

The Department also launched the "[I Am What I Learn](#)" video contest. Students can respond to the President's challenge by creating videos describing the steps they will take to improve their education and the role education will play in fulfilling their dreams. All students age 13 and older are asked to create and upload their videos to YouTube by October 8; entries may be in the form of video blogs, public service announcements, music videos, or documentaries. The general public will then vote on their favorites to determine the top 20 finalists. These 20 videos will be reviewed by a panel of judges, including Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The panel will select three winners, each of whom will receive a \$1,000 prize. (Sept. 2009)

President Obama released his [Strategy for American Innovation](#), which calls for investment in building blocks that will ensure the American economy has all the necessary tools for successful innovation. Among them is reforming public schools to deliver a complete and competitive education. (Sept. 2009)

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Jim Shelton, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement, addressed district superintendents and nonprofit leaders on August 20 about the importance of innovation in education. The Secretary [discussed](#) the historic role of innovation and the need for new ideas to support the Department's moon shot goal – producing the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the end of the next decade. (August 2009)

Secretary Duncan will be joined by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and civil rights leader Rev. Al Sharpton on a four-city [tour](#) to highlight the Obama administration's efforts to reform public education, spur innovation, and discuss challenges facing America's school systems. An outgrowth of their meeting with President Obama last spring, the tour will include school visits, stakeholder meetings, and media briefings, and is expected to stimulate discussion and community engagement around issues of education reform. Tour sites include Philadelphia on Sept. 29, New Orleans on Nov. 3, and Baltimore on Nov. 13. More stops, including a rural site, will be added as the tour progresses. (August 2009)

The latest release of the International Assessments of Student Achievement, the [Programme for International Student Assessment](#) (PISA), results are "another wake-up call that our students are treading the waters of academic achievement while other countries' students are swimming faster and farther," according to Secretary Arne Duncan. "Our students have stagnated educationally, putting our long-term economic security at risk." In his [statement](#), the Secretary specifically pointed to the fact that math scores of America's 15-year-olds now lag behind those of 31 countries, and that American eighth graders' science scores are now trailing those of their peers in eight countries. "We've never settled for second best," Secretary Duncan observed, "and now we're in another race of sorts – a race to the top tier of the world's students whose academic achievement is the best and the brightest." (August 2009)

Despite busy schedules and summer heat, many Cabinet members and senior administration officials joined Secretary Duncan for "[Read to the Top!](#)" the Department's weekly reading initiative, during June, July, and August. For 12 weeks, Secretary Duncan and 15 Cabinet members and other senior administration officials brought books to life for the more than 1,200 children who gathered under shady trees on the Department's plaza to listen to the stories and ask questions. Even the "First Grandmother" of the United States, Marian Robinson, stopped by to read to the children who had many questions for her. (August 2009)

On August 18, Secretary Duncan addressed several thousand arts education advocates via a [teleconference](#) that focused on the role of the arts in a complete education. The Secretary expressed his concerns about access to arts education in U.S. public schools and noted several ways that K-12 arts programs can be supported in the future. The nationwide call followed the release of a [letter](#) to school and education community leaders about the arts in schools. "The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines the arts as a core subject," the Secretary wrote, "and the arts play a significant role in children's development and learning process." (August 2009)

Secretary Duncan continued his "[Listening and Learning](#)" tour on September 15 with a special town hall meeting to begin the new season of the Department's "Education News Parents Can Use" television broadcast. In this "America Goes Back to School" edition of the show, Secretary Duncan engaged parents from across the nation in a live, interactive discussion via telephone, e-mail, and video. The Secretary has visited more than half of the states to date, meeting with hundreds of students, parents, teachers, principals, education support staff, superintendents, professors, higher education administrators, and community leaders, and has engaged them in a conversation about federal education policy in anticipation of the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. To watch the archived broadcast, go to <http://www.connectlive.com/events/ednews>. (Sept. 2009)



The National Center for Education Statistics' Back to School [Forecast](#) notes more students are entering and returning to America's schools and colleges than ever before. In fall 2009, a record of nearly 49.8 million students will attend public elementary and secondary schools. Of these, almost 35 million will be in prekindergarten through 8th grade and 14.8 million in grades 9 through 12. (Sept. 2009)

From the Office of Innovation and Improvement

And the winner is...children's literacy by way of innovative television programs supported by OII's [Ready To Learn](#) Partnership. [Between the Lions](#), a multimedia educational initiative for children ages three to seven, and [WordWorld](#), which empowers preschoolers to read, won a combined four top awards at the 36th Annual Daytime Emmy Awards ceremony. Now in its ninth season, *Between the Lions* won Emmys for both Outstanding Pre-School Children's Series and Outstanding Writing in a Children's Series. *WordWorld*, launched in July 2007, was honored for both Outstanding Children's Animated Program and Outstanding Writing in Animation. Sesame Street received a [Lifetime Achievement Award](#) as well as four other Emmys, including one for New Approaches in the Daytime Children's category that recognizes the use of new media such as Web sites and interactivity. Cookie Monster, helping to accept the Lifetime Achievement Award, declared it both an honor and delicious as he devoured the golden statue. (August 2009)

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called on the nation to turn around thousands of underperforming schools. In announcing [draft requirements](#) for \$3.5 billion in Title I School Improvement grants, the Secretary joined U.S. Senator Harry Reid at Harley Harmon Elementary School in Las Vegas. "If we are to put an end to stubborn cycles of poverty and social failure..." according to Secretary Duncan, "we must address the needs of children who have long been ignored and marginalized in chronically low-achieving schools." (August 2009)

In early August, Secretary Duncan [announced](#) the availability to states of \$11.37 billion in Title I, IDEA, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funding as part of ARRA, which was 30 days ahead of schedule and in response to President Obama's direction to Cabinet members to pick up the pace of the Recovery Act implementation. (August 3, 2009)

The Council of Chief State School Officers, on behalf of the National Center for Education Statistics, is hosting a series of WebEx information [sessions](#) for states planning to apply for [Statewide Longitudinal Data System \(SLDS\) grants](#). The last of the series of three sessions is scheduled for October 5, 2009, from 12:00-1:30 p.m. (EST). Participants will receive an overview of the FY09 SLDS competition and opportunity for questions and answers. (August 2009)

American History

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation presented its [Award for Federal Preserve America Accomplishment](#) to the National Park Service for its integral role in the service learning project, *Of the Student, By the Student, For the Student*, at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. The Park Service combined efforts with the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership and the Harpers Ferry Middle School to help students to create six vodcasts that provide a middle-school perspective on the John Brown Raid. Walking in the footsteps of the raiders, and using the places where the raid occurred and primary historic documents, students interpreted the significance of the John Brown Raid to their peers. The vodcasts will be seen by visitors to Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. (August 2009)

Arts Education

[MusicianCorps](#), a domestic "musical Peace Corps," sponsored by the nonprofit Music National Service, is up and running in four cities. Talented musicians are recruited, trained, and placed in under-resourced schools, low-income communities, and health care settings, where they will provide music learning and mentoring experiences for at-risk youth. The inaugural cities are New Orleans, the San Francisco Bay area, Seattle and Chicago. Musician Corps Fellows receive a modest living stipend, professional development, and health care in return for their full-time service commitment. (August 2009)

The Kennedy Center's Education Department launched [Any Given Child](#) to assist communities nationwide in strengthening and expanding arts education opportunities for students. The goal is to ensure that all young people in the community have access to a complete, affordable arts education. Participating communities will begin by assessing existing arts resources in the schools as well as programs offered by local organizations and then develop long-range plans for arts education in each community. The Center plans to bring its staff and consultants to work with community leaders and school administrators.

Charter Schools/Choice

Nearly two-thirds of Americans favor charter schools, according to the latest [Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll](#), which sampled more than 1,000 adults on a wide range of education topics that included both their support for public charters and their understanding of several specific characteristics of charter schools. A majority of respondents, for instance, wrongly assumed that charter schools charge tuition and 71 percent didn't know that charters have open enrollment policies. Other topics addressed in the annual survey include early childhood education, teacher pay, and high school dropouts. (Sept. 2009)

Public School Choice News provides links to research, policy, and tools for the implementation and improvement of public school choice. The e-newsletter, developed through [BuildingChoice.org](#), a Web site funded by OII, features news and information related to ARRA as well as a wide range of public school choice resources. To subscribe, visit the Public School Choice News [subscription page](#). (August 2009)

Closing the Achievement Gap

The Aldine Independent School District (AISD) outside Houston won the 2009 [Broad Prize for Urban Education](#), the largest education award in the country, and as a result will receive \$1 million in college scholarships from [The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation](#). Aldine, where a majority of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals, has "shown some of the most consistent student achievement gains nationally in the last decade and has been recognized as one of the top five most improved urban American school systems in four of the last six years." Other finalist districts for the 2009 prize were Broward County Public Schools in Florida; Gwinnett County Public Schools outside Atlanta (see "Innovations in the News"); the Long Beach Unified School District in California; and Socorro Independent School District in Texas. (Sept. 2009)

A combination of educational and social barriers, including family care-taking responsibilities, poor academic preparation, and gender stereotyping, are causing Latina students to drop out of high school, according to a

new [study](#) by the [National Women's Law Center](#) and the [Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund](#). The two organizations used surveys, interviews, and focus groups to concentrate on high school issues encountered by Latinas. The study was prompted in part by an earlier law center report concerning girls' graduation rates that revealed disproportionately high dropout rates for Latinas. Researchers reported a substantial gap between Latinas' educational goals and their personal expectations about reaching those goals. (August 2009)

More than 1.5 million students in the class of 2009 took the SAT, the most college-bound students of any graduating class and the most diverse annual group of students to take the college admission exam, according to [the College Board](#). Forty percent of the 2009 SAT takers were minority students, a more than 10 percent increase in that group since 1999, when minority students constituted only 29 percent of the test takers. (August 2009)

Leadership

A [study](#) by New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy indicates that students in elementary and middle schools led by graduates of the city's Aspiring Principals Program made gains in English-language arts at a faster pace than students in schools headed by new principals who did not attend the program. Run by the New York City Leadership Academy, the program teaches turnaround strategies and has trained about 15 percent of the city's principal corps. (August 2009)

Teacher Quality and Development

The talents of great teachers appear to have a positive effect on their peers, according to a [study](#) in which researchers reviewed 11 years of North Carolina school data and found results suggesting that high-performing teachers' abilities not only resulted in better student performance in their classrooms, but in other classrooms at the same grade level. "If it's true that teachers are learning from their peers, and the effects are not small, then we want to make sure that any incentive system we put in place is going to be fostering that and not preventing it," said C. Kirabo Jackson of Cornell University, a co-author of the study. (Sept. 2009)

Innovations in the News

Charter Schools/Choice

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The mayor of St. Louis is looking for a few good schools that will address the unmet needs of students whose present schools are performing poorly. Based on the results of a recent study that compared performance of both district and charter schools by ZIP code, Mayor Francis Slay wants to strategically locate new charter schools in neighborhoods with the least access to good public schools. The mayor's office plans to invite local and national charter groups to propose new schools in six neighborhoods targeted by the study. [More—[The St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#)] (Sept. 1)

Nineteen organizations are proposing to open as many as 23 new public charter schools in Louisiana in the 2010-2011 school year. Twenty of the applications submitted last month to the Louisiana Department of Education are for traditional brick-and-mortar buildings and three are for virtual schools. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers will screen the applicants and make recommendations to the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education later this fall. [More—[The Advocate \(Baton Rouge, La.\)](#)] (August 31)

Raising Student Achievement

A committee of the National Science Board has convened to consider ways for schools to produce students with the ability to innovate in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. "Innovators are a bit of a different breed," according to Camilla P. Benbow, a science-board member, who said the committee will consider what the needs of innovators are, and how schools can address those needs. [More—[Education Week](#)] (September 2) (*paid subscription required*)

Urban Academy, one of five new alternative high schools in Newark, is offering potential dropouts a set of

possibilities for achieving their diplomas, including online courses, evening classes, and internships. The Academy is part of a network, the Alternative High School Initiative, which began six years ago with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the National League of Cities, and is also operating in Nashville and Indianapolis. The Urban Academy's new comprehensive program replaces the district's former Twilight program, which only provided night courses for dropouts. [More—[The Star-Ledger \(Newark, N.J.\)](#)] (Sept. 1)

Students attending the new City Polytechnic High School of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology in Brooklyn will be able to earn both their high school diplomas and college associate degrees in five years. The school, the first of its kind in New York City, operates on a trimester schedule and blends a career and technical education curriculum with advanced coursework that permits students to complete high school graduation requirements in three years. [More—The [Brooklyn \(NY\) Daily Eagle](#)] (August 31)

In Baltimore, students at risk of dropping out of high school now have a new option – the accelerator school, which provides a concentrated version of high school in two years. Students ages 14 to 21 are eligible to attend, but must participate in a lengthy interview process and agree to abide by a set of strict rules that include a ban on cell phones in school. The Open Society Institute provided a grant to help the new schools get underway. [More—The [Baltimore Sun](#)] (August 31)

Schools in Arizona and Florida's Brevard County have adopted two similar approaches to ensuring that students in as early as elementary school are setting their sights on and preparing for college. At the Kyrene de los Niños Elementary School in Tempe, Arizona, the college-prep culture is evident from the pennants that adorn the school's lobby to the visits by college students who share their experiences and advice on degrees and paying for college. Niños is part of the No Excuses University Network, which is based in California. Nine schools in Brevard County are part of AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, which focuses on seventh through 12th grades and includes courses at each grade level in college-success skills. Participating students are recruited in sixth grade and, with their parents, sign contracts that address expectations for their GPAs and homework. [More—The [Arizona Republic](#) and [Florida Today \(Melbourne\)](#)] (Sept. 1 and August 26)

Advanced Placement scores of students participating in the Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative (MMSI) increased by 39 percent, 11 times greater than non-participants. The program is supported by a national math and science coalition that includes ExxonMobil, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Dell Foundation. Twelve additional high schools in the state will join MMSI this school year, and the program is expected to involve nearly 100 schools and more than 37,000 students by 2013. [More—The [State House News Service \(MA\)](#)] (August 28)

Report cards for Miles Elementary School students in Kentucky will be dramatically different this year; A's and B's will be replaced by standards that are set by teachers and students. An example for second graders: In the first quarter of the year, students will be able to identify whether two- and three-digit numbers are odd and even. Students' performance will be rated in five categories, ranging from no progress to above standards, and teachers will judge progress and achievement using rubrics they developed as part of a professional development phase of preparing for the new countywide grading system. Parents have also been involved in the system's development. [More—The [Cincinnati Enquirer](#)] (August 24)

School Improvement

Researchers at the University of Illinois studied data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study concerning tenth graders at nearly 700 U.S. high schools, and found that "classroom disruptions and psychologically hostile school environments can contribute to a climate in which good students have difficulty learning and students who are behind have trouble catching up." Students' fear for their physical safety was relatively low, according to the researchers, but 70 percent of the students reported being negatively affected by classroom disruptions, and 20 percent reported being put down by peers. School environments that protect students from physical harm cannot be assumed to also protect them from emotional harm, the researchers reported. [More—[Science Daily](#)] (Sept. 2)

Cleveland’s “innovation” schools are celebrating a successful year in which, as a group, the eight schools earned impressive grades on their school report cards. The schools have either no or flexible admission requirements, and differ from other schools in Cleveland by virtue of their small size, autonomy to shape their curriculum and extend the school day, the ability of principals to hire from outside the city and ignore seniority, and agreements with the Cleveland Teachers Union that give the schools what the union calls management rights. [More—The [Plain Dealer \(OH\)](#)] (Sept. 1)

Wisconsin is replacing its longstanding statewide test with a system that will combine assessments at the state, district, and classroom levels, according to state superintendent Tony Evers. The move is applauded by the state’s associations of school districts and local school boards as well as the largest teachers union in the state. Recommended by a task force that studied statewide tests, the new set of tests will be computer-based and will provide multiple opportunities for gauging student progress throughout the year. [More—The [AP](#)] (August 27)

“Staying true to one program and giving it time to take root is the key,” according to Valarie Lewis, assistant principal at New York City’s Osmond A. Church School, which received a three-year, \$784,000 grant 10 years ago and used it to develop and carry out a comprehensive reform plan. Since that initial investment, the consistent use of a portion of Title I funds to support the school’s choice of Core Knowledge as the center of its reform, as well as avoiding fads and quick fixes, has led to success, including a national award from the Education Trust. [More—The [Christian Science Monitor](#)] (August 26)

Gwinnett Schools, Georgia’s largest school district, has used the flexibility given to it by the state in exchange for greater accountability to earn a finalist spot for the coveted Broad Prize (see “What’s New”), which recognizes urban school systems that demonstrate marked gains in student performance and reduction in the achievement gap among low-income and minority students. While Gwinnett school officials await word from the Broad Foundation, the district was named as a potential stop on a new national tour (see “What’s New”) by former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich and the Rev. Al Sharpton to showcase districts that are showing promise in school reform. [More—The [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)] (August 25)

Teacher Quality and Development

New teachers in Bridgewater, Mass., are feeling confident about their assignments thanks to the Teachers for a New Era Partnership that included a new teacher workshop led by veteran teachers and will be followed by seven two-hour mentoring opportunities during the school year. Bridgewater State College and Boston College, with support from the Carnegie Foundation, sponsor the Partnership, which also provides a graduate course for veteran teachers to help them become more effective mentors to new teachers. [More—[The Boston Globe](#)] (August 30)

In Washington, DC, teachers started the new school year with a detailed set of guidelines and strategies, the “DCPS Teaching and Learning Framework,” that specifies the expectations for highly skilled teachers. For example, a highly skilled teacher should, within 30 minutes of class time, respond to students’ correct answers by “probing for higher-level understanding” of the idea under discussion. A corps of “master teachers” will assist principals in assessing their teachers based on the new framework. [More—The [Washington Post](#)] (August 23)

Technology in Education

South Dakota, Maine, and Wyoming lead the nation in the percentages of their students that have one-to-one, or ubiquitous, computing programs in their schools, according to Project RED: Revolutionizing Education, led by a group of education technology researchers and market analysts. The national database compiled by Project RED reveals a national average of just over five percent of the nation’s schools with ubiquitous technology programs, affecting approximately four percent of American students. [More—[eSchool News](#)] (Sept. 1)

Students at Chesapeake High School in Maryland can now bring real-world situations in environmental

science and geometry into the classroom using 3-D simulations. The Johns Hopkins University's Center for Technology in Education, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman are partnering with the county schools in the creation of the \$2 million virtual laboratory. The laboratory is modeled in part on the Hopkins' Applied Physics Laboratory and students can communicate remotely with Lockheed and Northrop engineers. [More—The [Baltimore Sun](#)] (Sept. 2)

Despite the current economic climate and resulting school budget shortages, schools in Maine are expanding the state's commitment to providing laptops for every student. Begun in 2002, the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) initially targeted 7th and 8th graders. Now MLTI is expanding the effort to high schools, with state funding to install wireless-network infrastructures and school-level purchases of laptops. Half of the state's high schools are expected to participate in the first year of the MLTI expansion. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Sept. 2) (*premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org*)

School leaders in Trussville, Ala., believe that more is better when it comes to students accessing the Internet, including the use of online social networking sites that most other districts declare off-limits for classrooms. "We know kids use these tools, so we really feel obligated to help kids use them right and prepare them for what they face in the world every day," said Trussville superintendent Suzanne Freeman. Access is incrementally expanded as students move through the grade levels and encounter the need for increasingly complex educational content. The approach is in line with advice from media experts and guidance from the American Library Association's Center for Intellectual Freedom. [More—[Education Week](#)] (Sept. 2) (*paid subscription required*)

Purpose

The purpose of the U.S. Department of Education's online newsletter *The Education Innovator* is to promote innovative practices in education; to offer features on promising programs and practices; to provide information on innovative research, schools, policies, and trends; and to keep readers informed of key Department priorities and activities. The Department's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) is responsible for the newsletter's research, writing, and production.

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