

No, it still isn't Valentine's Day (except for the every-day-is-Valentine's-Day romantics in our midst); however, it is the **400th edition of CASN News** and we want to thank each and every one of you who regularly forward or post high-school related articles, reports, resources, funding opportunities, and events. Your willingness to share helps to make CASN News possible.

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PROFICIENCY MODEL IS CHANGING CULTURE IN OREGON HIGH SCHOOL

A small Oregon high school that has adopted a proficiency-model system under which students are given as much time as they need each year to demonstrate their understanding of state standards and concepts, and grades are determined by proficiency rather than a traditional points-based system. Students and parents resisted the system at first, but now students are taking more responsibility for the work they need to do to show proficiency. "Before I felt like I had to do it," one student said. "Now I actually want to learn it." <http://www.statesmanjournal.com/article/20100208/NEWS/2080332/1001/news>

MANY RACE TO THE TOP STATE APPLICATIONS INCLUDE PLANS FOR COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Many of the Race to the Top applications feature plans for collaborative professional development. These range from administrators to teachers and from traditional meetings to online gatherings. Idaho plans to expand an existing Superintendents' Network. Currently, 30 superintendents "meet four times a year to discuss improving student achievement and share challenges and success stories." California plans to develop a professional learning community that brings together state and local stakeholders.

" . . . teachers and leaders who have common goals, examine data, and share effective practices, particularly in strategic areas such as use of data to inform instruction, early literacy and mathematics, STEM programs, and strengthening high school graduation and college attendance rates."

In Washington, D.C. educators will have access to an online learning community in which they can share lesson plans and best practices. In application after application, there are plans for educators to collaborate, particularly in the service of interpreting and responding to data effectively.

OBAMA WANTS TO CONSOLIDATE CURRICULUM PROGRAMS IN FY 2011 ED BUDGET

As part of a budget plan designed to reshape federal support for education, President Barack Obama is seeking to consolidate more than a dozen

discrete programs into three broader, competitive funds focused on “effective teaching and learning” across the academic-content areas.

The proposal emphasizes literacy, the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and a final catchall category dubbed a “well-rounded education.”

But elements of that approach are facing stiff resistance from an array of organizations as well as from Democratic and Republican lawmakers. A chief concern is that the consolidation would lead to the neglect of issues Congress has long identified as national priorities, such as teaching U.S. history, boosting arts education, and distributing books to needy children.

Moreover, the plan—included in Mr. Obama’s fiscal 2011 budget request—is contingent on the uncertain prospect of reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year. Lawmakers are only now gearing up for that process, with the first House hearing held last week. (source: Education Week)

MASSACHUSETTS HIGH SCHOOL DEFENDS DECISION TO ELIMINATE HONORS AND TO PREPARE MORE STUDENTS TO TAKE ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

Officials at Boston Latin School are defending their decision to eliminate honors classes in an effort to prepare more students to take Advanced Placement courses in 11th and 12th grades. Many parents expressed concerns that removing the honors courses -- weighted an extra half-point in students' grade-point averages -- would hurt their children's GPAs, but administrators emphasized that the change would have little effect. (source: Boston Globe)

BETTER CONNECTIONS, PERSONALIZED LEARNING, USE OF STUDENT DATA TO BE PART OF NATIONAL BROADBAND/E-RATE PLAN

The upcoming National Broadband Plan is expected to recommend a revised E-rate program for schools that will include an increased emphasis on online learning as well as the use of student data to improve and customize

instruction. Better access to high-speed Internet for schools and libraries and community access to technology is also expected to be a focus of the plan, due to be finalized in March.

EMERGING TREND: MORE HS STUDENTS CHOOSING ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL SENIOR YEAR

A growing number of high-school students are choosing internships or taking advantage of early graduation or other options rather than attending a traditional senior year. Many of the students are academically advanced and may be restless or looking to accelerate the progress of their education. The trend is catching on with education policymakers as well, with a new program in eight states allowing students to take college and high-school courses concurrently. (source: U.S.A. Today)

TWO STUDIES FEATURE LESSONS FROM EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOLS: FOCUS ON IMPROVING ACADEMIC OUTCOMES FOR ALL STUDENTS

What separates higher-performing from lower-performing schools? "Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better," a new report from EdSource, suggests that the main commonality of high performing schools is a "schoolwide focus on improving academic outcomes for all students." Other practices distinguishing these California middle schools include:

- preparing all students for a rigorous high school education and beyond;
 - setting measurable goals for gains on standards-based assessment;
 - holding superintendents, administrators, and teachers accountable for student gains;
 - identifying and intervening early with struggling students; and,
 - using data to monitor student progress and improve teacher practice.
- <http://www.edsource.org/middle-grades-study.html>

TWO NEW STUDIES LOOK AT RACIAL ISOLATION IN CHARTER SCHOOLS
(Editor's Note: We realize that there are some excellent charter schools that do reflect the diversity of their communities; however, these two studies

raise important issues at a time when the U.S. Department of Education is promoting charter schools in Race to the Top. Please share your own perspectives.)

The Washington Post recently published an article about a study from UCLA's Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles which analyzed charter schools across the country and found them to be substantially more racially isolated than traditional public schools.

The CU Boulder's policy center, along with its partner policy center at Arizona State University just released a study that, coincidentally, asks some of the same questions as the UCLA study.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/03/AR2010/20303939.html> <http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/>
<http://www.asu.edu/> <http://epicpolicy.org/>

WHITE PAPER: WHAT A SUPERLATIVE STUDENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM MIGHT LOOK LIKE

A white paper from the Council of Chief State School Officers considers what a student assessment system would entail if built from the best practices in current educational research and educational systems in the U.S. and high-achieving nations around the world. The paper suggests that any assessment process should support a range of purposes -- informing learning and instruction, determining progress, measuring achievement, and providing partial accountability information. It should be student-centered and should honor research indicating that students learn best when given challenging content and provided with assistance, guidance, and feedback on a regular basis. It should support students in acquiring higher-order thinking and performance skills, and support learning for students, educators, schools, and states. <http://www.ccsso.org/publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=381>

COMMENTARY: FINDING THE TANGIBLES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING

In an op-ed in The Washington Post, Melinda French Gates writes she is "optimistic" about reform developments stemming from the Race to the Top initiative (RttT): "After decades of diffuse reform efforts, [these developments] all zero in on the most important ingredient of a great

education: effective teachers. The key to helping students learn is making sure that every child has an effective teacher every single year." The achievement gap between white and African American students would all but disappear, says Gates, if African American students were guaranteed teachers in the top 25 percent of their profession through high school. Why, then, hasn't education policy focused on teacher effectiveness? In part because effective pedagogy has so many intangibles, difficult to measure empirically. "To help surmount this logjam," the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is underwriting a project at seven sites that will move toward distilling the bases for teacher effectiveness, using methods that include videotaping classes, analyzing test scores, and surveying teachers, students, and parents. "If all the stakeholders -- the federal government, state governments, school districts and teachers -- continue to coalesce around the goal of having an effective teacher in every classroom, then public schools will start to deliver on their core promise," writes Gates. "They will prepare every single American to succeed in college, their careers and their lives." <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/18/AR2010021802919.html>

FROM THE BLOGS AND ED COMMENTARIES: WHITE HO

USE AND ED DEPARTMENT SIGNAL FUTURE FUNDING TIED TO COLLEGE-AND-CAREER READINESS STANDARDS

Based on several recent announcements it seems that in order to qualify for billions of dollars in Title I money for disadvantaged students, states will have to certify that their math and reading standards are college- and career-ready. They can either do this by adopting the state-led "common core standards," or work with an institution of higher education to certify their standards.

Obama's plan does not require states adopt what comes out of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, being spearheaded by the National Governors' Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers —but it seems to be the administration's preference. "You'll be able to better compete for funds," President Obama told the governors. That means as the administration seeks to make more education funds competitive, States participating in the common core effort may have an advantage. (Currently, 48 States and the District of Columbia are participating.)

SOME FUNDING AND AWARD OPPORTUNITIES

American Historical Association: Awards for Teaching of History

The American Historical Association Beveridge Family Teaching Prize recognizes excellence and innovation in elementary, middle school, and secondary history teaching, including career contributions and specific initiatives. Maximum award: \$1,500. Eligibility: K-12 teachers in groups. Deadline: March 15, 2010. <http://www.historians.org/teaching/Beveridge.htm>

Kohl's Corporation: Kohl's Kids Who Care Scholarships

The Kohl's Kids Who Care Program recognizes and rewards young volunteers who transform their communities for the better. Maximum award: \$10,000 scholarship toward post-secondary education. Eligibility: youth 6 to 18 years old, not graduated from high school by March 15, 2010. Deadline: March 15, 2010. <http://www.kohlscorporation.com/CommunityRelations/scholarship/index.asp>

The Shortie Awards: Film and News Festival

The premiere film festival for students ages 7 to 18 and their teachers! Established in 2001, The Shortie Awards: Student Film and News Festival recognizes original digital media productions created by student filmmakers, ages 7-18, and their teachers. The Shortie Awards focuses on nurturing imagination and choice making in students. The Shortie Awards is part of MHz Networks' Education Department. The event grew out of the Department's EAT (Education Arts and Technology) program for young filmmakers in the Washington D.C. area and has since blossomed into a national and even international event, featuring submissions from all over the world.

Entry Categories: Live Action: Narrative, Documentary, Experimental, PSA, Music Video, or Other Animation: Stop-Motion, Claymation, Machinima, Digital, or Other Daily News Program Deadline: April 9, 2010
Age Categories: 7-10, 11-14, 15-18, and K-12 Teacher.

Learn more at: <http://www.shortie.org/festival/rules/>

Toshiba America Foundation

The Toshiba America Foundation gives up to and over \$5,000 to math and science teachers (grades 7-12) in public and private schools. Funds are given to teachers who engage students in positive and challenging learning experiences. Past successful grantees used the students' natural curiosity and enabled them to frame their own scientific questions. For more information and to apply, please visit <<http://www.toshiba.com/tafpub/jsp/about/HowApply.jsp>>

SOME UPCOMING CONFERENCES

* National Service Learning Conference; March 24-27, 2010; San Jose, CA

<http://nslc.nylc.org/>

* National Educator Program SLC International Conference; Beaver Creek, Colorado, April 21-24, 2010

* Education Northwest National Institute: From Structure to Instruction: Sharing Best Practices and Lessons Learned from High School Redesign Efforts; Las Vegas, NV; June 28-30, 2010

* National Academy Foundation (NAF) Academy Leadership Summit, July 9-10, 2010; Annual Institute for Staff Development, July 11-13, 2010; Philadelphia, PA.

* High Schools That Work Staff Development Conference; July 14-17, 2010; Louisville, Kentucky

* National Career Academy Coalition Annual Conference; November 6-9, 2010; Austin, Texas

* National Coalition of Essential Schools Fall Forum; November 10-13, 2010; San Francisco, CA