

CASN NEWS March 2009

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OBAMA, DUNCAN SEE STIMULUS AS OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE EDUCATION

The federal economic-stimulus package signed into law Tuesday, totaling \$787 billion, will double the country's education budget over the next two years. President Barack Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan say they want to use those funds to boost achievement and shake up the status quo. "It's also an opportunity to redefine the federal role in education, something we're thinking a whole lot about," Duncan said. "How can we move from being [about] compliance with bureaucracy to really the engine of innovation and change?"

To receive stimulus funding, states will have to show they are making good progress in four areas:

- Boosting teacher effectiveness and getting more good teachers into high-poverty, high-minority schools;
- Setting up data systems to track how much a student has learned from one year to the next;
- Improving academic standards and tests;
- Supporting struggling schools.

OBAMA ON EDUCATION

In his first address to deal exclusively with education, President Barack Obama proposed lengthening the school year and increasing pay for high-performing teachers to regain an American edge in the world economy, Reuters reports. "Despite resources that are unmatched anywhere in the world, we have let our grades slip, our schools crumble, our teacher quality fall short, and other nations outpace us," Mr. Obama told the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "The future belongs to the nation that best educates its citizens, and my fellow Americans, we have everything we need to be that nation." To fulfill this potential, the president outlined a "cradle-to-career" plan that expanded early childhood programs and gave more money to states that raised student standards, tracked student progress, and cut drop-out rates. The president made clear that his administration will put the full weight of the federal government behind the reforms, tripling funds for education in the 2010 fiscal year beginning October 1. "In a 21st-century world where jobs can be shipped wherever there's an internet connection, where a child born in Dallas is competing with children in Delhi... education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success, it is a prerequisite," he said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/10/AR2009031000477.html>

http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-obama-education_wedmar11,0,6571296.story
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/12/opinion/12thu1.html>

STIMULUS PACKAGE INCLUDES TEACHER EQUITY PROVISION

The federal economic-stimulus package includes a provision mandating that governors address disadvantaged students' unequal access to top teachers and improve overall teacher effectiveness in order to be eligible for \$53.6 billion in state education funding. "The intent here is not to expect some sort of dramatic change overnight," said Marshall "Mike" S. Smith, a senior adviser to the U.S. secretary of education. "It is, however, to expect states to see that this is a fundamental inequity and to begin to address it in a thoughtful way."

CONGRESS PASSES FY2009 OMNIBUS BILL: BILL PROVIDES \$4.45 BILLION INCREASE FOR U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Throughout 2008, Democrats clashed with President Bush over funding levels for domestic priorities. Whereas President Bush's budget proposed to freeze spending for domestic programs not related to defense or homeland security, Democrats favored a plan that would increase spending by about \$20 billion. In September 2008, with both sides holding firm in their demands, Congress approved a temporary continuing resolution that funded nearly all domestic spending at the previous year's levels. This temporary funding bill had an expiration date of March 6.

Now, with a new president in the White House and an increased majority in the House of Representatives, House Democrats combined the nine Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 appropriations bills that Congress failed to pass at the end of 2008 into a single omnibus spending package. With a price tag of \$410 billion, the omnibus bill funds most domestic discretionary programs through the end of the federal fiscal year (September 30). It provides \$19 billion more than President Bush requested for FY 2009, including a \$4.45 billion increase for the U.S. Department of Education.

With the bill's passage, several education programs will see an increase. Title I, which received \$13.9 billion in FY 2008 will receive a \$593.5 million increase. Funding for special education will increase by \$586 million to \$11.99 billion. The omnibus bill will also provide increases for afterschool programs, the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling program, Smaller Learning Communities, TRIO, and GEAR UP. The Striving

Readers program, which targets middle and high school students who read below grade level, will receive \$35.4 million, the same amount it received in FY 2008. (Funding levels for these and other education programs that benefit middle & high schools are available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Fiscal09ProgramChart.pdf>).

In addition to the funding increases, many in the education world are keeping a close eye on a provision in the omnibus that could effectively put an end to a private school voucher program in Washington, DC. As written in the omnibus bill, the provision requires congressional renewal of the program for it to continue beyond the 2009–10 school year.

OBAMA RELEASES HIS FY10 BUDGET OUTLINE

President Obama released his FY10 budget outline, which lays out his administration's funding priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. Within education, one of the President's three key areas, his administration plans to focus attention on creating high-quality early childhood systems, strengthening and reforming public schools, and expanding opportunities for students to go to college. According to the budget document -- An Era of Responsibility -- "We know that the key to success in the 21st Century lies in investing in our people—in giving the chance to get a world-class education from cradle to career. "

The administration's budget also invests in improved results and more transparency in teacher and principal preparation programs as well as provides support for state and local efforts to implement merit pay and enhance teacher recruitment strategies and evaluation systems. It is expected that the President will release specific funding amounts in the coming months. In the meantime, the House and Senate Budget Committees will begin considering the FY10 budget.

STUDY: HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE FLAT AT 74%

A new report on the national high school graduation rate shows it remained flat at around 74% from 2002 to 2006, although some states & communities showed substantial progress. The report also found that Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska & Wisconsin are within striking distance of achieving 90% graduation rates.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University found that states with the best performance do not appear to share a common set of policies or practices, although all are implementing some "key reforms."

The report says 18 states gained in graduation rates & 12 made substantial gains. Tennessee led the list of best improved, jumping from 61% to 72%. Top states, in descending order, in terms of improvement rates are: Tennessee, Delaware, Kentucky, South Dakota, Arkansas, Alabama, North Carolina, New York, Hawaii, Missouri, Nebraska, & New Hampshire.

http://www.boston.com/news/local/new_hampshire/articles/2009/03/12/report_12_states_made_gains_in_hs_graduation_rate/

TEENS MUST BEHAVE IN SCHOOL TO DRIVE (Alabama)

In Alabama, teens will likely earn the right to drive as a reward for good behavior in school. A bill unanimously passed by the Alabama House and up for approval in the Alabama Senate, assigns teens points for every time they misbehave in school. One point is earned for in-school suspension, while up to 40 points are earned if a student is expelled. A student's discipline record is then reviewed when he/she is old enough to obtain a learner's driving permit or a driver's license. For every point a student has accumulated, he/she must wait one additional week before getting her/his learner's permit or driver's license. <http://www.tuscaloosaneews.com/article/20090226/APN/902262068>

IS A FOUR DAY WEEK IN SCHOOLS' FUTURE?

Kids in Florida public schools could be going to classes four days a week instead of five next fall if the state legislature lets financially strapped school districts adopt the cost-saving measure. School boards have been mumbling for months that a four-day school week would save a bundle on utility bills, diesel fuel for buses, and certain other expenses, if only state law would permit it. Now some legislators are pushing just such a proposal.

In Oregon 40+ school districts are using four day weeks. Typically, students in four-day districts generally go to school an hour longer each day. In Colton, Oregon, for example, high school doesn't end until 4 p.m. Teachers often work two Fridays a month, using the time to plan, meet with parents or get professional development. NOTE: Some school Districts run four-day weeks Tuesday through Friday to align with athletic schedules in other Districts.

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. According to Mel Riddle of NASSP, "People came to realize we needed to make the most of every minute...This is a big issue with student achievement. Some students need more time and don't learn at the same rate."

PROGRAM TEAMS TEENS WITH ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Albert Einstein HS asks athletes to volunteer to participate in a literacy program. The student-athlete-volunteers go to Highland Elementary School to read and communicate with the younger children. The program not only improves literacy skills, but also makes children more comfortable with the prospect of high school. High school students gain confidence as they chose and present a book. Younger children have a student-mentor in their high school volunteer -- someone they can look up to and ask questions of about life as a teenager.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/11/AR2009031101841.html>

STUDY: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARN MORE FROM SCIENCE COURSES WHICH FEATURE DEPTH OVER BREADTH

High-school students who study fewer scientific concepts but delve into them with more depth do better in college science classes than students in high-school classes that cover more topics but with less detail, according to a study that examined 8,310 college students. Many state science tests, which seek to measure knowledge about many topics, may fail to capture the knowledge gained by those who study a few important concepts in greater depth, researchers said. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/03/090305131814.htm>

IS THE FAFSA TOO INTIMIDATING FOR STUDENTS?

While most agree that the six-page federal form for families seeking college financial aid is daunting, the form itself, critics say, may scare off families in need and prevent students from going to college. To help alleviate the problem, the Department of Education is currently considering two approaches to simplifying the form. The first would cut out most financial questions, asking only for adjusted gross income and the number of tax exemptions. The second would let taxpayers direct the Internal Revenue Service to share information from their tax returns with ED. Although several pilot projects are being developed for next year's application season, transforming the system won't be a quick fix.

OPINION: THE GENTEEL UNTEACHING OF AMERICA'S POOR

Not all schooling is equal. In too many schools, too many students suffer an education

of drill and memorization but are deprived of high-level thinking activities, of intellectual discussions, of opportunities to synthesize information and respond creatively -- elements that form the basis of education for other students in other schools. Too many poor kids encounter expectations that deem them worthy of discipline and "the basics" rather than nurturing high-level thinking. According to Kylene Beers, president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), it is critically important that all students experience a rich, intellectually rigorous curriculum filled with all sorts of writing. "While writing, more than any other intellectual endeavor, sharpens our thinking, in too many schools, especially schools overwhelmed by poverty, writing is not about thinking but about copying; not about creating but about editing; not about persuading or telling or sharing or clarifying but about completing fill-in-the-blank activities or circling verbs in blue and nouns in red or counting the number of sentences in a paragraph to make sure the prerequisite three (or four or five) are there."

According to a new report from NCTE, unless we can reduce the number of schools that turn to scripted programs and highly structured class routines -- sometimes almost militaristic environments -- we will continue to be left with an education of America's poor that cannot be seen as anything more than a segregation by intellectual rigor, something every bit as shameful and harmful as segregation by color.

REBRANDING NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Arne Duncan has vowed to rename No Child Left Behind, thus revamping the "most negative brand in America," a phrase coined by Rep. George Miller. Eduwonk.com is sponsoring a rename-the-law contest. Some entries it has received so far: "Double Back Around To Pick Up The Children We Left Behind Act;" the "Teach to the Test Act;" and the "Could We Start Again, Please" Act.

FACTS WORTH KNOWING

1 in 50 U.S. Children Experience Homelessness

Foreclosures & job losses have led to an alarming rate of child homelessness, according to a report released by the National Center on Family Homelessness. Currently, 1 in 50 U.S. children experience homelessness, & that number is predicted to rise. Homeless children are far more likely than others to experience hunger, suffer chronic health problems, repeat a grade in school, & drop out of high school, the report affirms.

One-Fifth of All K-12 Students are Hispanic

According to new Census data, roughly one-fourth of the nation's kindergartners are Hispanic, evidence of an accelerating trend that will see minority children become the

majority by 2023. Overall, Hispanics make up about one-fifth of all K-12 students. The country's changing demographics, most evident in the West, will likely dominate political debate on topics from jobs to immigration to education in the years to come. (*USA Today*,)

SOME WEBSITES FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Study Skills

This *Study Skills* site is worth a look! The activities are all divided by ages (5-9, 10-14, and 15-18). Each age level includes teacher information, parent information, and *Learners...* the link to find the interactives! Each age level also highlights four key areas: Do, Get, Remember, and Understand and includes some age-appropriate text and interactives.

Highlights from the middle level (ages 10-14) include *Time Management, Exam Preparation, Note Taking, Revision, Memory Tips, Mindmaps, Pictograms*, and others. Older high school students (ages 15-18) delve into topics such as *Summarizing, Essay Writing, Learning Styles, Referencing, Learning from Lectures*, etc.

For professional purposes, there are also links (some PDF files) to research about the importance of teaching study skills. NOTE: This site was created in the U.K., so you may notice a few spelling & pronunciation differences from American English. The site also requires Flash & Adobe Acrobat.

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/studyskills/index.asp>

The Chemistry Collective

The Chemistry Collective is a collection of virtual labs, scenario-based learning activities, and concepts tests which can be incorporated into a variety of teaching approaches as pre-labs, alternatives to textbook homework, & in-class activities for individuals or teams. It is organized by a group of faculty & staff at Carnegie Mellon University for college & high school teachers who are interested in using, assessing, and/or creating engaging online activities for chemistry education. <http://chemcollective.org>

The Miniature Earth

This site shows a short but powerful video that breaks down the demographic makeup of the world if it were reduced to 100 people. Besides ethnic differences, it also shows statistics for sex divisions, urban vs. rural living situations, percentage of people with disabilities, general living conditions, literacy/educational level, computer ownership/ internet hookup, military presence, economic conditions, religions, and general material possessions. <http://www.miniature-earth.com>

The Spelling Bee Hive

You will find unlimited resources, word games, & information about all-things spelling at this site. Each day, a new game is featured that hones your students' spelling & vocabulary learning. Called the *Spelling Bee Hive*, it provides key links to the National Spelling Bee, spelling history, word games, and spelling quizzes. Practice spelling and English with "Daily Jumble," "Fowl Words," "Writing Block," and countless other activities. There is also a "word of the day." Daily podcasts are available at this link, to share the word of the day. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/spell/index.htm>

Genetics Web Lab Directory

This interactive website's fourteen modules help students learn the basic concepts of genetics. Basic modules such as Mendel's Peas, Dragon Meiosis, and Punnett Squares provide great examples of genetic fundamentals. Provide challenges and use some of the advanced modules for topics such as Genetic Counseling or the Hardy-Weinberg Equation. Hovering the mouse over each module provides a brief overview of the activity, along with the difficulty level. Each module provides downloadable student and teacher instructions along with the activity.

NOTE: As of March 2009, a few of the PDF downloads (i.e. teacher & student guides) are still under construction. This site requires shockwave and Adobe Acrobat. <http://www2.edc.org/weblabs/WebLabDirectory1.html>

Study Skills and Strategies

This site features hundreds of ways to help our learners, from online test taking, memorizing, to managing stress and so much more. Another perk from this site is that it is available in over 20 different languages, so our limited English speakers can learn these helpful techniques.

Content areas include Preparing, Learning, Studying, Learning with Others, Online Learning/Communicating, Classroom Participation, Project Management, Research, Reading Skills, Preparing for Test, Science & Technology, Math, Resources, Vocabulary/Spelling, Writing Styles, Writing Basics, & Taking Tests. There are over 100 individual topics to explore, including: Time Management, Avoiding Procrastination, Learning with ADHD, Effective Study Habits, Peer Mediation, Problem Based Learning, Netiquette, Public Speaking, Citing Websites, SQ3R, KWL, Overcoming Test Anxiety, Ten Tips for Terrific Test Taking, Prefixes & Root Words, & Seven Stages of Writing. <http://www.studygs.net/enews/index.htm>

NOTE: There are some basic advertisements at this site. Also, Flash and Acrobat Reader are needed

Vocabulary.com

Are you looking for some new tricks and tools to entice your students to learn and practice root words, vocabulary, and spelling? The main links at this site include *Root Word Lesson Plans*, *Thematic Puzzles*, *Word Lists*, *Test Prep/Assessment*, and *Daily Root Puzzles*.

The *Root Word Lesson Plans* offer three difficulty levels, prefix study, interactive puzzles focused on Greek & Latin roots. There are fill in the blanks, crosswords, true-false, word finds, & more.

The *Word Lists* are extensive & include nearly every topic one can imagine: Shakespeare, Legal Terms, Stock Market, ESL, Photography, Dance, Patriotism, Debate, Women in History, Kwanzaa, Psychology, Mythology, MANY other topics. *Thematic Puzzles* include printable pages, inter-active definition match games, & over fifty topics. If you have students preparing for SATs or ACTs, don't miss *Test Prep* section with over 200 vocabulary words. <http://www.vocabulary.com>

SOME FUNDING, LEARNING, & AWARD OPPORTUNITIES

Apply for an Educational Seminar Abroad

American Councils has announced a new series of programs for U.S. teachers and administrators (formerly referred to as Fullbright Teacher Exchange Programs). These programs provide unique opportunities to participate in three- to six-week work-shadow and observational study programs in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and India. All travel and program expenses are supported by American Councils, through its grant with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State. <http://www.americancouncils.org/educationalSeminars.php>

Power In Numbers: Win Group Grants to Ignite Change

Mountain Dew Voltage & Do Something are teaming to offer the Power in Numbers: Win Group Grants to Ignite Change. Groups of young people have the opportunity to win grants to get involved and energize their community. Submissions will be judged on whether they are youth-led and driven; bring measurable change; have a community focus; strive to make lasting change in the community, and are creative.

A minimum of three and a maximum of 10 friends can be on a team. Team members must be at least 13, but not older than 25 years of age and must be legal residents of the United States.

Ten groups of friends will win \$10,000 to see their project or idea come to life. Grants will be awarded to an eligible 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

The current submission period runs from March 9, 2009 – April 6, 2009. TIME SENSITIVE <http://www.dosomething.org/powerinnumbers>

Libraries, Literacy, and Gaming Grants

The Libraries, Literacy and Gaming Grant is designed to help libraries of all kinds develop & implement gaming experiences that support literacy development for youth 10-18 years of age. Public, school, and academic libraries in the U.S. that serve youth ages 10 - 18 are eligible to apply. Partnerships are strongly encouraged. Grants up to \$5000 will be awarded. Funded libraries also will receive technical assistance and ongoing support from a team of library literacy gaming experts. Simple online applications are due on or before Friday, March 20, 2009. TIME SENSITIVE <http://librarygamingtoolkit.org/rfp/>

Concern: Creative Writing Contest

The 2nd Annual Concern /Cecil Woodham-Smith Creative Writing Contest asks students and others to address a written piece to President Obama that will help him understand climate change, child labor, or world hunger. Entries may be in the form of a factual essay or a fictional story. Maximum award: laptops, iPods, & subscriptions to National Geographic Magazine. Eligibility: three entrant categories -- Junior, ages 12 to 15; Senior, ages 16 to 18; & Adult, ages 19+. Deadline: March 22, 2009. TIME SENSITIVE <http://www.concern.net/what-you-can-do/schools-and-youth/writing-competition-09/creative-writing-competition-09.php>

Target Arts Programs Grants

Target funds arts programs that bring the arts to schools or make it affordable for youth and families to participate in cultural experiences, such as school touring programs, field trips to the theater or symphony, or artists residencies and workshops in schools. Programs that make the arts accessible to school children are of particular interest.

Applications are accepted from 501(c)(3) organizations as well as schools, libraries, and public agencies.

Grants generally range from \$1,000 to \$3,000.

Online grant applications will be accepted until May 31, 2009, for programs taking place between October 1, 2009, and September 30, 2010. <http://sites.target.com/site/en/company/page.jsp?contentId=WCMP04-031819>

Captain Planet: Grants for Environmental Education

Captain Planet Foundation Education Grants support hands-on environmental projects that encourage innovation and empower children and youth around the world to work individually and collectively to solve environmental problems in their communities. Maximum award: \$2,500. Eligibility: 501(c)3 organizations. Deadline: March 31, 2009. TIME SENSITIVE <http://www.captainplanetfoundation.org>