



Success

Timely tips for OSBA student achievement liaisons

January 2008

What issues do you face?

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) Web site offers a variety of resources to help school board members examine the issues facing public education. To read about research on early learning and K-12 issues, visit www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issuesEL.asp.

Get parents involved

The more parents are involved in their children's education, the better children will do in the classroom. Ask your superintendent to make a presentation to the board on what the district is doing to increase parental involvement. The Ohio Department of Education has tips for parents at www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=245.

Post student art online

An inexpensive way to recognize your district's student artists is to post photographs of their work online. You can rotate the display among your buildings and invite several of the artists to attend a school board meeting.

How to be a student achievement liaison

Just what does a student achievement liaison do? If you are a new liaison and would like information on your responsibilities, please visit OSBA's Web site, www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm. Besides dozens of resources, you will find a job description for the position and a video featuring Student Achievement Leadership Team member **William Spahr** explaining the role and responsibilities.

Helping kids climb higher

January is School Board Recognition Month in Ohio. It is a great opportunity to promote the board's role in raising student achievement in your district. This year's theme, "Helping kids climb higher," gives you a vehicle to share the steps your board has taken to help students improve their academic performance. Include your accomplishments and plans for the future. Point to increases in proficiency test scores and other measures of student performance.

Student achievement research brief

Each month, **Success** brings you a research brief to share with fellow board members.

Do single-sex classrooms improve student achievement?

Many educators across the country have kept a close and interested eye on a study conducted at Woodward Avenue Elementary School in DeLand, Fla. In 2006, the U.S. Department of Education released new rules allowing public school districts to offer more single-sex education classes, as long as comparable numbers of co-ed choices remained. These rule changes have pushed the number of public schools offering same-sex classrooms to more than 300 from a mere handful 10 years ago. Although some groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, caution that single-sex classrooms may potentially limit opportunities for both genders, many parents and educators are strong proponents of the concept.

Partnered with Stetson University researchers, Woodward Avenue Elementary participated in a study that attempted to better understand whether boys and girls in single-sex classrooms would master content standards at higher levels than their peers in co-ed classrooms within the same school building, during the same year and while using the same curriculum.

Dr. **Leonard Sax**, executive director of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (NASSPE), monitored the study. Sax is not alone in his belief that boys and girls are inherently different in the ways their brains develop, and that those differences lead to widely varying learning styles and preferences.

Stetson professors and Woodward teachers worked together closely in developing the single-gender classes begun four years ago as a way to improve lagging achievement among boys. Initial results showed a significant difference in the achievement of both boys and girls in co-ed versus single-sex classrooms.

In the first year of the Woodward Elementary study, results from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or FCAT, showed that boys in Woodward's co-ed classes were 37% proficient, compared with 86% proficiency for boys in single-sex classes. For girls, 59% of those in co-ed classes were proficient, as compared with 75% in single-sex classes.

Teachers at Woodward have used these results to better understand the ways children learn best and to develop strategies for children in all classrooms to achieve at greater levels. Four years later, test scores are up schoolwide, although boys in single-gender classes continue to outperform their co-ed peers.

For more about NASSPE and other studies related to single-sex education, visit www.nasspe.org.

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No textbooks, no computer labs?

Empire High School in Tucson, Ariz., did away with its textbooks and computer labs. The money for these items went to help pay for laptops for each of the school's 737 students. To learn more about how Empire's staff developed its own digital curriculum, which met state standards, visit www.techlearning.com/story/showArticle.php?articleID=196604929.

KnowHow2GoOhio

The Ohio College Access Network is helping all Ohio students prepare for college, even those who don't think they can attend. A new Web site (www.knowhow2goohio.org) offers resources and encouragement to those with dreams, but no money or support.

As the world turns and learns

How is your school district affected by the global economy and global education? The February 2008 *Edutopia Magazine* offers an extensive, electronic look at the world of education, from Austria to Uganda. To learn more about the great international bazaar of education, visit www.edutopia.org/global-education-2008.

Share your success with other schools

In February, OSBA begins soliciting nominations for Capital Conference speakers, Student Achievement Fair exhibitors and student performing groups. Ask your superintendent and principals to consider what programs are worthy of a nomination. Nomination forms will be in the February *Journal* and *Briefcase* issues, or at www.osba-ohio.org.

Pay-to-perform on state graduation test

Maryland State Superintendent of Schools Dr. **Nancy S. Grasmick** approved a plan to reward struggling students in Baltimore who show improvement on their state graduation exams. Learn how they can earn up to \$110 at: www.baltimoresun.com/news/education/bal-te.ci.schools23jan23033219,0,3248095.story?coll=bal_tab01_layout.

Education Vital Signs

This issue contains a complimentary copy of *Education Vital Signs* for student achievement liaisons to share with your board.

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The school board's role as policymaker

Policy adoption is one of a school board's primary roles. In the past, school district policymaking has been focused on changes in state and federal laws and regulations, random events and issues, and special interests raised by parents, teachers, students or other district constituent groups. This has led to the creation of complex and extensive policy manuals that sometimes deal more with legal compliance instead of the vision, direction and goals of the local board, or student learning. While policymaking will always be a necessary component of effective school governance, compliance with mandates alone is not sufficient for school boards to govern effectively. Policymaking needs to be better integrated with district planning and priorities. It is crucial that local school boards begin to focus most of their attention on policymaking designed to improve student learning.

The role of policy is especially critical in this era of standards-based education reform and increased accountability for school districts. In order to create a system that will help all students meet rigorous standards, school boards and superintendents need to focus their time and resources on policies targeting student learning. The Iowa Association of School Board's "Lighthouse Study," a study of the school board's role in student achievement, has revealed that school boards in high-achieving school districts clearly and consistently expressed a belief system that all students can learn. This finding highlights the critical role of the school board in impacting student learning. School boards are well advised to articulate their expectations and beliefs about student learning and communicate those beliefs through written board policy.

Central to its responsibility to provide direction for the district, the board should establish a guiding vision for what children should achieve, as well as a set of fundamental principles that describe its beliefs and values. Policymaking will then keep the district focused on the "big picture" and establish a framework for decision-making that drives virtually all district action.

In assessing existing policy, list all policies that are related to the board's philosophy and ask some critical questions:

- Does the policy include a focus on student learning? How?
- Are the district's administrative procedures consistent with board policy?
- Do the district's practices comply with board policy?
- Is your policy current with legal requirements?

For more information, contact OSBA's policy services at (614) 540-4000 or (800) 589-OSBA.

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NCLB altered teaching time In a less-than-surprising study, the Center for Education Policy (CEP) found that since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) became law, schools are spending 186 more minutes teaching English language arts and math each week than before NCLB. You can find “Instructional Time in Elementary Schools” on the CEP Web site at www.cep-dc.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=494&parentID=481.

Kids will love this study Two Canadian professors, **Linda Cameron** and **Lee Bartel** of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, say homework does not improve student achievement in the younger years. A story in *The Toronto Star* reports that there is “scant evidence” of an educational benefit until students reach the seventh grade. The article can be found at www.thestar.com/GTA/Education/article/302001.

Achievement testing time Most of Ohio’s achievement testing occurs in April. A March board meeting is a good time to spotlight what your teachers and administrators are doing to help students excel. Share tips with the community and media on how parents can help their children do their best on the tests.

Communities crucial to school success In a recent issue of *Citizenship Matters*, **Wendy D. Puriefoy**, president of the Public Education Network, wrote “Communities provide the social, financial and political capital that is crucial to school success. ... There is an inextricable link between high-achieving schools and the community actions that support these schools. Without public action, there can be no quality public schools. Without quality public schools, the community is weakened. As is our democracy.” For the complete article, visit www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/77/37/7737.doc.

NSBA Resource Center Curious about an education study or fact? NSBA has useful resources on its Web site, www.nsba.org/MainMenu/ResourceCenter.aspx. In addition to NSBA information, there also are links to several national data sites

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What makes the most impact in a child's education?

There has been much debate on when children are influenced most in their learning patterns. In partnership with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is offering the Early Learning Initiative Program (ELI) throughout Ohio.

The program offers children:

- activities that will increase their understanding of how the world works;
- experiences with different kinds of books to support children's growing interest in reading and writing;
- guidance to support their growing social skills — learning how to take turns, play with others, taking the lead and learning to follow others;
- time to play and be creative through music and art activities.

ELI programs provide families:

- partial-day and full-day schedules;
- full-year programs and/or the traditional nine-month school schedule;
- educational experiences that are developed by skilled teachers;
- assurance of quality because agencies are monitored to ensure they are following Ohio's Early Learning Program Guidelines.

Families may qualify if they meet certain conditions:

- have children who are at least age 3 and not registered for kindergarten;
- meet certain income requirements, for example, a family of four may earn about \$37,000 per year; or
- care for a prekindergarten child (ages 3, 4 or 5) and receive child-only cash assistance through the Ohio Works First program.

Families may apply by contacting the nearest child referral and resource association or calling ODE at (877) OHIO-EDU for the names of nearby agencies. ELI agencies will assist parents in completing the application.

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Coaching produces more effective teachers

Coaching teachers is six times more effective than class-size reduction, according to an article written by Harry & Rosemary Wong, published by the *Teachers.Net Gazette* (<http://teachers.net/wong/MAR08>). The Wongs liken teacher training to a baseball team, with coaches for each position. Coaches (baseball and academic) are charged with using their specialties to bring out the best in their players (teachers).

“Nation at Risk” turns 25

It was 25 years ago this month when the National Commission on Excellence in Education released its “Nation at Risk” report. This report prompted greater involvement by the U.S. government in state and local education. To read the entire landmark report, go to www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html.

Get high-risk students involved in activities

Students who participate in after-school activities tend to do better in school. Research shows that neighborhoods and families influence students’ involvement in school activities. To get students from high-risk families and neighborhoods active in your programs, offer more comprehensive and long-term programs and recruit those high-risk students. To read the research from “Child Trends,” visit www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2008_02_05_Risks.pdf.

Share the joy of learning

Celebrate the fun of learning. Too often we focus on the problems of public education. Everyday, in every classroom, teachers and students enjoy teachable moments. Invite teachers from each building to a board meeting to share their favorite joyful learning experience as a teacher.

Rockin’ and rollin’ in Cleveland

Toddler Rock is a program that helps 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds learn letter recognition, rhyming and alliteration at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland. In one of the most unlikely of learning settings, inner city preschoolers work on their literacy skills. To read the story, visit www.cleveland.com/newsflash/cleveland/index.ssf?/base/entertainment-0/1205078352277620.xml&storylist=cleveland.

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Help students shine during testing: decrease test anxiety

Most of us get nervous or anxious at one time or another. In small amounts, we see these basic emotions as a “good thing.” They help us to avoid true danger and keep us “on our toes.” However, for some students, high levels of test anxiety often keep them from meeting their assessment potential. Research shows that many students with superior knowledge and intellect perform poorly during assessment due to high test anxiety. Testing situations involving formal processes such as timed response periods, unknown proctors and unfamiliar testing rooms can add to students’ distress.

Test anxiety comprises three major areas: affective, behavioral and cognitive. Affective symptoms occur when students show physical signs of discomfort, such as nausea, dizziness, cold hands or increased perspiration. Students experiencing these symptoms naturally find it more difficult to concentrate, focusing on their physical symptoms, rather than on test material. Behavioral test anxiety symptoms include those things that add up to inefficient study practices and poor preparation. Study avoidance, procrastination and disorganization lead to an inability to maximize performance in the testing situation. Cognitive problems associated with test anxiety involve students’ inability to quickly and logically organize accumulated knowledge into “blocks” for demonstration or to decipher information quickly enough to manage exam questions.

Parents, school administrators, counselors and teachers can help students in managing test anxiety.

- Encourage students to create manageable schedules at home and school that allow them to feel in control of time periods leading up to the test. Allow ample time in the schedule for study, rest, meals and physical exercise.
- Assist students with open communication between home and school to ensure that everyone is aware of test dates and content, and is ready to help the student in whatever way possible.
- Eliminate unnecessary distractions in the days before major assessments. Try not to schedule unnecessary appointments, travel or other “unusual” activities.
- Teachers should explain to students, to the extent possible, not only what content will be tested, but the formats that will likely be used (multiple choice or essay, for example) and what the physical environment may feel like.
- Do whatever is possible and allowable to make students comfortable for test-taking. Allow them to wear comfortable clothing, take a break and have a drink or snack handy during longer tests.
- Make study skills and successful test practices an active and enjoyable part of the curriculum. Lessons can include test-taking strategies, relaxation techniques and note-taking.
- In extreme cases, students with test anxiety should be referred to professional counseling and alternative testing methods (i.e., un-timed testing, oral versus written) should be considered.

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Child play is good

Child-initiated play lays a foundation for learning and academic success, according to the Alliance for Childhood. The organization says that through play, children learn to interact with others, develop language skills, recognize and solve problems, and discover their human potential. For more information, visit www.allianceforchildhood.org.

Need to network?

If you would like to collaborate with another district's student achievement liaison, or just need a contact to learn more about the academic successes of a neighboring school, OSBA can help. A searchable database of student achievement liaisons is available on OSBA's Student Achievement Web page. To use the database, visit www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm.

Teaching immigrant children

Canadian education professor **Charles Ungerleider** offered the Toronto (Ontario) School District suggestions for keeping immigrant kids in school. To learn more on how a new teaching approach will engage those new to the English language, read the *Toronto Star* story at www.thestar.com/article/408971.

The overscheduling myth

The February 2008 "Research to Results" brief, from the Child Trends research center, claims that overscheduled children do not suffer academically. Quite the contrary. The researchers say parents and schools instead should focus attention on those who do not participate in organized out-of-school activities at all. To read the research, visit www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2008_02_27_Myth.pdf.

Give 'em a pin

Positive reinforcement is powerful motivation for students. OSBA has two lapel pins that you can give to students to recognize their accomplishments. Many board members carry a handful of pins to hand out at school events. Contact **Linda Cooper** at (614) 540-4000 or (800) 589-OSBA to order the pins. Pins can be purchased in quantities of 50 at \$1.50 each or 100 and more at \$1.25 each.

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Good measures for good schools from NSBA's Center for Public Education

We are used to getting academic results in the form of a score. Whether it's a number or a letter grade, it tells us basically the same thing — how well students have learned certain subject matter or skills at one point in time. However, a score does not typically tell us how far students grew academically; if it reflects relatively normal progress, a huge leap forward or if the student lost ground.

This poses a real question for policymakers because of the challenges to our present definition of achievement for school accountability purposes. These standards are the tracks on which school accountability runs. Students are tested on the material described by state standards and schools are held accountable for whether students meet those standards. But the use of growth models will shift accountability to include measures for how much progress students make, not just whether they meet state standards.

Many educators argue that a status criterion alone is an unfair way to measure school effectiveness, particularly for high-poverty urban and rural schools. The current NCLB environment calling for growth models has largely centered on using them for high-stakes school accountability purposes, but some growth models, especially value-added models, can also be used to evaluate teacher or program effectiveness and as a tool for school improvement. Most researchers agree that these statistical tools present a more complete picture of school performance. The following describe each model.

Status model: A method for measuring how students perform at one point in time. For example, the percent of fourth-graders scoring at proficient or above in 2008.

Growth model: A method for measuring the amount of academic progress each student makes between two points in time.

Value-added model: A method of measuring the degree in which teachers, schools or education programs improve student performance.

Achievement level: Established categories of performance that describe how well students have mastered the knowledge and skills being assessed.

Scale score: A single numeric score that shows the overall performance on a standardized test.

Vertical scale scores: Numeric scores on standardized tests that have been constructed so that the scale used for scoring is the same for two or more grade levels. Hence, a student's scale score gain over multiple years represents the student's level of academic growth over that period of time.

For more information: www.centerforpubliceducation.org.

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Share this *Success*

A single copy of *Success* is sent to student achievement liaisons with the hope that you will duplicate and share it with fellow board members and administrators monthly at a board meeting. Some liaisons distribute copies of *Success* throughout their districts to building principals and central office staff. Back issues can be found on OSBA's student achievement Web page, www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm.

SALT resource kit in mailing

With this *Success* issue, you will find a resource kit examining grants and grant-writing. OSBA's resident expert on grants, **Cheryl Ryan**, education management consultant, offers a look at successful grant-writing. The Web-based program supplements the printed materials in this mailing.

Discipline and achievement

You don't need a study to prove that good students are rarely disciplined, and frequent visitors to the principal's office do not do as well as they could in the classroom. Ask your administrators to discuss their effective discipline policies and how they help improve student achievement.

Paying students pays

Paying students up to \$32 a week is improving academic performance in two Fulton (Ga.) County schools. Forty struggling middle and high school students were selected for a privately funded after-school tutoring program, which rewarded them financially based upon attendance and participation. **Charles Loudermilk**, chairman and chief executive officer of Aaron Rents, donated \$60,000 for the program. To read the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* story, go to www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/stories/2008/05/16/study_0514.html.

Sell your summer school

The June board meeting is a good time to promote your district's summer school. Invite the director of your summer instructional program to make a presentation to the board and community. Taxpayers like to see their schools being used efficiently year-round. If your program is tuition-based, share the financial details.

Student achievement research brief

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Mathematics Coaching Program improves student performance on Ohio Achievement Test

Ohio, like the nation, has huge achievement gaps in children's mathematics scores by race and socioeconomic status. The Mathematics Coaching Program (MCP), the brainchild of professors **Patti Brosnan** and **Diana Erchick** from the Ohio State University School of Teaching and Learning, has enrolled 70 of the lowest achieving K-6 schools in Ohio, hoping to understand how children learn mathematics and resolve a district's academic emergency.

For this school year, MCP widened its scope from 30 schools to 70 urban, urban-fringe and rural schools throughout Ohio. On average, 15 teachers per building participate, so about 1,050 teachers, 15 facilitators, 70 coaches and 26,750 students (averaging 25 per class) will participate in the Mathematics Coaching Program.

MCP has already achieved remarkable success in a short time. As an example, preliminary results show that in the first year, one Appalachian school had 32% of its students at or above proficient before MCP, but 67% at or above proficient as a result of the program.

During the first two years, the average gain of 11 participating major urban schools across grades three through five was 13 percentage points, with seven of the 11 schools leaving academic emergency and achieving adequate yearly progress.

Even more stunning, in one school, students in coached classrooms scored 85% at or above proficient on the math portion of the Ohio Achievement Test, while students in the same school, but in a non-coached classroom, remained at a 44% achievement rate.

Due to the success of the Mathematics Coaching Program, the Ohio Department of Education has funded MCP for the past three years at \$350,000, \$675,000 and \$1.1 million, respectively. The first year was a pilot year, where the Mathematics Coaching Program's professional development and coaching model were tested. With the first year demonstrating promising results, and the second year showing even stronger results, funding continues. As more school districts participate, MCP is poised to become a model to not only improve students' perceptions, but indicates a strong correlation for increased Ohio Achievement Test scores.

For more information, contact Brosnan at brosnan.1@osu.edu or (614) 688-5997.

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Are you smarter than a ... You could stage an academic challenge between the board and a group of fifth-graders, or save public embarrassment (just ask those who attended the Northwest Region Spring Conference in March) by visiting the “Dare to Compare” Web site. Sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics, the site lets you test your knowledge of civics, economics, geography, history, math and science against American fourth-, eighth-, ninth- and 12th-graders. If you are up for the challenge, visit <http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/eyk/index.asp>.

Your summer reading Summer is a great time to catch up on technology issues that face your district. If you want to learn more about technology and how it affects your students, pick up your July copy of the *American School Board Journal*. If you don't have a subscription, visit www.asbj.com.

Finding parent resources One key to student success is parental involvement. The National PTA offers a wealth of resources for parents. Encourage your district parents to visit www.pta.org/pr_category_details_1122916501015.html or create a parents' resource page on your Web site with a link to this page.

Was NCLB a plan to fail? A recent *Time* magazine story supports the theory that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was created to show public education's weaknesses and foster school choice. To read what the former assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education during **George W. Bush's** first term, **Susan Neuman**, now a professor of education at the University of Michigan, reveals in the story, visit www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1812758,00.html.

Hot links for Success If you have trouble typing the exact string of characters in the URLs listed in *Success* each month, go to www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm to download an electronic version that has hot links. Simply clicking on the URLs in the electronic version takes you to the Web page mentioned.

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What is the relationship between smaller class sizes and student achievement?

For many teachers, parents and policymakers, small class sizes have always been a supposed key to raising student achievement. But do test scores really rise when the number of students in a classroom goes down?

The majority of educational research in this area does support that small classes are beneficial, but that research also suggests that the “where” and “when” decisions are key.

A landmark study done over a four-year period in Tennessee, called the Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) Study, looked at nearly 12,000 K-3 students and 1,300 teachers in 42 different Tennessee districts. That study indicated that smaller classes did indeed lead to significantly higher reading and math scores, and that benefits were even greater for students who were placed in small classes early in their educational careers (kindergarten or first grade). The study defined a class as “small” when it had 13-17 students per teacher.

The state of Wisconsin built on the STAR project with one of its own, and its findings indicated that benefits continued to increase for minority students or those attending inner-city schools. Smaller class sizes for these groups of students led to higher achievement, lower drop-out rates, fewer disciplinary actions and greater numbers of students taking college entrance exams.

The benefits for students attending school in smaller classes seems to diminish in later grades, but students who attended smaller classes in kindergarten and first grade who move on to larger classes in later years continue to achieve at higher levels than those who didn't.

Costs to reduce class size can be considerable, and include additional teacher salaries, physical space or both. Even recognizing the benefits, the up-front costs to reduce all classes for young students can be prohibitive. Some districts have managed the additional costs through reallocation of current resources (e.g., “pull-out” specialists or other interventionists), finding that additional full-time teachers in smaller classes lead to fewer students needing intervention.

There seems to be little argument that smaller class sizes can yield achievement benefits, particularly for very young, minority or inner-city students. Argument does occur about how beneficial they are, and whether the benefit meets or outweighs the significant costs for many districts. In times of scarce resources, boards of education must weigh the challenges of class size against other valuable uses for the same dollars.

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What do the reports report? To prepare for the Aug. 19 release of Ohio's local district report cards, take a moment to visit the Center for Public Education's Round-up of National Education Report Cards Web page. This resource can help you understand what each report measures and compares. The URL is www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/c.kjJXJ5MPIwE/b.2551883/k.FD76/Roundup_of_National_Education_Report_Cards.htm.

What's right about our public schools? The Learning First Alliance, a partnership of 18 leading education associations with more than 10 million members, is working to improve student learning in America's public schools. The Alliance has a Web site where it shares examples of success, encourages collaboration at every level, and works toward the continual and long-term improvement of public education based on solid research. Also, you can submit one of your district's success stories. Visit www.publicschoolinsights.org.

Understanding value-added Battelle for Kids and the Ohio Department of Education produced a DVD to explain the new value-added measure and its role in Ohio's accountability system. This DVD will be sent to your district office and each elementary and middle school building. While this DVD is aimed at teachers, it can help school board members understand the new value-added measure.

Reforming Mass. schools? Massachusetts Gov. **Deval Patrick** released parts of his long-term plan for education reform. His Education Action Agenda is designed to raise achievement of all students as measured against global benchmarks and to help prepare all students by 2020 to compete successfully in the global economy. The plan is a result of the Readiness Project, a statewide initiative involving more than 200 Massachusetts educators, business and community leaders. To download the plan, point your Internet browser to www.mass.gov/Agov3/docs/Readiness%20Final%20Report.pdf.

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What research says about preparing English language learners for academic success

Improving academic success among English-language learners (ELLs) is a challenge faced by many schools and districts. The task is complicated by several factors, including the demographics of the ELL population, which has more than doubled since 1990, and the fact that the ELL label masks a great deal of diversity. For example, Spanish is the first language for 79% of ELLs, and the Asian languages are a distant second, but other ELLs may speak any one of more than 400 languages.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, ELLs, are students whose native language is other than English and “whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language” may prevent the individual from succeeding in the classroom and on state assessments.

Various states and districts apply their own criteria to determine which students are officially assigned ELL status. A unique characteristic of the ELL subgroup is its instability; students who learn English well enough to pass language proficiency tests move out of the subgroup as new students who don't pass the test move in. The success — or failure — of ELLs can count double in adequate yearly progress calculations because a student with an ELL classification may also belong to other NCLB subgroups (e.g., ethnic group, special education, free and reduced-price lunch).

Helping individual ELLs master academic language is a multifaceted, long-term process, not an event or a program with a clear end date. A statement from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics is worth repeating: “Research on second language learning has shown that many misconceptions exist about how children learn languages. Teachers need to be aware of these misconceptions and realize that quick and easy solutions are not appropriate for complex problems. Second language learning by school-aged children takes longer, is harder and involves more effort than many teachers realize.”

Districts can support both teachers and students by making sure teachers are well prepared, adopting programs that provide sustained and coherent instruction across grade levels, and fostering continuous school improvement with a focus on student learning.

For more information: www.centerforpubliceducation.org/atf/cf/%7B13A13846-1CA6-4F8A-B52E-2A88576B84EF%7D/EnglishLanguageLearners.pdf.

Success

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New Pre-PSAT coming

The *LA Times* reports that the College Board, owners of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), will be unveiling a new test to measure the readiness of eighth-graders. The test's goal is to help identify high-achievers and help them plan their high school courses to better prepare for college. To read the story, go to www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-test8-2008aug08,0,1941799.story.

What's right about our public schools?

We can all learn from others' successes, and one of the best Web sites to read about great things happening in public schools is sponsored by the Learning First Alliance (LFA). LFA is a permanent partnership of 18 education associations with more than 10 million members dedicated to improving student learning in America's public schools. To visit its "Public Schools Insights" page, go to www.publicschoolinsights.org.

How can state departments help?

The Education Alliance of Brown University hosted a discussion of how state departments of education can help school districts improve student achievement. A summary of the discussion among a group of education leaders, researchers and policy analysts can be downloaded from www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/csrqi/symposium.pdf.

How do you compare?

New school board members often want to know how their district compares to past years or to similar school districts. The Ohio Department of Education Web site offers a database of all the local district and building report cards since 1998. Set your browser to <http://webapp2.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard/archives> and select a district from the pop-up menu.

Get students involved in democracy

What better way to teach citizenship than to get them involved in the National Student/Parent Mock Election? OSBA is supporting the Ohio PTA in this project. To participate, have your teachers, parents and students go to www.nationalmockelection.org and register.

Student achievement research brief

Each month, *Success* brings you a research brief to share with fellow board members.

Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll offers some surprises this year

The 40th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools has some surprising results. One of the biggest responses came from changes needed for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The survey reported that over 40% of respondents believe that the next president should make changes to NCLB. Over a quarter of those who responded would like to see the law expire; only 16% would like to see NCLB extended without changes. The public is split on whether it believes NCLB is hurting or helping local public schools (22% and 25% respectively), while 41% feel it is not making a difference. However, the majority (54%) of the public still knows very little or nothing at all about NCLB. The public also would like schools to be judged on the academic growth their students make throughout the school year instead of the current system of judging schools on how well students perform on one test at one point in time.

Americans give similar grades to their local schools and schools in Europe and Asia. They do not grade schools that are outside their own community as high, nor do they grade them as high as they do schools in Europe and Asia.

Other results from the survey:

- Almost half (46%) of the public gives public schools in their own community an A or B, while only 16% give their schools a D or F.
- The public's view of schools is not as positive, but is improving, as 22% give the nation's public schools an A or B (up from 16% last year); while 18% give them a D or F, down from 23% in 2007.
- The percentage of adults who feel a lack of school funding is the biggest problem facing public schools dropped from 22% to 17% in the past year, despite the downturn in the economy.
- However, funding is still the public's greatest concern and is ranked above discipline, overcrowding, fighting, drugs, good teachers and standards.
- Although a greater proportion of the public thinks the best way to finance public schools is through federal taxes, 46% prefer local school boards to have the greatest influence over what is taught in schools instead of policymakers at the state (30%) or federal (20%) levels.
- Compared to other developed countries, the majority of Americans believe U.S. schools rank near the middle of the pack in math and science, reading and writing, and creativity and problem solving.

For more information visit www.centerforpubliceducation.org.

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Getting tough with truents One Maryland school district started a campaign of television, radio and print advertising as part of a crackdown on truency. The *Washington Post* reports on the actions Prince George's County Schools to discourage skipping school. To read the story, visit www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/27/AR2008082702335.html.

Preparing the first generation for college Public schools sending more and more students to higher education. For students from families that have no college graduates, their success rate in college is less than half of those from families where the parents both hold bachelor's degrees. Ask you guidance staff what the are doing for to prepare the first generation for college.

Plan now for Capital Conference SALT activities Be sure to attend the many Student Achievement Leadership Team (SALT) activities at Capital Conference. Enclosed in this mailing is a letter to student achievement liaisons and a flier promoting all the student achievement sessions and SALT programs. OSBA President **Edward A. Bischoff, Delaware-Union ESC & Delaware Area Career Center**, invites you to the student achievement liaison meeting at 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 11, in rooms E 150–151. A continental breakfast will be provided. Please RSVP to **Debbie Beckman** at (614) 540-4000, (800) 589-OSBA or d_beckman@osba-ohio.org.

Conference Guide available The complete, 216-page OSBA *Conference Guide* will be delivered to your district in October. If you want an electronic version, one is posted on OSBA's Web site at: <http://osba-ohio.org/files/CC08guide.pdf>.

Get students involved A British study on universal prekindergarten found that students who attended pre-k scored 27% higher on standard math test than those students who did not. To Read the *Boston Globe* story go to www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2008/08/29/preschool_tied_to_higher_math_skills/.

Student achievement research brief

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Does multi-age grouping make sense for middle school?

Many middle and junior high schools across the country have tried a variety of flexible arrangements of time and structure in efforts to more effectively meet the needs of adolescent students. One of those – multi-age grouping – is more familiar to many in elementary schools, but is gaining popularity from experts and administrators in the middle grades.

Multi-age (or multi-grade) grouping is a strategy that allows students of different ages and abilities to be placed together on learning teams or in classes. Most often, students remain on the same team throughout the middle school years, and teams change only when the oldest leave for high school, and the youngest enter from elementary grades.

This style of grade grouping allows students to interact across age groups and research shows students may develop deeper and longer-term relationships with other students as well as with teachers and administrators. In this type of setting, teachers are able to structure learning activities to meet individual student needs rather than aiming instruction at the “median” level of the group. This learning style is somewhat similar to “looping,” where one teacher, or team of teachers, stays with the same group of students as they advance from one grade to another. In multi-age grouping, however, the students stay together, but may indeed change teachers as the move from subject to subject.

Research on middle school multi-age grouping is scarce. One reason is that the model is still relatively scarce. More than 90% of all US middle school students are educated in single-grade classrooms. Existing research does show advantages for this strategy, noting that the use of multi-age grouping has been instrumental in improving classroom climate, teacher advocacy for students, quality of instruction, student achievement, parental involvement, and teacher-to-teacher relationships.

While some research shows that multi-age grouping yields neutral as well as positive effects, findings do indicate that such strategies are associated with enhanced self-concept and more positive attitudes among students toward school. Other studies found that children in multi-grade classes fared as well or better than their peers on standardized measures of achievement. For many administrators with multi-age classrooms within their buildings, the most profound findings have been the positive impact on self-esteem, less referrals for discipline, and a feeling of bonding when students are grouped together for more than one year and within varying ages and abilities.

For more information, please see the research link on the National Middle School Association Web site www.nmsa.org/research.

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Sending more students to college

More and more of our graduates are attending college. Ohio's 14 public universities had a 2.2% increase in enrollment this fall on their main campuses. The 24 regional branch campuses grew by 4.6% and the 23 community colleges grew by 3%. For more information, visit: <http://regents.ohio.gov>.

Special ed tool kit available

The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs has produced a tool kit to help with assessment, instruction and accountability for students with disabilities. The kit offers the most current and accurate information on how students with disabilities learn and how to measure student performance. Download the kit at www.osepideasthatwork.org/toolkit/index.asp.

Helping your new teachers succeed

One of the keys to student success is outstanding teachers. Most districts have teachers in their first year on the job and many districts have special programs to mentor first-year teachers. Ask your personnel director to make a presentation to the school board on what the district is doing to help new teachers succeed in the classroom.

Are boys the problem?

To boost the national trend of boys achieving in the classroom, a *Chicago Tribune* writer suggests schools look at how they teach boys in the early grades. **Peg Tyre** says principals and teachers should ask themselves, "Are we engaging boys in our classrooms?" and, if not, figure out why. Read her article at www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chicoped1013boysoct13,0,2793029.story.

Resource kit enclosed

The latest in the Student Achievement Leadership Team (SALT) Resource Kit series is enclosed in this mailing. It focuses on the creative uses of technology in Ohio classrooms. To obtain an electronic version of this kit or download past SALT resource kits, visit the SALT Web page at www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm.

Student achievement research brief

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How were the academic content standards developed in Ohio and what are they?

Academic content standards are clearly defined statements and/or illustrations of what all students, teachers, schools and school districts are expected to know and be able to do. Content standards describe the knowledge and skills that students should attain, often called the “what” of “what students should know and be able to do.” They indicate the ways of thinking, working, communicating, reasoning and investigating, as well as important and enduring ideas, concepts, issues, dilemmas and knowledge essential to the discipline.

The process for developing academic content standards began in 1997 when the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents created the Joint Council to oversee the implementation of recommendations made by the Secondary and Higher Education Remediation Advisory Commission. Both boards began to build a common long-term agenda for prekindergarten through grade 16 education. The Joint Council established a set of common expectations for what all students should know and be able to do upon completion of high school. This initial work established draft common expectations in six content areas: fine arts, English language arts, foreign languages, mathematics, science and social studies. With the addition of technology as a content area, these drafts were transformed into Ohio’s academic content standards.

Why develop academic content standards? Academic content standards provide a set of clear and rigorous expectations for all students. Students need to learn more and complete complex work at each grade level as they progress through school. The academic content standards provide clarity for Ohio teachers on what content and skills should be taught at each grade level. How the material is taught is a local school and district decision.

What are benchmarks? Benchmarks are the specific components of the knowledge or skill identified by an academic content, performance or operational standard. It can be characterized as being declarative, procedural or contextual in the type of knowledge it describes. Attainment is communicated through performance task (the construction of a response) and performance level (the defined score point on a formal assessment).

What are grade-level indicators? Grade-level indicators are what students should know and be able to do. The indicators are the checkpoints that monitor progress toward the benchmarks.

For more information, visit: www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDefaultPage.aspx?page=1

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Tech education resource

The Milken Family Foundation, known in Ohio as the sponsor of a prestigious teaching award, has put together an extensive Web site on the value of using technology in the classroom. To learn more about using technology in schools, visit www.mff.org/edtech.

Managing student emotions can increase learning

A yet-to-be-published, four-year study, sponsored by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, reports that if you teach students to better manage their emotions through the practice of empathy, caring and cooperation, student academic achievement levels improve. To read more about this report, visit www.casel.org.

Understanding the OAI/OGT

We hear a lot about the Ohio Achievement Test and Ohio Graduation Test, but what do non-educators really know about them? The Ohio Department of Education has a Web page to help understand these two statewide testing programs, <http://portal.success-ode-state-oh-us.info>.

Do cultural barriers inhibit achievement?

As Ohio's schools become more culturally diverse, we must learn more about students' home life. As one New York school district's enrollment increased with Asian-Americans, parental involvement dropped. To read *The New York Times* article on Jericho Schools' response to this issue, visit www.nytimes.com/2008/11/12/education/12parents.html?_r=1.

Reforming Massachusetts public schools

Ohio is not alone in examining what works in the classroom. Massachusetts Gov. **Deval Patrick** commissioned a study on how his state could improve education. To download the report, go to www.mass.gov/Agov3/docs/Readiness%20Final%20Report.pdf.

Thank you for your work!

The Student Achievement Leadership Team members would like to thank you for your work as a student achievement liaison. What you do benefits your district's students!

Student achievement research brief

Each month, *Success* brings you a research brief to share with fellow board members.

Education innovators propose alternative agenda for federal role in education

“Democracy at Risk: The Need for a New Federal Policy in Education” is a report written to be a road map for federal policy, and to guide a new president, secretary of education and Congress as they debate the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The report, written by the Forum for Education & Democracy, builds on lessons learned from other nations and innovative schools created by local educators and community members.

The report claims that federal education policy is “inconsistent and shortsighted,” despite 25 years of education reform, and has left the United States further behind than it was in 1983. The report argues that many promising initiatives have been developed recently, but a long-term policy to take them to scale has been absent. A new strategy would require intensive and highly focused research and development; a skilled teaching and leadership force; support for new organizational designs; and investments in low-wealth schools to ensure they have the capacity to maintain productive strategies.

Key recommendations of the report include:

- Paying off the education debt. “Just as questionable fiscal policies have saddled our young people with an enormous monetary debt, our nation faces a huge educational debt resulting from hundreds of years of unequal educational and economic opportunity.”
- Investing in a new “Marshall plan” for teachers and school leaders. For \$4 billion, the government could underwrite the preparation of 40,000 teachers annually, as well as seed 100 top-quality urban teacher education programs, ensure mentors for every new teacher hired and dramatically improve professional learning opportunities for teachers and principals.
- Supporting education research and innovation. The federal government needs to become much more actively involved in gathering and sharing promising educational practices to help educators.
- Engaging and educating local communities. The federal government should engage in a coordinating offensive, making schools true hubs of communities and gateways to social services for students and community members.

To download “Democracy at Risk: The Need for a New Federal Policy in Education, use this link: www.forumforeducation.org/upload_files/files/FED_ReportRevised415.pdf.

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