

## **CASN NEWS**     *January 2009*

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"Our children have just one chance to get a quality education, and they need and deserve the absolute best. While there are no simple answers, I know from experience that when you focus on basics, like reading and math, and when you embrace innovative new approaches and when you create a professional climate to attract great teachers, you can create great schools."    –Arne Duncan

### **Arne Duncan Named As New U.S. Secretary of Education**

President-elect Barack Obama has tapped Chicago Public Schools chief Arne Duncan to be his secretary of education. Duncan's selection is seen as a middle way between two sparring Democratic factions in education reform, both of whom lobbied the Obama transition team as it contemplated a choice. On one side are proponents of the whole-school approach, who feel helping students achieve cannot be limited to academics but should include school-based services such as clinics and counseling. On the other side are advocates of a get-tough approach to teachers and administrators, pushing for results through shake-ups in hiring, salary, and tenure practices. Duncan, who served seven years as Chicago's superintendent, is said to have worked well with the teacher union while undertaking back-to-basics reform and restructuring where schools were failing. He is a supporter of early childhood education, The Washington Post reports. He has urged Congress to retain the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, which he said were a step in the right direction but required standardization. Under his supervision, the Chicago Public Schools -- the third-largest public school system in the country -- were generally seen to have improved. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/16/AR2008121602475.html>

Related article: <http://www.suntimes.com/news/commentary/1332922.CST-EDT-edit16d.article>

### **Spellings Announces FY 2009 Ed Grant Priorities**

In one of her last acts as U.S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings announced on November 21 that in discretionary grant competitions for FY 2009, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) will continue its focus on: secondary schools; professional development for secondary school teachers; school districts with schools in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring; student data systems; state data systems; mathematics; science; and critical-need languages (i.e. Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Turkish). Essentially, when ED awards grants for programs funded by Congress, they can choose to give grants to applicants who meet one or more of these priorities, depending on the type of program and grant.

### **New Hampshire May Allow Some Students To Finish HS Early**

New Hampshire's plan to allow some students to graduate after their sophomore year has sparked passionate discussions among educators throughout the state about what high school should be and whether 16-year-olds are ready for college. "The purpose is to change the way education is delivered to students," said Lyonel B. Tracy, the state's education commissioner. "It will allow students who want to get on with advancing their education to do so. ... We are overdue for a change in our educational system." (source: Boston Globe) (Full Story included in accompanying CASN HS Files)

### **Not Enough CA Minority Students Taking Required College Prep Courses**

While improvements have been made, too many Hispanic and black students in California still don't take the high-school classes necessary to enter college, according to a new California Postsecondary Education Commission report. About a quarter of black and Hispanic high-school graduates were eligible for the California State University system in 2007, up from 18.6% and 16%, respectively, in 2003. About 37% of white graduates and 50.9% of Asian graduates met the standards in 2007.

### **Change.Gov Provides Opportunity to "Weigh-In" on Education**

A Web site created by the Office of the President-elect and Office of the Vice President-elect, Change.gov, provides news, events and announcements about the setting up of the Obama Administration. What's more, it provides opportunities for Americans to participate in redefining our government by providing thoughts and suggestions on a number of top agenda topics.

The following issues are being considered as part of the Obama-Biden plan to "restore the promise of America's public education:"

- Zero to Five Plan will provide critical support to young children and their parents;
- Early Head Start and Head Start funding will be increased and programs improved;

- Access to high quality childcare will be improved;
- No Child Left Behind will be reformed so that less time is spent on testing and the law's accountability system is improved;
- High Quality schools will be supported and low-performing charters will be closed;
- Math and science education will become a national priority;
- More funding will be provided to address the dropout crisis;
- High-quality afterschool opportunities will be supported, including doubling the funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program;
- College outreach programs will be supported;
- Programs for English language learners will be continued; and
- Programs to recruit, prepare, retain, and reward teachers will be initiated.

The Transition Team will be sharing new developments and will consider feedback from respondents on Change.gov.

[http://change.gov/agenda/education\\_agenda/](http://change.gov/agenda/education_agenda/)

### Poor AP Passage Rates in D.C. Prompt Changes in High-School Rankings

Washington, D.C., students sat for three times as many Advanced Placement exams in 2008 as in 1998, but earned passing grades on less than 10% of the tests. After discovering that one of D.C.'s worst high schools would have ranked in the top 5 nationally after students took 750 exams but passed just 2% of them, Washington Post columnist Jay Mathews amended his high-school rating system based on AP exam participation.

### Neuroscience Study Finds That Poverty Changes Children's Brains

Deleterious effects to certain brain functions of some 9- and 10-year-old children living in poverty follow roughly the same pattern as stroke damage, according to a new neuroscience study. While the effects can be reversed, it requires "incredibly intensive interventions to overcome this kind of difficulty," said University of Michigan education professor Susan Neuman.

### STUDY: Decrease in Number of Teen Car Accidents When School Starts Later

Delaying the start of school by only one hour resulted in a reduced number of automobile accidents involving teenagers. Students self-reported that the later start time resulted in more sleep each night. Ninth graders said they slept 12 minutes longer, while twelfth graders said they averaged 30 minutes more sleep a night. The extra sleep caused a significant increase (from 35.7% to 50%) in the percentage of students reporting getting at least 8 hours of sleep per weeknight.

Based on a new study, daytime sleepiness decreased and average crash rates for teen drivers dropped 16.5% after the school start time change. "It is surprising that high

schools continue to set their start times early, which impairs learning, attendance and driving safety of the students," said senior author Barbara Phillips, MD, director of the UK Healthcare Good Samaritan Sleep Center in Lexington, Ky.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/12/081215074351.htm>

### **STUDY: Paying Low Income College Students to Stay in College**

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has committed \$13 million to study whether paying low-income college students between \$1,000 to \$4,000 to maintain a half-time schedule and a C average is effective, the Los Angeles Times reports. The Gates-funded study will be conducted by MDRC, a social policy and education research institution, with the aim of reversing the dismal dropout rates for low-income college students, particularly those in community college. "The reasons people drop out are complex, and there's no one thing responsible, but financial reasons are a big factor," said Thomas Brock, head of the MDRC unit running the study. "The idea is to create an incentive so if you stay in college and demonstrate you're a serious student, you'll be rewarded." Right now, he said, about half of those students break off their education before completing a certificate or degree program. Most receive no help with room and board costs while they are studying.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-gates9-2008dec09,0,5609527.story>

Related story: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/09/education/09gates.html>

### **REPORT: The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School**

This new study offers evidence of the importance of upper elementary grades and middle school in preparing students for college and work. The researchers constructed predictive models to examine six factors, including higher grades and taking honors courses, in influencing students' college readiness, as defined by their performance on the ACT EXPLORE test. They found that, on average, only the approximately 20% of students who were on target for college and career readiness by 8th grade were ultimately ready for college and career by 11th and 12th grade.

"What we're saying is college and career readiness is a process that includes high school but is not exclusively a high school issue. It's a K-12 issue," said Cyndie Schmeiser, president of ACT's education division. <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/reports/ForgottenMiddle.html>

### **REPORT: A Developmental Perspective on College & Workplace Readiness**

This report examines the similarities and differences in the research findings on healthy youth development, workplace readiness, and college readiness. The authors report numerous similarities across these areas in relation to psychological, cognitive, and social development. Each area strongly supports the importance of high expectations and

critical thinking and reasoning skills. By contrast, while spiritual and physical development are considered important to healthy youth development, little research exists on their contribution to workplace and college readiness. [http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2008\\_09\\_15\\_FR\\_ReadinessReport.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2008_09_15_FR_ReadinessReport.pdf)

### **REPORT: Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-class Education**

Underscoring the link between a world-class education and a sound U.S. economy, the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve have issued a report offering sweeping recommendations to internationally benchmark educational performance. The report, *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-class Education*, provides states a roadmap for benchmarking their K-12 education systems against those of top-performing nations. The report explains the urgent need for action and outlines what states and the federal government must do to ensure U.S. students receive a world-class education that provides expanded opportunities for college and career success.

NOTE: The Advisory Group identified five transformative steps American education needs to undergo to produce more globally competitive students:

1. Upgrade state standards by adopting a common core of internationally benchmarked standards in math and language arts for grades K-12;
2. Leverage states' collective influence to ensure textbooks, digital media, curricula and assessments are aligned to internationally benchmarked standards and draw on lessons from high-performing nations;
3. Revise state policies for recruiting, preparing, developing and supporting teachers and school leaders to reflect the "human capital" practices of top-performing nations and states around the world;
4. Hold schools and systems accountable through monitoring, interventions and support to ensure consistently high performance, drawing upon international best practices; and
5. Measure state-level education performance globally by examining student achievement and attainment in an international context to ensure that students are receiving the education they need to compete in the 21st century economy.

<http://www.ihep.org/publications/publications-detail.cfm?id=121>

### **REPORT: Meeting the Needs of Significantly Struggling Learners in High School: A Look at Approaches to Tiered Intervention**

This report, authored by Helen Duffy of the National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research, provides an in-depth look at the implementation and structural issues, as well as the needed support required to successfully institute Response to Intervention (RTI) at the secondary school level. It defines the RTI models, explores benefits and challenges faced at the high school level, shares a snapshot of

implementation at the high school level, and outlines the necessary resources needed to support this work.

[http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC\\_RTIBrief\\_08-02-07.pdf](http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_RTIBrief_08-02-07.pdf)

**REPORT: Eight Elements of High School Improvement: A Mapping Framework**

The goal of the National High School Center is to encourage researchers, policymakers, and practitioners at all levels to engage in comprehensive, systemic efforts to maximize attainment for all high school students, with a focus on those students who have been traditionally underserved. To this end, the Center developed a framework that consists of eight core elements and provides a lens for mapping school, district, and state high school improvement efforts. <http://betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSCEightElements7-25-08.pdf>

**REPORT: Report on Key Practices and Policies of Consistently Higher Performing High Schools**

This National High School Center report focuses on successful high schools, highlighting the ways in which many superintendents, principals, and teachers are setting and meeting high expectations for all students. Developed specifically for state leaders, it provides them with suggestions on how they may support initiatives that are linked with accelerated learning.

[http://betterhighschools.org/docs/ReportofKeyPracticesandPolicies\\_10-31-06.pdf](http://betterhighschools.org/docs/ReportofKeyPracticesandPolicies_10-31-06.pdf)

**REPORT: Student Aversion to Borrowing: Who Borrows and Who Doesn't**

Using demographic and enrollment characteristics of undergraduate classes, as well as interviews with students and financial aid officers, the authors of this report examine the borrowing patterns of students enrolled in college and discuss reasons why certain students may not borrow. They identify three reasons for students not borrowing: 1) they may attend lower cost institutions or change their attendance pattern in order to reduce their expenses in a given semester, 2) they may use current income and savings to pay college costs, and 3) students from some racial/ethnic groups may have a cultural or familial perspective on debt that encourages them not to borrow.

<http://www.ihep.org/publications/publications-detail.cfm?id=121>

**COMMENTARY: How Mr. Obama Should Emulate Nixon**

Writing in The New York Times, Matt Miller, a journalist and senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, takes on what he calls the "deeply ingrained" practice of local control and funding of schools that he says "is sinking us morally and economically." He urges President-elect Obama to take a cue from President Richard Nixon's commission on school funding, which issued a report recommending that states equalize financing disparities, and led Nixon's domestic policy staff to consider a national tax that distributed monies that reduced state and local property taxes while closing the financing

gaps among school districts. Miller proposes a similar revenue-sharing plan that he says would increase federal contributions to local education by \$80 to \$100 billion a year. Miller also doubts that Mr. Obama's current plans to stimulate the economy by rebuilding rundown schools will fix the problems created by the very structure of American education financing. "The grim equation by which accident of birth determines educational quality in the United States is straightforward," he writes. "The poorer the district and the state, the lower the local tax base, with less money for students. No other advanced nation tolerates such inequities."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/28/opinion/28miller.html>

### **COMMENTARY: Hiring Effective Teachers: Addressing the "Quarterback Problem" in Public Education**

(Thank you to Charlie Dayton for recommending this article.) Writing in the New Yorker, Malcolm Gladwell contemplates the issue of teacher performance, which he characterizes as "a quarterback problem." That is, in the same way you can't predict who will become a star quarterback in the NFL until that athlete is actually in the NFL, you can't predict who will become a star teacher until that person is actually teaching in the field. No other situation replicates the blend of demands, skills, and intuitions of either job. College football, or teacher certification, can't predict success, and the stakes are high. According to research that Gladwell cites, students in the class of a bad teacher will learn, on average, half a year's material. Students in the class of a very good teacher will learn a year and a half's material -- putting them an entire year ahead of their poorly-taught peers. "Teacher effects dwarf school effects," Gladwell writes. "Your child is actually better off in a 'bad' school with an excellent teacher than in an excellent school with a bad teacher. Teacher effects are also much stronger than class-size effects. You'd have to cut the average class almost in half to get the same boost that you'd get if you switched from an average teacher to a teacher in the eighty-fifth percentile." The implications are clear: "After years of worrying about issues like school funding levels, class size, and curriculum design, many reformers have come to the conclusion that nothing matters more than finding people with the potential to be great teachers. But there's a hitch: no one knows what a person with the potential to be a great teacher looks like. The school system has a quarterback problem."

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/12/15/081215fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/12/15/081215fa_fact_gladwell)

Read a book excerpt at: <http://www.gladwell.com/outliers/index.html>

**Best & Emerging Practices: Lessons From The Field: What's Up With College Night**  
Berkeley High School (BHS) in Berkeley, CA hosts a "What's Up With College Night" which includes a panel presentation in which recent BHS alumni are invited back to talk with students and parents about what it is really like to go to college. The first half of the evening is a panel presentation open to both students and parents. In the second half of

the evening, students meet separately with their peers, and parents meet with other parents of recent BHS alumni. This event is “hosted” by a parent group, but is open to students and families of the entire school.

### **Some Websites For Students & Teachers**

#### *Google Zeitgeist*

Want a concrete indicator of public curiosity and concerns from the source they use most? Try Google Zeitgeist. This simple tool tells what people are searching most on Google (country by country), correlating it to the news and other major dates. Use the links to Year-End Zeitgeist or Zeitgeist Archives to see full-year trends. For example, use the 2008 summary to see the spikes in certain Google searches connected with events during the 2008 U.S. political campaigns. Get a quick snapshot of popular culture "hot topics" or personal concerns during tough economic times, simply by seeing what people are searching on Google. If you are trying to build world-awareness and 21st century learners in your classroom, keep Google Zeitgeist handy to spark discussion and curiosity. <http://www.google.com/intl/en/press/zeitgeist/index.html>

#### *The Goody Parsons Witchcraft Case*

Complete with copies of historic documents detailing court testimony, timelines, family trees, and paintings of the participants, this site is fascinating for those with an interest in the New England witchcraft frenzy of the 17th century. It tells the story of Mary Parsons and her family and their differences with neighbors that dissolved into slander and witchcraft accusations. This site is well-developed and laid out, divided into the story, the participants, the slander and witchcraft trials, and maps showing where the participants came from in England and settled in America. Clicking on links will show photographs of the participants, such as William Pyncheon and written records of the trials.

<http://ccbit.cs.umass.edu/parsons/hnmockup>

### **Some Funding & Award Opportunities**

#### *Sprint Character Education Grant Program*

The Sprint Character Education Grant Program accepts applications for funding of character education programs promoting leadership, youth volunteerism, character education and school pride. Grants will fund the purchase of resource materials, supplies, teacher training and equipment that facilitates character education for K-12 students.

The program is open to all US public schools (K-12) and US public school districts.

More than \$600,000 was awarded to schools and school districts during 2008. In 2009, district level grants will range from \$10,000 to \$25,000, while school level grants will range from \$500-\$5,000.

The 2009 application acceptance period is February 2, 2009 at 8am CST through Friday, February 27, 2009 at 5pm CST. Applications will only be accepted electronically.

<http://www.sprint.com/responsibility/education/character/index.html>

### *Captain Planet Foundation*

The mission of the Captain Planet Foundation is to fund and support hands-on environmental projects for children and youths. The Foundation's objective is to encourage innovative programs that empower children and youth around the world to work individually and collectively to solve environmental problems in their neighborhoods and communities. Through environmental education, children can achieve a better understanding and appreciation for the world in which they live.

All projects must:

- Promote understanding of environmental issues
- Focus on hands-on involvement
- Involve children and young adults 6-18 (elementary through high school)
- Promote interaction and cooperation within the group
- Help young people develop planning and problem solving skills
- Include adult supervision
- Commit to follow-up communication with the Foundation (specific requirements are explained once the grant has been awarded)

All applicant organizations or sponsoring agencies must be exempt from federal taxation under the Internal Revenue Code Section 501, in order to be eligible for funding (this includes most schools and non-profit organizations).

Generally, the range of grants awarded by the Foundation is \$250 - \$2,500.

Applications are due by March 31, 2009. <http://www.captainplanetfdn.org/grants.html>

### *Teaching American History Grant Program*

The Teaching American History Grant Program supports projects that aim to raise student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of traditional American history. Grant awards assist local educational agencies (LEAs), in partnership with entities that have extensive content expertise, to develop, implement, document, evaluate, and disseminate innovative, cohesive models of professional development. By helping teachers to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of traditional American history as a separate subject within the core curriculum, these programs are intended to improve instruction and raise student achievement.

Applicants are required to work in partnership with one or more of the following: an institution of higher education; a nonprofit history or humanities organization; and/or a library or museum.

Projects that help school districts implement academic and structural interventions in schools that have been identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left

Behind Act of 2001 will receive up to 10 additional competitive preference points.

Eligible applicants are LEAs, including charter schools that are considered LEAs under State law and regulations, that must work in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- An institution of higher education.
- A non-profit history or humanities organization.
- A library or museum.

A request of \$50,000,000 for new awards for this program for FY 2009 has been made. The actual level of funding, if any, depends on final congressional action. Applications are being invited now to allow enough time to complete the grant process if Congress appropriates funds for this program.

Total funding for a three-year project period is a maximum of \$500,000 for LEAs with enrollments of less than 20,000 students; \$1,000,000 for LEAs with enrollments of 20,000-300,000 students; and \$2,000,000 for LEAs with enrollments above 300,000 students. LEAs may form consortia and combine their enrollments in order to receive a grant reflective of their combined enrollment. For districts applying jointly as a consortium, the maximum award is based on the combined enrollment of the individual districts in the consortium. The U.S. Department of Education anticipates awarding from 52 to 65 grants.

The deadline to submit the Notice of Intent to Apply is January 22, 2009. The U.S. Department of Education will hold pre-application meetings on January 8, 2009 and January 12, 2009. The deadline for transmittal of applications is March 9, 2009.

<http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/announcements/2008-4/122308h.html>