



Success

Timely tips for OSBA student achievement liaisons

January 2009

Get on the bus, Gus

Mississippi's dropout average improved from 17.6% to 15.9% in one year thanks to a statewide campaign and other measures aimed at keeping students in the classroom. The creation of the Mississippi Office of Dropout Prevention and its "On the Bus" campaign helped 22 of 31 northeast Mississippi school districts improve their dropout rates. In the Baldwin School District, the dropout rate fell from 22.1% to 3.6%. To learn more, go to www.onthebus.ms.

How has NCLB changed your district?

Over 45% of those who responded to a survey by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development claim the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has caused their districts to make many changes. Another 27% say they completely revamped their curriculum due to the law. Invite your curriculum director to share with the board and community at a future board meeting how NCLB has affected the education process in your district and at what cost.

Are grades being inflated?

Grade inflation is a serious issue at some of America's top universities, reports Boston's *Globe Magazine*. Pressure from students to receive As is inflating grades. One study reports that one-half of the grades given at Harvard University in 2007 were in the A range. Is this happening in elementary and secondary schools as well? To read the story, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/54172>.

How to use *Success*

During the Capital Conference SALT Breakfast, one student achievement liaison suggested explaining how to use **Success**. While districts use the newsletter in different ways, most liaisons simply pass out the newsletter at board meetings to start a discussion on student achievement. Some districts distribute the newsletter to administrators throughout the district either by duplicating a paper copy or e-mailing the pdf version found at www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm. If you have another way to use **Success**, please send a brief note to editor **Scott Ebright**, APR, at s_ebright@osba-ohio.org.

Student achievement research brief

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

States make impressive gains in building longitudinal education data systems

While Ohio has seven of the elements of a comprehensive data system that can track student progress from preschool through college, six states have all 10 elements, according to the third annual report released in November by the Data Quality Campaign (DQC).

DQC, a national partnership to improve the quality, accessibility and use of data in education, annually highlights the power of developing and using longitudinal data systems to improve student achievement. Longitudinal data — data gathered on the same student from year to year — make it possible to follow individual student academic growth, determine the value-added dimension of specific programs and identify consistently high-performing schools and systems.

Key findings from the 2008 survey of all 50 states and the District of Columbia:

- In 2005, no state reported having all 10 essential elements of a robust state longitudinal data system; this year, six states do (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana and Utah).
- 48 states now have five or more of the 10 elements.
- 42 states (compared to 14 in 2005) report they have the data systems necessary to calculate the National Governors Association longitudinal graduation rate. All states except one (Idaho) will report this rate by 2010–11.

While each state's P-12 education system is unique, DQC said there is a set of 10 essential elements that are critical to a longitudinal data system (● indicates element met by Ohio):

- A unique statewide student identifier that connects student data across key databases across years;
- Student-level enrollment, demographic and program participation information;
- The ability to match individual students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth;
- Information on untested students and the reasons they were not tested;
- A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students;
- Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned;
- Student-level college readiness test scores;
- Student-level graduation and dropout data;
- The ability to match student records between the P–12 and higher education systems;
- A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity and reliability.

Source: Data Quality Campaign, www.dataqualitycampaign.org.

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Speaking a new language

Wiki, Twitter, Facebook, Google Earth and Gagle are terms that teenagers understand, so educators need to explore their potential for instruction. Many teachers have grasped what is known as Web 2.0 to invigorate, motivate and engage their students. Ask your technology director to speak at a board meeting on how your district is using this new technology to raise student achievement.

State budget and you

Gov. **Ted Strickland** kicked off the biennium budget process when he unveiled his proposed budget on Jan. 28. Your next board meeting is a perfect time to discuss how student achievement in your district will be affected by state funding.

Learning by doing

“They (students) get excited about learning math when it helps them accomplish something useful,” wrote **Anthony Cody** in *Teacher Magazine*. Cody uses a process called guided instruction to teach science. To read more about this, go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/44127>.

New teacher training works

A new study suggests that an alternative teacher training program is very effective in Louisiana. The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reports that educators in The New Teacher Project, in which outstanding college graduates earn teacher certification, outperform veteran teachers in math instruction. To read the story, go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/25977>.

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.

Student achievement research brief

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Understanding education research

School board members are bombarded with research from administrators, other board members, teachers, news media and yes, even OSBA. To help you understand why it is important to understand research methods, here is an introduction to “Consumer’s guide to education research.” It comes from the Center for Public Education, a collaborative effort of NSBA and its members, including OSBA.

Board members constantly want answers to certain questions (Are we using the best methods to teach students? What is the best curriculum to use? Are we operating our district in the most efficient and effective way?). By gathering information pertinent to those questions and reviewing the data, we can find the best answers. Research, then, is no more than a process of acquiring information to answer questions. Education research helps answer questions such as finding effective strategies for raising student achievement. Some people may be baffled by the various forms of research — what they are, how they’re conducted and what they say.

In a nutshell, research applies scientific thinking to questions. This means that the questions themselves must be constructed carefully so that the data gathered can actually help to answer the question. Moreover, the data must be gathered and analyzed in the most objective manner possible. What we’re after is solid research, which provides answers with facts and data that can be trusted.

What types of research methods are used? Research methods fall into two main categories — quantitative and qualitative — but at times they are combined to create a mixed-method research design.

Quantitative methods include: experimental research, quasi-experimental research, relational research (also known as cross-sectional or correlational), and descriptive studies and surveys.

Qualitative methods include: ethnographic research, grounded theory research and case studies.

Mixed methods include: quantitative and qualitative methods that are combined in a mixed-method research design.

The Center for Public Education offers an in-depth explanation for each of these research methods on its Web site. To read the entire “Consumer’s guide to education research,” and learn more about research, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/10223>.

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Follow the state budget as it evolves

Gov. **Ted Strickland**'s evidence-based budget dramatically changes the ways Ohio schools are funded. As the budgeting process unfolds, discuss at a board meeting what it means to student achievement in your district. OSBA's advocacy Web page (www.osba-ohio.org/advocacy.htm) will keep you well-informed on the subject.

Charters and your schools

Over 82,000 Ohio students attend charter schools, according to a report funded by the Education Voter Institute and the Forum for Education and Democracy. Most Ohio school districts lose students to charter schools. At an upcoming board meeting discuss how charter schools affect your district. For a list of charter schools in your county, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/35629/>. To download the report, "Reclaiming the Education Charter," go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/13289/>.

Better late than never

Students who graduate late, taking longer than four years to receive their diploma, do better in every aspect of life — not just academic, but work, civic life and even health — than dropouts. A Center for Public Education study examines this phenomenon. To learn more, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/22829/>.

Facts or reasoning?

A study of American and Chinese college freshmen counters the conventional wisdom that teaching science facts will improve students' reasoning ability. **Lei Bao**, associate professor of physics at Ohio State University, said that even when students are rigorously taught the facts, they don't necessarily develop the reasoning skills they need to succeed. Read more about this at <http://links.osba-ohio.org/15088/>.

Education Vital Signs

Student achievement liaisons will find a copy of the *American School Board Journal's Education Vital Signs* with this issue of **Success**. This complimentary copy contains interesting information and statistics on academic achievement across the nation.

Student achievement research brief

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Middle school counseling practices have evolved.

What many of us term as “guidance” counseling during the middle grade years has evolved and now include a much wider group of activities and realm of thought. Best practice in middle grades counseling now can encompass staff, students and families through comprehensive, preventive and developmental approaches aligned to the school’s mission. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) advocates a philosophical model that includes leadership, advocacy and a program-centered approach for all students (ASCA, 2006). Today, school counselors do much more than the traditional vocational guidance, and are often integrally involved in activities associated directly with learning outcomes, student motivation and personal accountability.

Because young adolescents vary widely in their individual physical, emotional and academic development, middle grades counselors are challenged in efforts to promote optimal education, career and social targets for all students. Effective school counseling programs should be aligned with the shared vision of all stakeholders and the school related to student achievement, student-teacher relationships and family participation (Swaim, 2001).

While the research related to school counseling outcomes is somewhat limited, a few studies serve to inform current practice. For example, Lapan, Gysbers and Petroski (2002) found that comprehensive school counseling programs in the middle grades were consistently related to important indicators of student safety and success. For both seventh-grade boys and girls, a full range of guidance activities and support practices led to “better relationships with teachers, higher grades, a belief that education is relevant to their futures and greater perceptions of their personal worth and of their value to the school community.”

Another study (Brigman and Campbell, 2003) investigated the impact of counselor-led classroom guidance programs on student academic achievement and success for fifth- to ninth-graders. Results revealed such programs were directly associated with improvement in behavior related to social and self-management skills. These skills, in turn, were related to increases in math and reading achievement scores.

With the wide variety of school counseling programs across Ohio and the U.S., it is difficult to assess the global impact of these programs on student development and performance. Based on current best practice and research, however, educational leaders can be optimistic that more comprehensive guidance programs can lead to greater and more positive student outcomes.

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Teaching music improves reading skills

Two Long Island University researchers have data to prove that teaching music skills improves reading skills. **Joseph M. Piro** and **Camilo Ortiz** published their study in the March 2009 *Psychology of Music*. To read about the study, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/33522>.

Poverty and your schools

A new report from Arizona State University argues that six out-of-school factors related to poverty are the major cause of the achievement gap between poor and minority students and other students. Those factors that inhibit student achievement are low birth-weight and non-genetic prenatal influences; inadequate medical, dental and vision care; food insecurity; environmental pollutants; family relations and family stress; and neighborhood characteristics. Read the policy brief at <http://links.osba-ohio.org/96844>.

Obama's education reform

President **Barack Obama** pledged to reform education during his campaign. Last month, he addressed his planned overhaul of education in a speech to the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Discuss how his reforms will affect your district's programs at a school board meeting. To read the CCN.com article, go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/70532>.

Plan now for end-of-year recognition events

As the school year winds down, be sure to plan for school board member involvement in those end-of-year recognition events. Parents, staff and students appreciate board members attending such spring activities. If student achievement is important to your board, show it by being visible at these public ceremonies.

SALT resources online

For more than 10 years, OSBA has focused on raising the quality of public education through the Student Achievement Liaison Team. In addition to **Success** coming to you each month, the SALT Web page offers valuable resources. To learn more about these resources, visit www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm.

Student achievement research brief

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Improving your school climate

School climate and the learning environment set the stage for teaching and learning. The overall school climate and specific learning environment of a classroom have enormous influence on student achievement. Students cannot learn in chaos, fear or embarrassment. They must feel safe, and they need an orderly structure. Every child deserves respect, encouragement and supportive opportunities to learn and grow. How can school boards assess the climate of their schools and their classrooms?

Ensure a safe environment for work and learning. School leaders must take steps to ensure to the best of their ability that schools remain a safe place. School boards need to develop policies and demand procedures to protect students and staff.

Examine the available data that reflect climate. One simple source toward understanding climate is attendance data. Patterns of student absence can be detected when comparisons are made among schools, races, genders and neighborhoods. Disparities may raise questions about the learning environment.

Examine the capacity to provide special programs. A lockstep-learning environment may cause some students to fall out of step and not regain their footing. The classroom teacher who recognizes and accommodates differences in student learning styles and pace creates a nurturing learning environment. Even in classrooms with a positive environment, some students may need supplemental or alternative settings in order to be successful.

Survey parents and students to determine satisfaction. School climate is a reflection of perceptions and feelings. Some districts have developed satisfaction surveys modeled after business surveys.

Build a positive culture within the organization. The way school board members interact with the superintendent or other staff members sends a message about the value of staff in the eyes of the board. The way board members treat each other also influences staff's perceptions and attitudes.

Make schools inviting places to be. Schools belong to the community and can define the community. While first impressions can be lasting, the true measure of welcome extends beyond them. The role parents and other community members are invited to play contributes to the school climate. Schools that build partnerships with parents and community members create a welcoming climate.

For more information: www.nsba.org/keywork2/

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Middle school math may be key for minorities

A University of Illinois professor says that the best predictor of student success in math for kids in high-minority urban schools is the math course they took in eighth grade. **Christy Lleras** used data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Educational Longitudinal Study to follow the effects of math placement, school-related behaviors and achievement in more than 6,500 public school students as they progressed from the eighth to the 10th grade. To learn more about Lleras' study, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/34887>.

Empowering parents

Not all parents know how to support their children in schools, especially those who do not speak English. Lacoochee (Fla) Elementary School Principal **Karen Marler** and her staff created a Parent University to help parents be, well, better parents. The program started with eight mothers, has tripled in size and plans to expand next fall. The parents in the program are getting more involved in their children's schools. One component is improving English-speaking skills. To read the *St. Petersburg* (Fla.) *Times* story, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/90615>.

Invest in writing

In an article in *Teacher Magazine*, Virginia high school English and journalism teacher **Mary Tedrow** suggests the United States invest in writing. She writes, "... reading is input — other ideas implanted from a variety of voices — and writing is output — a record of a student's understanding of what those voices are saying." To learn why this is money well spent, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/86253>.

Recognize your students

The Student Achievement Leadership Team has two award pins for recognizing worthy students. These are great to pass out at board meetings or academic recognition events. Contact **Ann Herritt** at (614) 540-4000 to order the pins. Pins can be purchased in quantities of 50 at \$1.50 a pin, or 100 and more at \$1.25 a pin.

Student achievement research brief

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Restructuring poor performing schools under NCLB may not improve student achievement

A policy brief from the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice finds little evidence that sweeping school restructuring — mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for so-called failing schools — will raise student achievement. The report is titled “NCLB’s Ultimate Restructuring Alternatives: Do They Improve the Quality of Education?” and was written by Dr. **William J. Mathis**, adjunct associate professor of school finance at the University of Vermont and superintendent of the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union in Brandon, Vt.

The brief examines the impact of the specific school restructuring approaches required under by NCLB. Under the law, enacted in 2001, schools are required to be restructured if they fail to make “adequate yearly progress” (measured by meeting test score targets) for six consecutive years.

NCLB school restructuring can take one of the following forms: takeover of the school by the state; turning management of the school over to a private firm; shutting down and reopening as a charter school; or reconstituting the school by replacing some or all administrators, staff or faculty. A fifth option provided under the law endorses “any other major restructuring of a school’s governance arrangement.”

The brief reviews existing research on each of the five restructuring options and finds “there is little or no evidence to suggest that any of these options delivers the promised improvements in academic achievement,” but notes that negative side effects are frequently recorded, including increased segregation, substantial, short-term drops in achievement scores and organizational instability.

Mathis concludes: “Given that these approaches are being proposed for the nation’s most troubled schools, the solutions (currently set forth by NCLB) are likely to be woefully inadequate,” and that “reliance on these restructuring options could actually deter schools from exploring more promising approaches of achieving the goal of a sound basic education for every child.”

In light of such findings, Mathis recommends against relying on restructuring sanctions to promote school improvement and encourages the support of research on the effectiveness of other school improvement strategies. He also recommends support for strategies that have been shown to increase school improvement, including early education, small school communities, and strong counseling and social support systems for students.

To download the report, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/63384>.

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Success goes electronic

This issue of **Success** is the first as an electronic newsletter. OSBA members with e-mail will receive an e-mail containing the eNewsletter. Those liaisons without e-mail will receive a printed version. **Success** will still be posted as a PDF on OSBA's Student Achievement Web page, www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm.

Building character builds achievement

The Lindbergh (Mo.) School District is proving that building character improves learning. The district started its character-building program in 1999 and achievement has soared. Between 2004 and 2008, the percentage of eighth- and 10th-graders scoring proficient or advanced in mathematics on the Missouri Assessment Program more than doubled, from 24.6% to 58.8% and 32.7% to 67.2%, respectively. To learn more, visit www.publicschoolinsights.org/stories/Lindbergh.

Using technology in your classrooms

Technology in education is evolving and has changed how we teach. Have your district technology director and several tech-savvy teachers make a presentation to the board on how your district is using technology to boost achievement. Move a board meeting to a classroom and witness a demonstration of what is happening in your buildings.

Earning college credit

The options for students to gain college credit while in high school are increasing. Invite your staff to explain how your students are taking advantage of advanced placement (AP), international baccalaureate (IB) diploma programs, postsecondary enrollment options, (PSEO), seniors-to-sophomores and tech prep. To learn more about these options, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/10514>.

Not doing homework

"What's your feeling about students who won't or don't do work outside of school?" asked a teacher on the Teacher Leaders Network's forum recently. *Teacher Magazine* turned the discussion into an enlightening article. To read what some teachers wrote about this sometimes-frustrating issue, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/96294>.

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Challenges and prospects for school-to-college transition

This brief is based on a research document prepared by the American Council on Education (ACE) and funded by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The advent of the No Child Left Behind Act caused school districts across Ohio and the country to begin small- and large-scale reform of curriculum and programs, many of which were designed to increase the number of students moving directly from high school to college. The success of students who enter college was also examined, as college retention and graduation rates are now seen as even more important than the numbers of those beginning the higher educational process.

The ACE report addressed issues associated with eliminating barriers to college, as well as those that have proven to limit graduation rates from college once students enter. A majority of recent research suggests the clearest path to shrinking the college access gap for all students. Strategies include:

- lowering financial barriers to affordability (a stated priority of the **Obama** administration),
- ensuring better academic preparation,
- increasing the professional development of guidance counselors within high schools so that students are better advised as they make crucial college decisions,
- increasing the quality and quantity of college entrance and financial aid information (beginning at much younger ages than the last two years of high school),
- increasing levels of parent and family involvement in college preparations,
- creating more equitable admissions policies.

Of these strategies, removing financial barriers and better academic preparation are widely acknowledged as the major priorities to improving college access and success.

A focus on school-to-college transition necessitates moving from accountability systems in schools that work to raise the level of the “educational floor” or a focus on minimum literacy standards — to a focus on the “educational ceiling” or college readiness. For example, research shows that significant effort must be made during the middle school years to increase students’ awareness of the academic rigor and preparation necessary for college success so that they can take the algebra or foreign language courses necessary for college acceptance.

Research shows programs that help shine light on the educational ceiling include college outreach, as well as early intervention initiatives. Proven benefits of these types of programs have been a literal doubling of the rates of college attendance from at-risk youth, an expansion of students’ educational goals and aspirations, and a boost in college enrollment rates across major demographic categories.

To read the full report from ACE, please go to **www.acenet.edu**.

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Creating the conditions for excellence

In a *Des Moines Register* article, former executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and now education professor at Stanford University, **Linda Darling-Hammond** offers some ideas on how school districts can improve education. To read the story and learn what advice she gave the Obama campaign on education policy, visit links.osba-ohio.org/44577.

Staff are learning all summer long

While your students may be out of school, many of your staff members are back in school. For your next school board meeting, have your superintendent report on what classes and conferences teachers and administrators are attending this summer. To read what some teachers are doing, visit links.osba-ohio.org/11152.

Few left behind

A Center on Education Policy report finds that most children are showing academic gains since the No Child Left Behind Act became law. To read the report and Ohio's progress visit links.osba-ohio.org/10621.

'Where are they now?'

There were 28 children in the photo of **Kanikah LeMon's** 1995 kindergarten class. "Where are they now?" wondered the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The newspaper found 27 of those Dr. George Washington Carver Elementary students from the city's distressed Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood. To learn how innovative approaches to urban education changed those students visit links.osba-ohio.org/84294.

National standards are on the way

Ohio and 44 other states have agreed in principle to national standards according to the Council of Chief State School Officers. By signing on to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, governors and state commissioners of education are committing to join a state-led process to develop a common core of state standards in English-language arts and mathematics. A *USA Today* story on these standards can be found at links.osba-ohio.org/50144.

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How do you spend your money?

Resource alignment is an important key to achieving your vision for improved student achievement. Nothing conveys what is important to a school district more than the budget. How you use your resources sends a message to staff and constituents as to how serious you are about your goals. You may say that accelerating reading skills in the early years is a top priority, but if the money available for improvements is directed toward increasing the number of advanced placement offerings at the high school, a mixed message is being sent and received.

Often school boards feel they have little control over budget decisions. Fundamental operating costs are long established and difficult to alter. Community groups, employee organizations and others have learned to exert political influence on the budget process. When money is available for growth or improvements, those groups all come to get their piece of the pie and school boards find themselves caught in the middle. It is natural to want to be responsive to constituents, but school boards that have established clear goals and priorities based on input from all stakeholders will focus on making spending decisions that support the shared vision.

Developing curriculum is the work of staff, but ensuring that the curriculum supports the district's priorities for student achievement is part of the key work of school boards. Board members should be aware of certain critical checkpoints and questions. After all, the curriculum is where your product quality control begins. If your curriculum is not directly tied to the learning standards set by the district and the state, how can teachers and students be expected to achieve the desired goals? Some important questions to ask to assess your initial understanding of resource alignment would be:

- Have we established a specific and limited set of priorities for improving student achievement that gives everyone in the district a clear focus?
- Do we make staffing and resource allocation decisions based on our student achievement priorities?
- Do we view the budget as the vehicle for accomplishing our priorities rather than simply our spending plan?
- Do we leverage resources within our budget to achieve our priorities?
- Do we add or delete programs and initiatives based on analysis of data and district priorities?
- Have we determined that there are no "sacred cows" within our budget?
- Is our selection of textbooks, instructional materials and technology directed by our student achievement priorities?
- Is our staff training designed exclusively to support our student achievement priorities?

The degree to which your board has achieved these elements will serve as a road map for important discussions and help to set the path in achieving your vision for student achievement. For more information, visit the National School Boards Association's www.nsba.org/keywork.

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Middle school is critical

What happens in middle school can determine a student's success, according to **Robert Balfanz**, a research scientist at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools and associate director of the Talent Development Middle and High School Project. To download the policy brief "Putting Middle Grade Students on the Graduation Path," go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/50441>.

What does the budget do to achievement?

While board members and administrators are trying to understand the ramifications of Ohio's biennium budget, hold a discussion on how it will affect your district's academic offerings. The latest budget information can be found at <http://osba-ohio.org/budget09.htm>.

Report cards will appear

The excitement of a new school year can be enhanced or lessened with the release of the school district report cards. The tentative release date is Aug. 25, although preliminary numbers were released to the media in mid-July. Ask your superintendent to share and explain the district's results. To learn more, go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/reportcards>.

Learning about student learning styles

Every one learns differently. Active, reflective, sensing, intuitive, visual, verbal, sequential and global are styles two North Carolina State professors, **Richard Felder** and **Barbara Soloman**, identify. To learn more about learning styles, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/37760>.

Are you tweeting?

Do you want the latest OSBA news coming to your smartphone or Web browser? Then go to <http://twitter.com/ohschoolboards> to follow OSBA on Twitter. Twitter feeds can be texted to your phone.

Foreclosures & schools

Foreclosures are hurting communities throughout America. What affects families affects students and schools. A report from the Urban Institute, "The Impacts of Foreclosures on Families and Communities," offers insight for schools. Read it at <http://links.osba-ohio.org/94496/>.

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What are your district's top priorities?

Student achievement and academic gains must be schools' number one priority. However, there are many approaches to achieve the best results. Frequently mentioned strategies include: smaller class sizes, additional time on task, clear instructional goals and use of formative assessment. Another promising strategy is the use of professional learning communities. In a professional learning community, the teachers and administrators continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn. Action goals are to increase professional effectiveness and improve students' learning.

The literature on professional learning communities identifies five main attributes:

- shared leadership by the principal, who invites staff input into decision making;
- collective learning among staff and applying that learning to address students' needs;
- shared vision developed from staff commitment to student learning;
- supportive conditions that facilitate the collegial environment;
- shared personal practice, including visitation of classrooms by peers for feedback that guides improvement.

What results for students, if any, might be gained from professional learning communities? Research has shown:

- decreased dropout rate;
- lower absenteeism;
- increased learning performance;
- greater academic gains in math, science, history and reading;
- smaller achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds.

Many believe the only legitimate use of teacher time is standing in front of the class, working directly with students. International comparisons of how teachers around the globe spend their time indicate that in many countries, teachers teach fewer classes, and spend more time planning and conferring with colleagues. They work with students individually, visit other classrooms and engage in other professional development. To understand and value teachers' professional development requires focused and concerted effort. "Teachers are the first learners." Through their participation in a professional learning community, they become more effective and student outcomes increase — a goal upon which we can all agree.

Source: Educational Resource Information Center, <http://links.osba-ohio.org/61486>.

Success

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The power of assets

The Abundance Assets Alliance found that children with higher levels of “developmental assets” are involved in fewer risky behaviors. To learn more about the 40 assets kids need to succeed, go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/88269>. To learn more how schools can use these assets in improving student achievement, contact **Richard Murray**, Muskingum Valley ESC superintendent, at rmurray@mvesc.k12.oh.us.

What does America think about our schools?

Do Americans think public schools are doing their job? The 41st annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools shows strong public support for national tests, charter schools, teacher performance pay, early childhood education and President Obama’s stimulus package. Read more at <http://links.osba-ohio.org/46291>.

Avoiding quick fixes

One New York City school bucked the trend to adopt the latest quick fixes in education. The school scrimped to keep the same curriculum for the past 10 years, even though it meant a 30-to-1 student-teacher ratio. To read the *Christian Science Monitor* story on the highly successful Osmond A. Church School, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/60198>.

No sick child left behind

Secretary of Education **Arne Duncan** and Health and Human Services Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius** urged educators to not let students suffering from the H1N1 flu get too far behind their healthier peers. To help prepare your district for a potential flu outbreak, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/80044> and <http://links.osba-ohio.org/98453>

Using the right data

A new Alliance for Education policy brief looks at how teachers can use data to improve instruction. For most teachers, using data is a significant shift in the way they do their jobs. The brief endorses formative assessments as an effective tool. To download the brief, go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/71190/>.

Student achievement research brief

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

Recipe for student success: Mix in music!

A relatively new study, published in the journal *Social Science Quarterly* (February 2009), reveals that music participation, defined as music lessons taken in or out of school, or as participation as an audience member at musical events and concerts, has a very positive effect on reading and math achievement in early childhood and adolescence.

Ohio State University faculty members **Darby E. Southgate** and Dr. **Vincent Roscigno** reviewed two nationally representative data sources to analyze patterns of music involvement and the possible effects on math and reading performance. Both elementary and high school student data were used.

The resulting analysis showed that music is positively associated with academic achievement, especially during the later middle school and high school years.

As one might expect, socio-economic status also played a vital role in the study. Students coming from economically disadvantaged homes generally were less able to access music education or private music lessons, resulting in lower levels of associated achievement.

The study also found that race and ethnicity are key factors in predicting involvement in music programs. In general, Asians and whites are more likely to participate in music than Hispanics, and while African-American students were often exposed to music through audience participation at concerts, they were less likely to take music lessons than were Asian or white students.

“This topic represents an issue of equity at both the family and school levels,” said the authors. “This study has policy implications for federal, state and local agencies. There is knowledge to be gained here that can help schools and families in allocating resources in ways that are most beneficial to children and to their academic achievement.”

For more resources about ways in which music education is linked to achievement, please see **www.sciencedaily.com**.

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Students need to take more responsibility

Lori C. Wingo, co-director of the University of Maine Upward Bound Programs, offers a different perspective in an article published by the *Bangor (Maine) Daily News*. "The sad truth is that despite all of our misplaced legislation with No Child Left Behind, there is a critical stakeholder who has not been asked to assume any responsibility in student achievement: namely, the students themselves." To read her commentary, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/59306>.

Adding "fun" to school

The South Kearns (Utah) Elementary School started an extended-day learning program, which focuses on making learning fun. Students enrolled in the program take one class in math, English or reading, and another elective, such as choir, theater and physical education. To read more about this program, which is funded by Title I stimulus money, read the *Salt Lake Tribune* story at <http://links.osba-ohio.org/19938>.

Conference Guide online

The complete, 184-page OSBA *Conference Guide* will be delivered to your district in October. If you want an electronic version, one is posted at <http://cc.osba-ohio.org/uploads/09CCGuide.pdf>.

Tough math frustrates and teaches

Underachieving students who get frustrated by math actually learn more than those for whom math comes easily, according to a New Jersey study. Researchers at Rutgers University have found that allowing students to struggle with challenging math problems can lead to dramatically improved achievement and test scores. To read the *Edutopia* story on this, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/87671>.

Learning styles debunked

A University of Virginia cognitive scientist says data does not support the individual learning style theory. Identifying which learning style best suits a child and teaching him or her that way may not be the best way to teach, according to **Daniel Willingham**, author of "Why Don't Students Like School?" To read more about Willingham's theory in the *Washington Post*, go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/20502>.

Student achievement research brief

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How does standards-based accountability measure up?

Is standards-based accountability meeting its dual role of motivating improvement while providing accurate accountability information? Establishing goals, making plans to reach them, measuring progress and revising programs based on results is the process commonly known today as standards-based accountability. The components are part of virtually all state-testing programs, as well as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Standards-based accountability has helped states focus their accountability programs and stimulate achievement and teaching. However, the accuracy of the information about school quality and student improvement remains in doubt, hampered by the use of 50 different accountability systems and questions over whether the gains are true or not. This is certainly not unique to standards-based accountability, but rather to our decentralized educational system. Regardless, the key question is: Can standards-based accountability, as embodied in NCLB, fulfill its dual roles? If this is to occur, then three actions are crucial from school boards and districts.

First, develop the best possible assessment programs in your school district, aligning standards and state tests with complementary district assessments that measure deep knowledge and the ability of students to apply skills across content areas. Provide resources for the development of high-quality classroom assessments, aligned to state standards and textbooks. Support the system all along the way with professional development, time, and — most important — leadership. Realize that a high-quality system needs monitoring, feedback, and continual improvement.

Second, continue to push policymakers at state and federal levels for flexibility in current NCLB requirements. Unless the requirements are changed, virtually all schools and districts may fail to make adequate yearly progress in coming years.

Finally, increase the school board and district commitment to the same “can-do” spirit of many districts whose children are beating the odds. While the NCLB goals are ambitious, many schools are well on their way to achieving them. Leaders at these schools have an impressive can-do attitude and an ability to inspire their staffs. They constantly ask, “What should we be doing differently in teaching and learning?” And then they try to do it, while carefully monitoring the success of their strategies.

They have adopted a philosophy that says: “This is our school and our kids. We have a school spirit here that cannot be equaled anywhere else. We’re not perfect, but we try all the time, each and every day, to keep growing and learning and there is nothing we won’t do to make our students successful.”

For more information: <http://links.osba-ohio.org/59990>

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Fair is time to share

If you are looking to learn about other districts' great programs while at Capital Conference, spend some time in the Student Achievement Fair. Sponsored by the Student Achievement Leadership Team, the fair showcases some of the best programs offered by Ohio public school districts. It runs from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 10, in Hall D. To learn which school programs will be showcased at the fair, visit <http://cc.osba-ohio.org/student-achievement-fair>.

School gets personal

Chelan, Wash., High School took a personal approach to education and saw its 10th-grade state test scores rise between 46% and 56% in reading, math and writing in 2008. To read about this amazing turnaround, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/30975>.

If one is good, are two better?

The more time a student spends on task, the more he or she learns. Right? Then logically, the significant gains reported by the U.S. Department of Education following one year of structured, after-school instruction would double after a second year. To read the surprising findings of a recent report, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/73314>.

Break on through to the other side

Is the status quo holding your administrators back? Do tradition, law, contracts, policies and regulations prevent your leaders from creatively solving problems and increasing student success? **Frederick M. Hess** tackles this challenge in the October issue of *Educational Leadership*. Read the story at <http://links.osba-ohio.org/29549>.

Kids get smart(phones)

Schools are partnering with cell phone companies to bring smartphones into the classroom to help students learn math. Engaging reluctant learners with technology is not new, but the idea of turning cell phones into teaching tools might seem foreign to most educators. Every student in one class using smartphones tested proficient in algebra, while the same teacher's regular math students averaged 70% proficiency. To learn more, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/67358>.

Student achievement research brief

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Total student load advanced as key factor in achievement

According to management expert **William G. Ouchi**, the key to improving student achievement lies in reducing teaching loads. In his book, *The Secret of TSL*, Ouchi reports that schools that have reduced total student load (TSL) tend to have higher passing rates on state examinations. These findings are based on a study of 442 schools in eight urban districts (Boston; Chicago; Houston; New York City; Oakland, Calif.; San Francisco; Seattle and St. Paul) that have given power to local principals to make budgetary, staffing and curricular decisions.

Ouchi defines TSL as the number of students that teachers come into contact with each academic term and the number of papers they grade. The concept of smaller schools and classes is not new, as teachers have advocated for smaller classes forever. TSL differs from simply reducing class sizes and is distinguished by “how” teachers interact, not by “how many” they serve.

In an earlier book, *Making Schools Work*, Ouchi reported on a study of school decentralization. In the research cited in that book, he found that when principals were given autonomy over their schools, the performance of those schools improved measurably. Among the findings coming from this seminal study, Ouchi recommends:

- making principals entrepreneurs, rather than bureaucrats;
- giving principals control over their budgets;
- holding principals accountable for student and financial performance;
- maintaining a “burning” focus on student achievement;
- involving parents as genuine participants in school decisions.

In *The Secret of TSL*, Ouchi explains what principals in decentralized schools actually do to improve student achievement. Principals who control their school budgets invariably hire more teachers. With fewer students, teachers are able to develop a stronger and more personal relationship with each student. Reducing the TSL from an average of 115 students to 80 translated to a 16% increase in the rate of students scoring at the proficient level on state exams.

Budgetary control was identified as a significant variable. On average, principals control about 6% of the money spent in their schools. In the decentralized districts, the level of budgetary control exercised by principals varied from the low in Chicago of nearly 14% to a high of 85% control in New York City.

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Leader or laggard?

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Center for American Progress and American Enterprise Institute, "... our education system needs to be reinvented." To read the group's "Leaders and Laggards" report and to learn how the state of Ohio fared on education innovation, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/44845>.

To platoon or not?

Traditional elementary schools feature teachers who teach most subjects to the students in his or her class. Once students hit middle, then high school, they change classes taught by educators who specialize in one or two subjects. Some call this secondary schools practice platooning or departmentalizing. To read how some districts are considering platooning in elementary grades to raise student achievement, point your browser to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/39213>.

Closing the tech gender gap

The Fairport Central School District in New York is closing the gender gap in teaching technology. Engineering schools across the country are filled with male students. Why? Some believe it is because girls shy away from technology classes, afraid of being the only female in the class. To find out how one school district is closing the gap with all-girl technology classes, go to <http://links.osba-ohio.org/16369>.

Where is NCLB going?

Andrew Rotherham takes a look at the future of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in *U.S. News & World Report*. He writes that the legislative coalition that supported the 2001 law is gone. So what is in store for the landmark law that changed public education? To read the story, visit <http://links.osba-ohio.org/40962>.

Thank you student achievement liaisons!

The Student Achievement Leadership Team members would like to thank the OSBA student achievement liaisons for their work. What they do benefits your district's students!

Student achievement research brief

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

Does playing video games increase math achievement?

It appears that the answer to this question lies more in *the kind and type* of video games students play.

Research conducted by the University of Central Florida (UCF) in 2008 suggested that students who prepared for district benchmark exams by playing educational video games did better on the exams than students who prepared through traditional classroom instruction. According to the study, students who played educational video games for four months prior to testing demonstrated higher gains on district exams than students not playing the games. Scores showed that both groups improved, but the control group (taught with traditional instruction methods) improved by 3.74 points (out of 25) while the experimental, or game playing group, improved by 8.07 points. The UCF study tested nearly 200 algebra and pre-algebra students from 10 different classrooms in Orange County, Fla.

In a similar study, citing the rapid growth of educational video games as a viable instructional tool, academic researchers at the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Watson School of Education want to learn more about the direct effects of these games on student math achievement. Their study will include 500 middle school students, as well as teachers, technology trainers and administrators using games manufactured by Tabula Digita. The games to be used are designed to teach and reinforce key math concepts as students playing the games progress through a series of "action adventure missions." Assistant Professor **Albert Ritzhaupt** said, "We hope our research will serve to explain further how playing serious, high-quality, interactive games influences mathematics achievement and self-efficacy in math."

However, dissenting voices can be heard, specifically from the National Institute on Media and the Family. Conceding that positive results from video gaming can include an increase in knowledge about computers and information technology, practice in problem solving, opportunities for parent/child interaction and improvement in fine motor and spatial skills, the group also warns about potential negative effects. These can include social isolation for students who "over play," exposure to violence and negative portrayals of women or other gender bias, games that do not require independent thought or creativity, and games that contribute to confusion between fantasy and reality.

The bottom line appears to be that the introduction of *appropriate, high-quality* video games may be beneficial to students in many ways, including raising achievement and test scores. For more on this subject, please see: www.newswise.com; www.mediafamily.org; and www.ucf.edu.

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