



Editor's Note
Feature

What's New ?

- From the U.S.
- Department of Education
- From the Office of
- Innovation and Improvement
- From the Institute of
- Education Sciences
- 21st Century Skills
- Early Childhood Education
- Standards and Assessments
- School Improvement
- Teacher Quality and Development
- Technology in Education

Innovations in the News

- Standards and Assessments
- Teachers and Leaders
- Interventions in Low-
- Performing Schools
- College Readiness
- and Completion
- Technology in Education

Purpose

Contributors

Disclaimer

Editor's Note

This is the final edition of *The Education Innovator*, but the commitment of the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) to support and encourage educational innovation is unwavering as we transform this e-newsletter format into the contents of a new and improved [OII website](#). You will find feature articles, innovations from the field, developments and lessons learned from communities of practice, and a variety of other pertinent information about a range of cradle-to-career topics. The new OII website will be a source for timely, relevant information on innovation, with an emphasis on strategies, approaches, or products that significantly improve outcomes and can be taken to scale. Be sure to visit the new website and subscribe to RSS feeds to automatically receive the latest from OII.

Feature

Looking Back and Ahead: The View from OII's Assistant Deputy Secretary

Jim Shelton became assistant deputy secretary of the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) in March 2009. This past calendar year, a number of new programs and initiatives were launched and many of OII's existing programs were refined to align with the Department of Education's commitment to being an "engine of innovation" for the U.S. public education system. In this interview, Jim Shelton discusses the highlights of this past year and provides his thoughts on several important issues facing education innovation in the weeks and months ahead.

Innovator: 2010 was a transformative year for OII. What, from your perspective, were the highlights of the year and the implications for the field?

Shelton: There were a number of highlights in 2010 that have the potential to be of considerable influence to the field.

Unleashed local innovation – Two new programs unleashed unprecedented amounts of local energy and innovation. First, the [Investing in Innovation](#)

[Fund](#), more widely known as i3, received 1,698 applications from local education agencies (LEAs) and nonprofits proposing ideas and programs that could dramatically change outcomes for our country's children. i3 provided just under \$650 million in support of the highest-rated 49 applicants that represent 24 states and are pursuing innovations in areas ranging from STEM to the arts, and are focused on a range of high-need students including those in rural communities, English-language learners, students with disabilities, and foster children.

Second, more than 300 communities came together to submit innovative, cradle-through-college-and-career integrated service models to the [Promise Neighborhoods Program](#), launching hundreds of those communities into unprecedented planning processes – some with, but most without, federal funding. Meanwhile, existing programs, including [Full-Service Community Schools](#), [Magnet Schools](#), [Ready to Learn Television](#), and others attracted record applications, including many cutting-edge approaches to persistent challenges.

Learning powered by technology – OII and the [Office of Educational Technology](#) produced the [National Education Technology Plan](#) to inform the Department’s and the country’s efforts to improve cradle-through-career learning by leveraging technology [see the [Dec. 7th Innovator](#)]. The plan’s five sections on Learning, Assessment, Teaching, Infrastructure, and Productivity provide a compelling frame for capturing one of the best opportunities our country has to leapfrog over other high-performing and rapidly improving countries.

Increased emphasis on data use and evidence – In existing and new programs, we were able to increase the focus on the use of feedback loops and evidence, especially those tied to student growth and achievement. i3, which was specifically designed to identify and fund local innovative practices, introduced a simple but powerful concept: a little money for a little evidence; a lot of money for a lot of evidence. In addition, winning [Teacher Quality Partnership Grants](#) committed to using data on student progress to inform improvement of their proposed professional development programs.

Increased openness – Whether making unprecedented amounts of data available by developing [Data.Ed.Gov](#), which provides significantly greater transparency into applicants and the application process, or prioritizing open educational resources and requiring data sharing in competitions, we *have changed the way we do business*, increasing access and maximizing accountability and return on investment for the public.

Innovator: The private sector is now playing a heightened and collaborative role in leveraging funds to support innovative programs and initiatives. What do you think helped to contribute to this increased degree of private-sector participation?

Shelton: Over the last few decades, the private sector has dedicated significant resources in response to a call to modernize and improve U.S. public education. The business and private sectors have long recognized that our education system does not produce enough graduates who are work-ready and who can fill many of the highest-growth jobs. In contrast to their experiences with other countries’ appetite for expertise, support, and partnership, the business and private sectors have struggled to have meaningful engagement with and impact on the U.S. education system. Along with the Obama Administration’s and Congress’ unprecedented investment in improving the education system, the bold leadership of President Obama and Secretary Duncan, and ambitious efforts of many states and districts, the private sector is seizing the opportunity to help lead change and leverage its investments.

“The growing, widespread acknowledgement that our education system is truly in crisis is bringing together the will and resources of the government with the will and resources of private philanthropies.”

It also seems that the clear crisis it always takes to spur action is finally coming into focus. Arne says it all the time, “the urgency for reform has never been greater. The growing, widespread acknowledgement that our education system is truly in crisis is bringing together the will and resources of the government with the will and resources of private philanthropies in the form of complementary decisions and actions. In fact, following our first [i3 Project Directors’ Meeting](#) this past month, the Aspen Institute, in collaboration with the Department, convened the [Education Innovation Forum](#) to capitalize on the tremendous momentum created by the response to the i3 Fund. It brought together national education leaders, entrepreneurs, and problem solvers with those from private funding sources looking to support implementable solutions to our most pressing challenges in education.

Innovator: Going forward, how will OII support districts, states, and other key education stakeholders such as community-based organizations in 2011?

Shelton: OII will continue to administer a number of grant programs and provide technical assistance to its grantees. We will also continue to elevate innovations from the field, strive to share best practices and

useful resources, encourage partnerships and collaboration, and connect the work of our grantees with the Department's overall innovation agenda.

Innovator: In education, the innovation agenda promotes taking effective practices, approaches, and strategies to scale. What are some of the key challenges for achieving scale and can ED help overcome them?

Shelton: The challenges can be simplified to three things: knowledge-sharing, acceptance, and investment. (1) Innovation is happening everywhere, but if these ideas, practices, and approaches aren't being shared in a way that supports adaptation and implementation, scale cannot be achieved. The truth is that the field just doesn't have a system to capture and disseminate best practices in an efficient and effective manner. (2) Even if we did, innovations aren't always easily accepted and adopted; many get caught up in slow bureaucracies or are rejected outright without being given a chance. (3) Finally, many innovations are unable to secure the funds necessary for implementation, refinement, and growth. Add to these insufficient focus on designing solutions that are easy for teachers to use and fit into the constraints of their environments, and you have a perfect storm.

ED can play a major role in helping to overcome these and other challenges by pursuing a three-pronged [innovation agenda](#) that seeks to:

- deliver and scale effective solutions that address high priority needs;
- build the Department's capacity to use its programs and policies to accelerate innovation; and
- support the development of the infrastructure and context for continuing innovation in the public and private sectors.

Innovator: What are the prospects for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) in 2011, and what could it mean for innovation?

Shelton: My hope and expectation is that reauthorization will be a priority for Congress as it is for the Secretary and the President, and that the new ESEA will greatly support innovation in the states — not only the development and implementation of new approaches and practices, but supporting the structures and systems that enable the development and dissemination of those things found most effective.

Innovator: Secretary Duncan has challenged everyone to acknowledge and embrace “the new normal,” essentially “doing more with less.” What are the greatest obstacles for districts and states in transitioning to a framework of better, faster, cheaper?

Shelton: First and foremost, strong leadership is the most critical element. Doing more with less requires leaders to both understand what is important and what works and be willing to act on it. The recent McKinsey report on how the world's best education systems keep getting better affirms the critical need for leadership [see “What's New?” section below]. This highlights two additional challenges: (1) Most budgeting and procurement processes are not based on understanding and doing more of what works; and (2) state and district agencies often lack the knowledge or skills to operate that way.

Innovator: What can the federal government uniquely do to help the U.S. education enterprise address these obstacles and succeed in this challenging era?

“The federal government [can] create the context and the infrastructure for great people to do great work.”

Shelton: One of the things we can do as the federal government is to create the context and the infrastructure for great people to do great work. The moon shot, the invention of the Internet, and the mapping of the human genome were each driven by a federal commitment to American leadership in those areas. Not one of these game-changing accomplishments would have happened, especially in the same timeframe, without federal involvement. We can provide the same leadership in education. This means not

only finding and funding some of the best work in the country, but also encouraging investments in public and private research and development, disseminating important findings and effective practices, and convening “thinkers and doers” to help frame the agenda and move the work forward.

Like cities and states, the federal government is also grappling with how we, as an agency and as a country, “do more with less.” Improving Cost Effectiveness 101 begins with eliminating waste. By identifying and elevating effective practices, we can help students, teachers, schools, districts, and states invest in what works and, perhaps more importantly, stop doing what doesn’t work. We can enable and provide incentives for new innovations that increase the productivity and outright effectiveness of both students and teachers. The [Open Innovation Portal](#), [Data.Ed.Gov](#), and the new [OII website](#) are three platforms that can and should serve as resources to the public in support of this effort.

“By identifying and elevating effective practices, we can help students, teachers, schools, districts, and states invest in what works and ... stop doing what doesn’t work.”

Innovator: With regard to states and districts, what steps can they take to build their capacities to identify and develop new strategies for doing more with less? And, equally as important, how can they achieve high expectations for all students being college and career ready without taking drastic and short-sighted measures such as eliminating teachers, foregoing a well-rounded education, or reducing opportunities for school choice?

Shelton: As [Arne says](#), “The first step is to see this challenge as an opportunity.” Although tough decisions will have to be made, states and districts and individual schools have many opportunities to become more creatively efficient and improve their outcomes. Early college high schools and competency-based progression give students the opportunity to engage in rigorous work, accelerate their progress into postsecondary studies, and save both students and systems time and money. The thoughtful use of technology has been shown to increase achievement, engagement, and completion while saving time and money. The use of digital resources in place of books can allow for more timely and relevant resources at lower costs. Strategic staffing, scheduling, and resource allocation also have been shown to increase achievement, often while lowering costs. The integration of social services and family and community supports into schools has been shown to increase achievement and completion while better leveraging the resources that are already being spent. The list of opportunities goes on and on.

States and districts that are struggling with adapting can reach out to each other and to outside experts to support their efforts to change and to build their capacity to become systemically engaged in continuous improvement focused on doing more with less. The Department and numerous NGOs are working to provide expertise, tools, and resources to support these efforts; but *the best resources will be the best ideas of fellow states and districts.*

What’s New ?

From the U.S. Department of Education

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan [renewed his call](#) for seizing opportunities for improved productivity and proficiency in this “new normal” time of economic and fiscal constraints in a conversation with school leaders and Dr. Gerald Tirozzi, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). He urged the listeners of NASSP’s online [radio show and podcast](#) to avoid such “imprudent steps” as reducing the length of school year, eliminating subjects that provide a well-rounded education, or closing down promising reforms. Instead, the Secretary urged them to consider such measures as deferring construction projects and lowering the costs of textbooks and health care. This is not a time “... for folks to throw their hands up,” he said, but rather it is “... a real test of leadership for those within the education community.” (January 2011)

"The urgency for reform has never been greater," Education Secretary Arne Duncan observed in an [op-ed](#) that appeared in The Washington Post at the outset of the New Year. And with key members of both political parties "poised to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," he offered an optimistic assessment of the chances of the reauthorization occurring in 2011. Democrats and Republicans agree, the secretary noted, on many issues related to the current law, known as No Child Left Behind, including its labeling of schools as failures, "even when they are making broad gains." Based on his two years of speaking and working with mayors, governors, and members of Congress, Secretary Duncan sees opportunity for bipartisan action on the needed reauthorization to "do something together for our children that will build America's future, strengthen our economy and reflect well on us all." (January 2011)

Education Secretary Arne Duncan [announced](#) 13 new National Board members for the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), a unit within the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education. These new board members, who possess expertise in education, business, and law, will advise the secretary and the assistant secretary for postsecondary education on priorities for improvement and suggest recommendations for implementing programs with demonstrated success. In addition, they will give advice about the operation of FIPSE, including guidelines for grant competitions. (December 2010)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

As the 21 planning grantees of the [Promise Neighborhoods](#) initiative get underway, help for them is being provided by not only the Office of Innovation and Improvement and other Department of Education programs, but also from the [Promise Neighborhoods Institute](#) at PolicyLink, an independent, nonprofit resource offering tools, information, and strategies to communities interested in creating their own Promise Neighborhood – whether they received a federal grant or not. The Institute, which serves as a comprehensive hub for high-quality technical assistance providers and consultants, including [PolicyLink](#), the [Harlem Children's Zone](#), the [Center for the Study of Social Policy](#), and [Bridgespan](#), offers an interactive map of Promise Neighborhood allies and a discussion forum for federal grantees and non-grantees alike. Other organizations facilitating the sharing of information among communities include the United Neighborhood Council's [Building Neighborhoods blog](#). (January 2011)

From the Institute of Education Sciences

During the holiday season, the National Center for Education Statistics issued reports on [bachelor's degree completion](#) after eight years and the [price of college](#) and updated both its [rural education](#) and [urban education](#) data websites. (December 2010)

21st Century Skills

Twenty schools across the United States are charged with expanding their programs to nurture children's creativity and prepare them to thrive in the 21st century. Funded by Crayola and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the "[Champion Creatively Alive Children](#)" grants provide schools with the opportunity to explore new ways of fostering children's critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills. The goal is to share outcomes via NAESP's website to help other educators develop promising practices of integrating the arts into their schools' curriculum. (December 2010)

[The Creativity World Forum](#) that drew more than 2,500 persons from 38 states and 18 countries to Oklahoma City last November continues to provide stimulating information by way of [videos](#) of conversations with such speakers as Daniel Pink, Sir Ken Robinson, and David Pogue, who share their insights on the importance of creativity and innovation in driving both our individual and societal growth. The dialogue from this conference also continues and widens via the ongoing [state-of-creativity blog](#). (January 2011)

Early Childhood Education

The [Foundation for Child Development](#) (FCD) has released “[Lessons for PreK-3rd from Montgomery County Public Schools](#)” (MCPS), the latest in its series of case studies that provide site-specific learning about the implementation of PreK-3rd approaches in the United States. The look inside the Montgomery County school system offers a firsthand account of ground-breaking policy development and practice, and documents the efforts of MCPS to create a well-aligned and high-quality primary education by connecting early learning to K-12 education. (December 2010)

The FCD also released “[Working Together to Build a Birth-to-College Approach to Public Education](#).” Together with a [video](#) produced by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute and the Ounce of Prevention Fund, the report illustrates that making connections between early learning and K-12 education requires skilled facilitation that fosters trust and common language about children's education. (December 2010)

Standards and Assessments

States that have adopted the Common Core Standards are making plans for changing policies and programs, such as developing or adopting new assessments, modifying curriculum materials, and offering professional development for teachers, according to a [survey](#) of state officials by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) this past fall. “States are making progress and see strong support for common core standards,” according to CEP’s president and CEO, Jack Jennings, “but this is going to take a long time and a sustained effort to see through.” Twenty-three of the 31 states that plan to require school districts to implement the standards do not expect to fully institute the requirements until 2013 or later. (January 2011)

Indiana is the first state to fully align its teacher standards with Common Core State Standards, based on action jointly taken by the state’s Professional Standards Action Advisory Board and the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE). The [Indiana educator standards](#) are custom-designed for Indiana and articulate IDOE’s expectations regarding the content and pedagogical knowledge and skills that are important for Indiana educators, including building and district-level leaders. “With the launch of our new teacher standards, Indiana is blazing the trail nationally for preparation and licensure of new teachers and school leaders,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Tony Bennett. (December 2010)

School Improvement

In what is described as the most comprehensive analysis of global school system reform ever assembled, a [new report](#) from McKinsey & Company identifies the reform elements that are replicable for school systems everywhere as well as what it really takes to achieve significant, sustained, and widespread gains in student outcomes. Twenty systems from around the world were analyzed, all with improving but differing levels of performance, examining how each has achieved significant, sustained, and widespread gains in student outcomes, as measured by international and national assessments. “How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better” is a follow up to a 2007 McKinsey report concerning how the world’s best performing school systems came out on top. (January 2011)

For the third consecutive year, Maryland ranked number one in the annual Education Week evaluation of schools’ performance, policymaking, and financing, [Quality Counts 2011](#). Also in the top five were New York, Massachusetts, Virginia, and Florida, with letter grades ranging from Maryland’s B+ to Virginia and Florida’s B-. The country as a whole received a C. The latest report provides insight as to the influence of the recent economic downturn on changes in education policies – relatively few, according to the report – noting that policy adjustments in 10 states that relaxed regulations on the length of the school day, week,

or year “generally represented quick fixes at the margins,” rather than fundamental structural changes, and they were “often paired with budget cuts and other fiscal responses.” (January 2011)

A [study](#) of more than 2,000 low-performing charter and traditional district schools across 10 states revealed that both categories of public schools are stubbornly resistant to significant change. Researchers for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute tracked the schools’ performance from the 2003-04 through 2008-09 school years to determine how many were turned around, shut down, or remained low-performing. Nearly three quarters of the original low-performing charters remained in operation—and remained low-performing—five years later, as did 80 percent of district schools. (December 2010)

The [State Policy Database](#) of the Education Commission of the States now has data available for 2010. Summaries of policies are collected from state websites, state newsletters, StateNet, LexisNexis, and Westlaw. Descriptions often reflect the content of bills as introduced and may not reflect changes made during the legislative process.(December 2010)

A report from The Center for Teaching Quality offers a set of recommendations for school policy and practice and offers a guide to developing systems of support for meaningful and sustainable school reform. “[Transforming School Conditions: Building Bridges to the Education System That Students and Teachers Deserve](#)” was developed by the Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) Team, a group of 14 accomplished teachers from urban districts around the country. They merge their own experience in high-needs schools with the best current education research to discuss conditions that are needed for teachers to teach all students effectively. Their recommendations cover such areas as preparing effective teachers, enhancing collaboration between teachers, and building bridges between schools and communities. (December 2010)

Teacher Quality and Development

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) announced the [four finalists](#) for the 2011 National Teacher of the Year. The [National Teacher of the Year Program](#), sponsored by the ING Foundation and Target, is a project of CCSSO in partnership with University of Phoenix and People to People Ambassador Programs. The finalists are: Cheryl Conley, 4th-grade teacher at Osceola Magnet Elementary School in Vero Beach, Fla.; Annice M. Brave, English and journalism teacher at Alton High School in Alton, Ill; Michelle M. Shearer, chemistry teacher at Urbana High School in Ijamsville, Md.; and Paul Andersen, science teacher at Bozeman High School in Bozeman, Mont. “These four individuals exemplify what it means to truly engage students,” said Gene Wilhoit, CCSSO executive director. (December 2010)

More than 8,600 teachers and school counselors achieved [National Board Certification in 2010](#), bringing the total number of accomplished educators certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) to more than 91,000. “At a time when our country is trying to build successful models of whole-school transformation, a key determinant of a student’s outcome is a highly effective teacher. That is why this announcement is so important,” said Joseph A. Aguerrebere, NBTS’s president and chief executive officer. “Like board-certified medical doctors, National Board Certified Teachers have met high standards through intensive study, expert evaluation, self-assessment, and peer review.” (December 2010)

The role of teacher leaders – from how they can contribute to overall school success to policy implications and recommendations for state policymakers on how to explore and/or expand teacher leadership – is the subject of the latest issue of the Education Commission of the State’s “[The Progress of Education Reform](#).” (December 2010)

A monograph from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, “[Supporting Instruction: Investing in Teaching](#),” explains the foundation’s investments in tools to support teachers as they prepare to deal with the

substantial changes coming to schools and classrooms as a result of Race to the Top and other major changes in policy and practice. (December 2010)

Technology in Education

In a [special report](#), “E-Learning 2011: Crafting E-Curriculum that Inspires,” Education Week explores many facets of e-learning, from the coming influence of common core standards on the future of online curricula to the current state of blended learning to ways in which cyber learning can teach needed social skills. (January 2011)

A report from the Foundation for Excellence in Education (FEE), “[Digital Learning Now!](#),” lists 10 elements of high-quality digital learning. The report is the first product of FEE’s new Digital Learning Council, which includes leaders in education, government, philanthropy, business, technology, and think tanks. The council was convened last year to define the actions that lawmakers and policymakers should take to spark a revolution in digital learning. (December 2010)

The [National Writing Project](#) has launched a [new website](#) that is a companion to its “Digital Is” project, a nationwide initiative to create and disseminate new classroom practices that use digital media to teach young people how to write. In addition to information and informed perspectives on a range of topics and issues affecting student writing in a digital age, the site features images of award-winning student art from the [Alliance for Young Authors and Writers](#), the nation’s premiere organization for recognition and support for creative teens that administers the Scholastic Awards in Art and Writing. (December 2010)

[EdTech Leaders Online](#) (ETLO), an instructional professional development project of the [Education Development Center Inc.](#) (EDC), won the [award](#) for Outstanding/Innovative Online Learning Practice for a Non-Profit or For-Profit Individual or Team from the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL). ETLO’s work with the e-Learning for Educators program, a 10-state consortium funded by the U.S. Department of Education through Alabama Public Television, was praised by iNACOL for having “broken the mold” for instructional and professional development planning and delivery. E-Learning for Educators helps states and public television stations work together to provide effective online professional development for K–12 teachers. (November 2010)

Innovations in the News

Standards and Assessments

The national movement towards common-core standards has just begun, but the implementation phase could be a long-awaited opportunity for online learning programs to play a significant role and allow them to “... start sharing, collaborating, and really refining what we’re doing,” according to Susan D. Patrick, president and CEO of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning. Online courses have typically been developed separately for each state; the common core standards offer the opportunity for states to work together. The virtual-learning community is also well-positioned to play an instrumental role in developing new assessments based on the common-core standards, according to Linda Pittenger of the Council of Chief State School Officers, since “assessment is often embedded into online curricula,” she noted. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Jan. 12) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)

High school students are expected to be taking more, not less, tests in the future. That is one of several key findings of the latest survey of high school exit exams conducted by the Center on Education Policy (CEP). The likely increase in testing could be a positive development, according to CEP’s president, Jack Jennings, “but only if it’s done right,” he noted. The CEP study, its ninth annual report concerning high school testing, indicated an increase in the number of states using an exit exam for seniors to qualify for graduation. The number of states with an exit-exam requirement increased from 26 to 28 states in the past year. The trend of more assessments can be positive, Jennings noted with an accompanying caution – as long as lean budget times don’t result in poorly designed, aligned, or implemented assessments. [More—[Education Week](#) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)] (Dec. 21)

Teachers and Leaders

At Arizona State University (ASU), elementary-education majors will soon experience a year of student-teaching duties in order to earn their bachelor degrees. The effort is part of iTeachAZ, a pilot program that is a response to a research-based need to do a better job of preparing new teachers. The longstanding practice of prospective teachers having only one semester of student teaching is inadequate – they experience either the beginning or the end of a school year, resulting in “second-semester student-teaching candidates hav[ing] a more difficult time with classroom management because they didn’t see all the community building that happens up front,” according to Andi Furlis, an assistant superintendent in the Scottsdale Unified Schools. [More—The [Arizona Republic](#)] (Dec. 27)

Interventions in Low-Performing Schools

The Franklin Learning Center (FLC) in Philadelphia, one of only two 2010 Blue Ribbon Schools in Pennsylvania, regularly sends more than 90 percent of its graduates on to college, a feat all the more impressive given that three-quarters of its students are from economically disadvantaged families. Begun more than 30 years ago in response to the high dropout rate at the nearby Benjamin Franklin High School, the Learning Center was originally modeled on a Catholic high school in Omaha, Neb. In addition to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation visiting FLC recently to find out more about its record of success, this year the school is a model for four Philadelphia schools slated for academic improvement. [More—[The Philadelphia Inquirer](#)] (Dec.28)

Sparked by the widely reported challenge grant from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, the Newark Public Schools undertook a door-to-door canvass last month, asking for suggestions for fixing the city’s schools. In addition to homes, survey campaign volunteers visited welfare offices, high school sporting events, and homeless shelters, netting more than 20,000 completed questionnaires. Newark Mayor Cory Booker was among city leaders who also attended town-hall forums focused on getting ideas for school improvements, which were resulting in some “gems,” according to the mayor. For instance, at one small-group breakout, a Newark principal suggested giving her and other principals more control over their schools’ budgets. A report of the findings of the citywide canvass is expected this month. [More—The [Wall Street Journal](#)] (Dec. 22)

College Readiness and Completion

Pittsburgh has joined cities such as Detroit, Denver, and Kalamazoo in supporting college-going by students who graduate high school and meet scholarship requirements by implementing the Pittsburgh Promise. Behind the donations that provide four-year scholarships worth up to \$40,000 is the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, which gave an initial \$10 million and committed to matching other donations up to \$90 million over nine years. The Promise in Pittsburgh is more than scholarships. Adult volunteers staff a student mentoring program, all ninth-graders get a pep talk from Pittsburgh Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin, and a Promise Readiness Corps is focused on making sure no ninth-graders fall through the cracks. [More—[USA Today](#)] (Jan.7)

Advanced Placement, the venerable set of courses and exams in more than 30 subjects that attracts nearly two million students annually, is about to do a makeover. “The New A.P.,” which rolls out in February with completely revamped versions of A.P. biology and U.S. history, is responsive to several major changes in today’s schools, and especially the need to be “anchored in a curriculum that focuses on what students need to be able to do with their knowledge,” according to Trevor Packer, vice president for Advanced Placement at the College Board. In place of the course outlines containing lists of points likely to appear on the exams, curriculum frameworks will emphasize concepts and stimulate critical thinking by students. Course exams are also being completely revamped, reducing the importance of fact memorization and recall. [More—The [New York Times](#)] (Jan.7)

How educators can best encourage high school students to attend college, particularly those from underrepresented groups, is the subject of “Closing the Gap between High School and College,” a report from the Blackboard Institute. Twenty-four experts in education theory and practice were interviewed for the report, and among the strategies identified were exposing students to college learning experiences through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and other programs that accelerate learning. High school exit exams were considered to be ineffective in motivating students and, according to the report, “often target efforts on students passing the test without enough focus on 21st-century skills or sufficient core content knowledge.” [More—[T.H.E. Journal](#)] (Jan. 7)

Thanks to out-of-the-box thinking by the superintendent of the Hidalgo Independent Schools in Texas, the district became the first “early college district” in the country. In 2007, then Hidalgo superintendent Daniel P. King wasn’t satisfied with support from the state that would allow half of his high school students to participate in the Early College High School Initiative; he sought out other grants to see that all 800 of the students participated. Ninety-eight percent of Hidalgo students, who are 99-percent Hispanic and nearly 90 percent of whom come from economically disadvantaged families, graduate from high school, compared with the statewide average of 81 percent. [More—The [New York Times](#)] (Dec. 23)

Technology in Education

In a pilot project in Roslyn Heights, N.Y., high school students and teachers in humanities classes are starting the New Year equipped with school-issued iPads, and they will use them to turn in assignments, communicate about progress, and create digital portfolios of student work. The effort, with an initial investment of \$56,250 for the iPads, is a cost-saving measure in part by going paperless, but also an acknowledgement of the potential of the iPad to be a “powerful and versatile tool with a multitude of applications, including thousands with educational uses.” Similar pilots are underway in New York City, where 2,000 iPads have been ordered, and in Virginia with the state education agency supporting a \$150,000 initiative to replace A.P. textbooks in history and biology with iPads. [More—The [New York Times](#)] (Jan.5)

The Utah Office of Education is investing \$375,250 in seven projects that may point the way for new uses of technology in the state’s schools, including the use of iPads in kindergarten classrooms, piloting of electronic math textbooks, and giving students immediate feedback and allowing teachers to adjust instruction. “The superintendent is convinced that technology will play a key role in helping to keep Utah ready to compete, especially when you consider technology is a part of students’ lives in their homes, but it isn’t as much in schools,” said Brenda Hales, state associate superintendent. The results of this year’s projects are expected to inform recommendations to the legislature in 2012 for expanding or continuing the technology investments. [More—[The Salt Lake Tribune](#) (Utah)] (Jan. 4)

Students in rural Arkansas are gaining math and science knowledge as they make their daily trek to and from school thanks to a first-of-its-kind technology innovation partnership between the Pope County school district and Vanderbilt University. The district’s school buses have been turned into mobile classrooms, equipped with ceiling-mounted screens that show math and science content. Students are seated based on grade levels to allow for separate lessons being displayed, and the buses’ seats are equipped with headphones. The videos, supplied by PBS, NASA, the Discovery Channel, and the Smithsonian Institution, are rotated daily and account for 10 extra hours of leaning weekly. Bus drivers report not only quieter trips but not a single reprimand for students acting out since the initiative began. [More—[eSchoolNews.com](#)] (Nov. 30)

Purpose

The purpose of the U.S. Department of Education’s online newsletter *The Education Innovator* is to promote innovative practices in education; to offer features on promising programs and practices; to provide information on innovative research, schools, policies, and trends; and to keep readers informed of

key Department priorities and activities. The Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) is responsible for the newsletter's research, writing, and production.

James H. Shelton III, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of Innovation and Improvement, sponsors *The Education Innovator*, which is published up to 10 months annually.

Contributors

Doug Herbert
Editor

Cynthia Cabell
Senior Production Editor

Dramon Turner
Production Editor

Emily Archer
Copy Editor

Adam Honeysett
Elena Rocha
Article Contributions

Disclaimer

The Education Innovator contains links to Web sites and news articles. We believe these links provide relevant information as part of the continuing discussion of education improvement. These links represent just a few examples of the numerous education reference materials currently available to the public. Some of the news items may require both paid and unpaid subscriptions. The opinions expressed in any of these articles or Web pages do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OII or the Department. The inclusion of resources should not be construed or interpreted as an endorsement by the Department of any private organization or business listed herein.

Please send questions, comments, and suggestions to [The Innovator Webmasters](#).