics is turning public education back into a democratic institution that truly serves all children.

VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP PROVIDES STUDENTS WITH HUMAN ANATOMY LESSONS
A group of Florida high-school students used videoconferencing to watch a real-time dissection of a human cadaver. Students were able to watch as a doctor guided them through the dissection, showing them major organs and answering their questions in real time. Educators say the technology to take students on the virtual field trip was less costly than an in-person visit would have been, and students said they learned more than they would have from looking at a textbook.

ARTICLE: WHAT MAKES A GREAT TEACHER? (or how do we screen for a relentless mind-set?)

Predicting who will be a superb teacher and who will be merely average or poor is notoriously hard but with its smaller sample set and its own organization's relentlessness, Teach for America (TFA) has retroactively tracked outcome data and tried to distill characteristics for its own admission process, reports Amanda Ripley in *The Atlantic*.

Up to this point, TFA has kept its findings under wraps, but with the pending release of a book by its head of training and support, Stephen Farr, the group allowed access to its data compiled over 20 years. Rather than profile a TFA participant, however, the article takes the organizations conclusions and measures

these against an excellent teacher in the D.C. public schools who is not an alumnus of the program. The similarities are the same: The two overarching traits of an excellent teacher as judged by student outcomes are persistence in the face of challenge and high life satisfaction.

TFA has 30 data points for which it screens candidates, however, and refines these each year rather than relying on impressions. According to the article, "If school systems hired, trained, and rewarded teachers according to the principles Teach for America has identified, then teachers would not need to work so hard. They would be operating in a system designed in a radically different way -- designed, that is, for success." (SEE FULL ARTICLE IN ACCOMPANYING CASN NEWS - THE HS FILES) <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/201001/good-teaching>

POLICY BRIEF: UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO A QUALITY EDUCATION

A new policy brief from the Education and Public Interest Center offers three case studies of a school (a San Diego charter), a district (on Long Island), and a nation (Finland) that have "abolished curricular stratification and promoted outstanding student achievement." According to the brief, classrooms and schools where all students are taught a challenging common curriculum offer proof that detracking can produce increased achievement and far more equitable outcomes. While acknowledging the complexity of such a reform, the brief's strong recommendation is the elimination of curricular tracks that separate students by race, socio-economic status, or assumptions about learning potential. It proposes that states require districts to identify all curricular tracks, describe their composition by racial and socio-economic groups, and indicate student placement policies. Policymakers should communicate clearly to the public what the data demonstrate about tracking and the reasons for reform. Detracking should begin with the lowest track, and meaningful access to Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses should be available to all students throughout the reform process. The brief also advocates school, educator, and student support during the process, and presents model statutory code language that can be used by legislators seeking to implement these changes.

Find the brief, "Universal Access to a Quality Education: Research and Recommendations for the Elimination of Curricular Stratification" on the web at: <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/universal-access>

STUDY: INCREASED STUDENT MEDIA USE MAY BE AFFECTING GRADES

Americans between the ages of 8 and 18 devote an average of 7 hours, 38 minutes a day -- or 53 hours a week -- to media use, according to a report by the Kaiser Family Foundation. That is up by more than an hour from five years ago, when a

similar study was conducted. The study also noted a link between heavy media users and lower grades, showing that 47% of the heaviest users earned C's or lower, while only 23% of light users earned the same grades. The study could not say if there was a cause-and-effect link between media use and grades.

Co-CREATOR OF WIKIPEDIA TURNS TO EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS

The co-founder of Wikipedia has launched a Web site designed to offer free access to thousands of education-related videos for students ages 3-18.

Larry Sanger, who helped create Wikipedia and has since left the organization, says the new site, <http://www.watchknow.org/>, will allow students and teachers to sort through a library of online videos by content, and pick out what they need. Topics range from math and science to history. The site is meant to house and organize videos that are free and available online, yet which most people don't know how to find.

The site was launched in October. So far it offers 11,000 videos in 2,000 categories. The contributions have come from National Geographic and Google Videos, among many other sources. Sanger describes it as "YouTube meets Wikipedia."

SOME ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Sprixi

Looking for free images to use in the classroom? Sprixi offers another creative commons alternative through an easy-to-use search for images that are free to use without copyright concerns. Use Sprixi to not only find images but to report on the usefulness of the picture matching the search term. The more users rate usefulness, the better the searches become. Register with an email to contribute pictures to the site and create additional topics. Click on "Use" to either download the picture or use a link. The best part of Sprixi? The images are automatically attributed with the username and license information, so you and your students are modeling and practicing ethical use of the images. <http://www.sprixi.com>

Teacher Training Videos

Become a technology expert by learning from the best. View screencasts of great training videos for teachers. Find content to support in a variety of subject areas with tutorials and "how to" for a variety of sites. Subscribe to newsletters to receive updates of newly produced videos. Find "how to" videos of web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs, and other more complicated tools by clicking on "Web 2.0/ICT Videos." <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com>

Engineer Your Life (Engineering Site for HS Girls)

The tag line says it all: A guide to engineering for high school girls. Find answers to common questions or thoughts such as: "Why engineering," "Meet Inspiring Women," and "Find your dream job." Become a fan on Facebook, follow on YouTube, or view the multitude of links to open up other career alternatives to girls. There are also links for counselors and parents. <http://www.engineeryourlife.org>

Plus a few more web discoveries/sharings:

College Prep Physics: A teacher created College Prep Physics site for 9th grade Physics (contains various physics project ideas plus an Einstein's Birthday Celebration <http://cpphysics.homestead.com/>)

STANFORD'S SCHOOL REDESIGN NETWORK ANNOUNCES STUDY TOUR VISITS TO HILLSDALE HS IN SAN MATEO.

SRN LEADS is pleased to announce 2010 dates for the popular Study Visits to Hillsdale High School in San Mateo, CA. These study visits take place February 22-23 and March 29-30.

Building on the success of past Study Tours, SRN LEADS and Hillsdale staff have designed these visits to create a meaningful exploration of key issues of school redesign into smaller learning communities (SLCs). Hillsdale started its redesign process in 2003, with equity as a major cornerstone. The student-centered, teacher-led redesign resulted in a change from a comprehensive high school of 1,200 into three SLCs of 400 students each. Hillsdale was named a California Distinguished School for 2007 and is the recipient of a \$1.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support its SLC work. The Study Visits provide time for participants to explore the school and to identify their own needs and goals and frame their own school context within the visit. Hillsdale was one of four schools selected from across the country to be featured in SRN's Windows on Conversions, a case study and film series that will be used as part of the Study Visit. Space is limited, so register soon. For information, call 650.725.2249. See also <http://srnleads.org>

SOME FUNDING AND AWARD OPPORTUNITIES

Lowe's Toolbox for Education Grant Program

Deadline: February 12, 2010

Raise up to \$5,000 for your school in minutes. It's almost that easy when you take advantage of Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant program. Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation knows how hard people work for their kids and community. They are dedicated to helping parent-teacher groups achieve even more for schools. Apply for the Toolbox for Education Grant now and build on

your success with a Lowe's grant. To apply, visit <http://toolboxforeducation.com/index.html>.

U.S. EPA National Environmental Video Competition

Deadline: February 16, 2010

The U.S. EPA is sponsoring a video contest that challenges filmmakers and students to produce short, creative videos that highlight the Three Rs of individual consumption: reduce, reuse, and recycle. The EPA will award cash prizes up to \$2,500 and will be accepting video submissions through February 16, 2010. The competition "Our Planet, Our Stuff, Our Choice" calls for short, creative videos that examine consumption and recycling and offer community based solutions. Entries should be 30-60 seconds in length and promote steps individuals and organizations can take to minimize negative environmental impacts within their communities on the following topics: Reducing and reusing, Recycling, Composting, and Consumption and its effect on environmental footprint. To enter, visit <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/wycd/video.htm>.

Call for Young Eco-Hero Nominations and Applications

Deadline: February 28, 2010 Calling all Young Eco-Heroes for this annual Action For Nature juried contest. Cash prizes and other gifts are awarded to young people, 8 to 16 years of age, who have initiated and achieved outstanding environmental success, and whose efforts will inspire others. Guidelines and application form available on the Web site. Nominations encouraged. To apply, visit <http://www.actionfornature.org/>