

# CurriculumReview

A monthly report on what works in our schools



**Celebrating Teachers: Resources for Spring & Summer Professional Development, pages 14 & 15**

**Safer Schools—Is it possible?**

**Sexually Active ‘Tweens**

**Robot Zoo**

**Hate Crimes, Sexual Orientation & Schools**

**Look out Superman--It's Super Abe (Lincoln, that is)!**

**Putting Science in the Driver's Seat**

**Dreaming in LA**

**Frogs are Friends but ... No Turtles Allowed!**

## CurriculumReview

works to help K-12 teachers and administrators by sharing the success stories, techniques, resources, opinions and wisdom of other educators.

## Contents

What They're Saying .....	2
By the Numbers .....	3
Technology Update .....	4
What's Working .....	6
Inspiring Words for Educators .....	12
Between Tears & Laughter .....	13
Special Report .....	14

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# What They're Saying

## Survey Shows Parents & Teachers Committed to Homework

A new national study, *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience* indicates that eight out of 10 parents believe that their child's teachers assign the right amount—or even too little—homework. And, the majority of parents surveyed believe doing homework helps students learn more in school.

- Teachers spend an average of 8.5 hours a week—or 15% of the time they spend on all weekly school-related responsibilities—on students' homework.
- 77% of students surveyed spend at least 30 minutes doing homework on a typical school day.
- 45% of students spend at least one hour doing homework.
- 90% of parents surveyed noted that helping their child with homework provides an opportunity for them to talk and spend time together.

## On Homework, Parents & Teachers

Parents and teachers must work together and communicate to make sure that students are not only receiving enough homework, but are also being challenged by the assignments and lessons they take home. Helping a child with his or her homework is one of the best ways parents can become more involved in their children's education. When parents show they care about homework and other educational matters, students take learning more seriously, and this leads to improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism and improved behavior. By fostering a positive attitude about homework, parents can help children develop fundamental study habits that will serve them well for life.

~National Education Association  
President, Reg Weaver in a formal statement (Feb. 14) regarding the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher

## Safer Schools for All Children

Only 10 states and the District of Columbia protect students from bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation, and only five and the District of Columbia protect students based on gender identity/expression. We can make our schools safer, and every child deserves to know that we care enough about them to try.

~Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network Executive Director, Kevin Jennings in response to a February 2008 school shooting in Oxnard, California

## Importance of Parental Involvement

It's a fact. When parents are involved, children succeed in school. That's why this special week offers school staff and families an opportunity to spend time together. I would not allow a stranger to educate my child. So we hope this week serves as a catalyst for parents to be involved and join their PTA.

~National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) President, Jan Harp Domene, PTA during "Take Your Family to School Week" in February 2008

## Opposing President Bush's FY2009 Budget

Although the President has proposed a \$3 trillion budget, relatively little of that would be invested in education. We are dismayed that President Bush proposed meager increases amounting to less than the rate of inflation for the nation's major K-12 education programs, including Title I grants for disadvantaged students—which are the main funding source for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Further, the funding allocations proposed for other education programs would be slashed—a fate that already-struggling school districts cannot face.

~National Association of School Board Administrators Executive Director, Ann Bryant in a formal statement (Feb. 13)

# By the Numbers

## Schools Increasing Focus on Reading & Math

A new report released in February by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) verified what many in the education and policy communities had long suspected—the majority of the nation’s school districts were increasing time spent on reading and math in elementary schools since the No Child Left Behind Act became law in 2002, while most of these districts cut back on time spent on other subjects.

The report, *Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects*, reveals that districts increasing time for ELA and math had done so by an average of 43%, or about three hours each week. To make room for the added time for ELA and math, districts reducing time in other areas averaged cuts of about 32% across those subjects, nearly 2.5 hours each week. Some of the districts reduced their time in one subject, while other districts decreased instructional time in several areas.

Eight out of 10 of the districts that increased time for ELA did so by at least 75 minutes per week, and more than half (54%) increased by 150 minutes or more per week, or at least 30 minutes per day. Of the districts adding time for math, 63% increased by at least 75 minutes per week, with 19% adding 150 minutes or more per week.

Of the districts that both increased time for ELA or math and reduced time in other subjects, 72% cut time by at least 75 minutes per week for one or more of the other subjects. For example, more than half (53%) of these districts cut instructional time by at least 75 minutes per week in social studies, and the same percentage (53%) cut time by at least 75 minutes per week in science.

The new report is available at: [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org).

## States Working to Increase College-Readiness

Recently, Achieve Inc. ([www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)), a non-profit and bipartisan education group, reported that 18 states and the District of Columbia now require students to complete a college and career-ready curriculum in order to earn a diploma, including four years of challenging mathematics through at least Algebra II and four years of rigorous English, and 12 states are expected to follow suit. Just three years ago, only two states had such requirements in place.

In addition to raising graduation requirements, states have also achieved significant progress in making academic standards rigorous enough in English and mathematics so that they reflect the expectations of colleges and employers. Nineteen states now report that their high school standards are aligned with

college and workplace expectations, and 26 more are in the process of aligning standards or plan to do so.

“The pace and the progress of high school reform efforts are encouraging,” said Matthew Gandal, executive vice president of Achieve, “but no state has done everything that is necessary to close the gap between what is required of students in high school and what will be expected of them after they graduate. Higher standards must be accompanied by better assessments and next generation accountability systems if we are to realize the goal of all students graduating college and career ready.”

## Children as Young as 11 Engaging in Sexual Activity & Dating Violence

A new survey reports that a surprising number of young adolescents are experiencing significant levels of dating violence and abuse. In fact, 1 in 5 children between the ages of 11 and 14 (20%) say their friends are victims of dating violence and nearly 50% of ‘tweens in relationships say they know friends who are verbally abused.

The survey on ‘tween and teen dating relationships, conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited (TRU), explores how relationships among young adolescents

are fueling high levels of dating violence and abuse. In response to the concerns about teen dating violence and abuse across the U.S., the incoming president of the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG), Patrick C. Lynch, said that he will introduce a resolution at NAAG’s June 2008 meeting that will call for the inclusion of curricula on teen dating violence in schools in every state.

To access the survey, visit: [www.loveisnotabuse.com/surveyresults\\_2008tweens\\_mstr.htm](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/surveyresults_2008tweens_mstr.htm).

## \$5,000 World Book/ALA Award for School Libraries

World Book, Inc. and the American Library Association (ALA) recently announced the creation of the World Book/ALA Information Literacy Goal Award, which will provide one public library or public library system program and one school library program with a \$5,000 award.

The award will be presented at the 2009 ALA Annual Conference. Nominations will be taken from June 1 - Dec. 1, 2008. To learn more or to access a nomination form, visit: [www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=awards](http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=awards).

Visit us online at: [www.curriculumreview.com](http://www.curriculumreview.com) and click on “Subscriber Spot” (password = *spring*) for a downloadable PDF on dating violence.



# Technology Update

## Studying & Jammin'

Ask kids and parents what school subjects they struggle with the most, and the answer is likely to be math and science. When kids have trouble understanding aquatic ecosystems or are stuck on a homework question about division equations, where do they turn? Now they can get help finding the answers with Scholastic StudyJams!™, an online experience for kids in 3rd-6th grades that takes the most challenging math and science topics and explains them through animated videos, Karaoke songs, interactive tutorials, quizzes and more.

Developed in conjunction with a nationwide panel of teachers, this subscription-based learning service lets kids sing about “Solids, Liquids & Gases,” play a “Mean & Median” basketball game and create their own downloadable song, all while mastering those tough math and science concepts they need to know in order to excel in school.

When kids enter the personalized StudyJams! site, they are immediately introduced to four animated and very cool middle school mentors, Zoe (the music lover), Sam (the artist), RJ (the sports fan), and Mia (the tech wiz). The mentors cheer kids along as they navigate their way through more than 200 “Jams,” multi-media lessons that include: videos, animated tutorials, slide shows and tuneful Karaoke songs such as “Photosynthesis” and “Rules of Divisibility.”

The program is based on state and national testing standards and operates in a safe, password-protected environment. In addition, StudyJams! allows parents the opportunity to manage a master account that includes three unique child accounts, so they can easily track the progress of multiple children. A home subscription is \$9.95 per month or \$99 annually, and includes a 14-day free trial.

Teachers can also use the program in the classroom to introduce and reinforce lessons. The program is available to educators for an annual subscription rate of \$79 and comes with one teacher account.

For more information about StudyJams!, or to subscribe, visit:  
[www.scholastic.com/studyjams](http://www.scholastic.com/studyjams).

## Student's Tragic Death Reminds Schools to Teach Acceptance

In February 2008, high school student, Lawrence King was shot by a fellow student in Oxnard, California. The reason? Media reports suggest that King, a 15-year-old, was killed because of his sexual orientation—making the murder a hate crime.

Following this tragic event, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) called on schools to honor King's memory by using this as an opportunity to address violence and harassment directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students.

“While we are all still numb to the reality of this horrible tragedy, it is important that we begin to look at ways we can make sure something like this never happens again,” said GLSEN Executive Director Kevin Jennings. “Schools can take steps to ensure that all their students are safer, regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression/identity.”

GLSEN recommends four approaches that schools can begin implementing now to address anti-LGBT bullying and harassment:

1. Adopt a comprehensive anti-bullying policy that enumerates categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender expression/identity. Enumeration is crucial to ensure that anti-bullying policies are effective for LGBT students. Policies without enumeration are no more effective than having no policy at all when it comes to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment.
2. Require staff trainings to enable school staff to identify and address anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying and harassment effectively and in a timely manner.
3. Support student efforts to address anti-LGBT bullying and harassment on campus, such as the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance or participation in the National Day of Silence on April 25, 2008.
4. Institute age-appropriate, inclusive curricula to help students understand and respect difference within the school community and society as a whole.

While lethal violence like Lawrence's murder is rare, anti-LGBT bullying and harassment are pervasive problems in our schools, and effective responses are crucial to prevent escalation.

For more information, visit: [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org).



## The Robot Zoo

Children across the nation can explore the biomechanics of complex animal robots to discover how real animals work, thanks to a touring exhibit, “The Robot Zoo.”

The 5,000-square-foot exhibit reveals the magic of nature as a master engineer. Eight robot animals and more than a dozen hands-on activities illustrate fascinating real-life characteristics, such as how a chameleon changes colors, a giant squid propels itself and a fly walks on the ceiling.

The larger-than-life-size animated robots include a chameleon, a rhinoceros, a giant squid with 18-foot tentacles and a platypus. Also featured are a house fly with a 10-foot wingspread, a grasshopper, a bat and a giraffe whose head and neck alone stretch 9 feet tall.

Cutaways expose the animals’ insides as a host of easily recognizable machine parts and gadgets, such as shock absorbers and pumps that demonstrate what makes animals work. By comparing anatomy, environments and size of the actual creatures to the mechanic counterparts, The Robot Zoo provides fantastic new insights and hands-on fun for discovering just how animals work.

To find out when the Robot Zoo will be in your area, visit: [www.evergreenexhibitions.com/exhibits/robot\\_zoo/index.asp](http://www.evergreenexhibitions.com/exhibits/robot_zoo/index.asp).

## History Online

It’s a history teacher’s dream come true! Colonial Williamsburg’s newly updated, comprehensive media-rich website entices kids of all ages to jump into its interactivity to participate in history through games, downloads, puzzles, virtual museum exhibitions and more. The website, [www.history.org](http://www.history.org), opens up a world of sounds, sights, games and activities that make learning about America’s colonial past fun.

The website’s “Kids Zone,” ([www.history.org/kids/index.cfm](http://www.history.org/kids/index.cfm)) introduces children to rare breeds of farm animals, his-

## CR Reviews Your School’s Website

### Get your site reviewed

Would you like *Curriculum Review* to review your school’s website? Email the URL and a bit of information about what makes your site special to our editor, Susan M. Spangler, PhD ABD, [susan@paper-clip.com](mailto:susan@paper-clip.com).

toric trades and real events through imaginative games that require hand-eye coordination, patience, creativity and quick thinking. For example, a paper doll game allows the player to use her imagination to dress a paper doll, and in the process she’ll learn the names of the parts of clothing and why children dressed as they did in colonial times. In the word game “Pardon or Pillory,” the player must guess the correct letters for the word to keep the colonist out of the pillory.

“Dirt Detective” allows the player to be a junior archaeologist and think about how we learned about people of the past from studying what they left behind. A budding author can write in colors with a quill pen or create and send an electronic postcard with the Kids Zone characters.

In addition, multimedia pages offer a daily jigsaw puzzle of Colonial Williamsburg images. Video clips bring to life a variety of choices—Electronic Field Trips, the visit of Queen Elizabeth II, a cooper making a barrel and the fireworks of Grand Illumination, to name a few. Weekly podcasts feature interviews with everyone from the curator of historic interiors to the manager of rare breeds, as well as tradesmen, architects, musicians, interpreters and historians.

### DVD Encourages Students to Discuss Gay & Lesbian Issues at School

In February 2008, GroundSpark (formerly Women’s Educational Media) re-released the DVD *It’s Elementary—Talking About Gay Issues in School*.

The DVD is intended to show why and how elementary and middle school

teachers can facilitate age-appropriate classroom discussions that include awareness about gay and lesbian people. This watershed documentary’s original 1996 release catalyzed the national movement to build LGBT-safe schools and sparked a spirited national dialogue.

“Ten years after its original release, *It’s Elementary* is still inspiring educators to address homophobia and create classrooms where all youth are respected,” said Judy Shepard, whose son Matthew was brutally murdered in 1998 because he was gay. “It should be mandatory for all new teachers if we are serious about raising kids to be free of hate and prejudice.”

The re-released DVD version of the film is accompanied by a new documentary, *It’s STILL Elementary*, that presents fascinating “where are they now?” interviews with students and teachers from the original film, along with commentary from the filmmakers and other educational leaders who look back at the political backlash the original film received and at the tremendous impact it has had on the American educational system.

In addition, the new 140-page edition of the film’s accompanying guide is based on the stories of hundreds of educators, parents, principals and professors who have used GroundSpark resources to promote understanding and respect for all. The guide is a clearinghouse of ideas and resources for using *It’s Elementary* to make change on many levels in the classroom, in schools of education, with school boards and within communities.

For more information, please visit: [www.groundspark.org](http://www.groundspark.org)

# What's Working IN EDUCATION

## Administrative Action

Grades K-12

### School Violence: Tragedy, Turmoil, Learning and Response

Newspaper headlines these past couple of months have sent many people reeling, as school violence dominates both K-12 and higher education settings once again. Within the first 15 days of February alone, a total of six shooting incidents took place, resulting in numerous deaths and many injuries. Coupled with the anniversaries of both the Virginia Tech University shooting on April 16th and the Columbine High School shooting on April 20th,

concerns over safety at school become especially pervasive.

You may be struggling with school violence in a number of ways. You are likely wondering how to keep yourself safe, how to reassure students and parents, and how to maintain a system that will keep everyone as safe and secure as possible in the school setting. In both a proactive and reactive sense, there is a great deal on educators' minds these days.

As you work to serve students and parents during this difficult time, here are a few things to consider when discussing school violence:

- **Students May Know Someone.** The world continues to grow smaller and smaller. As students and others struggle to make sense of school vio-

lence incidents, they may indicate that they know someone involved in some way. There's nothing wrong with this...it's just a way of humanizing the event.

- **They're Going to Question Authority.** What is your school doing to keep students safe so they don't have to go through what others have? Why didn't officials do more? How can we trust the people who are supposed to keep us safe? These questions and more may be on students' and parents' minds – and there may be a blame game in the works. Try not to get defensive and just hear them out. Then, provide students with true, clear information about what's being done—and what they can do – to help ensure their safety.
- **We All Need Reassurance.** When something as awful as a school shooting occurs, we need reassurance that we're safe. Stress to students that your school is made up of well-trained, caring individuals who are there because they want to work with students – and to help keep them safe and sound.
- **It May Stir Up Difficult Memories.** Unfortunately, many of our students have experienced trauma of some kind. And an incident such as school shootings can trigger reminders, fears and concerns. If you suspect that someone may be experiencing a type of post-traumatic stress, connect him or her with the appropriate people as soon as possible.
- **There are Going to be Crude "Jokes."** For some reason, there will be students who take what happened in other schools and turn it into insensitive remarks and jokes. It may be a coping mechanism. It may be unthinking action. Whatever it is, addressing these types of comments privately and calmly can help the student see how he/she is impacting the greater community. Be prepared.

#### It Reminds Us...

The 1999 shootings at Columbine High School that left 12 students and a teacher dead, plus the two gunmen, became a defining moment in the lives of many of today's young people. When this happened, school began not feeling so safe anymore.

Then last year's tragedy at Virginia Tech, where a student killed 32 campus community members, and then himself, added to those feelings of fear and uncertainty. Add the shootings at middle and high schools this year, as well as the shooting sprees on college campuses this year, and you can understand the fear.

Discussing school violence may naturally evoke reminders of past tragedies, whether it rekindles feelings of fear, dread or profound sadness. Students may want to talk it out as they—and others—ask: *Why does this keep happening?*

- **Some May Seem to Brush It Off.** We all have different ways of coping and some students may exhibit bravado, like what's happened at other schools, like Columbine and Virginia Tech, is no big deal. This doesn't necessarily mean that they are heartless; it could just be their way of making sense of what happened. Some students may, honestly, be a bit desensitized at this point, especially after the number of school shootings that have happened in the last year. Or some may not be ready to recognize the magnitude of yet another school shooting so they keep their emotions under wraps, not letting themselves "go there." Keep an eye on

Visit us online at: **www.curriculumreview.com** to access a *Commemorating Tragic Events* PDF, designed to help schools plan and organize memorial events. Click on "Subscriber's Spot" and enter the password: *spring*.



these folks as they'll likely need support when the reality does sink in.

All the best as you work with students to help them make sense of these difficult events.

## Coping with the Aftermath of a Tragedy

### Response Resources

- ✓ American Academy of Pediatrics • [www.aap.org/featured/resourcepage.htm](http://www.aap.org/featured/resourcepage.htm)
- ✓ American Psychological Association's Help Center • [www.apahelpcenter.org](http://www.apahelpcenter.org)
- ✓ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) • [www.samhsa.gov/MentalHealth/understanding\\_MentalIllness.aspx](http://www.samhsa.gov/MentalHealth/understanding_MentalIllness.aspx)
- ✓ Tufts University's Counseling & Mental Health Services, "Coping with Tragedies" • <http://ase.tufts.edu/counseling/tragedies.htm>
- ✓ Virginia Tech's Office of Recovery and Support • [www.recovery.vt.edu/](http://www.recovery.vt.edu/)
- ✓ Virginia Tech's "We Remember" • [www.vt.edu/remember/](http://www.vt.edu/remember/)
- ✓ National Youth Violence Prevention Campaign • [www.violencepreventionweek.org/](http://www.violencepreventionweek.org/)
- ✓ Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center • [www.safeyouth.org/scripts/topics/school.asp](http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/topics/school.asp)

## When Talking with Students...

Consider the following questions and reflections to help guide one-on-one or group discussions about school violence scenarios:

- What happened at <insert school name> was a tragedy. Although it didn't happen here, because it happened at another school, it still feels like it hit close to home.
- I know I felt ...(complete with your own feelings)
- What were your thoughts as you reflected on this incident?
- What do you think the students/teachers at <insert school name> were feeling after this happened?
- What do you think students across the country were thinking and feeling?
- How do you think parents of students felt as they watched those images on the news?
- It is understandable that you are concerned about your safety in school. It is a priority of the school to ensure each person's safety.
- When do you feel safe at school? Why?
- When do you feel less safe at school? Why?
- What can you and your peers do to ensure our community's safety?
- What could the school do to make you feel safer?
- Are you finding others to talk to about your feelings? May I ask whom?
- I am so glad that you came to me, and I'm wondering if you might want to continue processing your feelings with someone else. Who would you be comfortable talking with? Your parents? A counselor?
- Are there other students who you think would benefit from talking more about this incident? What format do you think would be most helpful?
- Why do you think you're having this reaction?
- How does your reaction impact others around you?

## Social**Studios**

**Grades K-4**

### Real-life Historical Figures Become Superheroes

*Indiana – 1818*

*“I’m not afraid! I’m not afraid! I’m not afraid!” Abraham Lincoln muttered these words under his breath as he marched through the Forest of Little Pigeon Creek. His best friend, Jack, strutted behind him.*

*A few months ago Abe turned nine. Right now, he wished he was still eight, because his pa had decided that nine was old enough to trek through the forest alone. But all the howling and screaming in the woods didn’t sit right with Abe...*

Have you ever thought of Abraham Lincoln, Amelia Earhart or Thomas Edison as superheroes? The new AmeriTales series considers these real-life American heroes to be superheroes in their own right and aims to make them part of children’s popular culture just like fictional superheroes, such as Spiderman and The Incredibles.

This revolutionary approach to children’s literature both amuses children, while familiarizing them with well-known American icons. The books, designed for children ages 4-9, include bold illustrations, colorful language and action-packed settings.

The above excerpt is from *Abraham Lincoln and the Forest of Little Pigeon Creek* written by T. D. Carter

and illustrated by Randy Jennings (published through AmeriTales Entertainment and available at bookstores nationwide, ISBN #9780979873904). This book is the first in this fictional action-adventure series. The story follows young Abraham Lincoln’s exploits in the Indiana wilderness and explores underlying messages of animal kinship and overcoming fear. *Abraham Lincoln and the Forest of Little Pigeon Creek* gives children a rare glimpse into Lincoln’s personality as a child, underscoring qualities that helped him rise to become the President of the United States of America.

You can find out more about this innovative new book series at: [www.ameritales.com/](http://www.ameritales.com/).

#### **More Books in This Series...**

*Amelia Earhart and the Haunted Winds of Kansas*

March 2008

ISBN: 978-0-979-8739-1-1

*Thomas Edison and the Fog of Port Huron*

May 2008

ISBN: 978-0-9798739-2-8

## Scientific**Notations**

**Grades 4-7**

### Get Their Science “Engines” Running

Rev up student interest in science and math with a new six-book series called *The Science of NASCAR* written by Mark Stewart and Mike Kennedy (published by Lerner Publications, a division of Lerner Publishing Group). The books are now available in hardcover format for educational markets and will be released as paperback editions for the Fall 2008 trade market.

From precise car designs to the roles of friction and momentum on the track, there is no escaping the science that permeates every aspect of NASCAR.

Drivers, pit crews, engine builders and spotters use science and math every day to make NASCAR run. With lively writing and hands-on science experiments in each book, readers will witness how science and math accelerate the excitement in a race.

With titles including *NASCAR at the Track*, *NASCAR Behind the Scenes*, *NASCAR Designed to Win*, *NASCAR in the Driver’s Seat*, *NASCAR in the Pits* and *NASCAR Safety on the Track*, *The Science of NASCAR* series blends fast-action entertainment with fact-filled education that supports national sci-



ence and math standards in upper elementary grades. A free downloadable teaching guide to correspond with the books is also available at: [www.lerner-books.com](http://www.lerner-books.com).

Here are two activity excerpts from *NASCAR in the Pits*:

#### See for Yourself: The Pressure's On

During a race, the right side tires travel farther than the left side tires. Is the difference large or small? Try this experiment and see for yourself.

- Unfold a newspaper on the floor. This is your "track."
- Find a toy car, about the size of your hand.
- Wet the wheels of the car. Quickly guide it around the newspaper in an oval shape. The car should be traveling to the left, like it would at most NASCAR races. You should have made two dark lines.
- Carefully lay a length of string around the outside line. Cut the string with scissors where the string meets itself.
- Take the string and lay it along the inside line. Notice that the end of the string overlaps the beginning of the string.

The extra part of the string shows how much farther the right tires travel than the left tires on every lap. During a long race, this amount of wear really adds up!

#### See for Yourself: Working Out

Why do NASCAR pit crews work out between races? Because the harder they train, the better they perform. See for yourself by making a chart with

seven columns.

Write today's date and the day of the week at the top of the first column. Put the other dates and days of the week in the next six columns.

- Set a kitchen timer to one minute.
- Start the timer. Count how many push-ups you can do in a minute.
- Each time you touch the floor with your chest and then straighten your arms counts as one push-up.
- Mark down the number of push-ups you were able to do in the first column.
- Repeat this experiment each day for a week. Try to do the exercises around the same time each day.

At the end of the week, you should be able to do a few more push-ups in a minute than you could at the beginning of the week. This is because your muscles are getting stronger. Each push-up is happening faster too. The increased speed that comes with strength is why NASCAR pit crew members work out.

There are numerous activities, like those excerpted above, included throughout all of the NASCAR books, designed to bring children closer to the text and to teach them through interactive methods.

These "See for Yourself" activities by Mark Stewart and Mike Kennedy appear with the permission of Lerner Publications, a division of Lerner Publishing Group, Minneapolis, MN. Text copyright (c) 2008 by Mark Stewart and Mike Kennedy. For more information, please visit: [www.lernerbooks.com](http://www.lernerbooks.com)

## Health**Habits**

### Grades K-12

## A "Blast Off" to a Healthy Day

Did you know that April is Global Child Nutrition Month? You can help today's youth develop good nutrition habits—beginning with the first meal of the day.

The American Dairy Council and the School Nutrition Association teamed up to launch an interactive website, just in time for National School Breakfast Week in March, to offer students a way to explore the many ways in which breakfast fuels their imaginations. But this information is helpful at any point during the year!

[www.curriculumreview.com](http://www.curriculumreview.com)

By visiting the *Fuel Your Imagination* website ([www.schoolbreakfast.com](http://www.schoolbreakfast.com)), students can engage in a number of activities focused on the importance of eating breakfast. Learning tools on the site include:

- A *Story Creation Station* where kids at all grade levels (even high school) are encouraged to submit essays explaining how breakfast helps to fuel their imaginations. Students who submit essays have the opportunity to see their story posted on the website.

- A *Rocket Race* where students can pick their favorite rocket as it blasts off to Planet Breakfast!
- *Breakfast Bites* which include quizzes, fun breakfast facts and polls that help students

learn more about school breakfast programs throughout the U.S.

The site also contains information for food service professionals, parents and teachers. To learn more, just point, click and blast off to:

**[www.schoolbreakfast.com](http://www.schoolbreakfast.com)**.

## Spring Fever: Month-Long Themes, Weekly Observances & Holidays

There's something for everyone! Teachers nationwide draw upon holidays, weekly observances and month-long themes in developing creative curriculum ideas. As the end of the academic year draws near and students begin to get antsy, consider incorporating some of these observances into your daily routine:

### April Month-Long Themes:

- ✓ Autism Awareness Month
- ✓ Celebrate Diversity Month
- ✓ Global Child Nutrition Month
- ✓ Jazz Appreciation Month
- ✓ Keep America Beautiful Month
- ✓ National Child Abuse Prevention Month
- ✓ National Humor Month
- ✓ National Kite Month
- ✓ National Pecan Month
- ✓ National Poetry Month
- ✓ National Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Month
- ✓ National Sexual Assault Awareness Month
- ✓ National Youth Sports Safety Month
- ✓ Physical Wellness Month
- ✓ School Library Media Month
- ✓ Soy Foods Month
- ✓ Stress Awareness Month



### Weekly Observances:

- ✓ National Youth Violence Prevention Week—March 31-April 4

- ✓ Golden Rule Week—April 1-7
- ✓ Medication Safety Week—April 1-7
- ✓ Prevent Hate Week—April 4-10
- ✓ National Week of the Ocean—April 6-12
- ✓ Explore Your Career Options Week—April 7-11
- ✓ National Library Week—April 13-19
- ✓ National Inspirational News Week—April 13-19
- ✓ Young People's Poetry Week—April 14-20
- ✓ National Wildlife Week—April 19-27
- ✓ Coin Week—April 20-26
- ✓ Innovation Week—April 20-26
- ✓ National Park Week—April 20-26
- ✓ Sky Awareness Week—April 20-26
- ✓ TV Turn-off Week—April 21-27
- ✓ National Dance Week—April 25-May 4
- ✓ National & Global Youth Service Days—April 25-27
- ✓ National Volunteer Week—April 27-May 3
- ✓ Safe Kids Week—April 27-May 3



### Holidays:

- ✓ April 1—April Fool's Day; National Fun Day; Poetry & the Creative Mind Day
- ✓ April 2—International Children's Book Day
- ✓ April 3—Pony Express Day
- ✓ April 4—Victims of Violence Holy Day; World Rat Day

- ✓ April 5—National Birding Day; National Love Our Children Day
- ✓ April 7—World Health Day
- ✓ April 11—Barbershop Quartet Day
- ✓ April 11-13—Trivia Days
- ✓ April 12—Licorice Day
- ✓ April 13—International Plant Appreciation Day
- ✓ April 16—International Moment of Laughter Day; International Stress Awareness Day
- ✓ April 17—Ellis Island Family History Day
- ✓ April 18-20—Comic Book Days; Yo Yo Days
- ✓ April 19—Passover
- ✓ April 21—Astronomy Day
- ✓ April 22—Earth Day
- ✓ April 25—Arbor Day; National Day of Silence
- ✓ April 29—Sense of Smell Day; National Teach Your Children to Save Day



## May Month-Long Themes:

- ✓ Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
- ✓ Better Hearing and Speech Month
- ✓ Family Wellness Month
- ✓ Get Caught Reading Month
- ✓ Gifts from the Garden Month
- ✓ Haitian Heritage Month
- ✓ Healthy Vision Month
- ✓ Jewish-American Heritage Month
- ✓ Latino Books Month
- ✓ National Bike Month
- ✓ National Correct Posture Month
- ✓ National Mental Health Month
- ✓ National Photo Month
- ✓ National Preservation Month
- ✓ National Smile Month



- ✓ Navajo Code Talkers Month
- ✓ Personal History Month
- ✓ Teen Self-Esteem Month
- ✓ Tennis Month
- ✓ Young Achievers Month

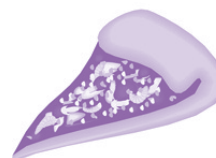
## Weekly Observances:

- ✓ Pen Friends International Week—May 1-7
- ✓ Be Kind to Animals Week—May 4-10
- ✓ National Family Week—May 4-10
- ✓ Reading is Fun Week—May 4-10
- ✓ Astronomy Week—May 5-10
- ✓ National Wildflower Week—May 5-11
- ✓ National Transportation Week—May 11-17
- ✓ Children's Book Week—May 12-18
- ✓ National Backyard Games Week—May 19-26



## Holidays:

- ✓ May 1—May Day; School Principals' Day
- ✓ May 3—Cartoonists Day; Join Hands Day
- ✓ May 5—Cinco de Mayo
- ✓ May 6—No Homework Day; National Teacher Day
- ✓ May 7—National School Nurse Day
- ✓ May 10—Windmill Day; World Fair Trade Day
- ✓ May 11—Mother's Day
- ✓ May 12—Limerick Day; Native American Rights Day
- ✓ May 16—National Pizza Party Day
- ✓ May 17—Armed Forces Day
- ✓ May 18—Celebrate Your Elected Officials Day; International Museum Day
- ✓ May 21—Turn Beauty Inside Out Day
- ✓ May 30—Memorial Day
- ✓ May 31—World No Tobacco Day



# Inspiring Words for Educators

## Dream Project Helps LA Students Think Locally & Act Globally

In a community where many residents struggle to put food on the table and avoid a life of drugs and gang violence, an inspirational group of eighth grade students at The Celerity Nascent Charter School in South Central Los Angeles are “thinking globally and acting locally” by participating in The Dream Project—an offshoot of The United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals.

The Dream Project is designed to empower young people to recognize

*“The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not Eureka! (I found it!) but rather, “hmm . . . that’s funny . . .”*

—Isaac Asimov

themselves as leaders that behold the potential to make a positive and real contribution to the world and to instill in them social responsibility, self-esteem, and creative problem solving. This pilot program gives students the opportunity to address and create solutions for the issues recognized in the United Nation’s Millennium Goals to combat hunger, poverty, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination in an attempt to fulfill these goals by the year 2015.

The Dream Project has kept the students at the Celerity Nascent School in Los Angeles (CA) entrenched in global issues for the last few months. For example, three 8th grade classes at Celerity Nascent were chosen to take a hands-on involvement in the Dream Project. The classes were divided into groups of eight, each group was given a Millennium Goal and asked to research the existing problem and envision its solution. At the end of a three-month period, each group will present their solutions to the entire school.

This is just one of the school’s many steps taken to better the world. In December, the school was a sponsor and distribution site for a Feed the Children project that fed more than 2,000 families in the Los Angeles area and ultimately more than 12,000 throughout the nation.

For more information on The Celerity Nascent Charter School, visit: [www.celerityschools.org](http://www.celerityschools.org). For more information about The Dream Project, visit: [www.dreamprojectun.org](http://www.dreamprojectun.org).

Article Link

## Project Focuses on Science Education

A new theory in teaching and learning science is based on lighting the spark of inspiration through sustained connections with “great explorers and great events” in core curriculum.

The theory is described in a white paper by Caleb Schutz, president of The JASON Project. Entitled *Education through Exploration: A New Theory in Teaching and Learning Science*, it is the result of the non-profit organization’s 19 years of practice and research in middle school science education.

Schutz draws on two well-known, factual examples to illustrate the power of great explorers and great events to create the spark and increase student engagement. The first was the October 1957 sighting of Sputnik by Homer Hickam, a West Virginia schoolboy whose future as a coal miner was preordained until he saw the satellite. Transformed, Hickam struck up a correspondence with scientist Werner von Braun, learned the requisite science and math virtually on his own, and overcame great obstacles on his path to becoming a NASA engineer.

A similar spark was lighted nearly 30 years later, when Dr. Robert Ballard’s discovery of RMS Titanic generated

16,000 letters from students asking to join his next expedition.

*“Dreams pass into the reality of action. From the actions stems the dream again; and this interdependence produces the highest form of living.”*

—Anasis Nin

Understanding the power of the spark, Ballard wrote back to many of them and then founded JASON in 1989.

JASON’s approach, Schutz said, is straightforward yet often overlooked: tap into students’ intrinsic interest and curiosity so they choose to become engaged in their learning:

- Introduce students to great events and the people behind them. Help them get to know scientists as people, learn about obstacles they have overcome in their careers and how they apply their knowledge to real-world situations, such as forecasting the formation and path of a tornado. Studying basic meteorological principles takes on new excitement and significance if it means the student, too, can be a storm chaser and protect lives and property.
- Provide opportunities for students to work with scientists and mentors in a language they understand—Internet chats, podcasts, webcasts, social networking opportunities, videos and computer games.
- Equip teachers and administrators with powerful tools to manage, assess and track student achievement, and deliver professional development in JASON curricula as well as core science and pedagogy.

“Through exposure to JASON curricula,” Schutz said, “we hope that all students will find themselves on the road to higher academic achievement and greater understanding of themselves and their world.”



# Between Tears & Laughter

## Year of the Frog

According to the Chinese New Year, it's the Year of the Rat. However, many zoos and aquariums have proclaimed 2008 *The Year of the Frog*. The year-long celebration began (appropriately) on Leap Day, Feb. 29 and will continue throughout the year.

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is highlighting frogs as a way to mark a major conservation effort to address the amphibian extinction crisis.

The Year of the Frog is also meant to engage the public in amphibian conservation and to raise funds for AZA amphibian conservation efforts into the future.



Why frogs? Well, they are going extinct. So are toads, salamanders, newts and the intriguingly unusual caecilians. In fact, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) estimates that at least one-third of known amphibian species are threatened with extinction. While the major culprit has historically been habitat loss and degradation, many of the declines and extinctions previously referred to as "enigmatic" are now being attributed to the rapidly dispersing infectious disease chytridiomycosis, which is caused by the fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Bd). Bd is causing population and species extinctions at an alarming rate. Can you imagine if we were about to lose one-third of the world's mammals? It's just not easy being green these days.

Somewhere, we just know Kermit is smiling about this year's focus.

Learn more about the Year of the Frog by visiting: [www.aza.org/Publications/2007/08/year\\_frog.pdf](http://www.aza.org/Publications/2007/08/year_frog.pdf)

## Classroom Pet Alert!

Turtles, unlike our froggy friends, are not receiving much support these days.

In fact, an alert issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention earlier this year, is blaming small pet turtles for infecting over 40 people in five states with salmonella bacteria. Some of these turtles may be found in classrooms where students learn about the animal and its habitat.

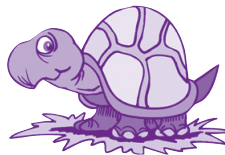
According to *WebMD* (1/28/08), the cases, which have happened since May 2007, mostly infected young kids who handled and cared for the turtles. The cases were reported in California, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina and Wisconsin.

"These turtles are a risk to the public and especially to young children," explained the CDC in a *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

People can catch salmonella by handling turtles or touching surfaces that have been tainted by salmonella in turtle feces.

Due to salmonella risk, the U.S. government bans the sale of pet turtles with shells less than 4 inches long except for scientific, educational or exhibition purposes. That ban has been in place since 1975.

**Symptoms: Salmonella infection usually causes diarrhea which may be bloody. Serious complications and death can also occur but are rarer.**



Want to know if a turtle is an appropriate learning "tool" for your school's classrooms? Visit the CDC for guidelines and suggestions at: [www.cdc.gov/healthypets/spotlight\\_an\\_turtles.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/spotlight_an_turtles.htm).

**Resource Link**

## Frozen to the Flagpole

According to January 2008 *Associated Press* reports, two fourth-grade boys mimicking a scene from the movie "A Christmas Story" wound up with their tongues stuck to a frozen flagpole.

Gavin Dempsey and James Alexander were serving on flag duty at Jackson Elementary School (IN), with the job of raising and lowering the school's flags. They decided to see if their tongues really would stick to the cold metal.

"I decided to try it because I thought all of the TV shows were lies, but turns out I was wrong," Gavin told reporters.

While nursing their sore tongues, they are likely to welcome spring with earnest!

## Will Smith Getting "Jiggy" with Education

Actor and singer, Will Smith, has announced that he and his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, plan to open a school in the near future, perhaps as early as next year. In an interview on the popular TV Talk Show *Regis and Kelly*, Smith said the idea came out of his family's experience in grouping home-schooled children together.

"We started home-schooling our children probably six years ago," he said. "We found about eight or nine other parents that home-school, so we put them together. ... There's just very powerful educational concepts that we believe in, and we feel like I want to design the system that revolutionizes public education."

In 2005, Jada Pinkett Smith told *Essence* magazine that the decision to home-school was based partly on the family's travel schedule—but also on dissatisfaction with the other options.

"The school system in this country—public and private—is designed for the industrial age," she said. "We're in a technological age. We don't want our kids to memorize. We want them to learn."

# Special Report

## Especially for Teachers—Tools, Resources & More!

Next month, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) will celebrate Teacher Appreciate Week (the first full week in May). This week was created by the PTA in 1984 as a way to honor the dedicated men and women who lend their passion, skills, time and talent to educating children.

In this spirit, we are highlighting a number of professional development and summer learning opportunities for teachers in this special report. We are also including some tools and resources that may help the last few months of the school year go smoothly. It's our way of saying "thanks for all you do!"

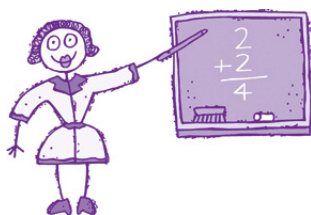
### NOAA Teacher Training Opportunities

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) trains teachers to use the mathematics, science and technology associated with exploring the oceans in their classrooms to help increase awareness and understanding of the ocean world. These ongoing workshops are designed to introduce educators to premiere ocean scientists/explorers and their research and explorations.

**April 19, 2008**, Audubon Aquarium of the Americas, New Orleans, Louisiana

#### *Learning Ocean Science through Ocean Exploration*

Introductory Professional Development Workshop for Teachers



**May 17, 2008**, New England Aquarium, Boston, Massachusetts

#### *Learning Ocean Science through Ocean Exploration*

Follow-up Professional Development Workshop for Teachers

**July 16 & 17, 2008**, SMILE (Science & Math Investigative Learning Experiences), University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island

#### *Learning Ocean Science through Ocean Exploration*

Professional Development Workshop for SMILE Teachers & Other Interested Educators

**September 20, 2008**, University of South Florida College of Marine Science, St. Petersburg, Florida

#### *Learning Ocean Science through Ocean Exploration*

Follow-up Professional Development Workshop for Teachers

**October 25, 2008**, National Aquarium in Baltimore, Maryland

#### *Learning Ocean Science through Ocean Exploration*

Follow-up Professional Development Workshop for Teachers

To learn more about these opportunities and more, visit: [www.education.noaa.gov/ttraining.html](http://www.education.noaa.gov/ttraining.html).

### America Walks Webinars

For teachers and community organizers looking to encourage students to walk and bike to school, the Safe Routes Coaching Action Network is a way to

learn from people who know how to make things happen. Attend FREE monthly presentations from experts across the country. Get FREE coaching from experienced America Walks organizer with experience in your safe routes to school in your region. To learn more, visit:

[www.americawalks.org/Content/10076/Safe\\_Routes\\_Coaching\\_Action\\_Network.html](http://www.americawalks.org/Content/10076/Safe_Routes_Coaching_Action_Network.html).

### Eisenhower Academy

The 11th annual Eisenhower Academy, a summer institute for teachers, will be held July 6-11, 2008 at Gettysburg College and Eisenhower National Historic Site in Gettysburg, PA. Sponsored by the National Park Service, Gettysburg College, and Mount St. Mary's University, the Academy presents an in-depth perspective of Dwight D. Eisenhower as president and world leader, and introduces effective strategies for teaching the Cold War era in the classroom. Lectures and discussion cover civil rights, the Cold War, 1950s economics, popular culture, and new scholarship on the Eisenhower presidency. Field trips include a visit to the Eisenhower family home and a walk through historic Gettysburg.

Total cost, including field trips, special evening events, banquets, lodging and all meals is \$685 for single occupancy. Cost for day students is \$380. Professional education and graduate credits are available.

For more information, contact: Eisenhower Academy, 250 Eisenhower Farm Lane, Gettysburg, PA 17325; 717-338-9114 Ext. 10; e-mail:

*continued on page fifteen*

john\_joyce@nps.gov; or visit:  
[www.nps.gov/eise](http://www.nps.gov/eise).

## Approaching Walden Seminar (July 13-18, 2008)

The Walden Woods Project is currently accepting applications for *Approaching Walden*, a professional development summer seminar for high school educators and graduate students. This six-day workshop is professionally, as well as personally enriching, and provides teachers with the skills needed to lead their students in a study of their home community. This place-based, interdisciplinary workshop uses Henry David Thoreau's ethic and his experience at Walden Woods as a model.

This seminar, now in its 12th year, features a daily mix of lectures, field trips, readings, discussions and reflection time. The participants encounter speakers from different fields with expertise in the areas of natural history, writing, literary analysis, art and the environment. Some seminar features include: lectures on Thoreau, Transcendentalism and social reform; workshops on historic land use, environmental issues in the classroom and nature journaling; and trips to Walden Pond, historic Concord and vernal pools.

Applications are due by May 1. For more information, visit:  
[www.walden.org/Education/TWS/AW/2008/App.htm](http://www.walden.org/Education/TWS/AW/2008/App.htm).

## Civil War Teacher Institute

The Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) will host its Seventh Annual Teacher Institute from July 25-27, 2008 in Hagerstown, MD.

This free weekend will feature "field trip" tours of Antietam and Harpers Ferry, focusing on techniques teachers

can use to make a battlefield visit a central part of their Civil War curriculum.

Teachers will attend their choice of workshops on Friday and Sunday, covering a range of military and civilian topics. Past presenters of these workshops have included leading historians and educators, and topics have ranged from tactical military history to strategies for teaching the Civil War to struggling readers. These workshops are designed not only to impart specific information about the era but also a variety of pedagogical strategies to help teachers bring the Civil War to life in their classrooms.

The CWPT Teacher Institute is provided at no direct cost to teachers, who have only to pay for their room and travel. CWPT anticipates being able to provide travel stipends for 10 or more teachers who would not otherwise have been able to attend due to geographic or funding constraints. Stipend applications will be made available to teachers in the near future.

For more information, contact John Blanton at: (202) 367-1861 x223 or by e-mail at: [jblanton@civilwar.org](mailto:jblanton@civilwar.org). Registration forms and details on the CWPT Teacher Institute can also be found on the web at:  
[www.civilwar.org/travelandevents/t\\_cwptevents.htm](http://www.civilwar.org/travelandevents/t_cwptevents.htm).

## National Parks Seek Teacher Rangers

The National Parks System is seeking applications for Teacher Rangers. The Teacher to Ranger to Teacher (TRT) Program links National Park units with teachers from low income school districts. Under this program, selected teachers spend the summer working as park rangers, often living in the park. They perform various duties depending on their interests and the needs of the park, including developing and present-

ing interpretive programs for the general public, staffing the visitor center desk, developing curriculum-based materials for the park or taking on special projects. To apply or for more information, visit: [www.nps.gov/wupa/forteachers/trt.htm](http://www.nps.gov/wupa/forteachers/trt.htm).

## Teacher-Friendly Online Encyclopedia

*Encyclopedia of Earth* is a new electronic reference about the Earth, its natural environments, and their interaction with society. The *Encyclopedia* is a free, fully searchable collection of articles written by scholars, professionals, educators, and experts who collaborate and review each other's work. The articles are written in non-technical language and will be useful to students, educators, scholars, professionals and the general public. Check it out by visiting: [www.eoearth.org/](http://www.eoearth.org/).

## Virtual Zoo Trip

Spring is the time of year when many teachers are busy planning field trips to complement the classroom curriculum. Sometimes, however, timing and lack of resources do not always permit for such excursions. Luckily classes studying animal behavior and habitats do not have to leave school to visit the zoo!

Scholastic Inc. has put together a variety of links, tools and resources at: <http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=2868>. By accessing the site, teachers and students can experience, the sights and sounds of zoos throughout the U.S. at the click of a mouse! Links include access to "Zoo in the Wild" where students come face-to-face with African mammals and birds. Here they will also access photos and facts about the animals. By visiting Scholastic's website, students can also find links to Sea World/Busch Gardens and the San Diego Zoo for a virtual field trip.



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