

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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"It's about relationships. Being a band teacher, you form relationships with kids that go beyond the classroom. You form relationships with the community — you're working with large groups of kids and parents, and you're providing experiences that will last a lifetime for a group of kids. It's

the same concept in redesigning high schools. High school redesign is about creating positive experiences for kids that enrich their lives and establish relationships with nurturing adults. Once you have that in place, attendance increases; discipline problems decrease. The kids see relevance in why they're going to school. Then it's easy to raise the rigor of what's being taught."

-- Jay Steele, Associate Superintendent for High Schools, Nashville

FY 2010 EDUCATION FUNDING APPROVED BY U.S. CONGRESS

FY10 federal education funding was approved by Congress and signed into law by the president on December 16th as part of an omnibus appropriations bill approved by Congress. Funding highlights include:

- \$67.4 billion for overall Department of Education funding;
- \$14.5 billion for Title I Grants;
- \$11.5 billion for IDEA;
- \$2.9 billion for Teacher Quality State Grants;
- \$545 million for School Improvement Grants; and
- \$7.2 billion for Head Start.

Attention now turns to FY11 education funding and speculation about the President's budget proposal which is scheduled for release in February. Many policy makers are concerned that federal programs, including education priorities, could suffer major budget cuts in the next fiscal year. Such reductions would compound the effect of the pending "funding cliff" associated with the final expenditures of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to states and schools.

NEW JOBS BILL MAY OFFER \$23 BILLION FOR EDUCATION

Cash-strapped school districts hoping to avert layoffs could get a boost from legislation approved by the U.S. House of Representatives Dec. 16 that is intended to provide a jolt to the sluggish economy, in part by creating a \$23 billion "education jobs fund."

Districts and states could use the money to restore cuts to K-12 and higher education to cover the cost of compensation and benefits for teachers and other employees. The funds could also be used for services related to school modernization, renovation, and repair.

The money—which would be in addition to the infusion of up to \$100 billion in education aid provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—would come from the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP.

RACE TO THE TOP DRIVES STATE ED INITIATIVES

As governors and state legislators gear up for a new year of budget action and policy-making, the federal Race to the Top competition is driving measures nationwide aimed, at least in part, at making states stronger candidates for a slice of the \$4 billion in education grants.

Those efforts emerge as a priority in the 2010 legislative season, even as many cash-strapped states face the prospect of tough spending decisions—including school budget cuts—on top of the midyear cuts they enacted in recent months.

For example, Governor Phil Bredesen of Tennessee recently called on his legislature to hold a special session in January to consider a package of education measures, including a requirement that student-achievement data be used in teacher evaluations.

MARYLAND HS STUDENTS MAY NEED FOUR YEARS OF MATH

Maryland's university system is considering a plan to require all high-school students seeking admission to its universities to enroll in a fourth math course and take math as seniors. If approved, the changes could affect students who begin ninth grade in 2011. "Math is not a spectator sport," said Chancellor William E. Kirwan, a former math professor. "If you get away from it for a year, you lose a lot. The research is pretty clear and consistent that it makes a difference to have math your senior year."

SOME SCHOOLS OFFER DUAL ENROLLMENT AS ALTERNATIVE TO ADVANCED PLACEMENT

More high schools are offering dual-enrollment courses as an alternative to Advanced Placement courses, saying it is a more cost-effective way to offer students college credit and challenge them in their senior year. However, some are concerned that school rankings determined by AP enrollment could drop, and students say the dual-enrollment courses are often viewed as less rigorous than AP and that the college credits they earn are not always accepted at top schools.

NEW STEM INITIATIVE ANNOUNCED

President Barack Obama announced a new \$250 million public-private partnership to improve science, technology, engineering and math education

-- doubling the investment in a STEM initiative he announced in November. Under the plan, about 10,000 new math and science teachers will be trained over five years, and 100,000 teachers already in the classroom will participate in professional development. "We really need all hands on deck from the private sector and the philanthropic sector because the government can't foot the whole bill for this," a White House official said.

TURNOVER IN SECONDARY PRINCIPALSHIP FOCUS OF RESEARCH

New research suggests that turnover in principalship is at a very high level. Data available from several states suggest that only about half of beginning principals remain in the same job five years later, and that many leave the principalship altogether when they go.

WILL SOCRATIC METHOD REGAIN TRACTION IN THE 21st CENTURY?

Cincinnati is just one of three districts across the country that offer "paideia" K-12 curriculum in public schools -- a method where the curriculum is focused on the Socratic method of in-depth discussion and classical debate. Paideia programming declined in schools as curriculum became increasingly focused on content-based instruction and standardized testing, but proponents of paideia teaching say it may regain popularity as educators move toward the teaching of 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and creativity.

FLEX PERIODS GAINING TRACTION NATIONWIDE

North Virginia high schools are rapidly adopting flex periods to offer students remediation and enrichment during the school day, representing a nationwide trend among high schools. The periods, ranging from 40 to 90 minutes, are helping schools save on after-school tutoring costs while simultaneously raising student achievement. Mel Riddile, NASSP associate director of high school services, found that flex periods have largely replaced study halls, which, he said, might have become largely extinct in the 1990s. "People came to realize we needed to make the most of every minute," he continued. "This is a big issue with student achievement. Some students need more time and don't learn at the same rate."

HIGH SCHOOLS OFFER FEWER COMPUTER CLASSES

While many students nationwide are proficient in using the Internet and social networking, interest in computer science courses is waning -- a concern for educators who say those skills will be necessary in the job market. The number of schools offering introductory or advanced computer science courses has declined since 2005, according to a survey by the Computer Science Teachers Association. "Their knowledge of technology is

very broad but very shallow," said Chris Stephenson, executive director of the association, referring to students. (source: Washington Post)

STUDENTS ARE TEACHERS IN TECH SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Red Riot Geek Squad club at Maine's Orono High School helps provide technical support as well as maintenance and repair for students and teachers in using the district's new fleet of laptop computers. After joining Maine Learning Technology Initiative's 1-to-1 laptop program, the school enlisted the students' help, offering them extra academic credit for their participation.

AN INDIANA HIGH SCHOOL TO PILOT ONLINE LEARNING DAY

Boone Grove HS in northwestern Indiana will offer two full days of online instruction as part of an inaugural effort to teach students how to manage time in a virtual environment. The HS has scheduled online lessons on Jan. 27 and Feb. 24 in a project that education leaders say could serve as a model for online learning throughout the state. District Superintendent Nick Brown says it's important to expose students to online learning now because more students are taking such courses each year. Indiana Department of Education spokesman Cam Savage says the department will help evaluate the project. The online training will expand to middle schools in the fall of 2010 and elementary schools in spring 2011.

AVID PILOT PROGRAM TO RAISE ACHIEVEMENT AMONG BLACK MALES

Woodlawn High School in Maryland's Baltimore County is one of six schools nationwide participating in a pilot program to raise achievement among black male students. The grant-funded initiative is part of the nationwide college-preparatory program Advancement Via Individual Determination -- or AVID -- and brings in black male teachers and tutors who focus on students' individual learning styles, provide lessons in organizational and note-taking skills and incorporate culturally relevant information into the curriculum.

(NOTE: See full story in the accompanying CASN News - the HS Files)

OPINION: QUALITY TEACHING AT THE CENTER

"All too often," writes Stephen Fink in The School Administrator magazine, "school leaders responsible for observing teachers on the job don't know what quality teaching looks like." Fink, who is executive director of the Center for Educational Leadership at University of Washington in Seattle, says that both studies and his own extensive experience have shown that

too few school leaders who oversee instructional improvement have the expertise to identify what makes teaching effective -- and this may explain the wide variation in opinions when observing a particular teaching performance.

To improve teaching, education leaders must model their own learning in public ways. This means building a school culture where teaching practice is given the same kind of scrutiny found in a medical or law school. Leaders must know their teachers as individual learners, and apply instructional focus to developing teachers in the same way that teachers are expected to do so with students. And district leaders must know principals as individual learners, so that they, too, can be intentional in developing leadership expertise. "This is not easy work," Fink concedes, "but the benchmark is exceedingly clear. At the end of the day, every structure, program, process or training activity must be measured by asking: Has teaching practice improved? How do you know?"

SOME WEB RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Geogebra

provides teachers with a venue for sharing lesson plans, creating work sheets and interacting with students at home and at school.

<http://www.geogebra.org>

Brightstorm

The California-based Web site Brightstorm offers online math help for students with video lessons created by teachers. Most of the site's math lessons are free, but the company also offers fee-based lessons in preparation for standardized tests. "Anybody who is confused with their homework can come to our site, search for the concept, find it really quickly, and then they can get an explanation that is concise and to the point from a really talented presenter who is also a great teacher," a Brightstorm representative said. <http://www.brightstorm.com/d/math>

NBA Olymics Learn

This choice website is loaded with high quality videos and is co-sponsored by the National Science Foundation! The content is professional, and very well presented. There is a free trial, however, it is only available for thirty days. Act fast! During the trial, the video originals and the science of the Winter Olympics can be streamed, but they cannot be downloaded. The five minute clips are perfect and very well suited to the concepts of beginning physics. Younger and older students alike will be able to make the connection

between current events and science. Plus, the added bonus of sports and science is great! There are also grammar videos and mini documentaries that would be useful in language arts, English, and history classes. Clever users will use a 30 day trial to preview and perhaps a separate trial (using another email address or from another teacher) for teaching during the Olympics. Thirty days go by quickly.

<http://www.nbclearns.com/olympics>

<http://www.nbcolympics.com/science-of-the-games>

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