Friday, October 31. 2008

News Nuggets

Campaign Buttons?: Not on our Campus!
The chancellor of the New York City School System promulgated a memo reminding system staff that political paraphernalia could not be worn at school.He sent this memo in response to the truckloads of campaign buttons that the teachers' union sent to the schools to promote their favorite candidate.
Of course, this action reached the national news, and the chancellor took flack from both political camps…as well as free speech advocates, anarchists, religious rights groups and atheists.
The memo pointed out that the NYC Schools have a long-standing policy that prohibits the display of campaign artifacts. However, there had been lax enforcement of these rules until the teachers' union pushed the issues to the limit.Where do Self-Expression Prohibitions End?Should children discuss politics and national issues in school?
Of course, since the candidates often skirt these concerns in favor of spin that is designed to avoid angering anyone. But, should teachers say what candidate they favor, even with non-verbal button?
And, if it is non-verbal, how can it be free speech?
And what are the boundaries? For example, students know which teachers drive what cars. Can a teacher place a candidates bumper sticker on his or her car, and park the car in the school parking lot?
Or, does the teacher have to park said car outside the campus fence?
And, if the car must be parked outside the campus fence, how far away from school property?What other Speech is Protected?What other speech is "protected speech?"
What about religious speech?
For example, a cross is worn not far from where a campaign button might located. Is the cross OK, but the button outlawed.
And, if the cross is OK, what about a crucifix?
Schools have dress codes about Tee-shirts that use harsh, profane or other "disruptive" language.
Images of devils, demons are prohibited, and students were even banned from wearing Tee-shirts with Darth Maul, the Sith apprentice in George Lucas' movie, The Phantom Menace. The reason, he had a red and black face and small horns.
But the crucifix, depicts torture. Why should that be allowed?
And isn't a crucifixion multiple levels of magnitude worse than water boarding?
And, what if someone expresses anti-abortion sentiments. Could they make the case that abortion kills just as dead as crucifixion? But, couldn't another person make the case that the unborn fetus is a lesser person than a person that was born, and therefore it is OK to kill them> Doesn't breathing oxygen from the air instead of from a liquid or a tube confer civil rights that are absent from earlier, metamorphic stages?Where do the Rules Stop?Wicca is an established religion, probably founded before Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And Satanic Churches obtain tax deductions because they represent a legitimate religion.
However, some schools may still prohibit Muslim girls from wearing head scarves. How is a head scarf disruptive to the campus learning environment?Extremists to the RescueRational people, good natured and tolerant, are content to allow others to express their views and opinions. These folks just don't want other people to bother them. A Satanist is OK, as long as they don't sacrifice your pet black cat on Halloween.
But extremists hold a stricter agenda. They want to control other peoples' behavior, and they wish that they could control other people's thinking. They want other people to think in a manner similar to the way that they think.
So, while most people are content to let others alone, extremists keep churning until they get their own way.Absent: Good Sense and Sound JudgmentPeople of gentle disposition wish that others operated with a level of tolerance and decorum.
Unfortunately, the folks that set the rules and draw the boundaries might favor one political party or another, might favor one religion over others.
So, who wants politicians to make rules about our schools, especially folks who have another political affiliation or religion than we do?
On the other hand, if we need to keep partisanship, bigotry and poor judgment out of our schools; someone has to set rules.
Let's just hope that whoever sets the rules allows out teachers to model freedom, tolerance and respect for others; and let's hope that our teachers make decisions based upon an open minded assessment of what is best for our nation's children.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Tuesday, September 30. 2008

News Nuggets

"Fail to the Chief": Neither Candidate gets NCLB
After eight years of failed education policy, two candidates vie for the title as "Your Education President for Change."But neither candidate understands education, and neither candidate realizes what a negative impact that the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) perpetrated upon American education.
"Clueless" might be a word that describes both candidates acumen in the education arena.It's not Education this Election YearMoney and War (also a topic about money) are the issues that predominate in "water cooler and back fence" discussions during this election year.
Health care really is a discussion of what is affordable because no one believes that millions of folks without access to health care is desirable.
In a way, the discussion about education issues is like the health care debate; i.e., everyone agrees that quality education is important and desirable. But, beliefs "head-butt" when discussions focus upon how to deliver quality education in a way that meets needs and solves problems as cheaply as possible.NCLB UniformityTeachers, and the students they foster, suffered under the auspices of the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB); and neither candidate has a "plan" (or a pledge) to end that misery and pain.
The prospect is for continued despair and doom because this sad political meddling in the affairs of education. This occurs because education concerns fail to rise to the level of importance that this cornerstone of our nation's future deserves.What's More Important than the Education of our Children?The "Economy" and a two-fronts war are on the minds of voters during this election season.
Gas pump sticker shock, "Pain at the Pump", keeps this issue in the face of both the voters and the politically disaffected.
Every stop at the grocery store produces a teeth-clenched, tooth-grinding reaction to the tag price on basic food staples.
The paradox is that the same pocketbook pain that families feel impacts schools at an accelerated level. If parents find it difficult to afford two children, imagine the issues involved in providing services and caring for 20,000 children.You're Invited to a Party, but no Need to CelebrateParty politics outranks common sense, good judgment and the common good when presidential politics roll around. (No pun intended. No one is rolling around on the floor because of laughter.)
Rabid party loyalty skews the normal sound judgment and cautious optimism of our citizens into "howling at the moon", radical platform-following zealots. Only the rush to grab their "imagined share of inheritance money" makes some people more crazy than a presidential election.Catch Phrase Change, but "Business as Usual"And as usual, "teachers and students get the business."
Obama is apt to come up with a more creative name for the NCLB than McCain, but a new catch phrase is only rhetorical slight of hand.
"Slogans do not an improved education make!""Platform Nuances a Difference Don't Make"Minor variations on a theme amount to dressing the political wolf in "off the shelf" discount store suits.
Here are some of the differences in the political stance of the candidates.
Note: The positions are left scrambled so that you can guess who is in favor of what "innovation and change" (Sarcasm intended).
One candidate thinks that NCLB was a major breakthrough and would like new rules for testing non-English-speaking and Special Ed. students while the other thinks that NCLB was a good first effort that should be revised, not dismantled.
One candidate believes that technology funding and technology access should be increased and that low-wealth school districts should have more technology while the other candidate thinks that local choices for technology programs are more important.
One candidate supports summer learning programs while the other supports after-school programs.
Both candidates support an increased math and science curriculum, both would boost funding for Head Start programs and both support some version of "Merit Pay" for teachers.
Describing these differences in the candidates is like comparing and contrasting the difference between Tina Fey (portraying Sarah Palin on Saturday Night Live) and Sarah Palin (playing a candidate) on Good Morning America.
These differences are not like the Danny DiVito and Arnold Swartzeneger style of twins, but more like the difference between two pieces of pork that are turning rancid in the same barrel.The Real Difference between Candidates:
Slashing Cows in the AmazonIn the Amazon, cattle herders have to drive livestock across piranha-infested streams to get to market. This operation can create mayhem for the farmer's investment and diminish the overall market value of the herd.
What to do?
So, these enterprising Amazon ranchers take a sickly, puny cow upstream of the ford site, slash the animal and drive it into the river. The bleeding cow attracts the school of piranhas to the feeding-frenzy party; and the healthy cattle ford the

stream in temporary window of safety…downstream from the distracted piranhas.
Sacrificing one cow for the sake of the herd, and for the sake of overall profits makes economic sense.
NCLB operates on the same principle, although in operation the process is more bruising than bloody.
The intent of NCLB is to sacrifice our public school systems so that some folks can get public money to send their children to church schools.
Of course, this financial maneuvering is illegal, but not if the public schools can be shown to be incompetent and harmful to our students.
So, like the puny cow that is sacrificed to the piranhas for the sake of all, some school districts need to be sacrificed so that voucher-based schemes can be marketed.
Support for public schools vs. support for a voucher system for dismantling our public schools is the one educational policy area that separates the candidates.
The corollary of the NCLB attack on public school teachers, the support for standardized testing, also differentiates the candidates.
One candidate favors continued focus upon standardized testing to hold teachers accountable, while the other candidate only notices that teachers are "teaching to the test." (Imagine that?)
But, in this time of financial turmoil, few people are focused enough upon educational issues to notice.
In fact, school districts are so focused upon financial challenges that there isn't enough energy to raise a national conversation about this political dirty-double-dealing.
Neither candidate is taking the leadership in exposing this double-crossing of our public school system by the political leaders that demand our trust.
During this election cycle, incumbents of both parties are apt to be turned out in record numbers. Unfortunately, it will be for economic issues, not their lack of vision and support for public education.
For voters who are looking for a clear choice in presidential leadership based upon a vision and focus for education and the future of our children; wait four years, and see what the political machine has to offer at that time.
Neither candidate has an education program to offer this time around because neither candidate understands how detrimental the NCLB is for education.

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Thursday, July 31. 2008

News Nuggets

Fracturing Teacher Trust with Forked-Tongue Politics
"Speaking with forked tongue" and "talking out of both sides of the mouth" is standard fare from politicians. So are promises to teachers for additional money and job support. And, what politicians give, they can take away.A recent example showing how the precarious position that teachers salaries and salary bonuses (stipends) teeters upon the will and good graces of politicians surfaced in Florida.
In Florida, teachers were promised stipends if they went through the expense and ordeal of becoming nationally certified.
Here is what it takes to become a Nationally Certified Teacher…SidebarNational Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

NBPTS Assessment
NBPTS Fee Schedule ($2,565.00 USD)
Note: Some Florida school districts did reimburse teachers for the hefty NBPTS assessment fees

But, hard to come by, harder to hold; Florida teachers that took the extra classes and paid for the certification exam, are being short changed. (What else is new?)
SidebarFrom the St. Petersburg
Times…http://www.sptimes.com/2007/11/13/Hernando/A_plum_for_6_who_teac.shtml
From The Ledger…
http://www.theledger.com/article/20071216/NEWS/712160423
And sometimes, teachers fork over large amounts of cash (and spend valuable personal time) studying to earn additional certifications.
When the promise to give teachers more pay for certifications meets reality, someone is certain to be hurt and disappointed in the "jilted" promises that ensue…and it won't be the politicians.
Why would teachers invest time, energy and money to become certified? Did promise of more money make them do it? No.
Most teachers realize that additional college classroom seat time is next to irrelevant in their actual, minute-by-hour-by-day teaching activities.Teachers improve teaching skill by teaching in the same way that students improve reading skill by reading.
But, teachers want to improve their professionalism and their status. The money is not sufficient to drive teachers down the long road to certification success, but the promise of more money probably tips motivations that are on the fence over to the "I'll do it" side of the internal debate.
Sidebar"In Florida, board-certified teachers earn an annual bonus of about $4,000, and can double that by working as mentors.
A handful of districts go even further, offering cash bonuses to lure board-certified teachers from other districts or out of state. Some of those are large counties like Miami-Dade, which pays a one-time stipend of $7,500, or Duval and Broward, which offer $2,500 and $2,100 per year respectively, according to the board.
But tiny Nassau County, with an enrollment of about 11,000 students, pays a $1,500 stipend, and 35,000-student Lake County pays $500 a year.
Hernando pays no extra stipend, and officials acknowledged they might be missing out on a useful tool to recruit and retain qualified teachers."
Source:Tampa Bay .Comhttp://www.sptimes.com/2007/11/13/Hernando/A_plum_for_6_who_teac.shtmlIn the State of Florida, what teachers thought was a "promise of marriage" turned out to be a "one night stand," or maybe if they receive some money, "a long weekend of romance…before being dumped."
What the Florida Legislature is up to amounts to an "annulment."
But, how do teachers feel when they are "dumped?"
Perhaps words that seem acceptable for modern, prime-time television (but are still less than acceptable in our classrooms) might describe the the new personal lows felt by some Florida teachers who trusted in the promises of their political leaders.Should Classroom Toolkit Publish this News Item?The danger that politicians (and their school district cronies) in other areas of the country might latch on to this "annul stipends solution" to ameliorate their budget ills, and sabotage other stipend programs.
Maybe in tough economic times, the choice between gasoline and electricity, heating fuel and a five-day school week comes down to scuttling stipends for…Special Education Teachers
Bilingual Teachers

Gifted and Talented Teachers
Coaches (except for the money-making men's' football and basketball coaches)Come to think of it, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) focuses upon "highly qualified" teachers. So, why not make a Master's Degree the entry level for teachers?
This way, teachers with a Master's Degree wouldn't deserve stipends. Even better, teachers with only a Bachelor's Degree could enjoy a cut in pay.
And those PhD's and EdD's? Their degree was probably only theoretical or statistical…nothing practical for raising test scores…so they wouldn't mind forgoing stipends for their terminal degree, would they?Due Process, Hold Harmless and Property RightsOrdinary contact rights would not allow school district officials to dump stipends at will. There are Due Process and Property Rights, and clauses about Holding Rights Holders Harmless.
This usually means something like dropping the money that new folks might get, but not reducing the money that in-place employees receive.
The "loop hole" in this flawed thinking is when a State Legislature changes the law. This absolves school district leaders of what would ordinarily be a crime (and criminal intent).
But, politicians and school district officials who damage the professionalism of our schools should be open to class action lawsuits.
Contracts with teachers should be a commitment to a perpetual right. Political mismanagement or political meddling should entitle teachers to a class action recourse (preferable at public expense).
SidebarMoney spent in lawsuits, legal fees and lost work time would be better spent by increasing teacher pay, anyway.The Danger of Speaking Out"Job EndangermentUnfortunately, teacher talent, outstanding results and exemplary past evaluations are insufficient shields for executive-directed, rock-bottom evaluations the next time evaluations roll around.
Joining a class action lawsuit could mean retribution that costs more money than the loss of the puny stipend.
SidebarBut since teacher salaries are low, the loss of a few dollars in stipend money seems huge…just ask spouses and children of teachers how many pleasures they are denied because family funds are limited.All of this leaves teachers feeling like the naive gal who wakes up to find herself alone in a motel room, with bus fare pinned to her undergarments…
Of course, with politicians as bedfellows, what else can you expect except "day-after" remorse, lowered self-esteem, a withering sense of professionalism, and depressed energy levels.
A bit of indignant anger and "vent-able" hostility might be appropriate, too.
But, in a political climate where education "takes a back seat" to most other issues, a teacher's best hope might be a gentle, collegial shoulder to cry on.

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Saturday, May 31. 2008

News Nuggets

Miami: Now a Majority Spanish-Speaking City
It's official. Miami is a majority Spanish-speaking city.And, this does not mean that like San Antonio, Los Angeles or Tucson that the majority population is of Hispanic origin. This means that the majority of the city's population speaks Spanish.This also means that folks that don't speak Spanish find job hunting to be difficult…and the job quest is becoming more problematic.Imagine the disadvantage of speaking only English and not being able to find a job because your language skills were deficient. Of course, this is the same kind of challenge that Spanish speakers face throughout the rest of the US.But Miami is not a hot bed of poor folks who got there by swimming the Brave River of risking dehydration in the desert.Miami is a cosmopolitan city, with high property values (fueled by a recent, unregulated, property speculation craze) and vibrant economic growth.And, Miami does not have a majority Cuban population anymore. The immigrant hurricane floods Miami with folks from Argentina, Haiti, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Central America.
So, what drew these folks to Miami…a vibrant business climate, an attractive social life, and ease of assimilation. Because immigrants speak the language of commerce, trade, entertainment and daily communication (Spanish); Miami is a natural haven in the US.But these are the same market forces that are driving English-speaking people out of Miami as if a leaf-blower was cleaning the city.So, speak only English and apply for a teaching job in Miami. Or try to get a job as a school nurse, counselor, teacher aide, custodian or food service worker.When the majority language changes, even little details change. For example, imagine…Students in the Bilingual classes will be native English speakers
Assemblies will be conducted in Spanish with English translation for only a few crucial parts
Spanish textbooks will be of high quality, and the English textbooks for the Bilingual class will be substandard
School districts will siphon off Federal Bilingual money and use it for the Spanish-speaking majority, giving English-speaking students short-shrift
Cafeteria menus will reflect the ethnic food items that Spanish students prefer
School bus drivers must be able to speak Spanish in order to give orders to students
Coaches will need to upgrade their skills to learn to coach fútball (i.e., soccer) to replace American-style football
Parent-Teacher conferences will require translators to be brought in so that Spanish-speaking teaches can communicate with parents that speak only English
So, begin studying Spanish now. The pattern of growth that Miami experiences may be coming to a city near you, even your city.¡Buena Suerte! (Good luck!)References:In Miami, Spanish is becoming the primary language
Miami: the Capital of Latin America
English-only speakers disappearing from Miami-Dade
Repeal Is Likely for 'English Only' Policy in Miami

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Wednesday, April 30. 2008

News Nuggets

Districts “Cutting Down” on Teacher Absences: Will they use an Axe, Weed Trimmer or Bulldozer?
May is the time to maximize student learning. But, May follows a period of maximum, high-stakes-test-related stress and fatigue.
In addition, teachers put off (often under principal-induced duress) appointments with physician, dentists, gynecologists and psychiatrists.
So, immediately following the high-stakes ordeal, teachers begin cashing in their "Sick Days" and "Personal Days" as if these were a "Thanksgiving" bonus. District Cross CurrentsAt the same time that teachers grab their moments of relief, school districts face:Budgets that are running short
"Use it or Loose it" restraints that force squandering money now
The problem of keeping substitute money in reserve, or worse, exceeding the budget allotment for paying substitutes
Of course, school district under book and under budget the funds required for paying substitutes. This makes the school district's executive leaderships appear to be incompetent. School district leaders become squeamish about this under budgeting when the "budget deviance" becomes apparent.
So, district executives institute a "program to remedy" the situation.Blame Teachers? Of Course!An initiative to resolve a "problem" must address what the problem is. In this case the argument goes like this:
Students learn better when their teachers are teaching them.Teachers are not teaching their students when they are at a doctor's or dentist's office or recuperating from triple by-pass surgeryTherefore: Teachers are the problem.
Solution: Clamp down on teachers that leave the classroom for any reason.Research…Researchers who should know more about the "real world of teaching" come down on the side of school district administrators in seeing teacher absence as a "problem to be addressed.""In the past year, research papers from economists at Harvard University’s graduate school of education and Duke University in Durham, N.C., have argued that teacher absences have a small but significant negative effect on student achievement as shown by test results. Both groups point to previous research that suggests ways of reducing such absences.The researchers note, for instance, that the more generous leave provisions are, the more days on average are taken.They also say it is worth considering incentive plans that, typically, reward exceptional attendance or pay teachers for earned leave they don’t take.Another promising approach, according to the researchers, is to require teachers to report time off to their principal directly, rather than to the central office or an answering machine."Source:Education WeekPublished Online: April 28, 2008
Published in Print: April 30, 2008http://tinyurl.com/3o6afm

And there are proposed remedies: Some positive, some punitive, some draconian…
And, there is an attempt to twist research to show that students learn more from their teacher than they learn from a substitute. (What else is new?)
But what researchers fail to understand is that much more money was wasted when teachers were paid to be in class and focus upon high-stakes test practice. Bailing out on the curriculum to teach-to-the-test subtracts more student learning than what learning is lost when the teacher is absent because of a sick day or personal day.
And the number of days that students learning is "hijacked" because of test practice (or benchmark testing) exceeds the number of days that most teachers are away from the class for personal reasons.
And, those school districts that run a rigorous "teacher training program" pull teachers out of the classroom far more days than the sick-day, personal-day total time that teachers "enjoy."
Other bits of "real world wisdom" that are missing from the "research equation" include:The number of hours that Special Education and Regular teachers are removed from class to conduct Special Education Planning Meetings
The amount of uncompensated (unpaid) time that teachers spend each day outside the ordinary work day
The fact that teachers initiate contact with sick and unhygienic children places teachers at a higher risk illness
The tendency of school districts to hire younger, inexperienced teachers in lieu of hiring veteran teachers (who earn much more). These teachers will tend to have children, and need to be away from the classroom to take care of family needs.
Perhaps these up-tight, penny-clutching experts would like to see a return to the "one room schoolhouse" days where teachers were unmarried, lived with a local family, and were fired if they became pregnant (or even if they married). Why, they became more expensive and the community didn't want to pay.Entitlement: The Warped View of Twisted MindsThe folks that argue that teachers see sick days and personal days as an "entitlement" are clueless about education.
These pundits view substitute teachers as a budget drain and a cost center lack an understanding of the important role that substitutes play on a campus team. With the tiny amount of money that most substitutes make, school districts are lucky to have any names on the substitute roster.Campuses manager that form a supportive mutual relationship with

great substitutes know that they have to keep these folks employed, or they are lost.Community ResponsibilitySure, our communities do not want to pay the cost of educating our children, and prefer to operate our school systems "on-the-cheap." But, this is the fault of a "wrong-headed mentality" and bad advice…not the fault of teachers.
But, many folks are jealous of teachers because teachers enjoy one of the most personally rewarding (although not financially so) professions in the world. Teachers receive love and "warm fuzzies" from children, and teachers watch children improve, grow, learn, blossom before their eyes.
So, why begrudge teachers a deserved (earned, needed) sick and personal day benefit when teachers' salaries remain artificially low?
It is time to send the mean-spirited, clueless "researchers" to work at teachers' pay, give them extra work to do at night and demonstrate just how much that teachers work for the meager salary and benefits that they receive.
"Bean counter-experts" (pun intended) produce educational improvement plans that are not "worth a hill of beans."The Real SolutionThe real solution for these substitute woes is to hire full-time, highly trained substitutes and integrate them into the campus staff. This strategy would…Ensure that enough substitutes are available
Ensure that the substitutes kept instruction moving at the same, high level that the regular teacher maintains
Ensure continuity in daily classroom routines since the substitutes would be familiar with each classroom and each teacher's classroom management
Ensure high behavior standards because the substitutes would know the children, and know of individual, special needs.
Allow school budgets to reflect real budget needs, instead of the under budgeting management that causes difficulties at this time in the school year
If we want a quality education for our students, we have to be willing to pay for the components of that education. And, paying for substitute teachers is just one of those costs.
School district executive managers should just get used to the fact that quality education is an investment, not a money drain.
We can invest our money in many ways that produce little payoff, or we can invest in education and harvest long-term social and societal rewards.
If our children and our families benefit from our investment in education, so be it.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Monday, March 31. 2008

News Nuggets

Does your School District have a "Rubber Room"
National Public Radio (NPR) ran a program about the " Rubber Room" program that is operated by the New York Public School System.So, "What is a Rubber Room?" you ask.
A "Rubber Room" program is an administrative option that reassigns teachers to non teaching jobs until the school system develop an administrative solution to deal with the teacher that is assigned there."We hear from New York City school teachers about a secret room in the New York City Board of Education building. Teachers are told to report there, and when they arrive, they find out they're under investigation for something. They have to wait in this room all day, every day, until the matter is cleared up. They call this bureaucratic purgatory "the rubber room." Some teachers have been stuck in it for years.This story was produced by Joe Richman, Samara Freemark, and Anayansi Diaz Cortes of Radio Diaries.We first heard about the rubber room from a documentary by Jeremy Garrett. There's a trailer at rubberroommovie.com. Jeremy's looking for funding to finish the film, and a distributor. (23 minutes)"
Listen to the This American Life broadcast, #350: Human Resources
But that is New York City, with their massive inefficiency and administrative problems. This couldn't happen to in our school district, could it?
How could a school district operate a program with up to a dozen rooms, filled with between 700 and 800 teachers, each collecting their full pay and benefits…but doing absolutely nothing?
SidebarFor a general search of this topic, check out the search term…NY school district Rubber Room
Do you think that this couldn't happen in smaller school districts, but on a smaller scale?"I think that there are "Rubber Rooms" in every school district. We just haven't heard about them. For the most part, a waste of money and a waste of time. Yes, we should be protecting our students; however, too often, folks know who to play the system and the innocent gets caught up in this mess."SourceComment on the Teacher Forum., The Teacher Cornerhttp://tinyurl.com/2da4ke
While not every school district maintains huge rooms with hundreds of non-working teachers reporting for confinement; this strategy seems to be widespread.Reasons for the WasteThe cost of litigation is probably the main driver of the "Rubber Room" phenomena. It is probably less costly (cheaper) to pay a teacher for doing nothing for a year than to pay a legal firm to handle the issue for a few weeks or a month. (We have no actual data on school district personnel legal costs as much of this process happens "behind closed doors" and is generally exempt from "Public Information" regulations.
The extent of this money-wasting practice will remain hidden from tax payers and community members.
But, Classroom Toolkit offers a solution.SolutionClassroom Toolkit is inaugurating the "Laptops for Rubber Room Inmates" Program.
In this program, we will provide laptops with wireless Internet access to every teacher that is assigned to a "Rubber Room."
Then, we will put this talent group of folks that have been "downgraded" (degraded undervalued and diminished) into productive curriculum designers, test item writers, lesson plan developers, and teacher tools producers.
All materials developed by this program will go into the public domain, and become the property of the world of education.
In this way, the "RR - Rubber Room" will cease to be the "RR - Restriction or Retribution" or "RR - Restful/ Restless Reassignment" to become "RR - a Responsible Resource."
Now, we just have to find a "fat-cat" sponsor with more money than brains (like the NY Public School District." Hmm. Sounds like a job for the Federal Government. Candidates, are you listening?
In this way, we will get real and useful work from these talented professionals, and leverage the investment in the laptops.
Sounds good. But, can we trust the NY City School System to be able to keep track of the laptops?

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Friday, February 29. 2008

News Nuggets

Why Last Resort Programs Work: Stopping the Dropout Epidemic
It is amazing how "last resorts" programs sometimes enjoy success (and pick up the pieces) that other, better funded, better designed, higher-rated, programs (that are staffed by more highly-qualified folks) flub.What can explain such success?
What can one person do?
Answer: That person can do plenty if they have vision, focus, commitment and charisma.
Idealism and credentials also help.
Case in point: Cristo Rey!
"Fr. Foley's charismatic personality and infectious energy
have helped raise support and awareness for
Cristo Rey not only here in the Chicago area, but also
across the country. Locally, Cristo Rey partners with
over 90 businesses for the school's Corporate Internship
Program, has raised nearly $30 million to provide
the school with a striking new infrastructure, and sent
82% of graduates onto college. If that were not enough
to keep Fr. Foley busy, he has also played a key role in
opening ten Cristo Rey replications across the country.
Fr. Foley is the Chair of the Board of the Cristo Rey
Network, the newly formed organization leading the
effort to spread this model nationwide."Source:
Cristo Rey Newsletterhttp://www.cristorey.net/assets/charitable/viva_newsletter/spring04web.pdfNot bad for a program geared to help Chicago's central city (Mexican immigrants and minority students) escape from the "central city blight"…a deteriorated public school system, dropping out, gangs, drugs, teen-age pregnancies, learned hopelessness, defeat, despair, violence…even death.
Not a "Slam Dunk" on the "Court of Last Resort"
Success for the Cristo Rey program came with focus, dedication, sacrifice and hard work. Success didn't come easy.Watch the video…
Great video. Heartwarming results. Lives saved. Students working in corporate America at 14. Students graduating from high school (the first in their families, ever), and and an 82% college completion rate for Cristo Rey program graduates!
What the Cristo Rey program lacked in advantages became a model for turning "disadvantages into strengths."What's the secret?Corporate Sponsors Help. The Power of the Jesuit Mind and 500 years of social activism Helps. But, what is the Independent Variable that is responsible for this program's success?
Real goals, educational credentials, and a huge dose of reality help the Cristo Rey Project. But, none of these variables explain the program's success.
Even the charisma of its developer and director, the publicity on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), story publicity on National Public Radio (NPR) don't explain the success.
Time and Newsweek: Fr. Folley, or Newsweek: Daring to be Different
The real power of the program? Belief in students…
Don't Let Anyone Ever tell you that "Kids cant' Learn"
Here is the real secret to the success of Cristo Rey. The founders believed that students from the lowest strata of central city economic life can learn, can excel, can succeed, can create and can contribute to society.
The founders backed up this belief with a program that energized students and businesses.
Classroom Toolkit always promotes the belief that any school district that really educates its students enjoys sufficient monetary support to do whatever it takes to teach its students. And, this monetary support is unrelated to district wealth.
The results that the Cristo Rey program points to prove this assertion.
The program takes students that amassed marginal, mediocre and dismal performance records in the "barrio-centric" central city schools of Chicago.
In those schools the plethora of ills that plague lower socioeconomic kids prevail.
In Cristo Rey, hope, safety, zero tolerance and academic success prevail.
Which teachers go home at 3:00 p.m., tired, stressed, drained, depleted, desperate? That is if they go straight home.
Maybe the "barrio boys and gals" make a pit stop to imbibe their socially acceptable drug of choice.
Which teachers go home at 6:00 p.m., or 7:00 p.m.; energized, confident, satisfied that they are making a difference in the lives of their students?

And, while money was available in partnership with local businesses. this money was not a handout to help poor, depressed, ailing, sorry immigrant kids with freebies and handouts. This money was an investment in high quality, productive, creative workers who are an asset to the company that sponsors them. This work-study program is a take-away for businesses and students, not a "give-away that enforces the expectation that "continued generations on welfare remains the fate of the central city poor."
And, count competent staff as a resource.
The $30 Million USD in corporate support, grants and the $2.2 million in eRate funding didn't just fall from the sky. The endless positive publicity for the program didn't just explode. Folks, competent folks, go out of their way to bring these resources into the organization.
The Real Question…The real question is, "When are our public schools going to discover that our students have unlimited, untapped potential?"
Who will bring the type of success that the Cristo Rey program enjoys to the majority of our students?
We may not know who, but we know that this person (or group) will believe in the ability of students to learn…believe in the ability of students to excel.
And that charismatic student-focused leader will demonstrate that the learning performance targets, that educators and students shoot for and reach, exceed the "minimal skills targets" of state-sponsored, high-stakes tests.
Targeting education toward "tests of minimal skills" is deadly to the long-term success of our country…stagnation from within…resulting in the under-development of our greatest resource; the brilliant, talented, inventive, creative, dynamic minds of our students.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Thursday, January 31. 2008

News Nuggets

NCLB is up for Re-Authorization: Candidates Take Pot Shots, but Don't have a Clue
The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is up for re-authorization.
And, candidates of both parties have taken their pot shots at the bad law.
But, none of the candidates says anything to indicate that they have a clue about how to "fix" the law, or indicates that they know how to "fix" public education.Meanwhile, back at the ranch, President Bush hangs on to the fantasy that NCLB was a "good law." (You can't be more "out of touch" than that.)
Look what our president says about NCLB…
"President Bush urged Congress to “strengthen this good law” by increasing accountability, adding flexibility for states and districts, reducing the number of high school dropouts, and providing extra help for struggling schools.'Six years ago, we came together to pass [NCLB], and today no one can deny its results,' Bush said in his State of the Union address Jan. 28. 'Last year, fourth and eighth graders achieved the highest math scores on record. Reading scores are on the rise. And African-American and Hispanic students posted all-time highs.'"Source:eSchool Newshttp://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/?i=51868;_hbguid=005bac94-074d-4991-a7f1-841695cf4778
But, not everyone agrees with this biased, political assessment of the law's success.'"Instead of rushing to renew a broken law with fatal flaws, we need to first engage in a thoughtful debate about what is best for our nation’s children. While the president agrees that changes need to made to the law, we need to overhaul—not tweak—the law to help every child succeed,” said the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in a statement.'The six years since passage of NCLB have demonstrated that neither Congress nor the president had the will to finance an expanded federal role in education. We must continually examine our public schools and make system-wide changes to ensure schools are teaching children the skills they need to compete in the rapidly changing global environment. These 21st-century skills include collaboration, ingenuity, problem solving, creativity, and more—none of which is tested under NCLB.'"The devastating effects of poverty have a significant impact on student achievement. While schools systems currently work hard to address the effects of poverty, they cannot eliminate the causes of poverty. Federal efforts to improve student achievement should coordinate with other systems, such as health care, housing and judicial systems, to alleviate the fundamental inequities that perpetuate poverty.'"Source:eSchool Newshttp://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/?i=51868;_hbguid=005bac94-074d-4991-a7f1-841695cf4778But, though some of the candidates had a hand in NCLB, voted for NCLB, and are using public disgust for the results wrought by NCLB to foster political animosity; no candidate seems to know how to fix the law.
To fix something, you have to know…What is wrong (why it is broken)
What the real problem is
What it takes to make things right
That more of the same only results in the "same-old"
What it takes to do things right
Who knows how to do things right
How to let the people who know what to do take chargeWho Knows What to Do?Whether teachers know what to do to fix our schools is one thing. But, it is certain that our candidates and our politicians are ignorant of this objective reality.
But, our political process is polarizing, adversarial, win-loose, zero-sum…a circus.
Part of this problem is created by our political parties, not the candidates that pander to them. Our political parties polarize our country, and their zealots push their platforms (and the candidates that dance to them) to radical extremes.
And the party system fabricates "candidates" who represent a caricature of what real Americans believe.
And, all too often, voting is for the "Lesser of two evils", or "Voting for the Least-Worst" candidate.
True Conservatives
Americans are really conservative, i.e., practical and sensible.
Sidebar
Our definition has nothing in common with the Republican-Democratic Polarities that battle each other from the extremes of common sense and practical action. These two sides could be more accurately described as "Reactionary and Over-Reactive.
Feel free to figure out which is which, or if the label applies to both parties at the same time.
Here is the "real" meaning of the term, conservative…Common sense first
Practical solutions based upon common sense
Decisions for the good of everyone
Sticking to our American ideals
Granting rights based upon responsibilities to everyone, equallySo, can teachers pull off repair and the management of our schools if given the chance?

Who knows until they try?
But a couple of ideas bode well in the favor of teachers. Teachers know…Something about education while the current crop of folks in charge know little or nothing about education
That more bureaucracy, more tests, more external meddling and micro managing solves little
That the problems are not the result of lack of funding, and teachers know that tremendous amounts of additional funding are necessarySo, since the folks in charge haven't been able to do the job, why not give teachers a "shot at cleaning up the mess?"Hidden AgendaOf course, much of the debate from the candidates about whether multiple tests instead of a single test, or that NCLB saddled school districts with "unfunded mandates" hides the real issue.
As Classroom Toolkit has noted in many previous issues, the real intent of the law was to provide public money for church schools.
This is the reason that the system sets school districts up to "look bad."
This is also the reason that President Bush proposed a "Pell Grant for Kids," yet another attempt to funnel our money to church schools who don't deserve to get it.
Diluting the already too tiny pot of school dollars so that church schools can spend it to compete with our public schools makes as little sense as spending school dollars on tests that are designed to blame teachers for our politicians' mistakes.A Grain of SaltSo, when our candidates, and later, our nominees "cry wolf" about the "bad, old NCLB;" pay no attention.
The possible recession, the mortgage crisis, and a pop star who doesn't wear underpants have occluded even the "Iraq War" and "Immigration" in the minds and worries of our voting public.
Education is not on our political radar screen, and whoever wins the election won't know enough to do anything positive with NCLB's replacement.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Monday, December 31. 2007

News Nuggets

Paying Parents to "Do the Right Thing"
Paying "Low-Income" Parents to "Do the Right Thing?" Is this a viable antipoverty strategy? Do you think that an approach like this is "crazy?" Would you rather just put parents in jail for "Doing the wrong thing?" Is putting parents in jail for doing the wrong thing cheaper, or more expensive than paying them to do the right thing?There is a catch.…
Should we only pay parents of the lowest socioeconomic strata for doing what is right?
What do we do with middle class and wealthy parents who don't do what is right for their children? And, if paying low-income parents is the "right thing," why isn't it "right" to pay all parents?
And what is the "Right Thing?" Here are some examples:Getting a library card for their children: $50
Taking children to the doctor or dentist: $100
Getting the children vaccinated
Passing a state high-stakes content exam: $600 to student (Up to five exams)Source: New York City Government site: Schedule of Incentives
"The education incentives are designed to promote school attendance, parental engagement and improved performance on standardized tests. Health incentives will be offered for maintaining adequate health coverage as well for making timely medical and dental visits. Work-force incentives will be offered for those who sustain full-time employment and upgrade their job skills.Families that complete the noted activities will receive their cash payments every two months.The $50 million program is being privately funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Broad Foundation, the Starr Foundation, the Robin Hood Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the American International Group and Bloomberg."Source:ABC Newshttp://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=3589074&page=1 For a description of low-income parents that would have done the right thing anyway, but who are collecting the money, and how parents may delay doing the right thing until they are eligible for a payment, visit…
http://www.nypost.com/seven/09132007/news/regionalnews/this_dad_is_paid_if_his_kids_g.htmPolitical Future or Wasted Money?Of course, not everyone looks favorably on this program, although it is being funded with private (not government money), and the program was supposed to modeled after programs that were tested in Mexico. How could anyone object to poor parents earning extra money?
"The program is being offered to 5,000 low-income families, with payments in varying amounts to the families, if they get more involved in their children’s schooling, grades, attendance, doctor’s visits, etc.…One excuse given in the story was that “Sometimes, people need a little encouragement, so maybe this will help wake some people up”. Whatever happened to parental responsibility?! Parents need to pay close attention to what is going on with their children, their schooling, grades, their health, etc. But now parents are going to be paid to do what they should already be doing?! Hmm, paying parents to do what they should already be doing for their children, because it’s their children. Isn’t that what we call Bribery? Where do I sign up? I’ve got a kid wanting to go to college."Source:http://www.tellinitlikeitis.net/2007/09/mayor-bloomberg-paying-poor-to-do-the-right-thing.html"(Writing last month in Gotham Gazette, Heather MacDonald took the opposite view, arguing that it could set a dangerous and absurd precedent: "Not just attending classes, but refraining from hitting your teacher, not bringing a gun to school, showing up for an exam, bathing your kids and feeding them — all will be candidates for a bribe.")Source:http://www.gothamgazette.com/blogs/wonkster/2006/10/17/paying-parents-to-do-the-right-thing-new-york-is-smart-to-look-to-mexico/And, what about the Mexican program that the New York City was model upon?" This kind of cash incentive “is based on a highly successful Mexican antipoverty program, known as Oportunidades, that is now being tried by at least 25 other countries” and resulted in bigger, healthier and better-schooled children.Source:http://www.gothamgazette.com/blogs/wonkster/2006/10/17/paying-parents-to-do-the-right-thing-new-york-is-smart-to-look-to-mexico/
Read a report about the Mexican Anti-Poverty program…
The Mexican program started in rural areas, and migrated to urban areas (no pun intended).Economic OpportunityOne issue is clear. Parents who live in poverty do not want their children to become sick, suffer, die. These parents do not want their children's to feel pangs of hunger, neither do these parents want their children's teeth to rot out.The financial incentives may look like "easy-street" freebies to some parents, but this program uncovers contentious issues.Classroom Toolkit is just going to mention these issues, but we do not have solutions.Forces of ContentionHere is a list of "hot-button" issues (in no particular order):Unskilled workers cannot earn a living wage in a city with a high cost of living (such as NYC), even by working two jobs
People who cannot support themselves on their wages cannot support children
Crime, drugs, alcoholism, gambling, prostitution and gang activities tend to find recruits in impoverished areas
Alcoholism in particular creates chromosome and genetic abnormalities that can be passed down for several generations

Mental illness may be a root cause of some of the poverty
Affluent people in plain view of the impoverished people often cause the impoverished people to feel of resentment just because the affluent people have more luck, choices, benefits than they do
The emphasis upon government assuming responsibility when parents cannot or will not take care of their children is costly
What about providing "Universal Health Care" for all children. How about "Universal Health Care" for parents so that they remain well enough to take care of their children?
Political solutions that emphasize punishment of the underclass are seldom effective. Whether true or not, people in the lowest economic stations of life often feel like they are being punished alreadyImagine Paying Someone to do What they Should doPaying someone to do what is right sounds like a novel idea. What if our politicians learned about this?
Oh wait! Don't we already pay our politicians to do the right thing?
How are the folks who can't do what is right by their constituents (because they play "party politics," make "back-room deals," "sell their votes to the highest-bidding lobbyist" going to help the poor do what is right.
Surely the poor cannot look to our politicians as role models?A Drop in the Bucket$50 million USD is a "drop in the bucket" compared to the kind of money that it would take to make a significant impact in the poverty conditions of a city the size of New York City.$50 million is a meager sum for running a school district of 5,000 students.
$50 million sounds like a lot of money until you start to "crunch the numbers.If there were just over 1 million students in the NYC school system, this is a sum total of less than $50.00 for each student.Were the program to give $50 per student to the 100 largest school systems in the country (just over 10 million students), the program would cost over $540 million.
Poverty is a problem in our country, we just don't believe that we have the money to fix it.
And what is $50 per year? In the school district budget crisis a few years past, teachers were given a "token raise" of $50.00. Of course, $50.00 divided by 12 months, minus taxes, minus retirement; equals a barely noticeable increase on the paycheck.
What is your take on paying low-income parents to do the right thing?

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Friday, November 30. 2007

News Nuggets

Teacher Sexual Abuse of Children: Disgusting! Scandalous! Preventable?Our country's print media, talk shows and newscasts flooded with "deplorable news" after the Associate Press released a report on teacher sexual abuse of students.The Associated Press reported that one teacher in 10,000 to 100,000 abuses children. (Fuzzy numbers…estimates because the problem is so underreported.)
Sidebar
AP: Teacher Sex Abuse Cases Reveal Patterns
CNN: Sexual misconduct plagues U.S. schools, AP reports
AP: Sex Abuse Laws Can Fail School Kids
Google Search "Associated Press Teachers Sexual Abuse of Students"
A flood of these news stories are surfacing, much to the chagrin of honest, ethical, caring and law abiding teachers. Teachers know that these crimes happen, maybe even in their own school district.
What are the reasons that teachers remain stoic in the face of this "bad press?" What are the reasons that these criminals, who cast a pall on the teaching profession, seems to slither with impunity, unimpeded across our school districts' landscape?Want Failsafe Schools? Pay the Price!Logic dictates that even one case of a trusted adult (teacher, priest, rabbi, minister, imam, counselor, therapist, physician, nurse) abusing or molesting a child is "one too many."
Therefore, all such folks should be:Screened
Prosecuted, and if guilty, jailed
Registered and Tracked, if they are ever paroled
Banned from any further contact with childrenIn addition, school district administrators that "hire, harbor, shelter, cover up these crimes or otherwise allow these criminals to "roam at large" should be:Fired
Prosecuted and if guilty, jailed
Barred from future school district employment
Banished from contact with children or child-service organizationsBut, none of this will happen.
Our public will wail, then the "outcry" will smolder and the embers will cool. The ashes will soil our schools, but "nothing long-term, definitive, solid or substantial" will be done.
The Reason: Solutions would be too expensive!
Sure, the vocal outcry proclaims unequivocal support for ensuring that no "Perverted Perpetrator (PervPerp) is hired; or, is allowed to remain employed in our school systems.SidebarTo really protect our children, we'll need to screen employees of all private, parochial and charter schools.
If we can vet Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents, we can screen teachers! The technology and procedures for investigation exist. This process will only take time, people and money. Lots of money!If we really mean business when we profess our desire to protect our children, we can build the national database, create an identification (ID) system, integrate biometric scanning and install video surveillance system in our schools.
We can also build maximum punishment into the legal and justice systems, and stiffen punishment for PervPerps.
We will need to harden our schools to make them impenetrable, impervious and impermeable to the "Scums and Scummetes" that would betray our children.
Of course, this would cost too much since we would be tracking down devious criminals, wolves with chalk dust on their fingers, who blend in…and are often great teachersSidebarPervPerps often put a lot of work into becoming well-liked, proficient teachers. This helps them disguise their predilections, and brings them closer to the children that they prey upon.Other Suggestions:Create a national reporting hotline, similar to the state Child Abuse Hotlines. This needs to be national in scope because these PervPerps prowl across state lines
Remove the "Statute of Limitations" from the crime of teacher (and trusted adult) sexual abuse
Make "covering up the crime" by failure to report every incident to authorities a felony. Try associated school administrators in a court of law as accomplices…as "Accessories After the Fact"
Make scho0l district administrators "Personally, Jointly and Severally" Liable for Financial Suites brought by victims
Make lawyers that shield PervPerps from justice jointly liable for the crimes of their criminal clients If we were serious about protecting our children, we could:Build more prisons
Make room in existing prisons by expelling petty drug users (unless they were caught selling drugs to children)
Build in an upgrade path for the punishment for a second "PervPerp offense" to death row
Build a teacher licensure system Understanding the Status QuoAlthough understanding how school district officials (or any normal person) could sanction continued PervPerp employment in our schools, little will be done.
"The AP found attempts to stop particular offenders, it also found a firm resistance towards identifying and preventing abuse. Fellow teachers often ignore the abuse or believe they cannot help. School administrators cut backdoor deals to

sidestep lawsuits or bad press. In state governments and Congress, lawmakers are loath to impose harsher punishments or any national policy in fear of harming the teaching profession.Source:Teacher Sexual Abuse Of Students Increasing Neddermeyer, Dorothy M. PhD
How could stiffer penalties harm the teaching profession? What would a national policy do to corrupt the teaching profession?
Instead, what will happen is…PervPerps will continue to work in our school systems
Principals and superintendents will continue to fail to report sexual abuse crimes to the police
Superintendents will fail to alert other school districts (in state and out of state) about the depredations and dalliances of the PervPerps
Teachers will remain silent about their suspicions about colleagues for fear of being retaliated against (by district administrators)
Closet deals that rid one school district of the blight of a PervPerp employee will let that criminal skate, slide and slither into another districtSchool administrators will "Look the other way," make deals, and claim "ignorance of the facts" as the PervPerp skinks off sneakily into the sewer."Beyond the horror of individual crimes, the larger shame is the institutions that govern education have only sporadically addressed a problem that's been apparent for years.'From my own experience -- this could get me in trouble -- I think every single school district in the nation has at least one perpetrator. At least one,' says Mary Jo McGrath, a California lawyer who has spent 30 years investigating misconduct in schools. 'It doesn't matter if it's urban or rural or suburban.'"Source:Sexual misconduct plagues U.S. schools, AP reports
If a lawyer can "get in trouble" for whistle blowing, so can teachers.
It's a dynamic so common it has its own nicknames -- "passing the trash" or the "mobile molester."Source:Sexual misconduct plagues U.S. schools, AP reports
So, why the conspiracy of silence?
SidebarClassroom Toolkit explored this conspiracy of silence in a previous newsletter article, Telling it Like it Is in Education: The Muffled, Muzzled, Muted Sounds of Silenced Teachers
The Real Solution: Convicting the Innocent to Oust the GuiltyThere is only one real solution for ousting the PervPerp Criminals from our school districts. Honest, caring and innocent teachers have to speak out.
Hard-working, dependable, caring teachers have to be willing to loose their jobs to report instances of child abuse when they suspect that their colleagues are abusing children.
The paradox is that only by decent, innocent teachers being willing to take the retribution from district administrators for "Whistle Blowing" will the the dark deeds of dirty PervPreps come to light soon enough to protect current and soon-to-be-future victims.
If you know about an incident where abuse has happened, report it to campus officials, counselors, the district superintendent. But, also use the Child Abuse Hotline and the Newspapers.
Sure, you might become an unemployed, unable to get another teaching job "hero," but you will be a hero (unsung, under appreciated, maybe broke and homeless); but a hero that you can respect in your own conscience.
"Buckle up" your courage.
The chances are only 1 in 10,000 or 1 in 100,000 that one of your colleagues are one of these "lowest of the low" student sexual abusers.
But if you encounter one, do your duty.Report! Report! Report!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Wednesday, October 31. 2007

News Nuggets

Media: "One in Ten US High Schools is a 'Dropout Factory'": It Must be a Slow News Day
Surprise! One in ten US high schools fails to graduate a huge chunk of its students. Even more amazing, most of these students are culled (pun intended) from minority populations.Even more amazing is that this "bit of wisdom" from the "Tell us Something we didn't Know" department passes off for news.
It must be a slow news day if this issues plays in the media.
Another revelation: School districts and states under report the "dropout problem."SidebarOld News!"Every year, approximately 1.2 million students-that's 7,000 every school day-do not graduate from high school on time. Nationwide, only about 70 percent of students earn their high school diplomas. Among minority students, only 57.8 percent of Hispanic, 53.4 percent of African American, and 49.3 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students in the U.S. graduate with a regular diploma, compared to 76.2 percent of white students and 80.2 percent of Asian Americans."Source:Alliance for Education's: About the Crisis articleGuess who Else is Dropping OutThere is no fooling you, is there? You guessed that new teachers are dropping out, maybe even at a pace to outstrip the students.SidebarHere are some statistics from the Alliance for Education"At the same time, teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate: 14 percent of new teachers leave by the end of their first year; 33 percent leave within three years; and almost 50 percent leave in five years. Estimated conservatively, American schools spend more than $2.6 billion annually replacing teachers who have dropped out of the profession. Many analysts believe that the price is actually much larger and point out that the loss in teacher quality and student achievement must be added to the bill."Source:Alliance for Education's: About the Crisis articleAnd, the reason is the same: Everyone likes (even thrives on) success.
Everyone likes how success feels, likes how success structures their self-talk in positive ways, likes how other people dole out praise, affection and admiration when they achieve success.
The "dropout rate" (best described as school leaving rate) is a measure of success. Aren't 70% of our students "sticking it out" to the bitter end (graduation)?
Here is the problem: For all the money we spend on education, our goal of educating every student remains elusive.
Where the "Coming up Short" States are
The states with the largest percentages of "Dropout Factory" high schools are the states with the largest minority populations. No surprise!These also tend to be states with the largest populations.
State-by-State Breakdown of "Drop Out Factory" Schools
Big Bureaucracy: No Solution in Sight
Hope that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) can be revised to address this problem remains a bureaucratic fantasy. Wishful thinking heightens expectations, solves little.
Looking to the Feds to solve local issues by sanctions against teachers hasn't worked. What evidence is there that the "same soggy solutions" will spark levels of change that are large enough to be observed and measured?
But, what if Big Bureaucracy is the source of the problem…due to inept and inefficient management, red tape, and the inability to achieve goals?
Or, what if Big Bureaucracy really wants public schools to appear to be failing so that government money can be funneled into church schools?
Sidebar
Classroom Toolkit has addressed the problem of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the real motive of fostering church schools at public expense so many times that listing them here is unwieldy. Simply launch this search link, and scroll down through the list of articles about NCLB.
Search of Classroom Toolkit articles on NCLBBig Bureaucracy: The Cause of the Problem?Most news coverage deplores the situation, and reports the same "ByLine."
But the Black Commentator™ digs deeper and "Tells it like it is."
Link to the "Black Commentator™
The "Black Commentator™ notes that one way to raise test scores for a high school is to ensure that students who can't pass the test leave school by the tenth grade…or holding them back in the ninth grade for three years, the skipping them to the eleventh grade.Sidebar "The secret of doing well in the 10th-grade tests is not to let the problem kids get to the 10th grade."Source of this strategy:Washington PostEducation 'Miracle' Has a Math Problem
But since the Black Commentator™ focused upon the bureaucratic abuse of voucher systems as a way to subvert public education, they missed the second way that schools get students to pass the high-stakes tests, i.e., allow cheating.
SidebarClassroom Toolkit addressed this issue in the article, Say it isn't So! 50,000 Texas Students Caught Cheating on the State High-Stakes Test?

Public school students found cheating on the test, and public schools that fail to graduate huge percentages of students are "tailor-made" arguments for "incensed and outraged" politicians to use to demand that "We Do Something," even if that "Something" means "voucherizing" education and further weakening public schools."Dropout Factories" —
Resources on the WebDropout Factory Story from MSNBC™
Google™ Search for "Dropout Factory" for Original Sources
Alliance for Education's: About the Crisis article
Classroom Toolkit Article: NCLB is up for Re-Authorization: Bend an Ear, Twist an Arm, Shake your Fist, or Kick your Congress Person's Derriere to "Muzzle NCLB" and Salvage Education
Classroom Toolkit Article: The High Cost of Dropouts: Rod Paige is Still the Voucher-System's "Front Man"
Classroom Toolkit Article: NCLB: Up for Reauthorization, but "Not Up to the Task" of Benefiting Children
Washington Post Article: Education 'Miracle' Has a Math Problem
Blacks Pushed Down and Out
Johns Hopkins University: What your Community can do to End its Dropout Crisis
Education.Com&#8482: Why Some School Districts Might be Happy About Dropouts

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 09:00

Sunday, September 30. 2007

News Nuggets

Teachers Packing Guns? Coming Soon to a School Near You!An Oregon teacher is suing the school district that she works for so that she can be allowed to carry a gun to school (as a concealed weapon).In some states, police officers are not allowed to carry guns into campuses. And, in the wake of some high-profile school shootings, it is no wonder that most school districts and teacher groups are appalled at the prospect of "pistol-packin' teachers."
But, Oregon state law is on the teacher's side in this case (as well as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)Link to Google™ search for "oregon teacher carrying gun to school suit"
"Lawyers for the Medford, Ore. high school teacher who wants the right to bring her Glock-9mm pistol to school filed suit in Jackson County Circuit Court Tuesday, in a case that's being closely watched by both gun rights groups and school boards nationwide."
Source:http://www.kptv.com/news/14145616/detail.html
"The teacher has not been identified in media reports, because she says she is a victim of domestic violence, and fears for her own safety, and that of her daughter. In the lawsuit filed Tuesday, she's identified only as 'Jane Doe.'
But in an editorial printed in The Oregonian's Sunday editions, she wrote that she's seeking the right to carry a gun to protect against an ex-husband whom she claims has violated restraining orders and threatened to kill her.
Police are stationed in her school, she added, but far enough from her classroom that she feels exposed, especially since her ex-husband is an approved substitute teacher for the district.
'It is abhorrent that any district would be so hypocritical to insist students receive instruction on the importance of individual rights only to trample the rights of their teachers whenever it sees to do so,' the teacher wrote.
The lawsuit, filed by Lake Oswego attorney James Leuenberger, seeks to void the district's policy, saying that the district should not be "regulating, restricting or prohibiting," the teacher's licensed use of a firearm."Source:Oregon Teacher Files Suit to Bring Gun to School
"A solution is unlikely to come from the current state legislature, said Chuck Bennett, a veteran schools lobbyist, given the politically ticklish nature of the dispute, which many see as an infringement on the right to bear arms.
'We have had children shot, and we couldn't get them to pass legislation like this,' Bennett said, harking back to the 1998 shooting at Thurston High School in Springfield, Ore., when a 15-year-old student killed two of his fellow students and wounded 25 others. 'Even if the employees have the absolute need to protect themselves, the fear is, who is in the crossfire?'Source:Television News Commentary"School Board RightsOf course, a school board's jurisdiction does not trump the authority of a State Legislature. But…
"'People are trying to make this into a debate that it isn't,' said Medford School Board President Mike Moran. 'This is not about the Second Amendment (the right to bear arms). We are defending our right as employers and maintaining student safety.'Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, said the Legislature needs to clarify the law. She plans to sponsor a bill that would specifically authorize school districts to ban weapons on campuses even by permit holders. She has pitched similar proposals in past sessions since 2001, but all were defeated.Funded by the Oregon Firearms Educational Foundation, the teacher's lawsuit has fueled the debate over the merit of armed teachers in preventing massacres like those at Virginia Tech in April and Columbine High School in Colorado.Proponents contend teachers with guns could help avert school shootings or reduce death tolls.Source:Mail Tribune ArticleCommentary:To paraphrase a Star Trek™ phase, "The wants of the one and the politics of the few outweigh the needs of the many.Or…
What does it matter if a few children are caught in the crossfire, we should expect some collateral damage in the war to protect individual rights and the freedom to bear arms.Stress-Free Sanctuaries?Let's add another stress to our children's' school career by alerting them to the fact that their teachers are carrying guns.
And, if students are legally certified to carry concealed handguns, won't they demand equal rights on our campuses.
What right do our campuses have to be safe havens and bastions of love and caring? The demonstration and teaching of Morals, Values and Religious principals are unconstitutional, and threaten to tear away the fabric of our society.
Teachers can be fired for praying, but will have the legal right to carry a Glock™SidebarA Glock™ is not an ordinary pistol.Here is some background information about this weapon.(Note: 9mm stands for the diameter of the bullet. This means that the bullet is .35 inches in diameter. A thinner bullet means that more bullets can fit in the magazine that holds them. These are the objects that you see in the movies and the shooter drops one out and installs another. The other factor to consider about a bullet is how long it is. The longer the bullet, the heavier. The heavier the bullet, the more "punch" that it packs when it hits its target.)
"The 9mm Glocks are generally preferred by those who have less experience and are not planning to shoot a lot. Conversely, the more experienced shooters who do shoot a lot enjoy cheaper ammo prices. Many Shooters advocate the Glock 9mm for a variety of other reasons.On the plus side, ammo for the 9mm is plenty and considerably cheaper than other Glock ammo It's also reliability, more controllability, has greater magazine capacity with high capacity mags (still available, but getting very pricey). The 9mm is used by military armed forces around the world. Many claimed it to

be equal to .40 S&W and .45 Auto stopping power with the current best loads…MINUS FOR 9MMIt's limited choice and availability of good defense loads. For instance the +P+ loads are generally sold to law enforcement agencies (LEA's) only, but you can, occasionally, find them at gun shows and ammo distributors. A Glock 9mm with the right load is an adequate and fine PDW.Translation: This is a "military grade" weapon with the capacity to hold a lot of bullets with "stopping power", i.e., inflict maximum damage. The 9MMTactical WeaponsJust think of how many shots a teacher can get off when protecting themselves. It is only necessary to aim in the general direction of the attacker. Then, as the teacher keeps pulling the trigger, one shot is bound to hit the attacker. And, with the right bullets, one shot that connects with the attacker is enough to "stop them in their tracks."

Of course, those other shots that miss the attacker are where the collateral damage comes in. Even if children don't step in between the teacher and the attacker, they might be running and screaming behind the attacker. Or, they might be in lock down in a room behind the attacker.SidebarMany modern school building are constructed with non-load-bearing walls. This means that beams inside the wall holds the ceiling up. This also means that most of these walls are hollow. In addition, portable buildings consist of thin paneling with insulation sandwiched between the inner and outer shells. This means that the walls of portable buildings are easy to penetrate, too.Why so Much DetailThis article delves into so much detail so that you understand the full impact of this news item.

This lawsuit is about bringing a military-style weapon into a school, not about bringing an ordinary, run-of-the-mill gun. This is the kind of weapon that erstwhile school attackers and terrorists would lust and drool over. Just imagine what those crazed and demented school shooters in Colorado and Virginia could have done if they had one of these beauties. So, while we uphold the individual rights of one teacher, let's fund a new "Violence Prevention Program." But,where are we going to find the money for the program and its bureaucracy, you ask? Easy, we can take the money from family planning and sex education programs.

And where are we going to find people to teach these courses, you ask? Easy, we will have a regiment of teachers who are already legally certified to carry weapons.

Aren't weapons the best tool for deterring violence? But wait, these weapons will be concealed.

So, start your lobbying engines. Once guns are allowed in schools, people who carry guns in plain view, i.e., in holsters on their belts like cowboys, deserve equal rights…

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 10:00

Friday, August 31. 2007

News Nuggets

"SEX" is a Four-Letter Word for Politicians: Maybe "Virginity" is a Four-Letter Word for EducatorsHow can these be "Four-Letter Words?"SidebarThe phrase, "A Four-Letter Word" is an idiom that means "bad-words, cuss words, or words that we are not supposed to say, especially in school.
What we are referring to in this article is an attitude against what that word represents.
Here is the problem…
Certain politicians want to fund "Church Schools" because the people who voted them in want to see our country adopt their version of "family values."
What does "Sex"and "Virginity mean to politicians?One man, one woman marriages
Sexual activity only after marriage, to one partner, for life
No abortions
Funding for "abstinence only" sexuality education programs in our schools
A "flight of fancy," out-of-touch, understanding of the real worldWhat does "Sex"and "Virginity mean to teachers?Wasted, scarce funds for programs that do not work
Wasted student time
Students who don't get the contraceptive and safe-sex information that they need

Teachers favor family values, moral behavior, and any learning that helps students take better care of themselves as they become productive citizens.
But, teachers also favor success, and they favor allocating their time to strategies and programs that pay off for students. Teachers view projects, programs and initiatives that don't stand a "snowball's chance" in a bad light."Tempest in a Teapot" or a Real Educational Issue?What set off this discussion is the following article headline…
Abstinence Education's Future UncertainAnd some of the rest of the article…
For the first time, however, Virginity Rules and 700 kindred abstinence education programs are fighting serious threats to their future. Eleven state health departments rejected abstinence education this year, while legislatures in Colorado, Iowa and Washington passed laws that could kill, or at least wound, its presence in public schools.Opponents received high-caliber ammunition this spring when the most comprehensive study of abstinence education found no sign that it delayed a teenager’s sexual debut. And, after enjoying a fivefold increase in their main federal appropriations, the abstinence programs in June received their first cut in financing from the Senate appropriations committee since 2001.But the final outcome is in question. Some $176 million in federal support has survived several early maneuvers in the House, and the full House plans to debate the issue July 18 as part of the proposed Health and Human Services budget.Lost in the political rancor, however, is that teenagers throughout the country are both abstaining more, and, especially among older ones, more likely to use contraception when they do not abstain."Source:AOL News Story: http://news.aol.com/story/_a/abstinence-educations-future-uncertain/20070718091209990001 (No longer available online)Success is the ThingDespite the fact that so much money has been wasted on the "Abstinence Only," "making Virginity the ticket to living sainthood" program; teachers are more concerned about instructional success. If these programs could be successful in any way, shape or form; teachers would stand behind them.
Schools squander and waste so much money that news of yet another hemorrhage of lost revenue doesn't phase them. But, like everyone, teachers want to be successful.
So, why would a teacher want to be mixed up in a program that has limited (or no) chance of success?
Trick Question: Answer: Most don't. Most know better.How Bad is This?Teachers might just as well teach "Swimming in Quicksand" as teach "Abstinence Only." Of course, the Quicksand Swimming would have a better success rate than teaching "Intelligent Design" to chimpanzees, but the dangers are greater.SidebarFYI: Swimming in quicksand is possible. The trick is to not make any sudden moves, gently lie flat, and spread your whole body across the mud. Struggling and fighting just causes sinking more quickly.
Actually, quicksand is more buoyant than water in the same way that salt water is more buoyant than fresh water. The only thing is that the quick sand mud sticks to you, while the fresh or salt water doesn't.
Spread your body's surface area over the mud and slither and slide out.But, what is the danger?
Anyone that has seen the number of pregnant teens that we have in our schools knows the danger of focusing on programs that don't work.
How do we know that our students are "failing the abstinence test?" The growing bumps on their abdomens are a give-a-way.SidebarAnyone that works in our schools where this issue is a problem (what school doesn't have this problem?) knows that the girls that become pregnant are not the "bad girls" that the politicians think they are. These are often nice girls, sweet, loving (maybe a bit too loving); who will make good mothers. They will also have a much more difficult life and a real challenge to get out of and stay out of a low socioeconomic fate.But is Teen Pregnancy a School

Problem?Teen pregnancy is a social problem, not a school problem.
Teen pregnancy is a problem that society sends to our schools.
And, rather than blame our schools, and forcing our teachers to teach useless "Abstinence" courses, our politicians should focus their "talents" on eradicating one huge source of the problem.
How can we expect our students to keep their bodies and minds pure until marriage with the amount of sexually explicit imagery, sexual banter, and sexually exciting content ravishes our air waves and movie screens>
Titillating, barely covered bodies, cleavage, blatant sexual banter that bypasses the entendre stage, and "matter of facts of life" attitudes and on-screen, on-tube behaviors assail our students, moment by moment.SidebarWe're referring to mainstream, network TV, not the specialty channels or the Internet, though many children have access to "cable TV" from the privacy of their rooms.
These are the big campaign donors who deserve support for their "Freedom of Speech" First Amendment rights.
The fact that they feed the mouth of the hand that protects them by the lavish "extra curricular perks of office is not relevant to our discussion of our schools complicity in teen pregnancy issues, is it?
The stimulation of broadcast media upon our students seems similar to placing our student on a strict diet (fast, where abstinence is concerned), then wafting cooking smells and delicious aromas under their noses.
Solving social problems such as Teen Pregnancy, like so many other societal issues that schools take the blame for, is beyond the scope of our schools' mission.
So, when politicians as schools to teach non-functional, non-results-producing, "doomed to failure," "no-way to succeed" programs; teachers should, "Just say, No!"

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Tuesday, July 31. 2007

News Nuggets

Teacher Jobs Aplenty on the Horizon: Can you Survive?
We train lots of teachers, yet there is a teacher shortage. What's happening here?Teaching is a great job, a noble profession,
Teaching touches the future. Teaching is the hope that we pin on human survival and the shared welfare of our society.
We even have "fast-track" job readiness programs, i.e., Alternative Certification Programs available in most areas.
So, why are so many jobs available?SidebarWhere are the Jobs?Occupations With the Largest Projected Growth Through 2014:Registered Nurses: 703,000
Postsecondary Teachers: 524,000
Nursing Aides, Orderlies, Attendants: 325,000
Management: 308,000
Elementary School Teachers: 265,000
Accountants: 264,000
Computer Software Engineers: 222,000
Computer Systems Analysts: 153,000 Source:U.S. Bureau of Labor StatisticsCited by AOL on 6-17-2007 jobs.aol.com/article/onlinecampus/_a/where-the-jobs-are/20070618150.The Job Outlook for EducationThe Education ExplosionWith about one in four Americans enrolled in an educational institution, education is the second largest industry in the country, accounting for about 12.7 million jobs. Most teaching positions -- which constitute almost half of all educational services jobs -- require at least a bachelor's degree, and many require a master's or doctoral degree.Secondary school teachers are expected to increase in numbers by some 18 percent by 2012. Salaries are rising as well; the American Federation of Teachers estimates the average salary of all public elementary and secondary school teachers in the 2004-05 school year as $47,602. Additional benefits include flexibility in vacation time.Postsecondary teaching positions are expected to grow 38 percent over the next decade.Median annual earnings of all postsecondary teachers in May 2004 were $51,800. Postsecondary instructors enjoy flexibility comparable to secondary teachers, and are generally able to focus on their specific field of interest.Source:Cited by AOL on 6-17-2007jobs.aol.com/article/onlinecampus/_a/where-the-jobs-are/20070618150.Thin Shoes, Hot PavementTeaching is wonderful, a "warm fuzz-filled delight," an honor and a "blessing." But, teachers work in school districts that range the gamut from the "Mad Hatter's Tea Party" to "Grand Central Station," to the "Weather Underground" to the "Gulag Archipelago." Some other school districts are mini-corporate cubicle clusters and others are lock-step military machines.And, hugging children zero's suspicion upon teachers as though the human resources director needs to pass out ankle bracelets to all new hires on the first day of indoctrination, I mean, orientation.You are not the CrazinessThe first thing that teachers need to know is that are not the cause of the craziness that they feel and experience.
This craziness is mostly felt as "generalized stress," but it can be experienced as other things, i.e., gastritis, ulcers, colitis, high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke.Or, the affects can be personal and interpersonal, such as nervousness, irritability, family discord, anger and short-tempered outbursts.So, our educational system has a "survival of the fittest" campaign to thin the ranks of the teaching corps (generally without the expense of health insurance, although some teachers qualify for food stamps and public assistance) to ensure that there will always be teaching jobs.Shrinking Birthrate, Boomers Past the Fertility Years… still Lots of JobsThe reason that the job horizon is so optimistic is because the outlook for first to fifth year teachers is so pessimistic.
Teachers was out in droves during the first three years on the job, and especially between the third and fifth year.Why?Is teaching so difficult that these trained and ready teachers can't make it?
Or, is the job situation so skewed, oblique and convoluted that remaining on the job is the worse between the unemployment evil, and begging in the breadline?Sources of Job StressThere are a number of sources of on-the-job teacher stress (particularly for the new teacher)… Principals that want all students to pass high-stakes tests and are on a mission to weed all "non-performers" out of the profession
Budget cuts that force serious behavior disordered students into classrooms without assistance, generally in the classrooms of "newbie" teachers
Inefficiency that keeps the new teacher working week nights until 11:00 p.m., and 1:00 a.m. on Saturday
Placement in special programs (i.e., with Special Population students) with funding siphoned to the regular classes (where it will do the most good)
Expectations that new teachers know technology better, so that they will be models for integrating technology (even though the "old hands" haven't made headway into this storm of under funding, either)
A general public, whipped up by politicians that want to show that our public schools are "no good" so that they can provide vouchers for church schools
The general irrationality and ignorance of bureaucracy as it tries to slop through the No Child Left Behind Act and punish

schools, school districts and teachers for being "highly trained and of high enough quality"Rosy Prospects?The prospects for jobs in education are rosy…Just make sure that that cherry red glow is not:The glowing embers of stress under your feet
The enflamed ulcer in your tummy
The lights on the top of the ambulance that is scurrying you to the emergency room
The color of the red ink on your cash flow and statement of net worthReal-World HelpClassroom Toolkit and the Classroom Toolkit Newsletter offer antidotes for teacher stress. We also offer methods of streamlining instructional planning and instructional management so that teachers have more time to rest and take care of themselves.Remember: the Craziness that you experience is not you, but the system. However, the craziness can overtake you, make you a basket case, or encase you in a coffin if you allow fail to attend to your own needs.Take care of yourself, so you can care for your students.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Saturday, June 30. 2007

News Nuggets

Say it isn't So! 50,000 Texas Students Caught Cheating on the State High-Stakes Test?
The No Child Left Behind Act is not the only culprit in creating undue stress and providing warped and convoluted motivation for students and teachers.States can skewer education in untoward ways, too. Big time!
Is it true that as many as 50,000 Texas students might have been "caught cheating" on the state high-stakes test? Of course this might be far worse than it seems because this alleged cheating was not for the whole plethora of grade level tests, but for specific test that determines if students can graduate!
These would be the students who want to go on to higher education…students who want to enter the job market…students that just want to graduate and go on to positions of trust.
But wait, some of the "evidence" indicates adult complicity, maybe even the application of a "magic pencil" after the students turned in their tests?
Who could be involved in an enterprise like that?Why "Might have Cheated?"We might think that the agency (in this case the Texas Education Agency (TEA) responsible for governing and policing this testing would want to uncover wrong doing, and would want to punish the culprits to the fullest extent of the law. We might think so, but no.
But wait, wasn't this the same organization that had to pull back on its scheme to reward "exemplary pilot sites" because of allegations that some of the "high-performing" sites may have been involved in cheating?What the Statistical Study FoundCheck out the investigative study backed by the Dallas Morning New entitled, "Analysis shows TAKS cheating rampantState says it's addressed the problem, but News uncovers more than 50,000 cases05:29 PM CDT on Sunday, June 3, 2007Link to the study…
Sidebar
There still is a connection to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), but in this case the connection is a correlation, not a cause and effect relationship.
The connection is that a big chunk of the "lame horse idea" that became NCLB was already "on the loose" in Texas and stomping manure when the "Washington Outsider" from Texas imported it for domestic consumption.Of course, when the initiatives that left a bad taste in the mouth of Texas teachers became the "law of the land," teachers' dispositions soured all across our great nation.What did the study find?
" The analysis – among the first of its kind on this scale – found cases where 30, 50 or even 90 percent of students had suspicious answer patterns that researchers say indicate collusion, either between students or with school staff. Perpetrators go almost entirely undetected and unpunished by state officials.The study contradicts the Texas Education Agency's stance that cheating on the TAKS is extraordinarily rare and that the agency has done a good job of policing it. Many schools with big cheating problems, including some in North Texas, have officially been cleared by recent state investigations – in most cases simply by proclaiming their innocence on a state questionnaire."Told you So!But, the TEA is not going to take specific remedial measures, such as…Ordering seating charts of students who take the test
Determining if Cell phone text messaging was used in some sites
Ensuring that secure tests were not available "on the market" ahead of time
Allowing independent observers in schools during the testing, similar to how we assign impartial observers to check on elections in Third World countries.
Other inferences from the study…
" The findings also show that on a high-stakes test like the TAKS – which can determine a school's reputation, a teacher's salary and whether a student walks across the stage on graduation day – some people will seek whatever advantage they can find."What we have here in many of the schools, particularly charter schools, is rampant cheating involving many students," said David Harpp, a professor at Montreal's McGill University who studies cheating and reviewed the analysis."The UpshotThe upshot is that "rather than facing the firing squad," the cheaters, if there were any, will not be "smoked out."
If any cheating occurred, it will have been the perfect crime, not because the criminals were particularly cleaver, but because the agency charged with oversight has a "see no evil, hear no evil, believe no evil" posture.
For any of the cheaters, if they really existed, the statute of limitations for cheating, at least as interpreted by the TEA, seems to be measured in microseconds; or maybe the need to catch cheaters fades (dissolves, disappears) as soon as the test is handed in.
What could be the possible motive for such institutional (bureaucratic) behavior?
The TEA seems to approach the "Cheating Allegation" with the same attitude of the teenage babysitter when asked how the lamp got broken on his or her watch.
Could it be that after the TEA has gone on record, affirming that any cheating is a rare and isolated occurrence and so limited that there is no cause for alarm, that there is cause for alarm?
How do the chances of getting away with cheating on a high-stakes test in other states compare with the relative ease of

the operation in Texas. Are other states asleep in the saddle? Do agencies in other states have their hands on the bridle of the dark (cheating) horse?

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Thursday, May 31. 2007

News Nuggets

NCLB is up for Re-Authorization:Subtitle: Bend an Ear, Twist an Arm, Shake your Fist, or Kick your Congress Person's Derriere to "Muzzle NCLB" and Salvage EducationIt's time for the Summer Recess, and despite the public's perception that you will spend the time on the beach or in your favorite local bar, you know that you will be busy.You will either have to work a second job, part-time, temporary, menial...or teach summer school...
Or, you will spend the time tuning up your work for the next school year.
Hopefully, you will work on open-ended strategies that are adaptable in case you are shuffled to a new grade level or content-area assignment.
But, take time out to lobby for the demise of NCLB.SidebarNCLB is really the "spin name" for the Elementary and Secondary School Act, that can't go away. But, the odious features of NCLB, i.e., the ones that stupidly handcuff and sabotage education in favor of making public schools look bad so that vouchers can be used to prop up church schools; can be eliminated.
Think about all the pain and misery that the noble, but subverted, goals of NCLB have wreaked upon students and the teachers who teach them. Then, take action and hound your highly-paid representatives and senators until they commit to radical changes in NCLB.You will save yourself lots of time and aggravation and stress if you are successful in eliminating the odious features of NCLB.Dark and Dangerous Forces are Already at WorkForces bent on continuing the "legacy of ill" of NCLB well into the next administration are at work.
For example, note these sources
Secretary Spellings Lobbies Congress for NCLBSecretary Spellings testifies before the House CommitteeSecretary Spellings Invites House and Senate Education to Convene on No Child Left Behind

Of course, the Secretary of Education has the "inside track" in influencing members of Congress because she speaks the same dialect as they do, i.e., "Spin-based, Bureaucra-tease."A Educational Technology Related ItemUS Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, has asked for ideas on the integration of technology in education. There is a form on the ed.gov site, but no ability to dialog or even leave your contact information if you fill it out. Link to the US Dept. of Education "Ed Tech Roundtable" PageYou will have to send an E-mail message because there is no way to leave feedback on the page.E-mail link: edtech@ed.gov
Here are the questions, and Classroom Toolkit's less than reverent answers…In what ways has technology improved the effectiveness of your classroom, school or district?Answer: Technology's history in public schools misses the potential that proponents promised. This is not the fault of the technology (though the technology is too hard to use), but is the fault of partially funded and under funded technology projects, the faultof a lack of professional development focused upon our curriculum, and the fault of the general mismanagement that occurs when the federal government bureaucrats meddle in something (like education) that they understand little about. Based on your role (administrator, parent, teacher, student, entrepreneur, business leader), how have you used educational data to make better decisions or be more successful?Answer: Nobody uses "educational data" to make better decisions. This is not the fault of the data, because useable data is non-existent. Fault school district officials who base decisions more on budget requirements than instructional needs. Also fault our federal government and our "public" for focusing on (and exaggerating until it is a caricature with monstrous proportions) a strategy of limited usefulness, i.e., high-stakes test scores.
Anyone who wants usable (and actionable) educational data needs to be willing to pay for it. And, the cost of acquiring this data has only a minor technological component. Most of the cost of building that data. Useable educational data comes at the cost of hiring, training and employing large numbers of trained observers. Without professional observational data, any other (easy to collect) data is "next to useless." In what ways can technology help us prepare our children for global competition and reach our goals of eliminating achievement gaps and having all students read and do math on grade level by 2014?No answers, but more questions. Note: The face validity of this question seems to indicate that the author is unqualified to meddle in education in any way.
Three unrelated question stems are twisted into one sentence. These question stems are: Technology preparing children for global competition
Question 3, Part 1.) Comments:
Technology doesn't seem to prepare children for anything except for more technology.
Learning experiences, generally facilitated by teachers, prepares students for later life experiences.
Preparing children for global competition doesn't seem to be one of our core curriculum subjects.
Are we planning a high-stakes test that assesses each student's readiness for global competition?
Wouldn't the study of foreign languages be for productive than technology initiatives in developing global competitors?
Eliminating achievement gaps (in whom?)Question 3, Part 2.) Comments:

Achievement gaps are calculated as the deviation or discrepancy between the arbitrary (Grade Level) standard and the arbitrary high-stakes test
The correct standard is the progress toward each student becoming all that they can be, with each student focusing on personal milestones and personal benchmarks
The "Grade Level/ Group Achievement Gap" is an arbitrary and distracting target. This Grade Level/ Group Achievement in reading and math has no relationship to global competition, or even a relationship to success on future jobs
This "standard" is based upon philosophies that didn't even function during the 19th Century when they were proposed. There is no chance that these concepts will be functional during the 21st Century All students reading and doing math on grade levelQuestion 3, Part 3.) Comments:
Answer: Does this assume that reading and math are keys to competition and world domination?
What evidence exists to prove that reading and math are the independent variables that determine success at global competition?
Corporate research shows that needed Twenty First Century skills include:Collaboration
Teamwork Skills
Problem-Solving
Decision-Making
Project Management
Plan into Action and Vision into Reality, i.e., Execution
Application and Performance (AnP)
Personal Marketing

What should be the federal government's role in supporting the use of technology in our educational system?
Pay lots and lots of money and get out of the way.
Develop realistic timeframe's about how long changes will take in our schools
Develop realistic budgets. Hint: Realistic budgets will be levels of magnitude higher than the skimpy, wimpy, anemic budgets that school disticts now rail about.
Realistic budgets also will be controlled by different folks (teachers) than the people that currently control those budgets (business office staff and administors)
SidebarOne thought: Develop a matching grant program where our federal government matches dollar for dollar the money that we spend in warfare. This would be a 1:1 Program where the Feds really could provide a positive impact upon education.But, don't just settle for our ideas. Prepare your own rebuttal for NCLB and put this "vampire-like" law out of its "dark world" existence. Halt this law from its continued sapping the lifeblood of educational excitements and teacher empowerment.
Tell your senators and representatives what this law is really doing to education.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Monday, April 30. 2007

News Nuggets

Why H 1 B Visas Matter for US Education
The Tuesday, 4-3-2007 Marketplace® broadcast noted that the applications for H 1 B Visas (not credit cards) had run out in two days. Last year, it took two months before the applications were gone. The H 1 B Visa is a permit that allows foreign (high tech) workers to accept employment in the US. The Marketplace® story went on to say that the 65,000 available visas will be assigned by a lottery.
(Note: 150,000 applications were received, the two offices were "swamped," and they had to just stop accepting them.
Link to the Marketplace® article… Why should this be important to American education?
Lots of reasons…
First, American companies cannot hire enough local high tech workers (engineers, programmers, etc.) because we don't graduate enough of them. And, as the report noted, our students are studying other things besides science and math.
If our students are not studying science and math, what are they studying?
Aren't school districts eliminating art, music, even Physical Education (PE) to… Save money?
Teach a high-stakes test curriculum? If we're not teaching science and math, and if we're not teaching art, music, PE; What's left besides "Teaching to the Test?"
And, aren't employers unhappy with the quality of workforce candidates that our schools are graduating? (See our newsletter article, Workforce Readiness: The Tripe Behind the Hype
Actually, the answer is "self-evident." As teaching to the high-stakes test squeezes out the rest of the curriculum, test scores rise incrementally, but learning takes a precipitous "nose dive."
And since employers have no need to employ test takers, disenchantment with the competency of our schools increases among employers.
An analogy to this situation would be that as we stomp on the gas, our car's engine races, our gas mileage decreases, and wear on the engine (stress) climbs. But, instead of going faster, our car slows down and can't carry as many people.Scenarios? Transitioning from an industrial economy to a service economy to an information economy seems to require planning and a roadmap. Otherwise we we may end up in a place that we don't want to be.
Here are some scenarios that seem possible if we continue to under fund our schools using the "do it as cheaply as possible," mass-production, factory model… India and China become the dominant world economies in the next ten years
India and China become the dominant forces of innovation in the next 20 years
High-Tech companies such as Cisco™, Intel™ Microsoft™, Oracle™ will relocate to countries with adequately trained high tech workers so that they can remain competitive, just as Levi Strauss did in the textile and garment industries
Chinese companies will take over administration of US Health Care and Foreign Guest Worker Industries, just as they have taken over the administration of the Panama Canal
Admission to the Test Prep Academies (formerly the public schools) will be by political appointment
A lottery will be held to choose which students will be able to enroll in India and China as foreign exchange students, and India and China will try to increase the number that can enroll each year as part of their foreign aid package to the USFar Fetched?Well, just consider "The Law of Numbers" in the Game of War. For example, you can play "War" with coins or cards.
SidebarWith cards, each player reveals their next card, and the player with the highest card takes both. If the next play results in a tie, the players reveal the next card and the highest card takes all the ties, plus the current play.
With coins, one player chooses "even or odd" and the other player gets the opposite. Two coins are shown during a play. If both coins show "heads" or if both coins show "tails," the player who called "even" wins and takes both coins." If the coins show dissimilar, the "odds" player takes both. (You cannot have a tie in the coins version of the War game.
In the Game of War, the person who starts out with the most coins or cards usually wins all the coins or cards after multiple iterations of the game.
In the case of world competition, the country wins that trains the most scientists, engineers, mathematicians, technologists and innovative managers.
So, continue focusing on improving high-stakes test scores instead of improving what students learn. Continue driving creative and motivated teachers out of the profession with bureaucratic inefficiencies, with a lack of support, and with a "No Can Do" attitude toward funding hands-on, real-world experiences for our students.
Continue replacing experienced teachers with brand-new teachers (because they are cheaper), and keep on complaining that our teachers are not instructing as well as they should.
Continue approaching access and use of technology as though it was a "budget-buster", and squeeze a few extra years

out of the equipment because that is cost-effective.
In short, continue, business-as-usual, and watch other countries that don't have our resources out-compete our country.
Why? Because other countries have a vision for success and follow-up, while we want to deliver as much as we possibly can with minimal cost and with minimal sacrifice.
Our country has to commit to education on a higher level and with a greater passion. Otherwise, Chinese is destined to become the dominant world language.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Saturday, March 31. 2007

News Nuggets

The High Cost of Dropouts: Rod Paige is Still the Voucher-System's "Front Man"
Politicians grandstanding to the media is not news. Neither is a politician who stages a public event to attract reporters and journalists worth the newsprint or air time that they receive.Sometimes the politicians pull off these events, sometimes the event is so contrived that everyone sees through the thinly veiled "hidden agenda."
What category of staged news event do you think that the latest Rod Paige (defunct Secretary of Education) pulled? (Hint: Notice that I didn't write, "pulled off.""The High Cost of Dropouts" Non-EventRod Paige and a host of "NCLB Lackeys" conspired in a "wool-over-our-eyes" media menagerie.
Link to the news release that set up this media circus…
Out trotted the politicians of the "Let's bash public schools, again," ilk to show that…Dropouts (school leavers) place a drain on our society, i.e., cost money
Public schools can't pull their weight in this arena
Vouchers would salvage these "left-behind students, lost-national-talent-resources"
Vouchers would increase competition and force schools (and by default, teachers) to do their jobs
Public schools can't do the job as well as church schools"The NCPA is an internationally known nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute with offices in Dallas and Washington, D. C. that advocates private solutions to public policy problems.
Hispanic CREO’s mission is to improve educational outcomes for Hispanic children by empowering families through parental choice in education. We achieve this by providing parents with free information and resources, which help them become self-advocates for their children. CREO is a non-profit, non-partisan organization. “CREO is Spanish for ‘I believe.’”
Based in Indianapolis and dubbed “the nation’s leading voucher advocates” by The Wall Street Journal, the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation was started by Nobel laureate Dr. Milton Friedman and Dr. Rose D. Friedman in 1996 as a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about the role competition plays in achieving real K-12 education reform."Source:The NCPA Press ReleaseLink to the news release that set up this media circus…Flim-Flam ReasoningDr. Rod Paige, political pitch man for NCLB, is a dedicated soldier who is willing to "take a bullet" for his Commander in Chief.
No doubt that Dr. Paige believes that public school systems need more testing (wrong), need to take better care of students (yes), and need more accountability (yes, but who should be accountable, and to whom should they be accountable).
"But there is a way to stem these costs, and help more students graduate, says Brian J. Gottlob, senior fellow at the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation and author of the study. School choice improves graduation rates and produces millions in public savings:School districts with more students in private schools have higher public school graduation rates; all Texas children would benefit from increased competition from private schools.
Even a modest school choice program, one that increased private school enrollment by fewer than 5 percentage points, would reduce the number of Texas public school dropouts by 8,720 to 17,440 per year.
That reduction would save Texans between $27 million and $53 million in tax revenue, Medicaid costs and incarceration costs every year.
The total savings from preventing these students from dropping out, over an expected lifetime of 50 years, would be between $1.4 billion and $2.8 billion."Source:Daily Policy Digest ArticleLink to the article…Errors in Logic: Perhaps these "Voucher-Hucksters" Need Test-Taking SkillsStatement: "School districts with more students in private schools have higher public school graduation rates."
Error: Even if this were true (doubtful), correlation does not prove cause and effect.Perhaps the areas where there are more private schools are "wealthier"
Perhaps the private schools will graduate any student who is willing to pay, no matter what the competency level of the studentIt is doubtful that private schools have any effect on…Early failure (in the first two grades)
Teen Pregnancy
Economic Hardship
Migrating StudentsBesides, these same Voucher Pundits are the folks that want to restrict or deny a public education to the children of undocumented visitors.
Another Error:
Hidden in this argument is the assumption that private (church) schools teach children in a superior manner. But research has shown that this assumption is bogus.SidebarSee our Newsletter Article, Research Shows what we have Known All Along: Public Schools are as Good as Private Schools!Bad MathStatement:
"…increased private school enrollment by fewer than 5 percentage points, would reduce the number of Texas public school dropouts by 8,720 to 17,440 per year…would increase save $27 million and $53 million in tax

revenue…
Error:
Why stop with only five percent enrollment increase if this is true?
Increase private school enrollment by 100% and save 20 times more money.
This puts savings at $540 million to $1.06 billion per year, or from $27 billion to $53 billion over 50 years.
If this is such an incredible bargain, let's go for it.
But…Would the church schools take all those students?
Do the church schools have the facilities to manage double enrollments?
Do the church schools pay teachers enough to attract twice as many teachers?
What happens to church-based instruction when the enrollment hits the point of 50% students who are members of that church and 50% that are not?(Note: In the bussing experiment, a 40% critical mass proved to be sufficient to keep minority students from being "ganged up on", while not diluting learning standards for the majority. Perhaps the Voucher Schemes are a disguised "parent-based reverse bussing" movement.)Thinly Disguised MotivesThe real intent of the "church school on the public dime" advocates is to separate and sanitize their children from the "riff-raff and heathens" that "infest" the public schools."
This motive needs to be drawn out in the open so the exposed hypocrisy can wilt and wither in the light of day.
The Classroom Toolkit philosophy treasures all children, supports drawing out their unique abilities, and helping each child become "all that he or she can be." We offer no solution or sympathy for folks who don't prize diversity and inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-ethnic, inter-class, inter-religious communication.
Segregation is synonymous with stagnation, and both the "segregratee and the segregator" are poorer because of the practice.
Communicating with diverse groups, exposure to viewpoints other than their own, a laboratory for working out issues with divergent others is a benefit that the money of private school enrollment cannot buy. Children that miss out on these experiences are poorer in interpersonal skills, less likely to be competitive in a interactive, "shrinking" world, and more likely to remain stagnant in an evolving, changing world.The Real SolutionIt is "un American" to deny people with money that right to buy whatever they want, including education. But, it is also undemocratic to siphon away public money, divide availability, and provide a lesser service to everyone, especially the "less than affluent" who deserve every opportunity to succeed.
The real solution is to provide more funds for public schools, not diminish the money that is available.
But the corollary to that solution is to empower teachers and place control of school district budgets in the hands of teachers.
Sure teachers will ask for more money to operate our schools.
And, reverse the "accountability blame game" and make principals, directors and superintendents accountable to teachers for providing the needed support for their classrooms.
Let's get the debate right, frame the questions correctly, and the solutions seem so, so obvious.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Wednesday, February 28. 2007

News Nuggets

UNICEF Report: USA and Britain the Industrialized World's the Worst Places for Kids!
Our children are our future.So, is our future looking pretty break?Aren't we spending more on education than any other country, even though we derive little to show for our "generosity?"What the UNICEF Report Reveals…National Public Radio (NPR) reported that the United States and (maybe "not so Great") Britain scored "dead last" among industrialized nations on "the best countries to live in if you were a child" report.
This rating for the US and GB was so bad that the NPR writers dubbed this study "The Worst Places to Live" if you are a child. Link to the NPR ArticleUNICEF measured 40 factors…
"UNICEF says an examination of 40 factors, such as poverty, deprivation, happiness, relationships, and risky or bad behavior puts the United States and Britain at the bottom of a list of 21 economically developed nations.
The UNICEF report sought to assess children's well-being in developed countries by measuring a number of factors, including health, education, poverty, family relationships, and bad or risky behavior. Children were also asked to say whether they were happy."Source: U.S. on List of UNICEF's Worst Countries for Kids:
http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7407245
More results…"The United States fared worst of all 21 countries in health and safety, measured by rates of infant mortality and accidents and injuries. The United States and Britain were lowest overall in the category of behavior and risks, meaning that American and British children are more likely to use drugs, drink alcohol and be sexually active than children elsewhere."Source: U.S. on List of UNICEF's Worst Countries for Kids:
http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7407245Other, poorer countries, such as Poland and the Czech Republic were rated better than "rich countries" like the United States and Great Britain."Professor Jonathan Bradshaw from the University of York in England led the research into the project. He was scathing about the failures of successive British governments."We've failed to invest in child health, in child education, in child care," Bradshaw says. "It's the result of neglect, which other countries have not done… they've just spent more on their children, despite the fact they're not as rich as we are."Source: U.S. on List of UNICEF's Worst Countries for Kids:
http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7407245The Testing Craze: The "Smoke Screen" that Obfuscates Our Lack of Investment In our ChildrenWe care about our children and their future, and we have plenty of laws, and bills, and the bills from our testing programs to prove it.
But tests fail to create a happy life for a child. And tests fail to create working-world skills that make happy employers delighted to hire our high school graduates. (See our January 2007 article Workforce Readiness: The Tripe Behind the Hype
The problem with this investment in testing not only is that we measure the wrong things, in the wrong way (See our article on The Flaws, Fallacies and Foolishness of Benchmark Testing, but that test taking skills don't win jobs or make employers any money.
But, testing to show that we are making sound investments in education is a "smoke screen" for spending minimal amounts of money, and for spending money on the wrong things.
Testing to learn if we are making progress seems as though we are traveling on a rational course. But, does spending money on investments that will never pay off, pan out or bring in a reasonable return seem rational?
But, if wasting money on testing were the real issue, then we could overcome this obstacle by just "Saying No! to Tests".The Conspiracy to Commit "Stingyness"People who enjoy the highest standard of living in the world…people who consume more per capita of the worlds resources than anyone else…people who pride themselves on giving their children the "best things in life"…seldom face the fact that, while we are generous (to the extreme) with our own children, we are "tightwad, penurious misers when it comes to supporting the collective good of our children.
Why else have we not broken the shackles of our tradition of "providing education on the cheap", a process that has changed little since the days of the "unmarried school Marm" and the "one room schoolhouse?"
Why else do we allow bankers, real estate brokers, lawyers, physicians, mechanics, truck drivers, house wives, business leaders, even sanitation workers…instead of teachers…to run our schools?
A farmer, rancher, butcher, baker, candlestick maker, Native American Chief…can all be school board members; but a teacher cannot.
Why?
Teacher know what it takes to run schools andTeachers love children Therefore,Teachers will run up costs and "break the budget" by managing schools the way that schools need to be managedWhat the "Testing Smoke Screen" is HidingThe testing model scientific, psychological, valid; but the rendition perpetrated against children in our schools is actually a "quality control model that is borrowed from the manufacturing industry."
Ask yourself these questions:

Do we want every toaster, computer, automobile, light bulb, TV, VCR or DVD Player to…Live up to its own unique potential?
Be all that it can be?
Make its own space and shine for all to see?
Actualize itself?
Live longer, glow brighter, run faster, dance higher, play louder, be stronger, excel in a unique, special area?Or, do we want all products in the same cohort to:Work, act and operate the same?
Be like all the other members of the lot?
Meet standards, fit in uniform packaging, and contribute to "brand" recognition?
Distinguish itself with uniform quality?
Last at least as long as the warranty period, glow to specifications, run uniformly, play the same, be the same, excel in providing a uniform user experience?Marching children in lockstep to the cost-effective production drum, holding them to production standards (i.e., high-stakes test controls), and griping that non-standard products (such as Special Education students) cost to much…exemplify the lack of investment that the UNICEF Report identifies.
Here is a novel idea: "Let's spend just as much on our children as we do for defense, i.e., about 12% of our Gross National Product (GDP).
This would increase our investment in our children by three or four hundred percent. This would "cost a lot."
But, our children are worth the investment.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Wednesday, January 31. 2007

News Nuggets

NCLB: Up for Reauthorization, but "Not Up to the Task" of Benefiting Children
Why would a politician propose extending a non-working program? This is like putting gas into a car that has the tires removed and is sitting on blocks. You can rev and race the engine, listen to the muffler growl; but you get zero miles per galleon and you arrive at exactly where you were, only your wallet is a bit lighter because the wasted gasoline was so expensive.
From this scenario, the choice is obvious, i.e., put some tires on the car before wasting any more gas. Why isn't the same obvious for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)?
In the car example, the car owner could say that they were testing the fuel injectors or the power train. They might say something like this, even though they know that the facts don't support their statement, to avoid their neighbors saying that they are "stupid."
Politicians seem to have the same motivation, plus an extra level of concern; e.g., that the voting public will become angry for the "stupid" decision of supporting the NCLB Act, and vote them out of office.Voting NCLB "Out of Office:" The Time is NOW!Finding a teacher who believes that the NCLB benefits children is a long standing challenge that Classroom Toolkit has issued. In over a year, we have yet to find such a person.
The teacher that believes that the NCLB does any good at all for students is probably a "mythical creature."
SidebarBy the way, the "Find a Teacher that supports NCLB" challenge does not apply to the case study that politicians might dredge up; if the person that they find is, 1.) "off their meds." or, 2.) has not taught in a real classroom for the past decade.
Our Politicians Supported the NCLB "Stupidity": Now What?
What's a vote-hungry, do anything to stay in office political sot, (excuse me, I meant "sort") supposed to do?
The answer, of course, is to move to reauthorize the non-working legislation, then propose that the legislation be "improved and enhanced."
Of course, the "improvements and enhancements" amount to scrapping the legislation, but the important question of, "Why did you pass this albatross of a law in the first place?" can be deflected.Sidebar There is another strategy that politicians employ, but they won't be tempted to use this strategy because the next elections are only two years away. That strategy is to "blame the innocent."
  In this cases, blaming children for the failure of the law will aggravate parents. Parents know better, and a politician who attempts this ploy would be "walking on political thin ice."
   Blaming teachers, the other choice, would be like sawing a hole in the bottom of the "legislative party boat" and expecting to sail into the "Port of PorkBarell" with no wind in the sails. Teachers remember and teachers vote!
Teachers Need to do More than VoteNow is the time to take action to eliminate the NCLB and its odious effects upon education.Contact your state's Senators
Contact your representative
Contact an influential "politico"What to Communicate to Politicians (In Strong Terms)The ideals that prompted the NCLB Act are noble, but, the focus was misdirected, and execution was flawed. Here are the reasons:The process was started by politicians, for politicians, to benefit politicians
Those politicians had a political, rather than an educational agenda
The politicians didn't...Understand teaching
Understand children or the learning process
Know that there is little or no connection between standardized tests and teacher improvement
Know that there is little or no connection between standardized tests and improved student learningUnderstand the inefficient and wasteful bureaucratic process that manages our schools
Understand the human nature and survival instincts of teachersBesides, politicians wanted to create an instant cure for our schools, not realizing that it takes three years for a teacher to become proficient in a research-based, proven, and well-designed educational program.Other "Dead on Arrival" NCLB IssuesThe "Voyage of the NCLB Act" was jinxed and doomed, even before its ship left the dry dock.
And, the first years after the launch of the NCLB Act saw some of the most Draconian school district "budget hacking" in recent memory.
The NCLB Act is based upon unsound, now disproved, assumptions that…
Bureaucracies provide streamlined support for education
Bureaucracies are able to reward teachers with negative consequences and stressful demands
Students' standardized tests are valid measures of teachers' skill improvement

Programs forced upon schools by outsiders who know little about education have a snowball's chanceThe NCLB Act

diminishes education and creates obstacles and barriers rather than resolving the issues that plague our school systems operation and management.Taking Credit for a MirageThe politicians who point to NCLB successes are pointing to a mirage. What they are pointing to are schools where progress and improvement were happening (and would have happened) despite the NCLB Act.
What really occurred because of NCLB is that…Stress skyrockets in classrooms
Principals launch "witch hunts" to rid campuses of teachers who don't build "test score improvement" equity
Teachers bail out of schools where an oppressive administration tries to "put the screws to them" to make them work harder
Great teachers transfer from "inner city" schools to middle class schools where the "low hanging testing fruit" makes life easier
Testing "irregularities" abound
Students' alienation magnifies because there is no intrinsic motivation in studying test-taking, and no compelling life interest (Test-taking skills hold little currency in the world of work or the arena of life)
Crucial learning activities such as art, music, even physical activity such as recess, are eliminated to make more time for "teaching to the test"The NCLB Act fails in the same ways that my attempts to fly by making wings of wax and feathers will fail every time.
The time to reject the reauthorization of NCLB is NOW!
Tell your representatives so, now.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Sunday, December 31. 2006

News Nuggets

NCLB Bites the Young: Swapping KiddieLand for High-Stakes, Test-Savvy Kindergarten Expectations
Don't let sloth overcome our five year olds. If we hold high expectations for them, we can rid our schools of productivity-wasting, no-payback activities such as nap time, story time, art, music and recess. Maybe the dipping of tiny digits in finger paint smells like the onset of brain rot to the NCLB Police.Even if the high-stakes test is three years away (i.e., Third Grade), our Kindergarten teachers cannot let a day slip by where they fail to address test objectives.If you Think we are Being Facetious, Think AgainIn fact, check these links yourself and you will see to what lengths instruction is being distorted by "good" (i.e., test-driven) school districts.Kindergarten used to be play and nap time — no more
More kids repeating kindergarten
Kindergarten Transformation Slide Show
When Playing Equals Learning
Kindergarten Homework Slide Show
Retention in Kindergarten Slide ShowEarly Learning ResearchYes we know what research demonstrates about the effects of music on early brain development, creativity and the benefits of reduced stress upon mental health, happiness and memory. But, Mozart "just ain't [sic] on the test."
And what about the(long time, unfortunately unchanging) research that shows that the best predictor of school leaving (dropping out) is failure in the early grades. In the old days, this meant Grades One and Two (because children were not retained in Kindergarten). Now, as we see a shift downward, time will tell if the predictor of dropping out shifts to Kindergarten and First Grade, whether the predictor encompasses Kindergarten, First and Second Grades, or whether the overall dropout rate increases in nine or ten years, just because…So much time is spent in test practice that the content area curriculum suffers
More students fail the "end of year" content area tests
More students fail the exit level high-stakes testThe Value of Test-Taking SkillsIn the old time movies, the hero would quip that the "object of derision" plus a dime would buy a cup of coffee. This was a witty way to say that something is worthless.
Adjusted for inflation, the updated version of this salty remark is that "Test-taking skills and two bucks is not even enough for a premium coffee at the closest SpaceBronco's Java Mill.Teacher SilenceTeachers everywhere know what is happening to degrade the lives of children, and what is sapping life from what could be an exciting and meaningful school experience for our students.
Our students need teachers to speak out now, particularly as a new political party takes over the reigns of Congress. But, there are too many critical issues affecting our country, so our teachers' voices will have to be loud and persistent.SidebarFor an explanation of the forces affecting our teachers' ability to advocate for our students, see our article, Telling it Like it is in Education: The Muffled, Muzzled, Muted Sounds of Silenced Teachers

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Thursday, November 30. 2006

News Nuggets

"Out of Sight, Out of Mind" and NCLBSubtitle: "How soon we forget"The election is three weeks in the past and we have moved a sufficient cognitive distance away from caring. This enables us to forget about the election returns and move on to issues that are more important.No, this is not a satire piece about the election. How could it be when Give our Kids Good Schools reports that only 14 states had items affecting schools on their ballots.SidebarThe results of these ballot measures were mixed, but the long-term outlook is for teachers to enter the holiday season with less than rosy and bright confidence that education will become a priority in our country.
Here is a summary of what happened:Pro Funding Measures for Schools6 ballot measures favored funding
8 ballot measures rejected additional funding measuresTaxes on Tobacco Products to Support Education2 ballot measures passedRestrictions on Non-Citizen Access or Restrictions on Affirmative Action2 ballot measures passedGambling to Support Education Funding2 ballot measures failedSource: GiveKidsGoosSchools.Org E-mail Action Alert:Subject: How Did Education Fare in the 2006 Mid-Term Elections?Date: 11-14-2006 10:23:36 A.M. Central Standard Time From: info@GiveKidsGoodSchools.org No, this article is about forgetting what leaving no child behind means. In particular, the corollary to "test and complain" about our schools' lack of making "Acceptable Yearly Progress."The Rest of the StoryA common bureaucratic tactic (politician speak) is to "opaque over" important information with the intention of distracting the people who want to know what is happening.SidebarThe words "District" and "Distract" differ by only one letter. I learned this because of the "Freudian-Slip" typo that I just corrected.The area that school districts are not talking about is related to the rate of school leaving (dropout rate) that school districts and states have been storing in the "let's keep this from coming to light" file for years, files under "disgrace"… The question, "What happens to students who don't pass the state-mandated, high-stakes test during their allotted number of tries?"Answer: Who Knows, Who Cares?According to the San Antonio (Texas) Express-News article, In Limbo and Under the Radar (November 5, 2006, Pages 1A & 17A), the state of Texas cannot tell how many students lack a high school diploma because the student failed one or more of the exit exams.
Here are some numbers…25,556 (11% of the state's high school seniors) were in danger of not graduating in 2006
6,327 seniors in the class of 2006 completed all graduation requirements except passing all exit exams
20,637 students met all graduation requirements except passing one or more of these tests (over the last eight years)"Of those students, no one know how many many ultimately pass, because after these students leave school, no one keeps track of them.Source: San Antonio Express-News, 11-5-06, p. - 17A)Why does this not surprise us in a state that has deliberately undercounted school leavers for decades?"State Education Commissioner Shirley Neeley declined repeated requests for an interview. Her deputy, Robert Scott, said state education officials would like to know who these students are and what happens to them, but the agency doesn't have a mechanism for following them once they leave school, such as combining the information with state employment data. 'We're attempting to track those kids who have failed the test, and we've run into obstacles with federal privacy laws,' Scott said."Our comment: the teenage statement of wisdom, "Yea, right!"Why no Outcry?School leavers have been an invisible group for years, "invisible by design" to school districts and state departments of education, that is.
Of course, school leavers show up like launched flares on unemployment rolls, Welfare rolls (is there such a thing as a social safety net any more) and the rolls of social service agencies for the poor.
But, we figured out the reason that there is no outcry about the social ills and less-than-equal opportunity that these "ABD - all-but-diploma" students "earn."SidebarThe words "earn" and "learn" also differ by only one letter; the same number as the number of tests that it takes to keep a former student and their family in an economically vulnerable state (the state of their finances, not the State they live in) for years.By the time that former students take the high-stakes exit test for the "Bakers' Dozenth" time , they are 23 years old, and no longer children. (Note: In Texas, students can take the tests four times a year for as long as they can stomach the process and endure the humiliation.)
So, we are not leaving them behind as children, but we are leaving them behind, at the end of the pack of young adults who are scrambling for economic advancement. Adults can fend for themselves…they are not vulnerable like children…the plight of adults doesn't grab us by our "empathy bone."Scathing CriticismHere is the low-down on high-stakes tests as graduation requirements… "Critics of high-stakes exams argue that tests should be used to assess student weaknesses so educators can intervene early. They say that the true role for testing should be to help students, not to serve as a passport to a diploma.Students who show up and play by the rules play the penalty for lousy teaching or a school environment not conducive to learning, they say. Moreover, poor and minority students concentrated in the lowest-performing schools fare worse on the tests."(Source: San Antonio Express-News, 11-5-06, p. - 17A)Other Abuses…"Linda McNeil, co-director of the Center for Education at Rice University, has reported that some Houston-area educators have counseled students to quit school rather than be counted against the school's test scoresLame Excuse

"It's amazing that in this society that credit card companies know everything about us, but we don't even know how many students are passing the exit exam…" (Source: San Antonio Express-News, 11-5-06, p. - 17A)Final NoteYou can reach the author of this newspaper article at:jeanner@express-news.net

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Tuesday, October 31. 2006

News Nuggets

Student Honest and Ethical Behavior: The Road to Politics (Perdition) or Spin City?
A recent survey raises the possibility that our nation's young people lie and cheat and steal in greater numbers, now, more than ever before.Worse, these survey data show that our cynical young citizens feel no remorse for such behavior, or worse, accept such behavior as "normal" in business and life. These young people also think that they are ethical and moral, despite admitting to cheating, lying and other dishonesties.Link the Josephson The Ethics of American Youth Biennial ReportWhat is happening here?"Young people are almost unanimous in saying that ethics and character are important on both a personal level and in business but they express a very cynical attitudes about whether a person can be ethical and succeed."(Source: http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/reportcard/
Note: Since this election season spotlights our elected officials, I wonder if cynicism stemming from the antics (and scandals) of our trusted elected officials has anything to do with these survey results.Other Hallmarks of the ReportThe Josephson Report finds that today's students...Place high important on character and trust
Believe that ethics in the workplace is essential
Believe that being good is more important the being rich
State that adults in their lives provide positive role modelsSounds too good to be true, so far...
These young people also state that they are satisfied with their character and they state that they believe that they are ethical.The Rest of the StoryDuring this same survey..."82% admit they lied to parent within the past 12 months about something significant– 57% said they lied two or more times
62% admit they lied to teacher within the past 12 months about something significant -- 35% said they lied two or more times
33% copied an internet document within the past 12 months – 18% did so two or more times
60% cheated during a test at school within the past 12 months– 35% did so two or more times
23% stole something from a parent or other relative within the past 12 months – 11% did so two or more times
In 2002...
28% admitted stealing from a parent or other relative
19% stole something from a friend within the past 12 months – 7% did so two or more times
28% stole something from a store within the past 12 months – 14% did so two or more times"On first glance, the self-reports of our students seem to indicate worsening values and worsening behavior.But, is the Situation so Bad?On the other side of this issue (or maybe it is the other side of the spin), one college newspaper cites the similar data, and notes that the trends are positive.
Here are the campus headlines from Georgia Tech:"Integrity survey shows rise in student honesty"Link to the campus article about the increase in students integrity and the campus honor code...And this campus paper has been around since 1911!Are they or Aren't They?So, which is it? Are our young people becoming moral degenerates or noble citizens?
Are our students getting worse, or are they getting more honest in their self-reporting behavior?
Instead of drumming up the usual caveats and disclaimers about the ability to generalize from the one-time snapshot obtained from a survey, let's ask one question...
Has human nature evolved or deteriorated much in the past three, seven or ten years, fifty or one hundred years?
No, but social norms seem to evolve a bit faster. For example, the content of television programs today would not have been allowed 40 years ago. Does this observation indicate that our society degenerated, and is skiing down the slippery slope toward unbridled moral depravity?
More likely, the sludge on television indicates a shrinking customer base, and the need for television executives to provide ever more salacious, sexy, violent and action-packed programming to bring eyeballs in front of the tube with ever more channels and program choices.
Of course, this strategy won't pan out in the long run, because customers will continue leaving passive television watching in droves in favor of the interaction and dynamic content of the Internet (and interactive video games).The Lesson for SchoolsIncidents, such as the spate of recent school violence are exceptions, but every incident and foiled attempt at notoriety are pumped world-wide at electron speed.
What school districts should recognize, and what every master teacher (from ancient to modern) exemplified, is that imagination, interaction, , and creative interactivity whip the results and positive outcomes from passive learning, hands down.
There is no need to be discourages or distracted by negative headlines and scary headlines.
Teachers who look for and see the positive qualities that reside in each student will always draw out that best. Master teachers motivate students to become life-long learners and life-long productive citizens.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Saturday, September 30. 2006

News Nuggets

Our States are Falling Behind in Employing High-Quality Teachers!
Subtitle: The Sky is Falling
Everyone knows that our nation has high quality, highly motivated, industrious and over-working teachers who over-deliver student achievement results. Teachers who work under low compensation and even lower appreciation, teachers who work for bureaucracies that under-fund and and under-support instruction...while these same bureaucracies clamor for test score improvements.So, why did the Ben Feller (of the Associated Press) article for the Washington Post look so negative? In this article Mr. Feller summarizes the latest No Child Left Behind (NCLB) data.
Answer: He used a Department of Education Press Release to acquire the "facts" for this story.Link to the original Ed.Gov Press ReleaseMajor findings:
Four states failed to meet even one requirementHawaiiMissouriUtahWisconsin
Seven states were evaluated as having seriously flawed teacher quality programs and face the loss of Federal moneyIdahoIowaMissouriMontanaNebraskaVirginiaWashington
Thirty nine states "tried, but failed" to come up with a good enough plan
Nine states satisfied all the requirementsKansasLouisianaMarylandNevadaNew JerseyNew MexicoOhioSouth CarolinaSouth DakotaWhat does this Mean?"Under the No Child Left Behind law, states were supposed to have highly qualified teachers in every core academic class by the end of the last school year. None made it."Source: Ben Feller, http://articles.news.aol.com/news/_a/review-finds-states-still-fall-short-on/20060816232209990001?_ccc=3&cid=842(Note: This article is no longer posted by AOL™)
With information like this presented by the Washington Post and the Department of Education, you might think that education in this country is disgustingly poor.
But, actually, this commotion is all about making sure that "economically poor " students get highly trained teachers (a goal that everybody wants). Yet, getting highly trained teachers for lower socioeconomic (often minority) students is made more difficult by the insideous affects of the No Child Left Behind Act.The Rest of the StoryWhen you examine this information closely, you find that this "teacher quality" issue is only about some "statistics" that state education agencies were ordered to collect about degrees and professional development for teachers who work with minority students.
What the states failed to do was collect six categories of data in a "bureaucratically significant way", i.e., in a way that was complicated and expensive enough to appease the "Feds."
And the "Feds" can be mean taskmasters...
"The department can withhold money from states that fall short on teacher quality.
Based on a separate review earlier this year, seven states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico face the loss of federal aid if they don't improve their compliance.
Those states are Idaho, Iowa, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Virginia and Washington." Source: Ben Feller, AP http://articles.news.aol.com/news/_a/review-finds-states-still-fall-short-on/20060816232209990001?_ccc=3&cid=842(Note: This article is no longer posted by AOL™)But, why would our Federal Government "badmouth" teachers like this? Why would our Federal Government, a minority investor in our public schools (with a nine percent stake) want to make our nation's schools seem worse than they are?Hidden Agenda As we have speculated before, the answer may be a desire of some politicians to promote "Voucher Programs" so that children can attend private (religious) schools at government expense.
The logic seems designed for something like this...
"Let's show that instruction is horribly bad in our public schools so that we can 'Voucher students' into a backdoor funding ploy for religious schools."
And, if there is any degradation in teacher quality, the "Feds" are complicit in creating the climate for that slide by driving teachers away from teaching lower socioeconomic (minority) students.The Issues Human Nature TermsImagine how much cheating a teacher would promote if each student who achieved a 100% score on the weekly test received $100.00 USD for their effort.
When the stakes are high, motivation soars. And, sometimes this motivation glides under the radar of ethical and moral restraint.
But, what happens if self serving behavior is legal, ethical and moral? Won't people, such as teachers, embark on a course that brings themselves the most advantage?
Here is how the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) subverts education. There are several steps to the process...The Feds pressure school district to increase test scores
District administrators pressure teachers to "increase test scores"
Quality teachers bail out (transfer) from sites where delivering high test scores is more difficult (such as in schools filled with lower socioeconomic status students

Quality teachers, (under-compensated, over-worked) look for easier places to increase test scores (by teaching the more affluent)...or leave teaching altogether
The Feds cite states (and individual school districts) for failing to live up to the bureaucratic letter of the NCLB Law
The US Department of Education berates states and pillories teachers
So, there is increased pressure from the hollowed [sic] halls of Congress for voucher programs and "competition" for our public schoolsSidebarOf course the professional political proponents of this benighted course of educational interference take extraordinary steps to quench any competition for themselves. Our Federal bureaucracy needs competition, especially in the form of common sense.Wild FantasyImagine the mad dash to increase federal funding for education by certain incumbents if a new category of support for religious schools were to become constitutional.
But, this is idle speculation because these zealots would have to complete this shell game before November 2006, because a number of them won't make another term.
But, let's offer (tongue in cheek) a strategy of allowing the federal funding for religious schools. Why. Because this would be the best way to ride on the coat tails of the religius schools to flush funding of public education.
Sure, the public schools would only get crumbs while the religious schools got loaves. But, those crumbs would be a lot more than the "Feds" deliver, now.
Even better, once their real agenda (i.e., increasing funding for religious schools) were achieved, the "Feds" could drop the pretense of the No Child Left Behind law, and stop one source of their interference with education.What Education is Really AboutTo end this article on a positive note, let's consider the wisdom of a single sentence from an 11 year old student in Mexico who seems to have more insight into education than the whole pack of our politicians combined..."The teacher is to the students what the rain is to the field."Zaira Alexandra Rodriguez Guijarro, age 11, (Mexico)
Source: UNESCO (1996) What makes a good teacher? Paris: UNESCO
http://www.unicef.org/teachers/teacher/teacher.htm
Enough said!

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Thursday, August 31. 2006

News Nuggets

body dl dt {font-weight: bold; padding-top: 10px;}
Research Shows what we have Known All Along: Public Schools are as Good as Private Schools!
In fact, many public schools are better than many private schools.
Money is not the necessary or sufficient condition that produces highly positive student outcomes.More importantly, the effort to pull students from public schools into religious schools with the use of vouchers is shown to be ill-advised, political slight-of-hand.
What makes good schools? The answer is no secret: great teachers.
Every teaching situation requires a skilled and proficient teacher. This is a stated goal of the dreaded No Child Left Behind Act. Unfortunately, NCLB goes about it in the wrong way, possibly because vouchers for religious schools is one of the hidden agendas behind the law.
But, is there any logic that places the best teachers in religious private schools where the pay is more dismal than the public school system? Answer: none whatsoever.
In fact, teaching in the wealthiest prep schools (even if the school paid above average salaries) is no picnic. In schools for extremely wealthy children, stresses are high for both students and their teachers because the parents drive the students to excel. For teachers for the very wealthy, the trade off is an exchange of meddling politicians from afar for the up close and personal meddling of parents (demanding to get their way, and used to getting it).
Enough editorializing! What did the Research Show?
The research revealed that when students were matched for various demographic characteristics, the matching groups of students achieved at approximately the same levels.
Of course the corollary question immediately jumps to our attention, i.e., what kind of science was used in the past to measure different kinds of students against each other in the first place?
Seems like this could be the same twisted logic that jumps to the conclusion that blanket test scores provide a picture of how well a teacher is doing. (Maybe even the logic of comparing students from 40 countries on achievement tests is suspect.)
Anyway, here are the links to this story:Public Schools Perform Near Private Ones in Studyhttp://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/15/education/15report.html?ex=1310616000&en=abe96106c55b306f&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss#articleBodyLink
Study finds worst performance in Conservative Christian Schoolshttp://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/07/15/MNGI7JVJ361.DTL
Link to the full reporthttp://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/national/20060715report.pdf
Of course, not everyone agrees that our teachers are competent, hardworking professionals. And, our elementary teachers seem to teach better than our middle school and high school teachers; at least when compared our students to students in foreign, industrialized countries (if you inappropriately use students' test scores to measure teachers in the way that politicians and school district administrators do).
For a particularly scathing indictment of our school system at their worst, follow this link. Link to the view that school districts need competition.
Or, check out our book review in this newsletter issue where Paul A. Zoch paints a compelling picture of the failure of American education based upon false assumptions that were promoted and indoctrinated by the Progressive Education Movement. Link to the 8-31-06 Book Review of Doomed to Fail.
Implications
If we want to measure teachers' performance, we should measure teachers' performance. As we have noted in previous newsletters, measuring students' test scores is inappropriate for judging and evaluating teachers. Link to The Flaws, Fallacies and Foolishness of Benchmark Testing article.
And, when we measure teachers performance, we need to include some scaled score for "Newbie" teachers. No scientific rationale justifies measuring the student outcomes of classes taught by a beginning teacher against the outcomes of a master teacher with three to five years of experience.
In fact, lots of support, tender-loving-care, and patience are needed to upgrade a Newbie teacher to a master teacher level. When a Newbie leaves a college school of education as a certified Newbie teachers, he or she has little more than the ability to talk the jargon of the trade in their toolkit. A college education degree is only a "ticket to play", with little of the real experience that is needed to perform the actual skills required for day-to-day output as a "all-things-to-all-students, master-of-everything-under-the-sun; when in fact, the practice, integration and habit development of most instructional skills are learned on the job.
There are ineffective teachers working on great campuses, and there are great teachers working wonders in spite of ineffective principals.

Because of biases and because of the polarizing opinions, people from every angle of this debate will probably be able to use some part of this research report to trumpet their own viewpoint (just as we are doing here).
And, there may be a level of ambivalence on all sides, such as the Classroom Toolkit policy of wishing to protect our public schools while at the same time removing them from the muck and mire of bureaucracy.
The Real Distinction
Of course, we have to draw the distinction between the competencies of teachers and between the competencies of the school districts that they teach for.
And, it may not be that government schools are monopolies that is at the core of how poorly American high school students perform (in comparison to other countries), but that our school districts (and the government that pulls their "puppet's strings") are bureaucracies.
Of course, to the knowledge workers who finds their jobs outsourced overseas, it doesn't matter what the cause behind how overseas knowledge workers became more skilled than our workers.
And it won't matter what the cause, to the cities and towns where local companies loose business because foreign companies earn contracts in global competition. When overseas workers are more skilled than our local knowledge workers, who can blame companies from wanting to work with companies with the best-trained and most productive employees.
Looming Economic Defeat of U.S. Businesses?
This looming defeat of American businesses is avoidable, if we empower our teachers and teach our students to their potential.
But, since we don't expect our politicians or our school districts to empower our teachers, Classroom Toolkit provides the tools to help teachers empower themselves.
Even thought politicians and school district administrators continue to place barriers and obstacles to great teaching in front of teachers at every turn; teaching still is a great privilege (some would say that teaching rises to the level of a blessing).
Contributing to the welfare and long-term success of our students by teaching, instructing and sharing our knowledge, skills and abilities is contributing to the long-term success of our nation.
I'm sure that politicians and school district administrators want our teachers to excel, even if they don't know how to get out of the way and let our teachers teach.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 12:51

Monday, July 31. 2006

News Nuggets

Texas Strategy for Solving the "Poor Kids' Obesity Problem" | "Don't Feed them During the Summer"
The San Antonio Express News (tree-based news), July 16, 2006, Pages 3B and 7B alerted me to this strategy.
This newspaper column cites a study by the Food Research and Action Center entitled, "No Texas child deserves to go hungry."It turns out that Texas leads the nation in applying this strategy, to the tune of $32.3 million US!
This is the amount of federal money that Texas did not collect because eligible children from low income homes were not fed.
Texas left almost as much money on the table (no pun intended) as the next five states combined!
Amount not claimed for feeding low income children by just six states - $77.3 million US
And, this is not calculated at swanky-restaruant (the kind that teachers frequent, where a tuxedo-clad valet parks the teacher's BMW) prices. This was calculated on US Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided food prices. This is food sold to schools at below wholesale prices, i.e., comodity food purchased by our government to keep the prices that we pay at the supermarket high; food sold at lower than market prices so that between ten to twenty children could eat lunch for the price that an afluent teacher might pay for one mediocre bottle of wine at said upscale eatery. This represents a lot of missed meals for poor children...a really lot of meals.
And, we're only talking about one, no-charge meal a day for these children.
The Texas Success Story
In Texas, only about 19% of the low income children that could have been fed (were eligible for the program), were fed.
Sure, Texas kids are among the heaviest in the nation.
But, feeding children nutritious food each day keeps their weight down.
Placing children on a "no food available" diet, just causes them to "pack on pounds" once they get food again. Everyone knows that dieting does not work as a weight managment solution.
So, Why isn't Texas Feeding its Children at Federal Expense?
"The reason Texas has fallen behind other states, according to the study's authors, is that people either aren't aware the program exists or lack transportation to a site. Also some communities don't have available sites or have limited hours. Last year, 76 (Texas) counties did not have a summermeal program.Source: San Antonio Express News, 7-16-06, Study says state lost funds when kids missed free lunches, p-7b.
"I'm not sure why there's low participation in the program. Maybe people don't know about it, but we don't have money to do the big mega advertising...We advertise it as much as we can by sending press releases, sending letters home and posting flyers, but our funds are limited."Source: San Antonio Express News, 7-16-06, Study says state lost funds when kids missed free lunches, p-7b.
Commentary
Aren't the same people that let all these children go unfed the same ones that demand increased teacher accountability, and the same ones who demand increased test scores?
And, aren't these summer feeding programs also required by law for districts with large numbers of students who receive free meals during the school year?
And wasn't outrage expressed about the obesity problem in our country? (Surprisingly, teachers were not blamed for the obesity problem. But, teachers should find a way to integrate nutritional skills into the on going curriculum, shouldn't they?)
But, there is still time for politicians to add requirments for the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB).
"Whipping Boy" is not a Brand of Cream
Is there a parallel to the "whipping boy" concept here? That is, when the royal children misbehaved; because they couldn't be spanked, a substitute was called in to receive the beating.
One of the rules of "Blatant Bureaucracy" is, "Blame flows down the chain of command hierarchy" rests firmly on the shoulders, backs, backsides; of the lowest level employees. (This is the reason that they call it a "flow chart."
Guess where stuff flows where teachers are concerned.
There is no such thing as a free lunch!
Perhaps Texas school administrators would like to prove the adage: "There is no such thing as a free lunch."
But, this is misguided because the cost of the "free lunch" should be picked up by the poor kids' rich Uncle, Sam.
Since this situation demonstrates mismanagement, if not downright law breaking, do your want to start a nation-wide protest. How about making this protext so loud that it drowns out the
Only this time, it won't be teachers tootsies that get roasted if those responsible have their feet held to the fire.
Link to the Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation Report (PDF Format)
Link to the Food Research and Action Center site

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Friday, June 30. 2006

News Nuggets

Commercialization of Lesson Planning
Have you thought that your lessons were good enough that other teachers would pay for them?
Maybe you are rightBut, don't expect to make enough to quit teaching and retire on this income stream by tomorrow.
A new site...A new Possibility?
The Associated Press just reported a business idea for a site that allows teachers to post their lessons for cash.
Associated Press Article
"The site, TeachersPayTeachers.com, aims to be an eBay for educators. For a $29.95 yearly fee, sellers can post their work and set their prices. Buyers rate the products."
Associated Press Article

The site's developer, a former teacher, cashed in his retirement and maxed out his credit cards to launch the site.

"He keeps 15 percent of every sale, but he knows the only way he will really make money is by getting "teacher-authors" to pay the membership fee."
Associated Press Article

Being a Teacher of the Year Helps
Ten percent of the 80 teachers that had signed up for the service were teachers of the year. They were given a complimentary membership.
Maybe the materials will be worth membership fee. But, as the Associated Press article points out, there are a lot of free lessons on the Internet.
Even Classroom Toolkit offers free materials. Link to the Classroom Toolkit site
Want to Sell your Materials? Go for it!
It is probably difficult to convince other teachers to buy your lesson plans and materials when so many are available for free.
But, if you have a lot of materials, this might be a spare cash vehicle for you.
There are some cautions. For example:

If your materials were created while you were at work, the copyright might be owned by your employer
If you and some teacher friends jointly created the materials, you might need a legal contract or a formal partnership arrangement
If your materials contain any resources that were "borrowed" from textbooks, the textbook (or other) publishers might not like to find out that you were selling some of their intellectual property

Explore Your Options
There are other options that you can explore. For example:

You can sell your materials in electronic (or other form) on eBay, where the cost for conducting an auction is about 25 cents. Link to eBay™
You can collect your materials and sell them to a commercial publisher such as Teacher Created Materials. Here is link to their contact page: Link to the Teacher Created Materials site
You can hire an agent and sell your materials to a big-name publisher (You're on your own here.)
You can publish your materials with an online "Quick Print" publisher such as LULU. Link to the free, Quick Print site, LULU.com
You can share your materials

The Rest of the Story
The scramble for high-grade materials and the quest for high test scores can distract teachers from the fact that the most important asset for students is their teacher.
Often, in their push to hype and highlight their materials, marketers downplay the importance of the teacher in the classroom.
A real person that children like, real interaction that engages children, and the interpersonal dynamics of a sharing and caring teacher outdistance materials and plan books on the classroom productivity scale.
Our classrooms need student and teacher empowerment, not more powerful materials.

A materials-driven classroom strategy does not help teachers on a long-term basis.
As our friends in Great Britain would say, much of the stuff that teachers buy is "One Off." That is, one use and you're done. The "activity-driven" model of lesson planning is inefficient and it dissipates classroom focus.
What is more efficient is the modular lesson design that Classroom Toolkit advocates.
But, knowing what to do with all those world-class materials is also part of the story.
The time and cost benefits develop when you train your students in how to think, work together, solve problems and contribute to the learning in the classroom.
The Classroom Toolkit Business Model
Developing the Classroom Toolkit Web site did not take cashing in a retirement or maxing out credit cards.
The basic cost of hosting the site is $300 US per year.
And, the ads at the bottom left of the page just about cover that cost. I'm sure that the ads would cover the cost of the site if I moved them near the top of the page (so more folks would click on them), but that would spoil the look of the page.
The Classroom Toolkit site is a proof of concept project for a larger project, something like the goals of TeachersPayTeachers.com, except that participation and materials would be completely free to teachers, worldwide; and there would not be a cost, ever.
In support of this New Nugget topic, I have posted a number of electronic books/ courses, so that teachers can learn what it takes to develop these business strategies.
Hint: this is a lot of work, and you won't get rich quickly. The rule is "Buyer Beware" for any information that promises immediate riches if you buy today.
Here are the links to Second Income/ Alternate Business courses that teachers may find helpful:

How to start and run an Affiliate Business
Affiliate Business Course
How to develop an Automated Product Delivery strategy
Automated Product Delivery eBook
How to develop a long-term Internet Auction business course
Net Auction Course
How to write for the Internet Course
Net Writing Course
How to price your products for the most profit
Pricing Products
How to sell your services and increase your business using the Internet
Service Sellers Course
What you need to do to set up a Webmaster Business
Webmaster Business Course
Resources for setting up a at home business
Work at Home Course

Also, be sure to check the Top Tips section of this newsletter for a low/ minimal cost strategy that teachers can use to share materials within your district.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Wednesday, May 31. 2006

News Nuggets

School Busses are Dangerous for our Children

What's going on that the air inside our school busses is worse than the air outside the bus (if the bus windows are closed)?
Check these articles:

School Bus Fumes
from: ScienceNetLinks.com
http://tinyurl.com/lewjx

School Bus Diesel Fumes Fueling Kids' Cancer Risk?
from: Life.FamiliyEducation.com
http://tinyurl.com/h4oho

School Bus Diesel Fumes May be Cause of Rise in Asthma from: Mindfully.org
http://tinyurl.com/gey6h

Protect Children From Diesel Fumes from: the Minnesota OEA and MPCA
http://www.moea.state.mn.us/ee/noidle.cfm

The Office of Environmental Assistance and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency states on their web site...
"The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined that diesel fumes contain 40 toxic chemicals, including 15 carcinogens."
http://www.moea.state.mn.us/ee/noidle.cfm
Accolades to the Minnesota State Legislature for passing a bit of legislation that benefits and protects children.
"In May 2002, Minnesota adopted legislation to protect the health and safety of children from harmful diesel bus emissions. This law calls for schools to reduce the unnecessary idling of school buses in front of schools, and reroute bus parking zones away from air-intake vents or if necessary, relocate the air-intake vents)."
http://www.moea.state.mn.us/ee/noidle.cfm

What is going on here?

"Toxic chemicals in diesel emissions increase the risk of asthma, lung and heart disease, and are responsible for as many as 125,000 cancers nationwide. Yale University's Dr. John Wargo recently found that students on school buses are exposed to 5 to 15 times the levels of particulate pollution than at nearby monitoring sites. Bus idling and bus queuing (back-to-front line-up of buses) increases the concentrations of harmful particulate pollution inside school buses."
http://www.moea.state.mn.us/ee/noidle.cfm
What these articles also state is:

Older busses have higher concentrations of noxious and toxic chemicals
Some school busses that were tested were built in 1975, and are still on the road
Concentrations of toxic and noxious chemicals are higher in busses when the windows are closed
What these articles don't mention that:

In times of high fuel prices (maybe for the foreseeable future), idling busses get 0 miles per galleon, and fuel economy dissipates faster than the noxious fumes

The busses do not have to idle to keep the air conditioner in operation (Does anyone know of a school district that has air conditioned busses?)
Maybe the bus drivers want to keep the heater running during the Minnesota winters!

The fumes outside the bus are unhealthy for teachers who are required to perform bus duty
The gasoline powered vehicles of the parents who wait in a cue to pick up their children donate a lot of fumes to the parent pick up area, too
Some states have moved school bus fleets to the use of natural gas as a cleaner, more environmentally friendly, alternative to diesel fuel

It is nice that some attention is being paid to the health of our students in one state out of 50.
And, what about seat belts on school busses? If we care so much for our students, wouldn't seat belts make sense?
No, it turns out. The cost retrofitting seat belts on school busses would be too high. And, if two seat belts were placed on a seat, then they wouldn't be much good when three students have to sit on one seat because of over crowded routes.

One author states that school busses are safer than private transportation, and that parents shouldn't pull their children from the busses.

Sure, it is better for some children to die a lingering cancer death years later than for our school districts to spend the money to do what protects them now. The number of children that acquire cancer from school bus riding will only be a small percentage, as compared to the huge number of students that benefit economically from going to school.

And, what is the reason that school districts keep busses running for thirty years? Could tight budgets be the culprit?

The saga of bureaucracy and management is the endless compromises that are caused by budget shortfalls, and a "Let's do something, even though it isn't enough" reality.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Sunday, April 30. 2006

News Nuggets

Congress wants to Ban Junk Food in Schools
The obesity rate of students jumped four percent, from 14% to 18%, in four years, according to the Centers for Disease Control. (No need to document this, we all see for ourselves that this is true. But, here is the supporting link.)
http://tinyurl.com/hazdzWhile the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee (I'm not making this "Forestry" part up) ponders the danger of close to 1/5 of our children being on the brink of long-term health problems, we should wonder how so many high-sugar, high-salt, high-fat, caffeine-laced "food stuffs" get into our schools in the first place.
Second, we should wonder if schools are the only place that our kids get to eat this stuff?
Consider a study in NYC that determined that 25% of toddlers are obese and that 40% are too heavy for their age. This issue was most acute among children from lower socioeconomic homes. Why?
http://tinyurl.com/lkty5
Then, we should wonder "who's job it is to teach children what to eat?"
And finally, we might ask "Does lack of exercise also play a part in this problem?" (That is, unless we belong to the Food Products Association, and believe that non-nutritive food stuffs [no pun intended] has to be present in schools so that children can learn right from wrong [about eating].)
Maybe "No Child Left Behind" means that they are too heavy to run and can't keep up.
->SidebarEnd Sidebar

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00

Friday, March 31. 2006

News Nuggets

Federal Reserve Board develops Kids Page
You can check out this free resource at:
http://www.federalreserve.gov/kids/default.htm
This site does provide background information about the Federal Reserve Board that I bet you didn't know.
The pages have a mascot that looks like the big-footed eagle that students would draw for their pep rally for their upcoming game, maybe "Stomp the Congressional Inflators!"

There is also a ten question quiz at the end of the page.
I suppose that the appeal of the page is that it looks like a page that your students would create for their presentation on the Federal Reserve Board for a Middle School Civics Class.

However, if the student clicks on the map as, suggested on the page, they are taken to the various sites of the Regional FED. These Regional FED sites are ones that only an economist could love.

You probably would learn something that you didn't know if you read the page (The site is a long page with a Table of Contents).

But, maybe your best bet is to use the page as an example as you praise your students abilities, and assure them that their present ions can easily be better written and look more professional than this government site.

Check it out if you teach civics.
Let us know if your students obtain any value from visiting this site.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 11:00