Success

Ohio School Boards Association — Helping Kids Succeed!

Timely tips to improve student achievement   January 2015

Perry Local teacher uses nutcrackers for week of lessons

Perry Local's (Lake) Perry Elementary School teacher **Barry Sneed** spent the first week of December moving 629 nutcrackers from his basement into his classroom, where he teaches 20 second-graders. He then taught a weeklong lesson plan using the nutcrackers — instructing students on the German history of the pieces, having them write a paper about their favorite nutcracker in the room and even doing math with them. Read more at **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU235**.

Partnership expands students' access to online college courses

A new partnership between **Toledo City** Schools and Buckeye CableSystem will provide free laptops and Internet access to enable a group of high school students to take online university courses. The program is both an attempt to bridge the disparity in Internet access between low-income and more privileged neighborhoods, and a way to increase the number of students taking college-level courses. For details, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU236**.

Fewer students retained in grades, data indicate

Grade-retention rates have declined — dropping from about 3% to 1.5% between 2005 and 2010, according to a recent study. Education researchers and others say the reasons for the decline are unclear, but some suggest the rise of intervention programs and federal education initiatives may have played a part in the trend. Go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU237** to read more about the study.

How the Elf on the Shelf can help engage students

New York elementary schoolteacher **Christy Crawford** shares several ways teachers can use the popular technology Elf on the Shelf in their own classrooms. Her suggestions include making flash cards more fun by incorporating the elves, reading elf-themed books with students and boosting kindness with the help of the elf. To read her full article, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU238**.

Ancestry.com opens its historical resources to schools

The for-profit online family history company, **Ancestry.com**, has opened its collection of historical documents to schools for free, drawing on help from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to guide teachers in using them in their classrooms. Teachers in elementary, middle and high schools can apply through an **Ancestry.com** website for access to its material, which under the program will be granted only to computers used in schools. For the full story, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU239**.

Student achievement research brief

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The case, or not, for single-sex education

Single-sex education is on the rise in public schools, as educators seek to improve academic performance among poorer students, reports **Motoko Rich** for *The New York Times*.

The theory that girls learn differently from boys is held in low regard by most social scientists; however, some districts have seen improvement in low-income-student outcomes when trying the approach.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 750 public schools around the country have at least one single-sex class, and 850 schools are entirely single-sex. Critics cite scant evidence of substantial differences in brain development between boys and girls, and warn that dividing children by gender reinforces entrenched stereotypes.

Advocates of single-sex classes cite the struggles of boys, who lag behind girls in national tests of reading comprehension and are more likely to face disciplinary problems and drop out of school. Educators also argue that girls underperform in science compared with boys, and benefit from learning with other girls.

This year, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed complaints against four Florida districts, accusing them of using "overly broad stereotypes" to justify separating girls and boys into different classrooms. The ACLU also filed a complaint in Austin, Texas, against two new single-sex middle schools, and has pending complaints in Idaho and Wisconsin. Lawsuits in Louisiana and West Virginia have resulted in single-sex classes reverting to coeducation.

In response to the ACLU complaints and the growth in single-gender classrooms, the Obama administration issued guidance for school districts. Schools may set up such classes if:
- They can provide evidence that the structure will improve academics or discipline in a way that coeducational measures cannot;
- Students have a coeducational alternative;
- Families have volunteered to place their children in all-boys or all-girls classes.

But the guidance says that "evidence of general biological differences is not sufficient to allow teachers to select different teaching methods or strategies for boys and girls."

Overall, research finds that single-sex education does not show significant academic benefits — or drawbacks. **Janet Hyde**, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin - Madison who analyzed 184 studies covering 1.6 million children around the globe, said the studies showing increased academic performance often involved other factors that could not be disentangled from the effects of the single-gender component.

Click on **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU240 t**o read *The New York Times* article and to link to the mentioned research.

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Public library's digital catalog made available in Olentangy Local schools

Students at **Olentangy Local**'s **(Delaware)** Olentangy Liberty Middle School can go to the OverDrive media station in the building's library and borrow anything from the digital collection of the Delaware County District Library. The touchscreen digital kiosk that bridges students and the public library has been operating since November. Read more about the kiosk at **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU241**.

Delaware City educators say laptops increase student engagement

Administrators at **Delaware City**'s Dempsey Middle School say student engagement has improved since seventh-graders were given Chromebooks for school and personal use. The computers allow teachers to personalize assignments, share documents and set up more effective group projects. For details, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU242.**

View videos of space-themed stories read by astronauts in space

Ever listened to a story being read at 17,000 miles per hour? Just click on **www.storytimefromspace.com** and you can watch videos of astronauts reading stories from the International Space Station. "Story Time from Space" a project sponsored by the Global Space Education Foundation, a nonprofit education foundation that works with NASA. To learn more, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU243**.

How school leaders can determine if technology is being used effectively

To apply technology in the most innovative ways, school leaders should be able to answer six critical questions about student assignments, including whether they build student capacity and broaden their perspectives, says November Learning founder **Alan November**. "If you answer no to all six questions when evaluating the design of assignments and student work, then chances are that technology is not really being applied in the most innovative ways," November writes. To read his six critical questions, Visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU244**.

Using snow to teach science and math

Educators can use students' interest in snow to engage them in lessons on science and math, says Illinois fourth-grade teacher **Lindsey Petlak**. She offers links to resources and describes projects that include graphing and analyzing the possible targets in a fake classroom snowball fight to studying symmetry by creating snowflakes. To read her article, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU245**.

Student achievement research brief

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Reading in third grade: a state-by-state breakdown

A new report from the Education Commission of the States focuses on third-grade reading proficiency, highlighting policies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia (D.C.).

State policymakers are very aware of the importance of reading at grade level by third grade, and in many states have advocated for policies aimed at:
- Identifying reading deficiencies through state or local assessments.
- Interventions for struggling readers in grades K-3.
- Retaining outgoing third-graders who don't meet grade-level expectations. The report documents current specific statutory provisions.

Thirty-five states plus the District of Columbia require a reading assessment in at least one grade pre-K-3, with the primary purpose of identifying reading deficiencies via a mix of state-mandated and locally determined approaches. Thirty-one states plus D.C. require or recommend that school districts offer some type of intervention or remediation for struggling readers in those grades.

Some states dictate specific interventions, while others let districts choose from a suggested list. Fourteen states plus D.C. require retaining third-grade students who do not meet grade-level expectations in reading, and three additional states allow student retention based on a recommendation from a teacher, parent or superintendent.

Rather than relying entirely on interventions for struggling readers, the report also mentions that some states emphasize the need for all elementary school teachers to have the necessary skills to effectively teach reading. Access to highly qualified teachers provides students with the equivalent of a constant reading specialist. This ensures that struggling readers are identified and supported as quickly and effectively as possible, and helps alleviate the need for later interventions.

Fourteen states, including Ohio, use teacher assessments that meet the following key components:
- required as part of initial teacher licensure;
- required of all early childhood and/or elementary teachers rather than for a reading endorsement or reading specialist position;
- explicitly required by state law or policy;
- focused on the science of teaching reading and not a subtest of a general education assessment.

To download the full report, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU246**.

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Copley-Fairlawn students win national STEM engineering design

Copley-Fairlawn City's Copley High School took home first place honors in a national engineering design competition aimed at improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. The winning team of students partnered with Ohio manufacturer Weaver Industries to develop what they named the FOMO Nozzle Machine. The machine increases efficiency by mechanizing a manual assembly process. For more on the team's success, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU247**.

School dietician texts nutrition messages to parents

Avon Lake City School District dietitian **Shannon FitzGerald** began a Fit Kids Text program that sends parents in the community weekly nutrition tips and promotes school meals. The texts, she says, are based on scientific evidence and help create a positive reputation for the school meal program. The opt-in program is easy to sign up for and she sends one to two texts each week. Go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU248** to learn more about the program.

Study: Students need to improve online literacy skills

There is a large online literacy gap among students, according to a study published in the January *Reading Research Quarterly*. Further, there is a large achievement gap in online reading ability among economically disadvantaged districts and their peers in wealthier schools. Researchers define online literacy as using the Internet to read and learn new information — a skill they say is needed to be successful in the 21st century. To read more and download the study, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU249.**

How schools can make the most of their Wi-Fi connections

For schools seeking to provide students and staff the best Wi-Fi service possible, **Craig Mathias**, a principal with mobile advisory firm Farpoint Group, offers four suggestions. Among his recommendations are to optimize capacity, consider the diversity of devices and phase in any upgrades. To read his article, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU250.**

How to help students protect their online information, passwords

Some students may see sharing their online passwords with friends as no big deal, Massachusetts sixth-grade teacher **Kevin Hodgson** writes. In this article, he shares tips for teachers to help students learn why they should keep their passwords secure and how to select quality passwords to protect their online information. Visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU251** for more.

Student achievement research brief

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Closing the achievement gap, one school at a time

Nationwide, white students are more likely to attend high schools that offer advanced courses and are overrepresented in such courses when they are offered, writes **Sophie Quinton** for the *National Journal,* citing data from the U.S. Department of Education.

Quinton writes that unequal access to and participation in advanced high school courses are among the factors that lead to the broader achievement gap, and high schools and school districts around the country are looking for ways to expand access and close that gap. Some of the most promising approaches are listed below.

Evanston Township High School in Evanston, Ill., eliminated the honors track for ninth-grade humanities and created mixed-level classes that allow freshmen to earn honors credit through hard work. The redesign also prepares students for Advanced Placement (AP) courses and encourages enrollment.

Federal Way Public Schools in Washington state now automatically enrolls middle and high school students with high scores into honors, AP, International Baccalaureate (IB) or Cambridge Preparatory Academy courses. Minority enrollment in college preparatory classes jumped 200% in the first year.

Inspired by Federal Way, Washington state passed a law in 2013 encouraging districts to enroll all students meeting state standards into rigorous courses. The law also established incentives that set aside money for teacher training, curriculum development, exam fees and other costs districts incur by adopting a policy like Federal Way's.

At Wakefield High School in Arlington, Va., minority boys whose grades average a C or higher in ninth or 10th grade are invited to join Wakefield's Cohort for Minority Males. Participants get extra academic support, college planning assistance and a chance to bond with each other and staff. To date, 239 cohort members have graduated from Wakefield, and 87% have gone to college.

The University of Iowa introduced a program allowing rural Iowa high school students to take free online AP courses. Last year, 87% of students taking an online course completed it, and nearly all students completing the course pass the AP test.

Howard County, Md., has redesigned its six most diverse elementary schools to try to boost achievement in math and reading. It also examines its math course progression to ensure that small administrative decisions don't inadvertently keep students off an accelerated track.

In addition, eight high schools in California use IB to support nonnative English speakers. The schools are mostly Latino, and at least 30% of IB program graduates qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Across these schools, educators treat bilingualism as an asset for IB.

Click on **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU252** to read the full article and link to other in-depth profiles of each program listed above.

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Jackson Local brings art into English language arts lessons

Jackson Local (Stark) elementary schools are participating in a unique arts program called Connect the Arts. The grant-funded program uses visual arts to make the standard English language arts curriculum more impressionable to kindergarten through fifth grade students. Strausser Elementary School Principal **Susanne Waltman** said the district is working with four artists in residence to bring the program to the classrooms. For more on the program, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU253**.

Website allows users to research and rate educational resources

Learnteria is a new tool that allows you to research, rate and review educational resources. Those seeking Pre-K-12 educational resources can research textbooks, rate athletic equipment, review leadership conferences and much more. Learnteria is designed to make decision making easier by compiling resources in a single location and supplying feedback from fellow educators and the entire community. To check it out, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU254**.

Educator explains what it means to become a teacherpreneur

Robert Ahdoot, a California high school math teacher and founder of Yay Math, describes himself as a "teacherpreneur." His article shares an interview with his mentor and fellow teacherpreneur **Bruce Powell** on what the word means and how the fields of education and business collide. To read more, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU255**.

Using game show formats to engage students

Using a game show and buzzers in reading and math lessons is an easy and effective way to keep students engaged, says North Carolina kindergarten teacher **Brian Smith**. He notes that using simple game show tools such as buzzers can energize students while helping build confidence. Go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU256** to read his article.

Can analytics predict better teachers?

More schools are using data analytics to make hiring decisions, says **Jonah Rockoff**, a Columbia University associate professor of finance and economics who studies teacher-hiring systems. However, Rockoff says more research is needed to determine if the programs are effective. For more details on the relatively new practice of using predictive analytics in hiring, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU257**.

Student achievement research brief

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The toll of kindergarten absence

Armed with research results from a National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) report, California's Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) mounted a push to combat a large kindergarten absence problem in which some students missed 30 days or more per year, reports NPR's **Deepa Fernandes**.

The district charged its educators with getting these children to school every day despite obstacles that weigh heavily on parents in many low-income communities: heavy work demands, illness and poor health care, lack of transportation and extended trips to home countries.

In 2012, almost 10,000 students were chronically absent from LAUSD's kindergarten classes; last year, the number improved slightly. Still, LAUSD educators are encouraged by the improvement because they say it takes a student an average of four days to catch up on what he or she missed at one day of school.

LAUSD kindergarten teacher **Maria Ramirez Waight** said she sees the problem every day, and it affects teachers, students and their peers. "At age 5, kids are assembling the foundation for future learning," she said. "You have to constantly go over the things they are missing to try and catch them up, so you're playing catch up with certain kids all year long."

Waight's school set a goal of reducing individual student absences to seven or fewerlast school year, but less than half of the kids reached that goal. Now the district is trying even more aggressive tactics, such as handing out trophies and making more phone calls to families.

Although LAUSD is the nation's second-largest school district, its kindergarten absence problem highlights an issue that is happening around the country, and research confirms the danger that chronic absence creates for the youngest students. Children missing more than 10% of kindergarten were the lowest-achieving group in the first grade and, among poor children, chronic kindergarten absence predicts the lowest levels of achievement at the end of fifth grade.

NCCP said the problem has largely been overlooked because the U.S. doesn't have a way to ensure schools monitor and report levels of chronic early absence. Elementary schools often track average daily attendance or unexcused absences (truancy), but few monitor the combination of excused and unexcused absence for individual students. High overall schoolwide attendance rates can easily mask significant numbers of chronically absent students.

While a growing interest in state data systems with universal student identifiers creates an opportunity to collect such data systematically, many districts have yet to develop the capacity for tracking absences for individual students. As a result, many school districts do not know the extent to which chronic early absence is a problem in any or all of their schools.

To read the NPR report on the toll of kindergarten absence, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU258**. The full NCCP report is available for download at **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU259.**

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How to work writing into Mother's Day-themed project

Alabama first-grade teacher **Meghan Everette** had her students write essays about why they love their mothers as part of a Mother's Day project. In this article, she describes how she set up the assignment and how it promoted excitement and engagement in writing that can be gifts for moms. For more, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU263**.

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Mahoning County ESC students become entrepreneurs in PBL program

Northeastern Ohio students working with **Mahoning County ESC** were assigned a region of the United States and challenged to plan and design a self-sustaining restaurant in that area. Nearly every subject was involved as students researched the demographics of their region to determine what type of restaurant would make sense for their customer base. They also identified renewable energy sources they could use to cut costs and reduce the carbon footprint of their restaurant. Read about the unique project-based learning (PBL) program at **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU260**.

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What does neuroscience say about gender, brain development?

Peak cognitive development occurs at different ages for girls and boys, University of Pennsylvania neuroscientist Dr. **Frances E. Jensen** said. She suggested neurological evaluations as one tool to help educators personalize learning. "Brains are in such a different state from person to person, they should be taught differently," she said. To read more, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU261**.

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How educators can help shape students' identities

James Dillon, director of the Center for Leadership and Bullying Prevention, describes how students' identities can be shaped by the messages they receive from educators. He details one instance in which a student's identity was completely changed by a new role working in the school store. Go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU262** to read his article.

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Teacher uses gamification to motivate students

Minnesota public school science teacher **Steve Hafeman** turned his classroom structure into an elaborate dice game to motivate his seventh- and eighth-graders to work hard and complete assignments. Students earn dice rolls by completing learning tasks — with extra rolls awarded for standout work — and gain points for their teams by playing the dice game. The team with the most victories at the end of the year wins a pizza party. For more on the learning game he created, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU264**.

Student achievement research brief

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The effects of 'redshirting' students

New research from Duke University indicates that children who are older when they start kindergarten do well academically and socially in the short term, but as teenagers, can be more likely to drop out and commit serious crimes.

The study compares the administrative data for five cohorts of North Carolina public school students born 60 days before and 60 days after the school enrollment cutoff. At the time of the study, children needed to be 5 years old by Oct. 16 to enter kindergarten that year.

Prior studies have established that children who enter school "old for grade" perform better academically than younger classmates. The study confirms this, and also finds old-for-grade students one-third less likely to engage in delinquent behavior while still in school. However, after age 16, and for certain populations, the picture shifts.

Among old-for-grade students, the likelihood of dropping out and being convicted of a serious crime before age 20 is 3.4 times greater for those born to an unwed mother and 2.7 times greater for those whose mothers were high school dropouts. These effects are heterogeneous by gender, race and other indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage. The explanation may lie with the age at which students may legally withdraw from school, which is 16 in North Carolina.

The research also found that old-for-grade students are less likely to be retained in a grade between ages 11 and 15 and are more likely to outperform those born just before them in reading and math in middle school.

In particular, the tendency to "redshirt" students or retain them in grade is stronger for males than females, which mutes the dropout effect for males by shrinking the age gap. Sizable gaps also were found in educational and criminal outcomes based on the cutoff from children who were eligible for reduced/free price lunch.

To improve outcomes, the study recommends that states require completion of a certain grade or a specified number of years in school for withdrawal, rather than legal age.

The full working paper is available for download at **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU265.**

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Mount Vernon City gifted students create walking tour

Third-, fourth- and fifth- grade students from **Mount Vernon City**'s six elementary schools are literally leaving a historic mark on their community. As their final project for the year, they created a Mount Vernon Walking Tour for residents to enjoy for years to come. They researched other walking tours and developed their own rubric to evaluate them before creating the tour, which features video reports linked to tour signs via QR codes. To see the walking tour videocasts, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU266**.

Study: Cellphone ban improves achievement

Banning mobile phones may improve student achievement — especially among low-achieving and at-risk students, according to a recent study. The researchers noted that a cellphone ban led to the equivalent of five extra days of instruction annually. Read more about the study by logging onto **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU267**.

Six ways to harness the entrepreneurial spirit in the classroom

Educators can combine their passion for education and innovation and build their "entrepreneurial muscles in the classroom," suggests **Todd Brekhus**, a former educator and founder of an online literacy program. In his article — part of a series about "teacherpreneurs" — he shares six ways educators can harness the entrepreneurial spirit. For more details, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU268**.

Districtwide International Baccalaureate program is sought by Shaker Heights City

After a certification visit in April, **Shaker Heights City** administrators should know over the summer if the district could become the first in greater Cleveland to implement the International Baccalaureate program districtwide. "You know you're in an International Baccalaureate school when a student prank involves reading the morning announcements in five different languages," said high school science teacher **John Moore**. To read the full article, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU269**.

Fremont City students take field trip that teaches nature of math, science

Fremont City middle school students learned cross-curricular lessons in math and science during a recent field trip to a local nature preserve. Hands-on projects included mapping sections of the preserve and using math to calculate a creek's flow and velocity. For more on the unique learning experience, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU270**.

Student achievement research brief

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Studies: Massive open online classes help increase community college graduation rates

Despite the persistently low completion rate of massive open online classes (MOCCs) at community colleges, students who take at least some classes online are more likely to transfer to a four-year college or earn an associate degree, according to the results of two recent studies **Jill Barshay** wrote about in *The Hechinger Report*. The difference, researchers say, is that the classes students need are more readily available online since community colleges are trimming on-campus classes to save money.

Community college students who take online courses are 25% more likely to complete their two-year associate's degree or some sort of certificate than students who didn't take online classes. Not only are online students more likely to graduate, they're more likely to graduate before students who don't take online classes, according to **Peter Shea**, associate provost of online learning at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Shea presented his research in a working paper at the American Education Research Association conference in Chicago in April.

"It's a bit of a paradox," Shea said. "They're doing worse at the course level, but at the program level — despite lower grades — they're finishing."

In the other study, **Hans Johnson**, a researcher at the Public Policy Institute of California, found that 60% of California community college students passed an online class, while 70% of students passed a face-to-face class. Yet the students who took at least some of their classes online were more likely to transfer to a four-year college or earn their associate's degree.

"The long-term outcomes are better for students who take online classes," Johnson said.

The 60% of students passing an online class are graduating in larger numbers because it's easier to enroll in the online classes they need. By contrast, students taking only traditional classes are having a harder time registering for classes because budget cuts have caused many community colleges to eliminate sections of courses and cut some courses entirely. For a typical community college student, who's juggling a job and a family, it can be hard to find a seat in a required class at a time that works in his or her schedule.

"The longer you're there without reaching completion, the more likely you're not going to end up finishing," Johnson said. "If you're really motivated and intent on getting out in a timely manner, online classes are almost essential."

Typically, 25% to 30% of students who start at a community college complete their degrees or transfer to a four-year school. That means a small subset of motivated students can swing the graduation data in unexpected ways. For example, in a typical high school where graduation rates are above 80%, a writing class that leads to more failures could cause the school's graduation rate to deteriorate, too.

The question for community college leaders is whether they should continue to expand their online courses to help a minority of students get through college as quickly as possible, Barshay writes. It will be tempting to do so, since those students are boosting graduation statistics. But online courses are helping the most prepared students who are most likely to succeed, not the struggling students who need the most help. Johnson said the solution is to make online courses better and more effective. Read the full article by visiting **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU271.**

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Mentor EV teacher shares tips for using technology for small groups

Technology in small group settings can help students learn, according to **Tracey Dunn**, a kindergarten teacher at **Mentor EV**'s Hopkins Elementary School. Dunn said small groups enable her to differentiate instruction and better meet the needs of individual students. Her students rotate among four stations, where devices and apps are incorporated into the activities at each station. "The mix of teacher instruction and high-quality digital content has brought together the best of both worlds," she said. For more on her teaching method, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU272**.

Plain Local students get hands-on experience at Medieval Day

Seventh-grade social studies students at **Plain Local**'s (**Stark**) Oakwood Middle School traveled back to medieval times as part of a unique learning experience. Two teachers coordinated Medieval Day with a local nonprofit group of performers, who reenacted battle scenes and demonstrated other activities related to the era. Nearly 450 students watched the reenactors bring to life what they had learned throughout the year. To read the full article, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU273**.

All Columbus City schools to get Wi-Fi by end of 2015-16

Columbus City has reached a deal to install Wi-Fi access in all of its 109 schools by the end of the next school year — a project totaling $4.6 million. The federal government will provide funding for 85% of the project and $690,000 will come from the district's general fund. Read more at **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU274**.

Can genes predict foreign language learning skills?

Researchers have identified a gene variation associated with language learning. Data show participants in the study who had the gene variation were faster and more accurate at completing a language task, compared with participants without the variation. To read more about this research, log on to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU275**.

Software designers take the lead in integrating games into the classroom

Software designers behind popular games such as Medal of Honor and Minecraft are being tapped to make classroom learning more engaging. Rather than seeking games specifically designed for education markets, some teachers are beginning to look for commercially popular games, such as Madden NFL and Mario Kart, as potential teaching tools. For more on the using games in the classroom, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU276**.

Student achievement research brief

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New reports document resource inequities in public schools

The Leadership Conference Education Fund — along with Education Law Center (ELC) — recently released "Cheating our Future: How Decades of Disinvestment by States Continues to Jeopardize Equal Education Opportunity," a new report detailing the enormous resource disparities in public schools nationwide.

In addition, the Newark, N.J.-based ELC released its fourth national report card on the 50 states' school finance systems, "Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card," showing that most states still don't provide equitable resources for the millions of students attending schools in high-poverty districts. These students are the most vulnerable and need additional resources and supports because their education is at risk.

At a time when low-income students and students of color make up the majority of the nation's public school enrollment, the report finds that inequities in public education are significant and growing starker each year. According to recent data from The Education Trust, the highest poverty districts in the U.S. receive about $1,200 less per student than the lowest poverty districts, and districts serving the largest number of students of color receive about $2,000 less than the districts serving the fewest.

"Cheating our Future" examines the dire implications of the Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, which found that funding formulas for public schools based on local property taxes did not violate the U.S. Constitution, and that education was not a fundamental right under the Constitution. The report makes the case that the ruling has allowed states and localities to perpetuate inequalities of educational opportunities and outcomes.

By profiling schools in Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Colorado and South Carolina, "Cheating our Future" vividly illustrates how a lack of resources can create vastly unequal education opportunities, even for students within the same state. The report also makes recommendations for policymakers and advocates on how to address these disparities.

The report finds many students, especially in rural and urban areas, lack access to the academic courses, before- and after-school programs, extracurricular activities, facilities, well-qualified staff and transportation options enjoyed by peers in better-funded systems.

The report recommends that states, at a minimum, comply with court funding rulings, report data on per-pupil expenditures and fund districts and schools through weighted formulas that send additional funding to areas of concentrated poverty or with a larger share of English learners. It also suggests federal policymakers should require transparent reporting of, and plans to address disparities in, real school and district per-pupil expenditures, as well as student access to other critical educational resources. Finally, the report recommends that the U.S. Department of Education should use its authority under the Civil Rights Act to intervene when schools and districts unfairly deny students access to critical educational resources.

To read more about and download both reports, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU277.**

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Perrysburg EV to expand laptop program

For the second year in a row, **Perrysburg EV** will expand its laptop program to connect more students to technology. At the start of the 2015-2016 school year, fifth-graders will receive Lenovo Chromebooks, and 11th-graders will be issued MacBook Air laptops. Superintendent **Thomas L. Hosler II** said expanding the program will give more students access to technology and help teachers. For more, click on **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU278**.

Ultrafast broadband access gets big push in Ohio

Ohio's OneCommunity has installed 2,500 route miles of fiberoptic Internet connections among 800 institutions, linking them to the Internet and one another. While the initiative has focused on schools, government agencies, museums, libraries and other institutions, some say the next step is to identify private homes that lack the ultrafast Internet connections. To read the full article, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU279**.

Bexley City students study Cold War's history, policies

Some **Bexley City**'s Bexley High School students recently studied the history and policies of the Cold War era during a two-week summer enrichment course. Students engaged in role playing to address issues affecting eastern European countries, played board games to understand the role of communism and discussed major events, including the Cuban missile crisis. For more details, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU280**.

Why students should attend hackathons

All students benefit from "hackathons," according to **Claire Shorall**, a former instructional coach and STEM teacher at Castlemont High School in California. "The exposure and access that hackathons have provided to my students — from introductions to new technologies to networking with engineers of color — has been trajectory changing," she writes. To read more, log on to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU281**.

Teacher gleans insight from grading AP exams

Adam Haynes, a social studies teacher at **Delaware City**'s Rutherford B. Hayes High School, flew to Salt Lake City in June to help grade Advanced Placement (AP) history exams taken by students from all over the country. Students who take AP U.S. government and politics must complete an end-of-course exam that includes multiple choice questions and four free response questions. The multiple choice questions are scored by a computer, but the written responses require a person's judgment. Find out what he learned from the experience by visiting **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU282**.

Student achievement research brief

Each month, *Success* brings you a research brief to discuss with board members and administrators.

Survey finds educators want trained professionals to help serve poor students in schools

A national survey of 700 elementary and secondary teachers indicated that student poverty, lack of parental engagement, over-testing, weak administrators and student apathy are major barriers to learning, reported **Lyndsey Layton** in *The Washington Post*.

Respondents devoted 20% of their school time helping students resolve nonacademic problems. Nine out of 10 teachers reported spending personal money on school supplies, 51% on food for students and 49% on new shoes or clothes for students, while 29% facilitated student medical care. Respondents devoted 20% of their school time helping students resolve nonacademic problems.

"Twenty percent is the equivalent of one day a week or four days a month or, extrapolated out, roughly 2.5 to three years out of a child's 12-year career," said **Dan Fuller**, vice president of legislative relations for Communities In Schools, a national nonprofit group that commissioned the study. "This is time that teachers are addressing the needs of a few students at the expense of an entire classroom. Clearly poverty is an issue that impacts all students."

Educators under 34 or with fewer than five years' experience spent the most time helping students with problems unrelated to classroom instruction.

The survey comes at a time when the percentage of public school children living in poverty is rising, and the findings echo other recent teacher surveys about the impact of poverty on classroom learning. More than one out of every five school-age children in the U.S. were living below the federal poverty line in 2013, according to the federal government. That amounted to 10.9 million children — or 21% of the total — a 6% increase in the childhood poverty rate since 2000.

Grouped by race, half of white teachers identified over-testing as the biggest problem, followed by lack of parental engagement. African-American teachers gave equal weight to lack of parental engagement and over-testing, while Hispanic teachers said their greatest problem is students coming to school distracted by outside problems, followed by over-testing.

A majority of teachers wants school-based social services to help low-income students, and community partnerships and outside professionals to work with students in schools.

To read Layton's article, which contains a link to the full survey results, go to http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU283.

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Fab labs help expose Gahanna-Jefferson City students to latest tech tools

Fabrication laboratories — or fab labs — are helping some **Gahanna-Jefferson City** students learn about and use the latest technology tools. Gahanna Lincoln High School is launching a permanent fab lab, featuring a laser engraver and a 3-D printer. Last year, an Ohio Department of Education grant funded the development of the lab. For details on the lab and its benefits, click on **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU284**.

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Study: Start of school year leads to more headaches

Children ages 5 to 18 visit the emergency room for headaches 31% more often in the fall — a sign that the start of the school year affects students' health — according to a study by Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus. At issue, researchers say, is the effect of stress on students. To read more, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU285**.

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Are young students being assigned too much homework?

First- and second-grade students have about three times the recommended homework load, according to a study from the *American Journal of Family Therapy*. The study also found that kindergarten students have, on average, 25 minutes of homework each night and that "the general consensus is excessive homework not only shows no benefit, but may be detrimental." Visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU286** to read the full study.

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Hamilton City program improves student behavior, lowers suspensions

Hamilton City launched a pilot program in three of its schools during the 2014-15 school year aimed at improving students' behavior and decreasing suspension rates. The Restorative Practices program was so successful that it is being implemented districtwide this school year. To find out more about the start-up initiative, log on to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU287**.

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Brain scans may predict math gains in children

Stanford University researchers say brain scans may predict which students will do well in math. The researchers have been working with a group of kids who started getting brain scans at the age of 8, and who have followed up with tests into their midteens. During the study, scans identified areas in the brain that became more active in students who improved their math skills. The information could lead to the development of more effective interventions to help struggling students. Go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU288** to learn more.

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The connection between class size and student learning

A new report from the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center explores the connection between class size and student learning. The report identifies four key principles to inform policy debates, compares current class sizes in Massachusetts with optimum sizes identified by leading research and provides estimates for what it would cost to bring class sizes down to these levels in targeted districts.

According to the report, class-size reduction efforts across the country have not always been well implemented, but successes and failures have been instructive.

After a review of these efforts, the report makes four policy recommendations:
- Target early grades. Elementary class-size reductions are most effective for students in kindergarten through third grade.
- Target students with the greatest need. All students benefit from smaller classes, but students of color and low-income students particularly benefit from well-designed class-size reductions.
- Employ strong teachers. Reducing class sizes involves hiring additional teachers, and it's critical that they're highly qualified. When California implemented statewide class-size reductions, results fell short in part because of underqualified teachers.
- Combine class-size reduction with other school practices like appropriate teacher training and support, increased learning time and services that address nonacademic barriers that students face outside the classroom.

The study suggests that achievement could be boosted by reducing class sizes to 15 students in kindergarten through third grade, particularly in low-income schools. To make that happen, an additional 1840 teachers would need to be added to targeted Massachusetts districts and schools statewide, at an estimated cost of $161 million.

A good place to begin the class-size reduction process, according to the report, is by targeting smaller classes in schools that serve high proportions of low-income students most in need of additional support. The report also recommends reduction efforts incorporate funding for new teacher training and facilities upgrades to create additional classroom space, where necessary.

To read the full study, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU289.**

Ohio School Boards Association — Helping Kids Succeed!

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ODE shares fact sheets to explain testing, report card changes

The state budget that passed in July directed the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to discontinue state tests in English language arts and mathematics developed for the 2014-2015 school year by PARCC. This school year, ODE is developing new math and English tests with the American Institute for Research (AIR). To explain testing changes and how they affect Ohio School Report Cards, ODE is sharing fact sheets. The fact sheets can be downloaded by visiting http://www.ohioschoolboards.org/se-region, and scrolling down to Downloads.

Look to Twitter to boost teacher professional development

Twitter can help educators grow their professional learning networks for professional development, writes **Denver Fowler**, an assistant professor of educational leadership at the University of Mississippi, and **John Riley**, an instructor at **Hilliard City**'s McVey Innovative Learning Center. They offer tips to help educators get started on Twitter, including how to participate in Twitter chats. For details, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU291**.

Class aims to ease math anxiety for students, parents

A class implemented by the Antigo Unified School District of Wisconsin is bringing parents and their children together to work on math problems so parents can offer more help with homework. "We are really combating math anxiety family-wide," said **Andrea Knapp**, program director. Go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU292** to read the full story.

Teacher shares guide for student-run tech business

A **Pandora-Gilboa Local (Putnam)** computer technology teacher has connected real-world problems to students' learning by having them run an after-school tech business. In a Q&A session, educator **Mark Suter** shares lessons learned as the club offers Web design, video production and training to nonprofits and businesses. To read the story, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU290**.

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Certain type of cyberattack is on the rise in schools

The number of reported distributed denial-of-service cyberattacks is increasing, and a recent study says schools are a primary target. According to the "State of the Internet — Security Report," prepared by Akamai Technologies, the attacks are regularly launched on school systems to expose student records, hold information hostage and cause testing outages. Read more on this security case study at **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU293**.

Student achievement research brief

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The math on hours in school

Adding up hours, American children spend more time in school than all but three countries, writes **Mona Chalabi** for the FiveThirtyEight website.

According to an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report published in 2013, only elementary students in Chile, Israel, and Australia spend longer days in class each year than their U.S. counterparts.

In lower secondary school, defined as starting six years after primary education and lasting three years, about the equivalent of U.S. middle school, the average school year in the U.S. lasts 1,016 hours, or 42 continuous days, longer than in most developed countries.

Combining primary and lower secondary school hours, the U.S. ranks fourth of 34 countries.

OECD's data, however, may obscure important variations in each country's classrooms, according to Chalabi. For example, in the U.S., not all states count what the OECD calls "required schooling" the same way.

A study by the Pew Charitable Trust found that, unlike other states, Texas' school hours per year (1,260) include lunch and recess, making it appear as if Texas students spend more time in school than other U.S. students.

Money might affect hours logged as well. The 2007 schools and staffing survey by the National Center for Education Statistics found that in a typical week, third-graders in U.S. public schools spent 2.8 hours more on core subjects, but 30 minutes less on foreign languages and 30 minutes less at recess than counterparts in private schools.

To read the OECD report, Pew Research Center data and the 2007 schools and staffing survey, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU294.**

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| **Report: Ohio schools adopt blended learning** | About 58% of Ohio schools that participated in a recent study have adopted some form of blended learning. Data show that 71% of high schools have adopted blended learning, while nearly one-third of schools without blended learning programs say they plan to adopt one in the future. To read the full report, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU295**. |

| **Grants help Columbus City teach more preschoolers** | Thanks to new grants from the state and city totaling $1.54 million, **Columbus City** has expanded the number of preschool children it teaches by almost 200, or 25%. The district is providing 16 new, full-day pre-K classrooms of 12 students each at schools spread around the district. Classes, which already have begun, are free to parents, and bring the number of preschoolers served by the district to about 1,000. For more on the preschool expansion, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU296**. |

| **Do students benefit from four-day school weeks?** | Shorter school weeks have a positive effect on students' learning, according to a study conducted by researchers at Montana State University. The study compared results at schools that adopted a four-day week and those that maintained a traditional five-day schedule. The results showed, on average, math scores increased by seven points, meaning that the percentage of fifth-graders scoring either proficient or advanced in mathematics went up from 60% to 67% after the schedule change to a four-day week. For more on the study results, go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU297**. |

| **Student-created Mathopoly game wins national recognition** | Two **Worthington City** Evening Street Elementary School students proved even fractions can be fun by creating Mathopoly, a prize-winning board game that won recognition in a national contest. Fifth-graders **Ruby Culp** and **Bo Brofford** decided to collaborate on Mathopoly, which was featured in the 2015 Gameathon Hall of Fame at the MIND Research Institute's September Gameathon in Chicago. To read more on how they created the game, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU298**. |

| **How school administrators can use Twitter effectively** | Many school administrators struggle with how best to make the most of Twitter. **Kate Schimel**, contributing editor for **educationdive.com**, offers five suggestions for school leaders on using Twitter, including engaging parents with pictures, videos and tweets; seeking out professional networks; and putting social media students' hands. To read the full article, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU299**. |

Student achievement research brief

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An evaluation of teacher evaluations

A new article from *EducationNext* examines the design and performance of new teacher evaluation systems in four districts "at the forefront of the effort to evaluate teachers meaningfully." Authors **Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, Matthew M. Chingos** and **Katharine M. Lindquist** report that ratings assigned to teachers were sufficiently predictive of teachers' future performance to be used by administrators for high-stakes decisions.

Only a fifth of teachers in the study districts were evaluated based on student test scores. The other four-fifths, responsible for classes not covered by standardized tests, were evaluated based on classroom observation, achievement test gains for their entire school, scores from non-standardized tests chosen and administered by each teacher and some form of "team spirit" rating.

Classroom observations comprised between 50% and 75% of overall evaluation scores for teachers in non-tested grades and subjects.

Based on its analysis, the report issued several recommendations:
- Teacher evaluations should include two to three annual classroom observations, with at least one of those observations conducted by a trained observer from outside the teacher's school.
- Classroom observations that make meaningful distinctions among teachers should carry at least as much weight as test score gains in determining a teacher's overall evaluation score when both are available.
- Districts should adjust a teacher's classroom observation scores for the background characteristics of students, a factor that can have a substantial and unfair influence on a teacher's evaluation rating. Considerable technical attention has been given to wringing the bias out of value-added scores that arises because student ability is not evenly distributed across classrooms. Similar attention has not been paid to the impact of student background characteristics on classroom observation scores.

In summary, the authors state that their findings "provide reasons for optimism that new, meaningful evaluation systems can be designed and implemented by individual districts."

Their most important recommendation is that districts adjust classroom observation scores for the degree to which the students assigned to a teacher create challenging conditions for the teacher. The authors state the current observation systems are unfair to teachers who are assigned less-able and -prepared students, yet a prime motive behind the move toward meaningful teacher evaluation is to assure greater equity in students' access to good teachers. In the end, however, the authors claim they have demonstrated that these design errors can be corrected with tools in hand.

To read the rest of the article, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU300.**

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Bay Village City students use Skype to talk with famous author

Bay Village City Bay High School students used Skype to connect with author **Chris Gardner**, whose life story inspired the 2006 film "The Pursuit of Happyness." The class watched the movie as part of teacher **Anita Bauknecht**'s Imagine Your Future lesson that challenged students to pursue their dreams. To read more, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU301**.

"Minecraft" to help engage students in computer programming

Microsoft Corp. and **Code.org** will use "Minecraft" to teach students computer programming. The initiative will give students access to a tutorial and 14 "Minecraft" levels through the Code.org website. The agreement is the second this month for the computer-science educational group that recently added "Star Wars" to its lineup. Go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU302** for more details.

Ohio teachers use crowdfunding to raise money for classrooms

Some Ohio teachers are turning to online crowdfunding sites to raise money for resources they need in the classroom, such as lab supplies and specialized workspaces. "It's an avenue to get at some of those other resources that are outside the box," said **Worthington City** Granby Elementary School Teacher **Todd Korn**, who used crowdfunding to buy special chairs for his students. Go to **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU303** to read the full story.

Granville EV creates an ecological center for food, learning

Tilapia and basil are two items that **Granville EV**'s Granville High School students could soon see on the school menu after catching the fish and plucking the herbs from school property. The school now houses a small tilapia farm, garden and composting system. Student participation in school meals has increased with the introduction of local and fresh food initiatives, the school's chef said. To read about the positive impacts the green initiatives are having on student learning, visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU304**.

Do students really know how to use Google?

Students may not be using Google searches to full potential, according to **Alan November**, senior partner and founder of November Learning. He reveals several expert Google search strategies, such as using country codes when looking for sources from a particular country, isolating a search to sources from universities in a specific country and using Wikipedia to refine research. Visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU305** to access these useful research techniques.

Student achievement research brief

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Creating trauma-informed classrooms

In October, a video showing a school resource officer yank a student from her seat and flip her desk at a Columbia, S.C. high school went viral. The incident at Richland County School District Two's Spring Valley High School gained national attention. According to two Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP) authors, what happened demonstrates the need for trauma-informed classrooms.

In part two of a three-part series written for LAEP by **Erin Browder,** transformation facilitator, and **Lara Kain,** senior director of transform schools, the authors state that research shows positive adult relationships can help mitigate the effects of trauma and build resiliency in young people.

They quote a *Los Angeles Times* article about the incident in which former Los Angeles elementary teacher **Kent Peterson** explains how he would try to "maintain a level of professionalism and be calm and direct" when handling conflict in his classroom. Peterson said, "I'd ask them if they were ready to have a conversation with me. It would be quick and dirty; I wouldn't neglect my entire class for the individual. But I was trying to show them that I cared more about them than the perceived disrespect."

Browder and Kain wrote, "As Peterson exemplified, educators are in an ideal position and have an amazing opportunity to positively impact students through instruction, structured interactions and community building within classrooms and schools. We understand that educators are professionals and it is not our intention to confuse their professional identity with mental health specialists … (however) since educators are on the front lines in interacting with young students, the first step to creating those relationships and resiliency is by providing educators with the knowledge, strategies and support to become trauma-sensitive."

Once the educator can identify the triggers, Browder and Kain say, the second step is to teach educators how to guide or coach the student to self-manage or self-regulate during a "tornado" moment of emotion and provide support along the way. Some of the trauma-informed practices they teach include:
- Always empower/never disempower.
- Provide unconditional positive regard.
- Maintain high expectations.
- Check assumptions at the door; instead observe and question. Sometimes behavior is the only way they know how to communicate.
- Be a relationship coach (explicitly teach how to have healthy relationships).
- Provide opportunities for meaningful participation.

Browder and Kain recommend educators "approach the student with 'How can I help?' versus 'What's wrong with you?' it is more likely for the student to lower his or her defenses and understand that the educator is coming from a place of compassion and not consequence. This 'whole-school' approach to creating a trauma-sensitive school is what fosters a more compassionate, supportive environment for kids and the adults with whom they interact, which helps remedy challenging behavior, lower suspension rates and support success for the whole child."

To read part two of the series "Trauma-Informed Schools," visit **http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/SU306.**