

CASN News October 2010

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"I said to my children, "I'm going to work and do everything that I can do to see that you get a good education. I don't ever want you to forget that there are millions of God's children who will not and cannot get a good education, and I don't want you feeling that you are better than they are. For you will never be what you ought to be until they are what they ought to be."

-- Martin Luther King, 1968

(thank you to Bob Curtis for sharing this quote)

EDUCATION DATA:

Once first in the world, America now ranks 10th in the percent of young people with a college degree. Only half of the students who start 4-year degrees graduate -- in six years. Fewer than 30% of students who pursue 2-year degrees full-time earn their diplomas after three years. Despite decades of efforts, significant income and racial gaps persist.

41% of students who start college are not ready for credit-bearing courses -- resulting in disappointment, need to take remedial classes, and dropouts. - source: U.S. Department of Education

A SPECIAL TRIBUTE

Eeva Reeder, a truly wonderful math teacher and math consultant died recently. She was only 53. Eeva is someone many of us came to know

through teaching videos available through Edutopia and./or the Buck Institute of Education. She taught math at Mount Lake Terrace High School and also served as a math consultant for Aviation High School in Seattle. She worked with teachers on designing math-infused projects throughout the country and even internationally. Eeva always inspired and made us think differently about what students could do, but then she also helped us think how to scaffold our classrooms for more rigorous learning. In the words of one of her former students, Daniel Luce (MTHS Class of 1996): "I was shocked and saddened to hear of Mrs. Reeder's passing. She taught with an enthusiasm and a passion that was downright infectious, and she made math so much more accessible than any other math teacher I'd had previously. She had a tireless devotion to her craft and dedication to the potential of her students that shone through daily. It is particularly telling how much of an impact she had on her students, given how many of us have come here to pay our respects. I aspire to emulate her in my professional life; if we all were to do so, I'm sure her legacy would be everlasting. She will be sorely missed."

STATES PLAY FAST AND LOOSE WITH TEACHERS' JOBS MONEY

"What Congress giveth, governors taketh away" began a recent CNN Money story. In August, United States lawmakers gave states \$10 billion to save 145,000 teacher jobs. The funds were meant to hire back many teachers who had been laid off, to reduce overcrowded classrooms, and to save programs lost to state and district budget cuts. Instead, according to CNN and others, some governors appear to be using the "teachers' jobs money" to help close their State budget shortages. Some Governors are reducing state aid to school districts to align with the amount they receive from the federal government. Others want to use the funds for school construction projects.

Educators are increasingly worried that little of the additional funds will be used to actually retain teachers. According to Dennis Van Roekel, president of the National Education Association, "They (the Governors) are not doing the right thing for students. We know what the intent was. (Governors) should use it in this fashion and not to balance their budgets."

IN THE NEWS: INCREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

Nearly one million homeless students attended public schools in 2008-09, a 41 percent increase over the previous two years and

another sign of how broadly the economic recession has struck America. The numbers, based on federal data, were released by groups advocating for more federal aid for struggling families. South Dakota saw its number rise from 1,038 in 2006-07 to 1,794 in 2008-09 — a 73 percent increase.

MASSACHUSETTS MAY SCRAP CURRENT STATE TESTS IN FAVOR OF NATIONALLY SCHEDULED EXAMS

Education officials in Massachusetts may scrap 12-year-old state tests in math and English in favor of new tests being developed with a coalition of about 24 states. Officials have touted the academic rigor of the Massachusetts' tests and standards but say a test based on a new system of national standards would be at least as rigorous. Officials said the new tests could be in place by the 2014-15 school year. Critics say the move would represent a setback for the state's schools.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES DECLINE AGAIN

The national high-school graduation rate continues to decline, going from a peak of 77% in 1969 to 68.8% in 2007, according to a report from Education Week and the nonprofit Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. The rate in 2006 was 69.2% -- making 2007 the second consecutive year that fewer students graduated from high school within four years. However, the report also highlights districts that performed better than expected, with five districts beating expectations by at least 18 percentage points.

NATIONAL STANDARDS GAINING WIDE SUPPORT AMONG STATES

Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., Ohio, Hawaii, New York, Colorado, California, and Oregon have joined over two dozen other states that have endorsed national academic standards for math and English instruction in schools. The standards are being promoted as a way to ensure a similar education for all students and prevent states from expending valuable resources developing and implementing their own guidelines. Support was weak for previous efforts to standardize what is taught in U.S. schools, but the current push is being buoyed by the Obama administration's federal Race to the Top grant competition, which considers states' adoption of the standards among its criteria.

The New York Times reports that "swift adoption of the standards, which dictate what students should learn in English and math from

kindergarten through high school, has surprised observers, given a long tradition of state control over curriculum." The federal Race to the Top competition is one explanation; states adopting core standards by August 2 win points toward the \$3.4 billion still to be distributed.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/21/education/21standards.html>

SOME SCHOOLS POPULATED WITH MINORITIES ARE AMONG NATION'S BEST HIGH SCHOOLS (According to U.S. News & World Report)

A closer look at U.S. News & World Report's rankings of America's Best High Schools indicates that the best public high schools in the country not only vary by region, but by the ethnicity of the students that fill their hallways, too. The best schools are not populated by a homogeneous segment of this increasingly diverse nation; instead, they are attended by students hailing from an array of backgrounds.

In fact, 30 of the 100 schools that comprise this year's Gold Medal List have minority populations that exceed 40 percent, with seven schools boasting minority populations higher than 95 percent.

African-American population density is highest in the Southern states and five of the 10 schools on the top 100 list with the highest percentage of African-American students are located there. The John S. Davidson Fine Arts School located in Augusta, Ga., has the third highest ratio of African-American students among the top 100 schools. Its principal, Vicky Addison, cites the school's commitment to teaching the arts—which in turn piques students' interest in other subject areas—with the school's success across its diverse student body. "We have a culture of excellence that permeates our school, which students get caught up in when they come here, regardless of their race," she says. "We believe in challenging our students to do their best, whether in academics or in the fine arts."

The Hispanic-American population, now the largest minority in the country according to Census data, is concentrated in the Southwest and West Coast, so it's no surprise that nine of the top 10 most highly

Hispanic populated schools can be found in Texas and California. At Hidalgo Early College High School in Hidalgo, Texas, No. 97 on the list of Best High Schools, 99.8 percent of the student body is of Hispanic origin. At Hidalgo, 79 percent of students participate in the Advanced Placement program, which is designed to challenge students more than traditional classes and better prepares them for college. Such a high ratio is indicative that Hidalgo students, no matter their background, are primed for success after they receive their diplomas.

Each of the 13 schools with the highest ratio of students with Asian heritage is located in California or New York. At the country's No. 3 ranked school, Whitney High School in Cerritos, Calif., 84.9 percent of the students are of Asian descent. A full 100 percent of students participate in the AP program and students pass 92 percent of their AP tests.

Thirty of the 100 best high schools in the U.S. -- according to U.S. News & World Report -- have minority populations higher than 40%, and seven of the top schools are composed almost entirely of minority students. One Georgia principal, whose school has the third-highest percentage of black students on the list, credits a curriculum rich in the arts for her students' success. "We have a culture of excellence that permeates our school, which students get caught up in when they come here, regardless of their race," she said.

CHICAGO CHARTER SCHOOL SENDS 100% OF GRADUATES TO COLLEGE

Chicago's Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men is sending 100% of its first graduating class to college next fall. Just 4% of incoming freshmen were reading at grade level or above when they entered the school in 2006, and many have been affected by poverty and violence. But the school's culture -- strict discipline combined with an emphasis on high achievement and at least one mentor for every student -- has helped many make significant changes in their lives.

GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA, SCHOOL DISTRICT WINS \$1M BROAD PRIZE FOR URBAN EDUCATION

Gwinnett County School District, located just outside Atlanta, Georgia, has been awarded the prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education for 2010. The annual award, announced today, honors large urban school systems that demonstrate the strongest student achievement and improvement while narrowing performance gaps between different groups based on family income and ethnicity.

The 161,000-student district, led since 1996 by J. Alvin Wilbanks, will receive \$1 million in college-scholarship money for students graduating in 2011. Gwinnett County was also a finalist for the award last year. The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, in Los Angeles, established the program in 2002.

The four other finalists this year are the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district in North Carolina, the Montgomery County, Md., public schools, and the Socorro and Ysleta districts in Texas. Each of those districts will receive \$250,000 in scholarship aid.

"Gwinnett County's stable leadership and singular commitment to ensuring every student has the skills and knowledge to be successful in college and in life makes it a model for other districts around the country," Eli Broad, the founder of the Los Angeles-based philanthropy, said in a press release.

Each year, 100 of the nation's largest school districts that serve significant proportions of low-income and minority students are automatically eligible for the Broad Prize. The Gwinnett County district is the 14th largest in the nation, according to a fact sheet from the philanthropy. About half its students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The enrollment is also racially and ethnically diverse: 33 percent white, 28 percent African-American, 25 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent Asian/Pacific Islander.

Leadership and Teamwork

The Broad Foundation press release highlights four of the reasons Gwinnett County was deemed to stand out. It says the district has:

- Outperformed similar districts in Georgia in reading and mathematics, based on standardized-test scores;
- Narrowed achievement gaps between different ethnic groups;
- Achieved high participation rates on the SAT, ACT, and AP exams; and
- Brought a greater percentage of African-American, Hispanic, and low-income students to the highest achievement levels across elementary, middle, and high school, compared with their counterparts statewide.

A fact sheet from the foundation also identifies some of the factors seen as driving the district's success. For one, it notes that the school system has devised its own curriculum, which is "designed to be aligned with—but more challenging than—state standards" and is also geared to be "relevant to students' lives."

The district's central office serves as a model and guide of instructional effectiveness, the fact sheet says. The foundation praises Mr. Wilbanks, the superintendent and chief executive officer, for providing "skillful leadership" and the school board for working "collaboratively." It also highlights the longevity of the superintendent, who's been in office for a decade and a half, and school board members, all of whom have served several terms. And the fact sheet says that Gwinnett County is "not a district of haves and have-nots."

It elaborates: "School administrators and teachers widely report that students have equal access to programs—including honors and Advanced Placement courses—regardless of whether they live in the more heavily populated communities near Atlanta or the more rural areas in the northern part of the district."

For his part, Mr. Wilbanks said in an interview that central to the district's approach is "the belief that all students can learn, having high expectations, and then making sure that what goes on in the classroom [furthers those expectations]."

He also praised the district for having a "great community, a great board, and a great staff. ... We work together as a team."

Asked to highlight important changes made during his tenure, Mr. Wilbanks pointed to the development of a "rigorous and comprehensive curriculum," along with efforts to make sure that it is not only taught in the classroom but taught effectively and is closely aligned to student assessments.

"If you do that, you can go a long ways to making some gains in student achievement," Mr. Wilbanks said.

The nine members of the final selection jury this year for the Broad Prize included three former U.S. education secretaries, Rod Paige, Margaret Spellings, and Richard W. Riley; as well as former North Carolina Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. and former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala.

The selection jury evaluated student-performance data from the school districts, as well as their policies and practices, drawing on interviews with administrators, teachers, parents, and others, along with information gleaned from site visits conducted by a team of education practitioners.

MORE RIGOROUS CURRICULUM CREDITED WITH IMPROVING MICHIGAN TEST SCORES

Students in Michigan scored better than ever on state tests this year -- an improvement officials say is the result of a tougher high-school curriculum. This year's graduating class was the first to take on harder

graduation requirements, which include four credits of math. Students were more likely to pass exams this year in math, science, reading and writing than any year in the state's history.

STUDENTS TAKE MORE ONLINE CREDIT COURSES TO GRADUATE

More than 1,000 Chicago students in public high schools received diplomas this year with the help of an online credit-recovery program. The program allowed students to make up required credits at their own pace -- rather than retaking the courses at school with the same teacher -- and kept them on track for graduation. An online mentor provided through the district guided students through the program.

FROM CUTS, FAR REACHING CONSEQUENCES

Across the country, mass layoffs of teachers, counselors, and other staff are leading to larger classes and reductions in all but core subjects, writes the Associated Press. Cuts could lead to higher dropout rates and lower college attendance as students receive less guidance and become less engaged in school. In San Jose, California, the library at Silver Creek High is open for an hour a day. Its career center is closed, there is no summer school, and student athletes pay \$200 to participate in sports. This year, impending state budget cuts may force five fewer classroom days and the school will likely lose three of its four guidance counselors and three of its four custodians, as well as its health aide, mental health coordinator, and student activities director. Student government, clubs, pep rallies, homecoming, and the prom all are in doubt. Silver Creek High senior Anthony Chavez, who credits his counselors with helping him win a scholarship to UC Berkeley, said he worries that students won't get the same opportunities with just one counselor for more than 2,400 students. "Through my four years here, my counselors helped me with everything. I'm the first generation in my family to go to college," he said. "I didn't even know what SATs were."

USE OF ACT TEST FOR CURRICULUM/INSTRUCTION ASSESSMENT IS SHOWING RESULTS

States that require students to take the ACT test as part of a school program are seeing improved performance among black and Hispanic students, according to new assessments. The ACT -- which measures proficiency in English, math, reading and scientific reasoning -- is being used in Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, North Dakota and

Wyoming to assess student competence in 11th grade and make changes to instruction or the curriculum when necessary.

OBAMA ADMINISTRATION TARGETS "DISPARATE IMPACT" OF DISCIPLINE

Federal officials are getting the word out that addressing racial disparities in school discipline is a high priority, and they plan to use "disparate-impact analysis" in enforcing school discipline cases — a legal course of action that some civil rights lawyers contend was neglected under the administration of President George W. Bush.

REPORT: U.S. NEEDS TO RECRUIT TEACHERS FROM THE TOP THIRD OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

According to a new report, countries with the best-performing school systems largely recruit teachers from the top third of high school and college graduates, while the United States has difficulty attracting its top students to the profession. Singapore, Finland, and South Korea draw 100 percent of their teachers from the top third of the academic pool, write the authors, Byron Auguste, Paul Kihn, and Matt Miller. But only 23 percent of U.S. teachers come from the top third of college graduates—and in high-poverty schools, that rate drops to 14 percent.

Salary is keeps some top graduates away, say the authors. A starting teacher in New York City makes about \$45,000, while a starting lawyer makes \$160,000. Nationally, starting teacher salaries average \$39,000, and go up to an average maximum of \$67,000. In contrast, starting salaries in Singapore are more competitive, and teachers can receive retention bonuses of \$10,000 to \$36,000 every three to five years, the report says. Teachers also receive merit-based bonuses and increases, ranging from 10 percent to 30 percent of their base salaries. In South Korea, teachers receive salaries that would translate to between \$55,000 and \$155,000 in the United States, it says.

Teaching as a career also lacks academic prestige in the United States, the authors maintain. "More than half of teachers are trained in schools with low admission standards; many accept virtually any high school graduate who applies," they write. Kate Walsh, the president of

the Washington-based National Council on Teacher Quality, agreed with the authors' contention that there is a low academic barrier of entry into teaching. "It's easier to get into ed. school in the U.S. than it is to qualify to play college football," she said, noting that most college sports programs require a minimum grade point average and SAT score, while some teacher-preparation programs do not.

By contrast, in Finland, the process for becoming a teacher is "extremely competitive," and "only about one in 10 applicants is accepted to become a teacher," according to the McKinsey report. Applicants to education schools are drawn from the top 20 percent of high school classes and must pass several exams and interviews. "Teaching is the most admired profession among top students, outpolling law and medicine," it says.

The report notes that teacher retention is a struggle in the United States as well. The yearly attrition rate is 14 percent overall and 20 percent in high-poverty schools. Attrition in Singapore is 3 percent and 1 percent in South Korea.

The McKinsey report lays out some "cost-effective," though "not necessarily inexpensive," ways U.S. schools could attract more top-ranked college graduates.

Some teaching experts stressed that, even apart from increasing salaries, the profession in the United States could be made more attractive if teachers had more opportunities to learn from colleagues and grow professionally. "In Singapore and Finland, teachers have more time to collaborate," said Linda Davin, a senior policy analyst for the National Education Association. "In this country, compared to other industrialized countries," she said, "teachers have much more time on instruction with students," which can cause them to feel isolated.

PRESIDENT ASKS STUDENTS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

In June, President Barack Obama gave the commencement address to the Race to the Top High School Commencement Challenge winner, Kalamazoo Central High School, in Michigan. The president told the

high school graduates not to make excuses and to take responsibility for failures as well as successes. According to the president, the rest of the country could learn a lot from Kalamazoo Central High School.

President Obama applauded Kalamazoo Central High School's local culture: "Together as a community, you've embraced the motto of this school district: 'Every child, every opportunity, every time,' because you believe, like I do, that every child—regardless of what they look like, where they come from, or how much money their parents have—every child who walks through your schoolhouse doors deserves a quality education."

The Commencement Challenge asked high schools to submit an application telling the president how their school is making significant strides on personal responsibility, academic excellence, and college-readiness, and how they are working toward the president's national goal of having the most college graduates by 2020.

"It was the kids' vision of the school—that's what was cool," Kalamazoo Central chemistry teacher Mark Branch said. "I think it accurately reflects what most kids experience in our school. And the thing about education reform is that you have to inspire kids, and the students here are inspired."

In selecting Kalamazoo Central High School, the White House highlighted the district's privately and anonymously funded Kalamazoo Promise program. The district's 11,600 students are guaranteed scholarships worth 65-100 percent of a student's four-year college tuition at any of the state's 15 public universities or 28 community colleges.

The five-year-old program has accounted for \$17 million for 1,500 graduates thus far and will pay \$7.5 million this school year.

TENURE WARS

Whither lifelong tenure for teachers and teacher union collective bargaining? In a New York Times Magazine analysis of the battle over teacher contracts, Steve Brill (who also penned the notorious "Rubber

Room" article for The New Yorker) writes that the convergence of several key forces has changed the game for education reform in the past year, invigorating those who would do away with collective-bargaining job protections for teachers, and alarming those who see teacher unions as a bulwark against capricious administrators. Brill enumerates the factors: the rise of a certain class of reformers, whom he admits can come off as somewhat "snobbish" and "self-righteous"; a new crop of Democratic politicians across the country who seem willing to challenge the teachers' unions; the support of high-powered foundations that have financed research along with pilot reform projects, and wealthy entrepreneurs who have poured seed money into charter schools; and the charter-school movement itself, which has an increasingly large and vocal constituency of parents. In Brill's view, the teachers' unions up to this point have ignored the "rhetorical noise" and stuck to the work of negotiating protectionist contracts with the politicians who run school systems and depend on their political support. A new era seems to have dawned, however -- one in which unions must contend with new conditions.

SENIORITY AND TENURE IN THE NEWS:

From Los Angeles: "As the economic downturn has decimated budgets, however, this largely hidden practice has come into the spotlight. School districts use seniority - "last-hired, first-fired" - to determine layoffs. With record numbers of young teachers getting pink slips (more than 26,000 statewide), it has become clear that this outmoded ritual affects not only individuals, but also quality and stability for students."

FROM THE BLOGS: DEBATING VALUE-ADDED

On the New York Times' Room for Debate blog, eight voices from the education community recently responded to the question: "What are the benefits and pitfalls of using student test scores to measure a teacher's effectiveness?" Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford says value-added data are useful for large-scale research, but are a disincentive to teaching poor kids, since student scores are affected by too many variables beyond teaching. Vern Williams, a highly rated teacher, says objective tests can be misused, especially when classroom dynamics are ignored. Kevin Carey of Education Sector writes that value-added data, combined with peer evaluation and rigorous classroom observations, level the playing field for teachers.

Amy Wilkins of the Education Trust feels value-added assessments give important information to teachers and principals. Diane Ravitch writes that the best teacher evaluations rest on factors that include teacher observations, student work, and peer review. Lance Izumi of the Pacific Research Institute feels that policymakers should ask what they can do for the consumers -- parents and children -- once the data are analyzed. Jesse Rothstein of UC Berkeley says "value-added" assessments are still experimental, and should be a small part of any evaluation. Marcus Winters of the Manhattan Institute writes that imperfect value-added assessment is better than the current system, which doesn't differentiate effectiveness. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/09/06/assessing-a-teachers-value/value-added-assessment-is-too-unreliable-to-be-useful> (EDITOR'S NOTE: REMINDER (and a hint to David): CASN News is currently a yahoo news group and any CASN News participant can post to CASN News. If you wish to weigh in on value added evaluations or another high-school related topic or share a favorite education resource, please do so. You can post simply by sending your email message to CASN_News@yahoogroups.com

GUIDELINES FOR PERFORMANCE-BASED COMPENSATION SYSTEMS

In response to the scaling up of the federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program, which makes available \$437 million in competitive dollars to support performance-based compensation systems, three national groups that represent teachers, district administrators, and school boards have put forward 11 principles to aid those seeking funding, Education Week reports. The guidelines from the National Education Association (NEA), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) stress cooperation among parties. The principles include evaluation systems that use multiple measures, have adequate funding, and use collective bargaining as a vehicle for designing the plans. The joint document also calls on applicants to base plans on "professional base-level salaries." According to Anne Bryant, executive director of the NSBA, this underscores the group's desire that the plans be self-sustaining rather than financed by cutting current salaries. For the NEA, the document is the latest sign of a small but significant shift in its approach to alternative-compensation systems.

The union has historically opposed such systems, especially those that include consideration of student test scores. <http://www.nsba.org>

Improving schools in five 'common-sense' steps

Five large urban school districts have boosted student success and closed achievement gaps through approaches that make such obvious sense, writes The Los Angeles Times, that it would amaze people to know they aren't used everywhere. Looking at the winners of the Broad Prize for Urban Education over the past five years -- the Long Beach and Garden Grove unified school districts in Southern California, the Boston Public Schools, Norfolk Public Schools in Virginia, and the Aldine Independent School District outside Houston -- The Times identified five "common-sense steps" all districts have used to raise achievement despite distinctly different locations, funding, and to some extent, demographics. First, all developed a challenging, clear, and specific curriculum. Second, they set no more than six long-term strategic district-wide goals, and used them to drive practices in every school. Third, each district developed strategies to attract and retain effective teachers, support them, and cultivate a collaborative working environment, such as training teachers how to coach each other. Fourth, by using data to select, pilot, and monitor programs, district staff regularly evaluated whether a given approach or program was improving achievement and eliminated those that weren't working. Finally, leaders in these districts successfully built relationships with parents, community organizations, area businesses, and others with a stake in student success.

Read more: <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-zavadsky-broad-20100707,0,6034052.story>

Getting students to truly 'college- and career-ready'

The tension between high standards and high graduation rates seems obvious, writes Thomas Toch in The Washington Monthly. Raise standards, and fewer will graduate. But is this so? Given current mediocre standards, Toch feels that with more effective and engaging schools and teachers, American students might well meet higher standards and graduate in greater numbers. Moreover, while it no longer guarantees a middle-class life, a high school diploma is an essential passport to entering or remaining in the middle class. Currently, only 75 percent of students who enter high school graduate,

and, of those who do, less than half are ready to take college courses without remediation. Toch posits that if states were to impose the administration's standard for what a high school diploma should represent -- college- and career-ready -- then "the dropout rate would soar to politically untenable heights." This prospect has undermined earlier efforts to raise standards. What holds the most promise, Toch suggests, are the early-warning systems in place in a number of districts across the country that identify struggling students and assign them tutors and mentors, and closely monitor attendances and grades. If these are combined with a culture of high expectations in previously lagging high schools, where teachers and students believe in the importance of high standards and share a commitment to reaching them, much can be accomplished, as evidenced by the gains in graduation rates in New York City, Toch says.

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2010/1007.toch2.html>

Report: Putting pathways in place

A new report from Jobs for the Future details how the Hidalgo Independent School District -- in one of the most economically depressed metropolitan areas in Texas and with low numbers of college-educated adults -- is preparing all of its students to earn college credits while in high school. Hidalgo ISD is 99.5 percent Hispanic, 90 percent economically disadvantaged, and 53 percent limited-English-proficient. In 2005, the district promised that all of its students, not just a select group, would earn college credits before graduating from high school. Since then, it has transformed its elementary schools, middle schools, and high school by driving college expectations, implementing rigorous course sequencing, and integrating student support systems into all of its schools. It has also stepped up parental engagement, built strong relationships with partnering institutions -- the University of Texas-Pan American, the University of Texas System, the Communities Foundation of Texas/Texas High School Project, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation -- and encouraged faculty to become adjuncts in participating colleges and universities. This past June, more than 95 percent of the Class of 2010 graduated with college credits. Two-thirds of the graduating seniors had earned at least a full semester of credit for a college degree.

See the report: <http://www.jff.org/publications/education/college-success-all-how-hidalgo-independ/1144>

NEW INITIATIVE:

Complete College America's Alliance of States aims to mobilize state leadership to remove obstacles to college completion and redesign academic delivery to accelerate student success. To join the Alliance, states pledged to establish state and campus-level completion goals, adopt common metrics to measure and publicly report progress, and implement college completion plans and strategies to significantly increase the number of graduates with degrees and certificates of value.

Web Resources for Teachers and Students

Math Problem: "On Top of the World"- Two Different Ways to Solve

If you were standing on the top of Mount Everest, how far would you be able to see to the horizon? In this lesson, students will consider two different strategies for finding an answer to this question. The first strategy is algebraic—students use data about the distance to the horizon from various heights to generate a rule. The second strategy is geometric—students use the radius of the Earth and right triangle relationships to construct a formula. Then, students compare the two different rules based on ease of use as well as accuracy. An applet, activity sheet, questions for students, lesson extensions, and prompts for teacher reflection are included. <http://illuminations.org/Lesson.Detail.aspx?id=L711>

Using Comics to Look at Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Gender

In this lesson, students explore representations of race, class, ethnicity, and gender by analyzing comics gathered during a two-week period and then re-envisioning them with a "comic character makeover." This activity leads to greater awareness of stereotypes in the media and urges students to form more realistic visions of these images as they perform their makeovers. Working cooperatively, students carefully examine the images, messages, and themes presented in a comic strip. Students apply a formal strategy for analyzing, critiquing, and rethinking print media that combines visual and text elements (in particular cartoons and comics).

<http://www.readwritethink.org/resources/lesson-plans>

SOME FUNDING AND AWARD OPPORTUNITIES

K-12

Students Invited to Tackle Environmental Issues for the Third Annual Siemens We Can Change the World Challenge

The Siemens Foundation, Discovery Education, and the National Science Teachers Association have announced the launch of the third annual Siemens We Can Change the World Challenge, a program designed to educate, empower, and engage students and teachers across the United States to become "Agents of Change" in identifying and solving environmental problems.

Now expanded to include high school students, the third year of the challenge encourages all students, from kindergarten through grade 12, to team up with their classmates to create replicable solutions to environmental issues in their schools (grades K to five), community (grades six to eight), and world (grades nine to twelve).

Teams will be judged on both their ability to create a positive, measurable solution to a local sustainability issue or challenge using scientific methodology and their ability to explain how the solution can be replicated by other communities. Student and teacher/mentor prizes, which vary according to grade level, include savings bonds and school grants.

Teachers, students, and mentors can visit the program's Web site for complete application information and resources, and to register for the challenge. <http://siemens.discoveryeducation.com/>