

# April 2010 E-Newsletter

Dear Colleague,

In this spring e-newsletter, you'll learn the status of the proposed state budget cuts, what they might mean for your district and what you can do. News of the new initiative of Common Core Standards is also below. There are websites to aid you in many aspects of teaching, the latest in technology news, and summer programs for you to attend. We hope you will gain helpful information and share the e-newsletter with your peers. Please invite them to subscribe by e-mailing us at [teacher\\_center@wsboces.org](mailto:teacher_center@wsboces.org) with their names and e-mail addresses.

Angelique, Carol and Elyse

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## Addressing State Budget Concerns

Along with governors of most other states, Governor Patterson is proposing further cuts for next year. While these cuts are subject to legislative approval, and in some cases are likely to be significantly changed before enactment, the State Senate's embrace of the cuts would devastate New York's schools, colleges and communities, hurting students and scuttling the state's economic recovery, according to New York State United Teachers. Governor Patterson is proposing a \$1.4 billion cut to K-12 state education aid; \$143 million in funding cuts for four-year public colleges and cuts to a financial aid program serving students from low- and moderate-income families.

Read updates on the budget cuts and learn how you can make your voice heard on this issue. Go to the NYSUT website at [http://www.nysut.org/mediareleases\\_14686.htm](http://www.nysut.org/mediareleases_14686.htm). Look to the right. To learn projected losses for your district if the budget passes, click on **Projections**. To learn more about School Boards' reactions, click on **Reactions**. *Most important, to make your voice heard, click on*

*Take Action.*

## **News of Common Core K-12 Standards**

The **Common Core State Standards Initiative** is a significant and historic opportunity for states to collectively develop and adopt a core set of academic standards in mathematics and English language arts.

Why is this important? Currently, every state has its own set of academic standards, meaning public education students in each state are learning to different levels. This initiative will allow equal access to an excellent education. All students must be prepared to compete with not only their American peers in the next state, but with students from around the world.

As part of the **Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI)**, [the draft K-12 standards are now available for public comment](#). These draft standards, developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, seek to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce.

Governors and state commissioners of education from [48 states, 2 territories and the District of Columbia](#) committed to developing a common core of state standards in English-language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. This is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

The NGA Center and CCSSO have received feedback from national organizations representing, but not limited to teachers, postsecondary education (including community colleges), civil rights groups, English language learners, and students with disabilities. These standards define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. The standards are:

- Aligned with college and work expectations;
- Clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Evidence-based.

IDEA Partnership describes these new standards as: Fewer, Clearer, Higher.

More complete information is at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org), [www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org) or [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org).

## **FYI**

### **Announcements**

**Call for *Talking Points* Articles.** The new editors of *Talking Points*, published by the Whole Language Umbrella, have issued an open call for submissions for the October issue. "If you have a short piece that you've been meaning to send off somewhere," Jennifer Wilson, University of South Carolina, and Carol Gilles, University of Missouri, Columbia, encourage you to send it by **May 14**.

## Courses and Workshops

**Application Deadline April 30.** A special summer Professional Development opportunity from Intel for Science, Math and Technology teachers.

<http://iris.nyit.edu/~caucus/LIB/ITEMS/3746/7212/StemFlyerB.pdf>

**National Humanities Online Professional Development:** only \$35 for history and literature teachers. Find out more at [Online Professional Development](#). Fall schedule now posted.

**July 11th - 24th, 2010, Brooklyn College 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summer Institute at the University of Puerto Rico.** Building Partnerships between Teachers in New York and Puerto Rico *"Students with Special Needs in the Multicultural Classroom"*

- Earn 6 of 12 graduate credits necessary for Special Education Certification (2<sup>nd</sup> 6 credits available Fall 2010 / additional individual requirements may apply). Other course credits available (Multicultural Ed, Curriculum, and The Arts)
- Courses taught by faculty from Brooklyn College and The University of Puerto Rico
- Study and socialize with Teachers from Puerto Rico
- Experience site visits to educationally diverse locations
- Enjoy optional recreational and cultural events

Low cost includes tuition, 13 nights at the five star Intercontinental Hotel, (Double occupancy), Low group airfare, ground transportation. For Information and Application: e-mail: [ntinevra@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:ntinevra@brooklyn.cuny.edu)

## Events

**Early Bird Discount by May 1, 2010. Youth and Community Development: How the Arts Serve Economically Impoverished Communities** -This conference seeks to recognize the arts as critical to community building by exploring partnerships with art therapy, public art, and the Internet community. This conference will take place at the State University of New York at New Paltz June 11-13, 2010. To find out more information, click [here](#).

**July 8-11, 2010. [2010 Whole Language Umbrella Literacies for All Summer Institute](#),** Thinking about attending the "Literacies for All" Summer Institute? Hear what participants had to say about last year's event. "Reflecting On Our Practice: Pathways and Possibilities" is the theme for the event in Indianapolis. Speakers for the Institute include educators Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, Eric Paulsen, Franki Sibberson, and children's book author Kevin O'Malley.

**August 2-6, 2010. Summer Institute: "Drama and Music: Powerful Tools for Teaching Reading and Writing"**, Washington, D.C. The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. will offer a learning institute in August on how to integrate drama and music with curriculum content. Find out more by clicking [here](#).

**November 18-21. Plan Now to Attend the NCTE 2010 Annual Convention, "Teachers and Students Together: Living Literate Lives"**, Orlando, Florida. For more information go to <http://www.ncte.org/annual>

## [Sharing Success Research Articles](#)

### Quality Teaching

[How to Organize Your Teaching](#) [K-12] *U.S. Department of Education*

### School Improvement

[Scholars Identify 5 Keys to Urban School Success](#) [Elem]

A capstone book from Chicago researchers sees the interplay of those "essential supports" as critical to improving student outcomes. *Education Week*

### Math

[National Math Panel: Critical Foundations for Algebra](#) [K-12] *U.S. Department of Education*

### Technology

[Interactive Whiteboards](#) [K-12] *U.S. Department of Education*

Please [click here](#) to access research information on: Formal Teacher Evaluations [Elem, MS, HS]

## [Worthwhile Websites](#)

<http://teachers.teach-nology.com/> Teacher Timesavers, Teacher Resources, Printable Worksheets, Lesson Plan Center, Rubric Center, Graphic Organizers, the best on the Web for teachers.

<http://www.toolsforeducators.com/> FREE worksheets, worksheet templates, printables wizard and on-line teaching materials makers with images.

<http://www.timesaversforteachers.com/> Specializing in printable, often-used classroom forms, report card comments, spelling activities, practical teacher tools, worksheets and downloadable teaching materials that improve classroom management and save teachers valuable time.

<http://www.lessonplans4teachers.com/> Tools allowing users to search for over 120,000 original lesson plans found on hundreds of different sites throughout the Internet.

<http://www.readkiddoread.com/home> James Patterson's website dedicated to making kids readers for life.

**Twelve great websites for elementary and middle school students, parents and teachers**

[We Shall Overcome Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement National Register Travel Itinerary](#)  <http://www.nps.gov/history/NR/travel/civilrights>. A story of the Civil Rights Movement framed by singling out important places and buildings around the United States, from W.E.B. DuBois homesite in Great Barrington, Massachusetts to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s parsonage in Montgomery, Alabama.

[Weather Wiz Kids](#)  <http://www.weatherwizkids.com>. A veritable wealth of weather information that includes a glossary, terms, jokes, experiments, folklore, an "ask" section, and even

access to Doppler sites, hurricane tracking charts, and charts for wind chill, heat index, and temperature conversions.

**[WebMuseum, Paris.](http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/)**  <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/>. This is an exciting collection of resources on many subjects ranging from Paul Cézanne, to information on Paris, to Medieval art treasures. Many images can be enlarged for closer viewing.

**[Webrangers](http://www.nps.gov/webrangers)**  <http://www.nps.gov/webrangers>. The National Park Service provides activities for children. This site lets them experience activities similar to those found in the organization's onsite Park Rangers program. Participants can choose to complete activities as a visitor or can enter a user name and password to design their own ranger station and earn online patches for their work. The activities are rated as easy, medium, and hard and include topics such as learning about trees, animals, historical events, and the effects of nature on the park.

**[Welcome to the wonderful world of Joan Aiken](http://www.joanaiken.com/)**  <http://www.joanaiken.com/>. Learn more about the life and books of Joan Aiken, author of the "Wolves of Willoughby Chase" series. Don't miss the "Fun Stuff" section with online cards, coloring sheets and a game to play.

**[Welcome to WestWeb.](http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/westweb/)**  <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/westweb/>. An outstanding, topically organized Web site about the study of the American West. Links to dozens of sites on the study of the West.

**[What's it like where you live?](http://www.mbgnet.net/)**  <http://www.mbgnet.net/>. This site provides information about biomes (or habitats) and aquatic ecosystems as well as the plants and animals that live in them. These include the rainforest, grassland, taiga, tundra, desert, and temperate biomes; and the rivers & streams, ponds & lakes, wetlands, shorelines, temperate and tropical oceans ecosystems.

**[Wildlife Conservation Society at Bronx \(N.Y.\) Zoo](http://wcs.org/)**  <http://wcs.org/>. Opportunity to adventure with Pablo Python. Strong environmental and conservation approach. The photography and layout of text are excellent. Requires plug-ins.

**[Wildlife Film Maker](http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/filmmaker.html)**  <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/filmmaker.html> The National Geographic Wildlife Filmmaker allows kids to make animal movies using short clips of a wide variety of animals. With a simple drag-and-drop interface, they can add animal sounds, music and captions. Once a masterpiece is completed, it can be saved on the site to share with family and friends or e-mailed directly to them.

**[Will Hobbs](http://www.willhobbsauthor.com)**  <http://www.willhobbsauthor.com>. Hobbs, author of outdoor adventure stories, includes biographical information, a list of books, questions and answers, an online quiz and teaching suggestions for some of his books

**[Windows to the Universe.](http://www.windows.ucar.edu/)**  <http://www.windows.ucar.edu/> A vibrant site filled with facts, mythology, poetry, art, and games about astronomy, the solar system, scientists, space exploration, weather, and more.

**[Women's National Basketball Association \(WNBA\).](http://www.wnba.com)**  <http://www.wnba.com> Everybody knows the NBA, but do you know about the Women's NBA?

## **NCTE Inbox**

### **News**

**Needs of "Whole Child" May Factor in ESEA Renewal.** Educators speaking at a recent congressional hearing urged lawmakers to consider the needs of the "whole child" when discussing the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). [Education Week, April 27, 2010](#)

#### **. . . On Higher Education**

"More Colleges, Professors Shutting Down Laptops and Other Digital Distractions": [The Washington Post/The Big Money, April 25, 2010](#)

"Do Caps Help Adjuncts?": [Inside Higher Ed, April 22, 2010](#)

"Melinda Gates Pledges \$110 Million to Help 2-Year Colleges Improve Remedial Education": [The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 20, 2010](#)

**Improving Literacy from a Different Angle.** Career and technical education leaders are making reading and writing skills a top priority. [District Administration, May 2010](#)

"Test Program Gives More Students Chance to Take SAT": [The Dallas Morning News, April 24, 2010](#)

"State's Teachers Praise National Standards": [The Baltimore Sun, April 20, 2010](#)

"U.S. Tapping S.F. School's Recipe for Success": [San Francisco Chronicle, April 20, 2010](#)

"Brooklyn School Scores High Despite Poverty": [The New York Times, April 25, 2010](#)

"Pre-K Rules for ELLs Would Break Ground Nationally": [Education Week, April 26, 2010](#)

**Don't Challenge Books, Challenge Censorship.** The American Library Association has released its fifth annual report of commonly challenged books: [The Most Frequently Challenged Books of 2009. Independent Mail, April 16, 2010](#)

**Study Finds Young Do Care about Online Privacy.** Despite what they're sharing on online networks, young people care as much about privacy as older folks according to a new survey. [MSNBC News, April 15, 2010](#)

#### **. . In Washington**

"Duncan Prescribes [Drastic Measures for Schools](#)": [NPR, April 19, 2010](#)

"Senator Harkin Proposes \$23 Billion Fund to Save Teacher Jobs": [Bloomberg BusinessWeek, April 14, 2010](#)

"Obama's Plan to Reward Schools for Innovation Sparks Debate": [The Washington Post, April 14, 2010](#)

#### **. . Motivating Readers**

"Kindle E-Reader Motivates Less-Enthusiastic Readers": [ScienceDaily, April 17, 2010](#)

"Will Uniform MPS Reading Textbooks Make a Difference?": [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, April 17, 2010](#)

"Portland Kids Get to Bring Home Books in a Bag -- to Keep": [Oregon Live, April 14, 2010](#)

**Letting Students Choose Books Could Make Them Better Readers.** Some educators are ditching the traditional class-assigned novels -- and it turns out teens are picking books other than *Twilight*. NCTE member Gay Ivey is quoted. [Globe and Mail, March 29, 2010](#)

. . . **More on Reading from *Educational Leadership***

["Reversing Readicide"](#) by NCTE member Kelly Gallagher

["The Case for Slow Reading"](#) by NCTE member Thomas Newkirk

["New Horizons in Comprehension"](#) by NCTE member Ellin Oliver Keene

## **Views**

### **Providing Culturally Relevant Texts**

April 30 is [El día de los niños/El día de los libros](#) (Children's Day/Book Day) (G), an event developed under the leadership of author Pat Mora that focuses on providing children with books in many languages and making reading an integral part of their lives. Plan your celebration by tapping these ideas and resources suggested in the following articles and lesson plans.

In "[From a Writer's Perspective: Recreating Images of Community in Multicultural Children's Books](#)" (E) from *Language Arts*, Monica Brown, an author of bilingual children's books, encourages and models for students the opportunity to work from a vantage point that affirms their cultural heritage rather than one that tames or shames their personal stories.

The ReadWriteThink.org lesson [Is This the Right Book for Me? Strategies for Beginning Readers](#) (E) seeks to empower young readers by introducing the idea of making purposeful choices when selecting reading material. Students learn to take their reason for reading into account and to use strategies to match the book to their abilities.

Continue developing students' sense of choice and preference for books that they find powerful with the lesson plan [Opening the Door for Reading: Sharing Favorite Texts to Build Community](#) (E) from ReadWriteThink.org. In this lesson plan, students focus on reading and creating classroom displays that celebrate favorite texts. After exploring a sample display, students create presentations on their own favorites.

The *Voices from the Middle* article "['Stuck in the Middle': Helping Students Begin New Literacy Lives](#)" (M) discusses five principles that help students succeed after years of failure. The steps include creating literacy-rich environments, connecting readers to text, and supporting readers with strategic literacy instruction.

Introduce students to the work of one of the founders of Día in the ReadWriteThink.org lesson plan [Color of Silence: Sensory Imagery in Pat Mora's Poem "Echoes"](#) (M). Moving from personal experience to practical application, students use their senses to discover new ways to read and write. Pat Mora's poem "Echoes" is used to demonstrate that our senses are powerful tools for literary analysis and comprehension.

For details on books that you can place in the hands of young adult readers, check out the *English Journal* article "[The Ever-Expanding Mexican American YA Canon](#)" (S) from the "Bold Books for Teenagers" column. The article includes reviews of several recently published novels, poetry collections, and nonfiction works.

In the spirit of addressing personal and cultural relevance, students in the ReadWriteThink.org lesson plan [Joining the Conversation about Young Adult Literature \(S\)](#) create a persuasive case calling for the adoption of a particular young adult literature title into their school's language arts curriculum.

The review essay "[Learning to Read as Continuing Education](#)" (C-TE), from *College Composition and Communication*, works to convince readers that college composition instruction can capitalize on (and improve) students' high school reading experiences if instructors and program administrators think carefully about where their students are starting as readers and where they want them to get by the end of the course.

Read more about [DÍAPALOOZA](#), a month-long, virtual celebration of El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children's Day/Book Day).

## **[In the News from ASCD Smartbrief](#)**

### **Eye on Curriculum**

**School boosts achievement with focus on physical education.** Students at an Illinois high school say they are more engaged in learning and are performing better on reading and math tests since the school increased its focus on physical fitness. Physical education is the first class of the day for struggling students at Naperville Central High School, activities such as square-dancing are incorporated into the curriculum, and reading classrooms feature physical activity. [ABC News](#) (4/14)

**Debate over dissection in biology class is highlighted in Connecticut.** Connecticut lawmakers are considering a bill to allow students to opt out of dissections during science classes. Some biology teachers say there is no acceptable alternative to the hands-on activity, but some schools allow students to meet the requirement by completing a virtual dissection on a computer or using a model. Policies that offer alternatives are on the books in 13 states. [The Hartford Courant \(Conn.\)](#) (4/9)

### **Professional Leadership**

**California teacher strikes highlight impact of budget cuts.** Teacher strikes in two California districts in about a week's time are highlighting growing tensions between unions and school officials over budget cuts. Teachers in Orange County's Capistrano schools returned to work Tuesday after a three-day walkout ended with teachers agreeing to a 10% pay cut and the district agreeing to repeal the changes if more money becomes available, while teachers in Alameda County's Oakland district are set to strike Thursday over salary concerns. [San Francisco Chronicle/The Associated Press](#) (4/27), [Los Angeles Times](#) (4/28)

**NYC to give principals more authority over instruction.** New York City Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein has dissolved the division within the Education Department that oversees school curriculum and teacher training -- a change designed to give principals more control over school instruction. "The more authority you share, the more influential you become, so that what ends up happening now is that schools seek out our opinion," Eric Nadelstern, who employed the strategy at several top

schools and will become the deputy chancellor for school support and instruction. [The New York Times \(free registration\)](#) (4/26)

**How the Teacher Incentive Fund can be used to improve teaching.** The federally supported Teacher Incentive Fund offers an opportunity to provide the best educators with incentives and rewards for effective teaching, but many states and districts do not offer meaningful performance pay for teachers, write Bryan C. Hassel, the co-director of Public Impact, and Dan Katzir, managing director of the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation. They suggest the fund be used to make a switch from a compensation model that focus on tenure and advanced degrees to those that serve to reward and retain the best educators for schools. [Education Week \(premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org\)](#) (4/21)

**Move to expand avenues to teacher certification is gaining momentum.** Efforts are under way across the country to expand alternative avenues for those seeking teacher certification. The Education Department is encouraging states in its Race to the Top competition to allow alternative-certification programs, and in New York State, the Board of Regents is set to vote this week on a proposal to allow alternative groups to offer master's degrees in education. [The New York Times \(free registration\)](#) (4/18)

**What's the best way to implement a merit-pay plan?** Florida Gov. Charlie Crist may announce today whether he will endorse a plan for the state's teachers that bases pay on student performance and eliminates tenure for new educators. This article compares the bill on Crist's desk with other performance-based reforms that have been adopted across the country. A plan tentatively agreed to in Washington, D.C., differs in that it has union support, while a system in Denver schools allows veteran teachers to opt out, though they lose the opportunity to earn extra pay. [Orlando Sentinel \(Fla.\)](#) (4/14)

**Teacher-pension funds are short by \$932.5 billion, analysts say.** Pension funds for retired teachers across the country are short by \$932.5 billion, according to estimates by the conservative Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. While states' teacher-pension funds report being about 78% funded, the group's analysis suggests they are only about 54% funded. The researchers attribute the discrepancies to underestimating the cost of paying future lifetime benefits to the nation's teachers. [USA TODAY](#) (4/13)

## **Learning and Teaching**

**Private D.C. high school inspires volunteerism among students.** A private Catholic school in Washington, D.C., includes a focus on service learning that allows students numerous opportunities to volunteer. The campus of Gonzaga College High School includes a homeless shelter, where students can volunteer on their lunch break, after school or during summers, and educators say many students are inspired to continue volunteering after high school and throughout their lives. [The Washington Post](#) (4/26)

**Students at Brooklyn school have top scores despite disadvantages.** Public School 172 in New York City's Brooklyn borough has hired numerous specialists and offers after-school tutoring and Saturday school to ensure that its students -- many of whom come from low-income households, qualify for special education or do not speak English at home -- consistently have top scores on standardized tests. Educators at the school this year have been focusing on test preparation since

February and, beginning today, students will take new state tests designed to be more comprehensive and less predictable. The school's motto, the principal says, is "teach, assess, teach, assess." [The New York Times \(free registration\)](#) (4/25)

**Why RTI is the "last, best hope" for teaching all students to read.** Early-literacy expert and author Richard Allington explains in this interview why he believes response to intervention is "our last, best hope" for teaching all students to read. Allington, a University of Tennessee education professor, suggests that students do not need scripted reading programs but need the help of skilled and expert educators who can provide intensive, individualized reading instruction while they are in kindergarten and first grade. [Education Week \(premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org\)](#) (4/12)

## **Technology**

**Educators work to improve future of e-learning.** As educators and experts look to create an online-learning framework that spans the country -- or maybe even the globe -- some say that restrictive policies and other barriers will need to be removed. Funding is also an obstacle to creating online-learning networks that are not restricted to a single state. And while publicly funded e-learning might not go nationwide, some see possibilities for private foundations to step in. [Education Week \(premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org\)](#) (4/28)

**Online courses offer choices in instruction, teacher support.** School districts across the country are choosing a variety of course types as they integrate online instruction into the curriculum. Ideal choices should be those that offer differentiated instruction to meet the needs of individual students, as well as a strong teacher-support component, University of Florida associate education-technology professor Cathy Cavanaugh says. "The instructor is a key element," she says. [Education Week \(premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org\)](#) (4/28)

**School adds cell-phone technology to lessons on bullying.** Educators at a Florida school integrated mobile technology into school-wide lessons on bullying by having students offer anonymous responses to a survey on the topic by sending text messages. The survey capped off a weeks-long program where the school's students read a novel about bullying and participated in related activities that included viewing videos of school staffers reading portions of the novel. [The Tampa Tribune \(Fla.\)](#) (4/25)

**Software program provides intervention for struggling math students.** A new software program is available to help educators intervene with students in grades 3-12 who are struggling with math. Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Math for Intervention aims to improve students' math skills through practice, targeted intervention and testing, and includes professional development and other support for educators. [T.H.E. Journal](#) (4/19)

**Websites offer free resources for educators.** A number of websites have compiled free online resources for educators. The OpenCourseWare Consortium offers free course materials and lectures in multiple languages from 250 universities worldwide, as long as members post 10 courses within two years. Another Massachusetts Institute of Technology website offers introductory courses in calculus, physics and biology to prepare students for Advanced Placement exams. [The New York Times \(free registration\)](#) (4/18)

**Report predicts top technologies for nation's classrooms.** Collaborative learning environments and cloud computing are among the top technologies expected to make an impact on classroom instruction over the next several years, the authors of an education-technology report predict. Mobile technologies and game-based learning are expected to increase in use during the next two to three years, according to the report, which also lists five critical challenges for schools, including inadequate teacher training and outdated materials. [T.H.E. Journal](#) (4/13)

## **Policy Watch**

**North Carolina district hopes to continue progress despite cuts.** Officials in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district are working to make sure student gains aren't adversely affected because of budget woes. Achievement gaps based on race and income have narrowed in math for students in grades 3 through 8, but they have grown for the same students in reading and science. Schools chief Peter Gorman said a new budget allocates funding for the district's strategic staffing initiative, which places top educators in struggling schools, to help keep students on track, but class sizes are expected to increase. [The Charlotte Observer \(N.C.\)](#) (4/27)

**Teachers union seeks additional oversight of New York charters.** New York state's teachers union called on state lawmakers at a legislative hearing to increase oversight of the state's charter schools, asking that no further charters be approved until additional monitoring is in place. The union cited the case of a Buffalo charter school where records were vague about how the school spent some \$7.2 million in taxpayer money. [The New York Times \(free registration\)](#) (4/22)

**States are receiving \$3.5 billion in school-improvement grants.** The Education Department is distributing \$3.5 billion in Title I School Improvement Grants to states, giving them six months to launch turnarounds of their lowest-performing schools. All states are expected to receive some of the funds, which come with strict requirements and deadlines for adopting one of four federally approved reform strategies: replacing 50% or more of a school's staff, reopening a school as a charter, closing the school or overhauling the school's curriculum and teaching methods. [Education Week \(premium article access compliments of EdWeek.org\)](#) (4/21)

**Columnist: Broad efforts at school reform have fallen flat.** Chicago Tribune columnist Steve Chapman cites in this opinion article examples of many high-profile efforts to reform education that are not succeeding. Chapman looks at policies such as voucher systems, charter schools, additional funding and smaller class sizes, and finds that there is not a one-size-fits-all answer for improving schools. "From the local school district to the federal Department of Education, humility, caution and open-mindedness are in order," he writes. "Because right now, the main thing we know about improving schools is that we don't know very much." [Chicago Tribune](#) (4/15)

## **In the Field**

**Schools aim to stem suspensions with positive-behavior program.** A number of Milwaukee schools are joining others across the country in adopting the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program to monitor and assess student behavior. The program includes a framework of expectations and individual checklists for students to be completed by educators throughout the school day. The program is aimed at reducing a high rate of suspensions and is expected to be expanded from 30 to 55 district schools next year. [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) (4/25)

**Competition tests students' creativity in solving problems.** A statewide competition testing students' problem-solving skills was held at an Indiana school recently. The Future Problem Solvers State Bowl had students from 14 schools dressed in creative costumes and performing skits as they worked on problems related to the event's theme: food distribution. [The Indianapolis Star](#) (4/15)

**Utah sixth-graders are in the spotlight for environmental campaign.** A group of Utah sixth-graders is garnering national attention for their work on reducing pollution. The students helped draft anti-idling resolution, which will be signed this month. Their efforts led them to do more research on carbon dioxide as a pollutant, and they are working on other efforts to reduce pollution across the state. The students will be featured in an upcoming issue of People magazine to commemorate Earth Day. "I have definitely sprouted some activists," their teacher said. [The Salt Lake Tribune \(Utah\)](#) (4/13)

**Denver school is among 6 finalists in bid for presidential address.** The Denver School of Science & Technology is one of six schools that are finalists in a competition to have President Barack Obama speak at their graduation ceremony, and students are working on their campaign. Each of the six schools are producing a video to be posted on the White House Web site, and viewers will narrow the competition to three schools, from which Obama will choose the winner. [The Denver Post](#) (4/13)

*"I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it."*

*--Thomas Jefferson*