

Education Matters

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A FEW GOOD MEN

By R.J. McMahon

The Success of the Male Mentorship Program at Chicago International Longwood

At the end of a school day in September 2005, Robert Lang, Director of Schools at Chicago International Longwood on Chicago's South Side, looked out of his office window and noticed several young men—many of whom were high school students at his school—standing across the street on the corner. In addition to being classmates, the young men had something else in common: They were not involved in activities after school, so they spent their afternoons on 95th Street, hanging out with other young men from the neighborhood.

The situation troubled Mr. Lang for several reasons. First, he was very concerned about the company his students were keeping. Second, he did not understand how these young men could not find

extracurricular activities that interested them, given that the school offers fifteen different activities over the course of the academic year. And finally, he felt compelled to address the dearth of role models and structure in these students' lives. "We are a small public charter school with less than 500 high school students, so it is very difficult to fall through the cracks at Chicago International," Mr. Lang says. "Unfortunately, we were getting too close to letting these young men slip through the cracks."

Something Had to Change

Mr. Lang assembled the male members of his leadership team to address the need for a program that would target the male students who were most at-risk: young

men who were not participating in after-school activities on campus and who were struggling academically, socially, or emotionally. From this meeting, the Male Mentorship Program was born. This program would provide not only an after-school destination for more than thirty high school boys, but also activities every Monday through Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30 creating a structure in which these students could build relationships with positive male role models.

Launched in the fall of 2005, the program is built on daily two-hour sessions when four male African-American administrators at Longwood meet with small teams of young men. During these sessions, mentors and students work on enriching the boys' academic work and



Two days each week, members of the faculty tutor students who need help in any subject, and twice a week volunteers from the corporate community give presentations about important life skills, such as how students can open and manage checking accounts, start businesses, or improve their time management skills.

building personal skills, such as how to behave appropriately in class and how to introduce themselves to new people. The mentors lead discussions about topics that are sometimes uncomfortable, such as hygiene and grooming, relationships with parents, and the importance of completing work assignments. Two days each week, members of the faculty tutor students who need help in any subject, and twice a week volunteers from the corporate community give presentations about important life skills, such as how students can open and manage checking accounts, start businesses, or improve their time management skills. On top of these regular activities, mentors arrange college trips for the young men to see and experience where their hard work might lead. The message is central to the program's mission: College is the logical next step in your educational journeys. As a result of volunteers' time and the program's structure, the students have become more accountable—to themselves, their mentors, their peers, and the entire program.

Within three months, teachers and CampusProfile administrators saw positive changes in the young men. Suspensions dwindled. Students' grades, atti-

tudes, and self-esteem improved. And as a result, the students spent more time in the school building, a better option than hanging out on neighborhood streets.

The students were either plugged into other after-school activities, or gravitated to the activities that piqued their interest. Today, the participating students spend at least ten hours a day on campus, from 7:30 in the morning to 5:30 or 7:00 in the evening, depending on their activities.

Through their participation the first year, many students earned summer jobs on campus, working with summer school students, cleaning the school, or laundering uniforms for the sports teams. Now they have the skills they need to supervise other students in their



work around campus. The program instills not only a strong work ethic, but also—and just as importantly—a sense of self-worth in each young man.

The biggest misconception about mentoring programs is that the mentoring must be one-on-one. The Male Mentoring Program established at Chicago International Longwood uses a team approach. Each adult mentor has about 10 students assigned to him, and he serves as a go-to person for the young men in his group. But the mentors share responsibility for the students, creating a network of support for the young men.

Now in its third year, the Male Mentoring Program continues to change and grow. As suspensions decreased and attitudes improved at the high school, problematic incidents at the Junior Academy increased, so the program's focus shifted to young men in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, with a few high school students added to the mix. Once the high school students complete one year of the program—the

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time needed to get connected to the high school community—they become peer mentors for the younger students. Today, between forty and fifty junior high students participate with a corps of peer mentors from the high school—a circumstance that has strengthened

the culture of the school. The students grow together, the young men learn to be leaders, and the adult mentors serve as torchbearers who light the way. ■

Reprinted with permission of Chicago International Charter School. Photo credit: Caroline Voagen Nelson. For more information, visit Chicago International's website at www.chicagointl.org.

Good Report for Merit Pay

Report Finds Merit Pay Has Positive Effects on Students

An evaluation of a teacher pay-for-performance program in Little Rock finds that it produces significant gains in student performance on standardized tests.

The Achievement Challenge Pilot Project (ACPP) at five elementary schools in Little Rock offered teachers and staff substantial bonuses that vary depending on the level of increases in student achievement in each teacher's classroom.

According to researchers in the University of Arkansas (UA) Department of Education Reform, students in schools where the program operated in 2006-2007 enjoyed greater learning gains than their comparable peers in three subject areas on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Specifically, students in the merit pay schools improved by nearly 7 percentile points in math, by 9 percentile points in language, and by 6 percentile points in reading.

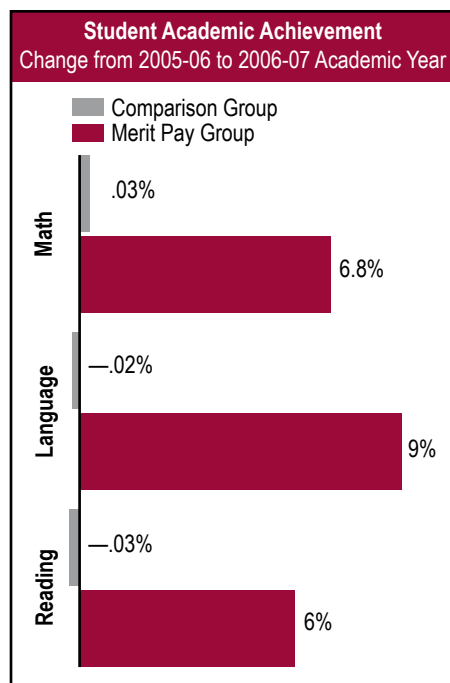
Big Bucks

In the ACPP merit pay program, teachers could earn a bonus worth as much as \$11,000. In 2005-2006, teachers and staff at Meadowcliff were awarded bonuses totaling \$200,926, while those at Wakefield received \$228,300 in performance bonuses.

According to the UA researchers, surveys of teachers at participating and comparison schools found that attitudes were mixed about the program's effects. The ACPP teachers, in general, did not indicate being more innovative or working harder, despite the fact that these are two oft-cited potential benefits of merit pay plans. However, teachers in schools that participated for multiple years in the ACPP reported being more satisfied with their salaries than their peers in first-year ACPP schools, and comparable nonparticipating schools. With regard to the frequently cited potential disadvantages of merit pay programs, the ACPP teachers did not report divisive competition, suffering from a negative work environ-

ment, or shying away from working with low-performing students. Teachers in the three schools implementing merit pay for the first time in 2006-2007 did highlight some problems with the implementation of the program, which resulted in their discontent and decreased program support. In general, however, ACPP teachers reported being more effective teachers than their comparable peers in non-ACPP schools. ■

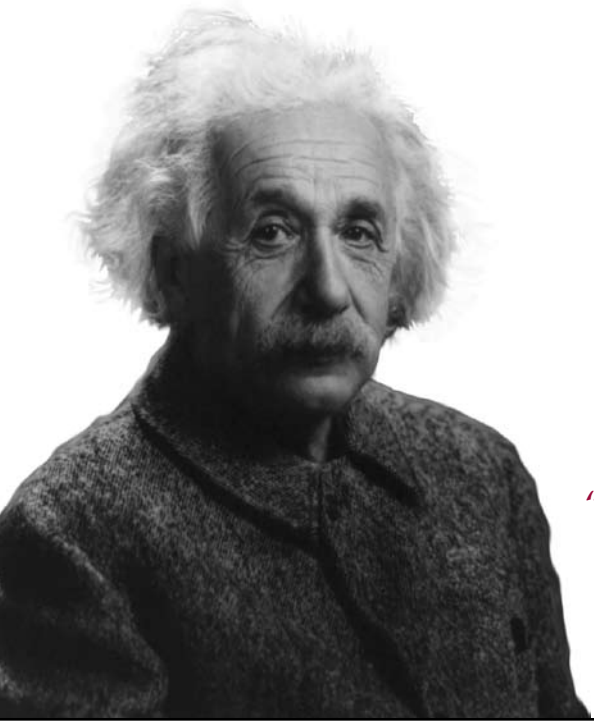
Gary Ritter holds the Endowed Chair in Education Policy in the Department of Education Reform in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas.



ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL



AAE member and 2008 Idaho Teacher of the Year, Carol Scholz, met with President Bush as part of the National Teacher of the Year ceremony. During this week of triumph, Carol also received the sad news of her mother passing away suddenly in her sleep while Carol was in Washington, D.C. Carol found solace in the fact that her mother was found peacefully lying in bed. Beside her was her coffee cup and the research paper she was writing about Shakespeare's play *All's Well That Ends Well*. "I felt she was with me spiritually the day I attended the White House events in her honor," Carol wrote later. "She was my inspiration for everything I have accomplished as a teacher."



Mathemat

Today's English Courses Need to Follow the
Lead of the Latest Math Recommendation

*"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken
joy in creative expression and knowledge."*

Albert Einstein

Similar to what many of you probably do, I find myself frequently yelling at the TV set! I am so tired of hearing incorrect grammar used by TV commentators, Teachers of the Year, firemen, city council members, college professors, political figures, Congressional staffers, recent college graduates, and people-on-the-street. *"He sung loud and clear...The interview was between him and I...She laid down for her nap just before the house became engulfed in flames...Sally snuck out to the playground...Jim dove into the swimming pool...The bell had rang by the time the police arrived...He and she often goes home early...Neither him nor me are interested in starting the meeting early...The park is more lovelier now than it was ten years ago."*

Recently, the National Math Panel released its excellent report detailing what is lacking in K-12 math instruction—an emphasis on the basics. To save the U. S. the time, effort, and funding to appoint yet another panel to study what is lacking in K-12 English courses, I would like to suggest a plan. Let's take the National Math Panel's report, cross out the words that relate to math, and insert instead the terms the apply to K-12 English courses.

From Math to Grammar

To prove my point, I have chosen an article written by Sean Cavanaugh in *Education Week* (March 19, 2008) entitled "Panel Calls for Systematic, Basic Approach to Math." In place of his words about math, I have substituted words about English and grammar. My substituted wording is highlighted in color:

At various points, the authors also allude to the enduring philosophical battles over how to teach the subject commonly referred to as "the **English communication** wars." Those disputes tend to pit those who argue that students should be grounded more firmly in **basic grammar** against others who advocate the teaching of "**textual intelligence** of **grammar and holistic scoring**... .

But the authors also identify a clear path to prepare students for **college English courses and the workforce**. Students should become proficient with **verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, noun and pronoun usage, correct use of adjectives and adverbs, punctuation, capitalization, various sentence patterns, simple/complex/compound/compound-complex sentences, typically taught in the 8th or 9th grade**, the report says. State tests, teacher education programs, and textbooks should be tailored to promote those skills; so should the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as "the nation's report card,"... .

The panel's report repeatedly calls for students to be able to recall **grammar/usage concepts** quickly and effortlessly. It also says that students' difficulty with **subject-verb agreement and incorrect usage of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs** is "pervasive" and a "major obstacle" to **being college and workforce ready**....

"To prepare students **to be college/workforce ready**, the curriculum must simultaneously develop **a student's understanding of basic English grammar/usage while at the same time requiring him/her to implement correct English grammar/usage into her/his speaking and writing**. Debates regarding the relative importance of these aspects of **grammar/usage** knowledge are misguided. These capabilities are mutually supportive, each facilitating the learning of the others... ."

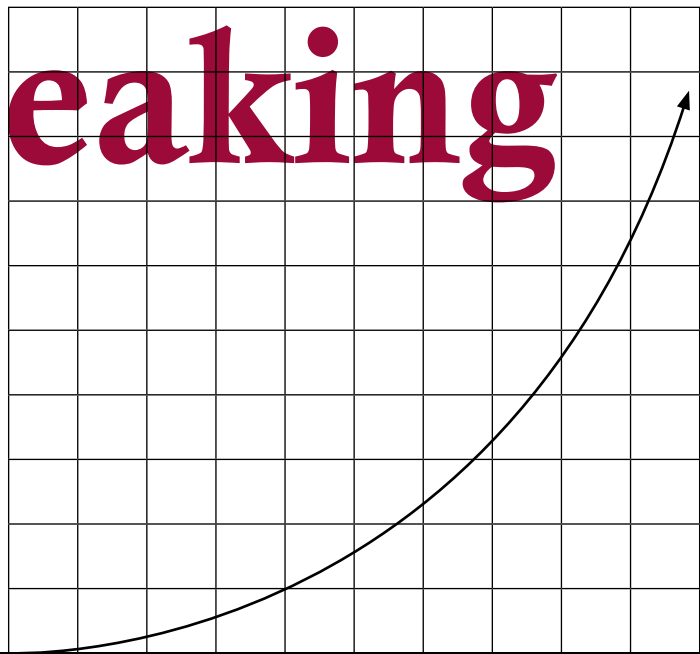
Helping Disadvantaged Students

"Children's goals and beliefs about learning are related to their **grammar/usage** performance. Experimental studies



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have demonstrated that changing children's beliefs from a focus on ability to a focus on effort increases their engagement in **grammar/usage** learning, which in turn improves their **writing/speaking** outcomes. [Research shows] that the engagement and sense of efficacy of African-American and Hispanic students in **correct and fluent English communication** tend to be lower than those of white and Asian students, but also that it can be significantly increased...

Teacher- vs. Student-Centered Instruction

"All-encompassing recommendations that instruction should be entirely 'child-centered' or 'teacher-directed' are not supported by research..."

Explicit Instruction

"Explicit instruction of **grammar/usage** with students who have **English communication difficulties** has shown consistently positive effects on **their writing and speaking** performance." The panel defines that term to mean "that teachers provide clear **writing/speaking models** by using an array of examples, students receive extensive instruction and practice in use of newly learned strategies and skills, students are provided with opportunities to think aloud [talking through decisions they make and steps they take], and students are provided with extensive feedback..."

"If your mental energy is consumed figuring out what **tense to use or what subject fits the verb** when that should have been covered three or four years ago, **how are you going to be able to write and speak with sophisticated communication abilities?** Mr. Williams said after the meeting..."

But panel members also discovered that some areas related to **English communication**, such as cognitive studies of how children learn, have produced much more high-quality research than others, such as how to prepare **English teachers** and give them ongoing professional development, said Mr. Faulkner, the chairman.

"We're going to have to learn more about what makes a good teacher and how to instill" those abilities, said Mr. Faulkner. "Very little is known about these things," he added, "surprisingly little, given [their] importance..."

"This really transcends politics or administrations," said Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.

The shortcomings in the teaching of K-12 English can be remedied in basically the same way math courses can be improved—a return to the basics. ■



Donna Garner is an AAE advisory member. She taught high school for over twenty-six years, and was appointed by Presidents Reagan and Bush to the National Commission of Migrant Education. She was also appointed to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) writing team for English/Language Arts/Reading. For a list of classroom strategies that Donna uses, contact wgarner1@hotmail.com.

Performance, Not Aspirations

The wrong focus deflates us

By Juile Greenberg

Sandwiching thirteen years of teaching between two periods of policy work, I have acquired an unusual perspective on the culture dominating the teaching profession. I learned early on that we teachers are a sensitive bunch. My warning to nonteachers: *never question the martyrdom of teachers.*

In commentary about and by teachers over reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, you can see only the most recent examples of how teachers are portrayed, and how we portray ourselves, as downtrodden, underappreciated, and overworked. For some time, we have cloaked ourselves in a mantle of martyrdom—though this may be fine for the halls of Congress or the bargaining table, it leaves us all pretty miserable on the job.

Creating Martyrs

Teachers didn't always feel like martyrs. We're simply responding to the wildly unrealistic demands that now go with the job. In the last few decades we've had a revolution in our schools that places demands on teachers that few mortals can satisfy for more than short stints. We're asked to devise instruction to match learning styles, be culturally sensitive, allow students to construct knowledge on their own, and assess through multiple modalities. We've been told to guide instruction that covers a range of student ability including special education students and students whose first language is not English. We're expected to teach critical thinking skills and higher-order thinking, often to children whose knowledge of subject matter is so scant that they have little about which to think critically. We must cope with students for whom failure in school and difficult family circumstances create a witch's brew of bad behavior.

In this context in which we continually come up short, teachers have felt stung by



the many critiques of education that have followed the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. Is it any wonder that we get a little testy when policy-makers and the media point out the many uncomfortable facts about student failure, rather than commending us for being willing to set foot in the contemporary classroom?

Were we succeeding in educating most children, sticking with this approach would make sense. But with only one-third of our children graduating from high school truly prepared for college or the workforce, we need to question the current teaching construct, for both the sake of our students and our own self-image.

Why We Keep the Label

Unfortunately, teachers haven't questioned the construct to date because of two large deterrents: the fear that one's competence will be doubted, and the threat that criticizing the status quo will be portrayed as a traitorous skepticism about the need or capacity of schools to educate the disadvantaged.

The profession as a whole is also reluctant to question this construct, and conveniently enough, it's found that martyrdom is lucrative. Rather than advocate for more realistic, achievable expectations for teacher performance, professional organizations have nurtured heroic expectations, the impossibility of measuring progress towards them, and the inevitable failure to meet them as the basis for increased funding appeals.

Advocating the Wrong Things

As I sought traction to improve performance in increasingly diverse advanced math classes, I would have appreciated union advocacy to help clear accountability waters muddied by practices such as regarding borderline and catastrophic student failure as identical and having

many students change instructors in full-year courses each semester. Instead, my union and school district trumpeted the challenges that I and other teachers faced to lobby for higher salaries that would reward us for attempting to meet them.

Moreover, the implications of this focus go beyond funding. Schooling itself has been molded by this ethos to make the classrooms "bearable" work environments: Teachers demand smaller classes at all grade levels, even when this extremely expensive reform improves student performance only in the primary grades. While well-executed projects can be engaging and educational, teachers plan an inordinate amount of activity-based learning because it's easier to keep children occupied than to teach them.

Even more important, we have created classroom environments that make it difficult to advocate for necessary assessments of student and teacher performance, and in which required testing is likelier to generate a "test prep" culture. Even as a strong testing proponent, I share my colleagues' resistance to current standardized testing. It's simply not fair to use standardized tests to evaluate year-end performance of either students or teachers in classrooms in which few students are at grade-level.

The Road Less Travelled

Teachers have another choice. We could take another road. An ethos based on performance rather than aspirations would be both healthier and ultimately more gratifying for teachers. Establishing realistic expectations for professional performance, demanding the educational infrastructure in which they can be met, and welcoming accountability measures that demonstrate to ourselves and others that we have attained them is a recipe for professional-level salaries and less, not more, professional frustration. Even more important, it is a recipe for more, not less, success in educating our children.

We must develop an ethos that doesn't settle for the rationalization that aspirations count as much as or more than results. ■

Julie Greenberg is Senior Policy Director for National Council on Teacher Quality.



Possible New School Construction Mandates



On April 30 the House Education and Labor Committee held a meeting on HR 3021, the 21st Century High-Performing Public School Facilities Act. HR 3021 authorizes \$6.4 billion for construction, modernization, or repair of kindergarten, elementary, and secondary schools in 2009. One of the stipulations in the bill requires that recipients of the funds use them to ensure that construction projects meet one of three green building standards: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design; Energy Star; or Collaborative for High Performance Schools. Corresponding state or local standards will be accepted as well.

2008 National Teacher of the Year



Michael Geisen, a Crook County Middle School science teacher in Oregon, has been named the 2008 National Teacher of the Year. Geisen, a teacher with an immense dedication to his students, often has many students come visit his classroom before school and during lunch to sit and talk, join him for jam sessions on their guitars, visit his turtle, or be part of the "Ketchup Club." Geisen's students know that during his free time he is always available to help students "catch up."

In his speech honoring Geisen, President Bush highlighted Geisen's students appreciation for their teacher by quoting one student, "...he's an awesome teacher. He could make watching grass grow interesting." In his speech President Bush also praised Geisen for using humor and creativity to encourage students to take science seriously as well as stressing the point that America needs more scientists. Every year Geisen has a science fair for

his students which he calls a "legendary evening of science, creativity, food, and wackiness."

Reading First Study Lacks Positive Results



A study done by the U.S. Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) shows that students who participated in Reading First do not have better reading skills than students who did not participate in the program. Reading First did, however, help teachers spend almost an hour more a week on phonics, a teaching method considered by many experts to be solid instruction.

\$81 Million for Teachers on Retainer in New York City

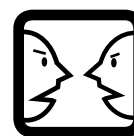


According to a new report by the New Teacher Project, over two years, New York City will pay \$81 million in salaries and benefits for over 600 teachers whose positions have been eliminated at one school and have not found or have not looked for new jobs. The current collective bargaining agreement, which took effect in 2006, no longer contains seniority rights in staffing decisions and automatic transfers for teachers whose positions have been cut. As a result, teachers who do not find new jobs are assigned to schools where they are required to show up each day and be available for principals to use as substitutes. There is no data available from the Department of Education on whether principals use the teachers on reserve.

According to the report, about 90 percent of the 2,700 teachers whose positions were cut in 2006 have found new positions. The report also notes that of the 600 teachers who are on reserve, about 50 percent admit that they have not

applied for jobs using the city's online job posting system. The report also highlights the fact that the reserve teachers were six times more likely than other teachers to have received an unsatisfactory rating during the course of their careers.

\$13.2 Million Grant Lost due to Disputes about Teacher Pay



Seven high schools in Washington State were slated to be the beneficiaries of a \$13.2 million grant the state won last year from the National Math & Science Initiative (NMSI), but NMSI will now pull the grant due to disputes over how to pay teachers. The grant would have been used to strengthen Advanced Placement courses in math and science in the high schools. Issues arose, however, when NMSI ran up against Washington's collective-bargaining laws. NMSI wanted to pay teachers for their extra time as well and for the success their students had on the AP tests. Collective bargaining laws require, however, that pay be negotiated between unions and school districts.

Possible Renewal of the Teacher Expense Deduction



The teacher expense deduction that allows educators to claim up to \$250 on their taxes for out-of-pocket classroom expenses incurred during the year expired at the end 2007. The Senate Finance Committee has included in their recently released legislation the "Alternative Minimum Tax Extenders Tax Relief Act of 2008," an extension of the teacher expense deduction. AAE will continue to work with the committee to ensure that this deduction is extended.



Some presidential candidates have campaigned for universal pre-K funded at the federal level. But according to a new study, a substantial body of national and international research reveals that pre-K programs are not as beneficial for four-year-olds as some proponents believe.

“Preschool advocates promote the expansion of taxpayer funding for early childhood education, claiming that it

Universal Pre-K Not Universally Good

reduces the need for special education, grade retention, welfare, and incarceration while increasing high school graduation, college enrollment, and employment at high paying jobs,” said Krista Kafer, an education expert who has served in the U.S. Department of Education and who is the author of the “Should Alabama Create a Universal Pre-K Program,” published by the Alabama Policy Institute (API).

“Unfortunately, most cost-benefit analyses and other promotional materials are based on the exaggeration and misrepresentation of the full body of research,” added Kafer.

Kafer’s review of over fifty pre-K programs and analyses found inconsistent data regarding the effects of pre-K programs. Her findings include:

- The majority of low-income children experience only short-term positive impacts; there is little long-term impact from participation in early childhood education programs.

- By fourth or fifth grade, graduates of pre-K programs experience a “fade out” effect where short-term cognitive and academic benefits fade out after a few years.
- Preschool participation has no positive impact on children from middle- or high-income families and in particular has been shown to have an adverse effect on math skills.
- Over the last few years, several studies have found that early childhood education can have an adverse effect on the behavior of children from middle- to upper income- families.

Pre-K programs for children from highly disadvantaged families can be beneficial, however, based on this overview of current pre-K research, there is simply no advantage for the federal government to provide pre-K for children from middle- to higher- income families in any kind of universal program. To read the report, visit www.alabamapolicy.org.

Teacher-to-Teacher Workshops

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced there will be twelve Teacher-to-Teacher workshops this summer. Due to the tremendous success of previous events, the National Park Service, NASA, and the Office of Charter Schools are again hosting workshops. New partners include the Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Energy, Department of Defense Education Agency, and the US Mint.

Prominent teachers, principals, and district officials provide training sessions and share research-based practices they have successfully applied in their classrooms and schools. Reading, math,

science and history will be the content focus as well as using data, differentiating instruction, Doing What Works, and technology to support student achievement. All workshops will also provide important resources from the National Math Panel.

Since 2004 the U.S. Department of Education, through its Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative, has trained 20,000 teachers at seventy-five regional and district workshops. Attendees have included teachers and administrators from all fifty states who work in urban, suburban and rural schools. For more information, visit www.ed.gov.



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