

The NEGP WEEKLY

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A Weekly News Update on America's Education Goals and school improvement efforts across America from the National Education Goals Panel

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FACT OF THE WEEK

Between 1992 and 1996, 39 states (out of 51) significantly increased the percentages of high school graduates who immediately enrolled in 2-year or 4-year colleges in any state.

—The National Education Goals Report: Building a nation of learners, 1999

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STATE POLICY NEWS

PEER ASSISTANCE: WAY TO GO IN CALIFORNIA (Goal Four: Teacher Education and Professional Development)

A new teacher evaluation program underway in California is winning praise from many teachers and administrators. Governor Gray Davis' peer evaluation program, which stresses teacher accountability, is a "key element" of his education reform package (Gorman, L.A. TIMES, 10/22). The program began this year in most districts throughout the state.

The law grants flexibility to teacher unions and districts that can decide how to structure the program. However, districts must begin the program this year if they want to collect their portion of the \$136 million in state funds earmarked for peer review.

For more information, visit the L.A. TIMES at www.latimes.com.

ITEM ANALYSIS: THE "JEWEL" OF TESTING (Goal Three: Student Achievement)

Individual student test scores from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) were released to schools and districts late last month. While the release of the "item analysis reports" met with little fanfare, Deputy Education Commissioner Alan Safran calls them the "jewel of the MCAS program, because it gives classroom teachers a wonder-

What is the National Education Goals Panel?

The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan body of state and federal officials created in 1990 by President Bush and the nation's Governors to report state and national progress and urge education improvement efforts to reach a set of National Education Goals.

Who serves on the National Education Goals Panel and how are they chosen?

Eight governors, four state legislators, four members of the U.S. Congress, and two members appointed by the President serve on the Goals Panel. Members are appointed by the leadership of the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Senate and House, and the President.

What does the Goals Panel do?

The Goals Panel has been charged to:

- Report state and national progress toward the National Education Goals.
- Work to establish a system of high academic standards and assessments.
- Identify promising and effective reform strategies.
- Recommend actions for state, federal and local governments to take.
- Build a nationwide, bipartisan consensus to achieve the Goals.

The annual Goals Report and other publications of the Panel are available without charge upon request from the Goals Panel or at its web site www.negp.gov. Publications requests can be made by mail, fax, e-mail, or on-line.

ful tool to improve instruction." (Greenberger, Boston GLOBE, 10/20)

The student item analysis can help teachers detect where the gaps are in student learning. "This is the information teachers can use to diagnose the problems and go to work," added Safran. Students take the MCAS in grades 4,8 and 10. Passing the test will be a requirement for graduation for the class of 2003.

For more information on the MCAS, visit the Massachusetts Department of Education at www.doe.mass.edu.

COMMUNITY AND LOCAL NEWS

HARTFORD BLUES: TOO MANY RESIDENTS FAIL POLICE ACADEMY ENTRANCE EXAMS

(Goal Six: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning)

The Hartford, Connecticut, police department has been understaffed and officials have waived the city's residency requirement in order to attract candidates who can pass the entrance exam. However, city officials note the tension that has risen since the police department is predominantly white in a city where the black and Hispanic population hovers around 75 percent (Gottlieb, THE HARTFORD CURRENT).

The policy academy test's reading level is at the 10th-grade level. An activist group "trying to force the city's compliance with a 1973 federal consent decree is demanding that the city freeze police hiring until it can help graduates of Hartford schools meet the hiring standards through remedial courses." Others argue that remedial courses are not enough. A former New Haven policy chief suggests an apprenticeship program that targets high school students and guides them through an associate degree in college.

Sargent Neil Dryfe explained the importance of being able to read and write. "Everything we do – you have to write it, you have to be able to express it," he said. "The police officer is the most important part of the judicial system – he's the one who writes the report."

The National Education Goals Panel

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Wisconsin, Chair, 1999

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Idaho

Senator Stephen Stoll
Missouri

For more information, visit THE HARTFORD CURRENT at www.digitalcity.com/hartford/news/provider.dci.

CUTTING DOWN ON SUSPENSIONS: ONE SCHOOL'S APPROACH

(Goal Seven: Safe Schools)

A new suspension-reduction discipline program underway at Lyons Township High School in La Grange, Illinois was featured at a meeting of public and private schools in DuPage and Kane Counties. Students at Lyons Township High School who are suspended for physical violence have a chance to reduce their suspension time by participating, with their families, in eight hours of one-on-one conflict training with a therapist from The Family Institute at Northwestern University.

If the family completes the program, the suspension can be cut in half, from the typical 10-day suspension to five. The families also are responsible for paying for the cost of the program, which is arranged on a sliding scale based on income up to \$125.

For more information, visit the CHICAGO TRIBUNE at www.chicagotribune.com.

FEDERAL POLICY NEWS

MATH QUESTIONS? GO TO NCES

(Goal Five: Math And Science)

National Assessment of Education Progress sample math questions are available at the Sample Questions Tool (SQT) at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ITMRLS/ITMRLS.HTM>. Nearly 300 math questions are posted at the site, including scoring guides, actual student responses and performance data. Civics, reading and writing questions also are posted in the SQT.

For math, an advance search is available where you can select by:

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS



Goal 1: Ready to Learn



Goal 2: School Completion



Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship



Goal 4: Teacher Education and Professional Development



Goal 5: Mathematics and Science



Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning



Goal 7: Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-free Schools



Goal 8: Parental Participation

- >grade (4, 8, 12)
- >content area (six areas in the NAEP math framework)
- >question type (multiple choice to extended constructed response)
- >math ability (three abilities in the NAEP framework)
- >difficulty (three levels)

For more information on the NAEP math framework, visit http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/math/math_about_frame.asp

**IN THE KNOW:
EDUCATION SECRETARY'S PRIORITIES
(ALL GOALS)**

The U.S. Department of Education's web site features a biweekly look at progress made on Secretary Riley's priorities for education. Currently, a selection of 15 projects and programs are available to search. Topics includes several reports, such as Getting Ready for College: A Report for National College Week, Third Annual Report on School Safety and 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing Quality Afterschool Learning Opportunities for America's Families.

Also included are several grant programs, such as technology grants to improve math and science teaching and media literacy grants. The satellite town meeting on high-quality preschool and Riley's testimony on IDEA funding are featured at the site.

For more information, visit www.ed.gov and visit publications.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

**SMALL CLASS SIZE: ECONOMIC BENEFITS
(Goal Three: Student Achievement)**

The economic benefits of reducing class size in grades K-3 are greater than the costs, since students in smaller classes will perform better and enjoy higher future earnings, according to a report released late October by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI).

In Understanding the Magnitude and Effect of Class Size on Student Achievement, Princeton University Professor Alan Krueger conducts a cost benefit analysis using existing data. He projects that a ten- percent increase in expenditures per students, financing a class size reduction of 22 to 15 students, will result in higher lifetime earnings. Krueger's research finds a strong relationship between student performance and future earnings.

For more information, visit EPI's web site at www.epinet.org.

INCLUSION: HOW IT'S WORKING IN MASSACHUSETTS (Goal Three: Student Achievement)

Along with standards and testing comes pressure to find ways to help special-needs students meet the same expectations as "regular-education students," reports the BOSTON GLOBE (Vaishnav, 10/10).

At the same time, special education has moved from "integration" to "mainstreaming" and now to "inclusion." According to the paper, inclusion takes mainstreaming a step further. From the GLOBE: "It requires schools to design curriculums with special-education students in mind, not create an entirely separate curriculum." Underlying inclusion is the philosophy that special-needs students can learn the same material as other students, only at a different pace and in different ways.

In Massachusetts, some officials are concerned because special needs students drop out faster and fail the state exam in greater numbers than do other students. Ten schools in East Boston and Charlestown are part of the National Institute for urban School Improvement, a federal inclusion project, which focuses on training and assisting teachers who work in inclusion classrooms.

For more information, visit <http://www.boston.com/globe>

FEATURE STORY

WRITING RUBRICS: BLESSING OR CURSE? (Goal Three: Student Achievement)

Rules for writing and grading essays, called rubrics, have swept English classrooms throughout the country – from elementary through high school. A WASHINGTON POST article discusses the pros and cons of writing rubrics (Mathews, 10/24).

Rubrics are a teacher's set of rules for an assignment. For example, a teacher may demand that students open with a topic sentence, provide three or more points, elaborate on the points in three paragraphs and end with a concluding sentence. The term rubric also may refer to a teacher's grading guide. For example, the POST reports how one teacher

told his students, who were assigned a writing exercise on the 2000 presidential campaign, that they would earn 10 points for an accurate portrayal of a candidate, 10 points for use of supportive details, 10 points for general effectiveness, 10 points for appropriateness of material, 15 points for good structure and flow of argument and 5 points for grammar and use of language.

Another teacher may tell students that to earn an A, they must write a 1,000-word paper that cites 10 sources and supports its theme with at least three arguments, but they will earn a C if the paper is 600 words with six sources and two arguments.

According, to the paper, many teachers argue that rubrics are a far cry better than the old-fashioned method of assessing student writing that was more subjective. Diane Butler, an English teacher in South Carolina, said rubrics provide students and parents ‘with a clear, visual demonstration of techniques to be mastered.’ Paul Bodmer, associate executive director of the National Council of Teachers of English was more cautious. “Properly used, a rubric can be useful and helpful,” he said. “The problem is that they oversimplify a complex process. . . . Kind of like the old paint-by-number kits one could purchase years ago.”

Kenneth Bernstein, a social studies teacher in Prince George’s County, Maryland, uses rubrics, but has discovered that some rubrics are “dumb,” writes the paper. He told of the POST of one eighth-grade girl “who realized that without providing a shred of meaningful content, she could meet all the requirements of a state writing rubric he had posted in the classroom.” Bernstein: “She had “figured out how to beat the system – which she made clear in her essay, she viewed as pointless.”

Rubrics also are a lightning rod for critics who claim the rules turn writing into a mechanical process. Thomas Newkirk, an English professor at the University of New Hampshire, argues that rubrics promote “mechanical instruction in writing” that bypasses “the human act of composing and the human gesture of response,” reports the paper.

The POST also highlights Butler’s success in South Carolina with high school seniors who have failed the state writing test required for graduation. She and a colleague developed a remedial course based on a “rubric-heavy” curriculum. “We’ve never had less than a 90 percent success rate for students” retaking the exam after the three-hour remedial class,” she said. “Even foreign exchange students, with very little command of the English language, can still pass. Phenomenal, n’est ce pas?”

For more information on writing, visit the National Council of Teachers of English at www.ncte.org.

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