



The "*Hot Topics in US-China Education*" is a free, monthly email service that watches for "what is hot" in K-12 US and Chinese education. This service targets educators, administrators, researchers, and parents interested in issues of excellence in education in the US and China. The articles presented in this listserv are organized according to the following five dimensions of education: 1) Teachers and Teaching, 2) Learners and Learning, 3) Leaders and Leadership, 4) Curriculum, and 5) Family and Community. Under each category, you can access the full story by clicking on the story title.

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**April, 2008**

**I. Teachers and Teaching**

**1. [Study Suggests Math Teachers Scrap Balls and Slices](#)**

*April 25, 2008 from The New York Times*

Entranced, perhaps, by those infamous hypothetical trains, many educators in recent years have incorporated more and more examples from the real world to teach abstract concepts. The idea is that making math more relevant makes it easier to learn. That idea may be wrong, if researchers at Ohio State University are correct. An experiment by the researchers suggests that it might be better to let the apples, oranges and locomotives stay in the real world and, in the classroom, to focus on

abstract equations. The motivation behind this research was to examine a very widespread belief about the teaching of mathematics, namely that teaching students multiple concrete examples will benefit learning.

2. [\*\*New York City schools burdened by substitute teachers\*\*](#)

*April 29, 2008 from New York Post*

Teachers who can't find positions after they've been cut from closing schools are becoming a huge economic burden, according to a report. Changes to the 2005 teachers' contract created nearly 700 substitutes who receive full pay. That agreement will have cost the city \$81 million by June, the New Teacher Project report said. The report also found that substitutes, known as the Absent Teacher Reserve, are less active in seeking jobs and more likely to have been rated poorly. The report calls for giving nontenured teachers in the ATR three months and tenured teachers one year before they're put on unpaid leave.

II. **Learners and Learning**

1. [\*\*130,000 people take Chinese language test worldwide last year\*\*](#)

*April 5, 2008 from [www.chinaview.cn](http://www.chinaview.cn)*

About 130,000 people from across the world took the Chinese language test in 2007, according to the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. The HSK -- Chinese level test - - had established 66 exam sites in 35 countries and regions, said Xu Lin, director of the office, at a meeting on Sunday. "We must improve our management and innovate on the Chinese language test to provide more convenient and better service to foreign learners," she said. More foreigners are showing interest in the Chinese language, numbering more than 40 million globally, along with China's steady economic development and rising international status, according to Xu. Since 2004, China has set up 226 Confucius Institutes in 66 countries and regions across the world to promote the study of Chinese language and culture.

2. [\*\*For Children, a Better Beginning\*\*](#)

*April 24, 2008 from The Washington Post*

In a wide-ranging look at how children have fared in their first decade of life, a study to be released today offers a promising picture of American childhood: Sixth-graders feel safer at school. Reading and math scores are

up for 9-year-olds. More preschoolers are vaccinated. Fewer are poisoned by lead. The analysis, which created a composite index of more than 25 key national indicators, reports an almost 10 percent boost in children's well-being from 1994 to 2006. This overall improvement comes in spite of two significant negative trends: increased rates of childhood obesity and low-birth-weight babies.

3. [\*\*Informal Style of Electronic Messages Is Showing Up in Schoolwork, Study Finds\*\*](#)

*April 25, 2008 from The New York Times*

As e-mail messages, text messages and social network postings become nearly ubiquitous in the lives of teenagers, the informality of electronic communications is seeping into their schoolwork, a new study says. Nearly two-thirds of 700 students surveyed said their e-communication style sometimes bled into school assignments, according to the study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, in partnership with the College Board's National Commission on Writing. About half said they sometimes omitted proper punctuation and capitalization in schoolwork. A quarter said they had used emoticons like smiley faces. About a third said they had used text shortcuts like "LOL" for "laugh out loud."

III. **Leaders and Leadership**

1. [\*\*China to enroll 8.2 mln secondary vocational students\*\*](#)

*April 2, 2008 from [www.chinaview.cn](http://www.chinaview.cn)*

China plans to enroll 8.2 million students for secondary vocational school education this year, Zhou Ji, the Minister of Education, said at a national meeting here on Monday. "Expanding secondary vocational education will be key for developing the country's over-all education level," said Zhou, adding it was a pressing task to increase the enrollment. He said to attract more students to secondary vocational schools, China should offer more financial support, build a better school management system and try to improve teacher training. In the past five years, China's vocational education has made good progress. In 2007, secondary vocational schools enrolled 500,000 more students than the previous year, boosting the total to 8 million.

2. [\*\*Fewer Options Open to Pay for Costs of College\*\*](#)

*April 12, 2008 from The New York Times*

Parents will have to navigate unfamiliar and difficult terrain when it comes time to pay for college this year, with student loan companies in turmoil and banks tightening their standards and raising rates on other types of borrowing. Lawmakers and the administration are trying to head off any crisis by making sure that “lenders of last resort” stand ready to take the place of companies that have left the federal loan program. And a growing number of colleges have applied to participate in the federal direct loan program, in which students borrow from the government.

3. **[Education Secretary Offers Changes to ‘No Child’ Law](#)**

*April 23, 2008 from The New York Times*

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings used her executive powers on Tuesday to propose a series of ninth-inning regulatory fixes to President Bush’s signature education law, No Child Left Behind, including requiring states to use a single federal formula to calculate and report high school graduation rates. Ms. Spellings also wants to require schools to notify parents of their right to transfer students out of failing schools two weeks before the start of each school year, and to explain more fully to parents the opportunities for federally financed tutoring that are available to students attending troubled schools.

IV. **Curriculum**

1. **[Children shown the green light in Shanghai](#)**

*April 21, 2008 from [www.chinaview.cn](http://www.chinaview.cn)*

Children from both home and abroad gained knowledge about environmental protection in Shanghai Saturday by celebrating World Earth Day, which falls on Tuesday - alas, a school day. Organized by Shanghai Zoo, the Rainbow Bridge International School and the Changning District Science and Technology Bureau, the activity had the theme "Make a Change, Keep the Balance." About 15 booths were set up in the zoo according to countries and non-governmental organizations. Each country displayed its ways of energy saving, wildlife protection and waste recycling. Games, such as painting and making leaf boats, were organized.

2. **[State Board of Education approves new grade school math standards](#)**

*April 28, 2008 from Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

Students in kindergarten through eighth grade will be held to more concrete standards when it comes to math, thanks to a revision of standards approved by the State Board of Education on Monday. The Legislature approved the revised standards earlier this year. The standards were drafted because student underachievement in math was causing alarm among educators and lawmakers. Now the revised standards are clearer, emphasize basic math facts and introduce some mathematical concepts in earlier grades.

**V. Family and Community**

**1. [China's Tsinghua Univ. to cooperate with Siemens in technology](#)**

*April 15, 2008 from [www.chinaview.cn](http://www.chinaview.cn)*

Tsinghua University signed a five-year contract here on Tuesday with the German multinational Siemens to establish a technology exchange center. The center will conduct research in rail transportation, waste water treatment, energy conservation, emission reduction, intelligent transportation systems and other fields. "Cooperation between universities and multinational companies will accelerate the speed of putting new technology into practice. The two sides can learn from each other and achieve a win-win situation," said Zhang Yaoxue, chief director of the higher learning department of Ministry of Education.

**2. [Is tech good for kids?](#)**

*April 28, 2008 from San Jose Mercury News*

Parents frequently find themselves these days considering whether to buy high-tech gadgets such as laptops, MP3 players and cell phones for their kids. But there are few guidelines to help decide what's appropriate. A big reason for lack of specific guidelines is the paucity of research on the long-term effects on children of these various technological gadgets. Researchers simply don't know whether giving kids a laptop at age 6, say, will prepare them for the new economy - or inhibit them from learning needed skills. Further complicating things is that children differ from each other in their maturity and readiness to be responsible with new technology. What's more, opinion ranges from those who preach caution to enthusiasts who rave about technology's benefits.

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