



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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February, 2007

I. Teachers and Teaching

1. [Commission urges tracking of teacher progress](#)

Wednesday, February 14, 2007, from cnn.com

A special commission reported an updated No Child Left Behind law should track the progress of teachers as well as students. The private commission said schools should be required to measure how well teachers are doing at raising student test scores -- one of 75 recommendations in a report meant to guide Congress as it prepares to rewrite the 5-year-old law this year. The idea came under immediate attack from the nation's largest teachers union. Teachers should be evaluated annually based on progress in the test scores of their students, the panel said. Reviews by colleagues or school principals also would be part of the equation for determining teacher quality. If a teacher has trouble showing student progress or getting good reviews after two years, that teacher would begin to get professional development. If that doesn't lead to a turnaround, after seven

years the teacher would be prevented from teaching in a school that receives federal poverty aid. The current law, which requires testing in reading and math in grades three through eight and once in high school, does not measure the effectiveness of individual teachers. It does require teachers to be certified, have a bachelor's degree and knowledge of their subjects, and pass subject matter tests in endorsement areas. The report also recommends closing a loophole under the law that has allowed states to set aside the scores of specific groups of students. States have a lot of flexibility in determining how large those set-aside scores should be, and an Associated Press review last year found that nearly 2 million students were not being counted when schools reported yearly progress by racial groups.

2. [Overemphasizing English learning started to haunt China](#)

Saturday, February 3, 2007, from [Chinanews.cn](#)

Xu Jialu, the famous linguist, calls for the general public's attention to the Chinese language leaning. "The Chinese language and characters are the marks of the Chinese people, thus we should pay attention to general public's Chinese literacy," said Xu. According to a research by the General Administration of Press and Publications, mistakes can be found in nearly all the Chinese dictionaries in the market, not to mention other books. Even most well-educated Chinese can't write or speak correct Chinese language nowadays. "Which is more important to us, English or Chinese?" asked Xu. Obviously, China is suffering from neglect of Chinese learning, and overemphasizing English learning.

II. Learners and Learning

1. [Researchers: Math anxiety saps working memory needed to do math](#)

Tuesday, February 20, 2007 from [cnn.com](#)

Worrying about how you'll perform on a math test may actually contribute to a lower test score, U.S. researchers said on Saturday. Math anxiety -- feelings of dread and fear and avoiding math -- can sap the brain's limited amount of working capacity, a resource needed to compute difficult math problems, said Mark Ashcroft, a psychologist at the University of Nevada Las Vegas who studies the problem. "It turns out that math anxiety occupies a person's working memory," said Ashcroft, who spoke on a panel at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in San Francisco. Ashcroft said while easy math tasks such as addition require only a small fraction of a person's working memory, harder computations require much more. Worrying about math takes up a large chunk of a person's working memory stores as well, spelling disaster for the anxious student who is taking a high-stakes test. Stress about how one does on tests like college entrance exams can make even good math students choke. "All of a sudden they start looking for the short cuts," said University of Chicago researcher Sian Beilock. Although test preparation classes can help students overcome this anxiety, they are limited to students whose families can afford them. Ultimately, she said, "It may not be wise to rely completely on scores to predict who will succeed." While the causes

of math anxiety are unknown, Ashcroft said people who manage to overcome math anxiety have completely normal math proficiency.

2. [Students take tests without proctors](#)

Tuesday, February 6, 2007, from Xinhua Net

No proctor in an examination hall! It may sound unlikely at a time when students are finding new ways and using more sophisticated tools to cheat and the number of such cases is rising. But No. 30 Middle School in Xi'an proved students were essentially honest by making 55 of them take their exams without a single proctor in the hall on Saturday. If the trial is a success, the 1,000-odd students will follow their 55 schoolmates. The 55 students voluntarily signed an agreement, saying they would not cheat, before being allowed to take the exam without a proctor. Exams without proctors were first held in junior and senior middle schools, colleges and universities of Henan, Hubei and Jiangsu provinces, from June last year to January, to instill a sense of moral responsibility in students. The move came amid widespread reports of students using more secretive methods and modern gadgets to cheat in exams, especially in national English-level and post-graduate admission tests.

III. Leaders and Leadership

1. Utah lawmakers OK vouchers for all public school kids

Monday, February 12, 2007 from [cnn.com](#)

A divided Utah Legislature approved one of the nation's broadest voucher programs on Friday February 9th, allotting up to \$3,000 for any public school student to put toward private school tuition. Voucher programs in the handful of other states that have them generally are aimed at poor families or students attending schools that have poor academic records. There will be no such restrictions in Utah, which has the largest class sizes in the country and until now has spent less per student than any other state. The Senate approved the bill 19-10 on Friday, a week after the House endorsed it by a single vote, 38-37. Both chambers are controlled by Republicans. Gov. Jon Huntsman, a Republican whose children attend public schools, has said he will sign the bill into law. The vouchers will be open to any of Utah's 512,000 public school students. The amount will depend on family income, but even affluent families would be eligible for at least \$500 per child. Students already in private schools would not be eligible. The plan, which goes into effect this fall, is expected to cost \$9.3 million in its first year and \$327 million over 12 years. Utah has a \$1.6 billion budget surplus. Public schools that lose enrollment will still receive a portion of state funding for five years after each student departs.

2. [China-Africa educational cooperation fruitful](#)

Sunday, February 4, 2007, from Xinhua Net

Chinese President Hu Jintao, who is on an eight-country African tour, has said that cooperation between China and Cameroon and Liberia in education has been fruitful during his meetings with the leaders of the two African countries. In 50 years, China has forged cooperative relations in education with 50 African countries. This cooperation has expanded from an initial simple exchange of students to the current multi-level educational cooperation, covering various fields and taking many different forms, according to Li Baoping, secretary-general of China's African History Academy. Li said in an academic article that from 1956 to 2006, 18,000 African youths got the Chinese government's sponsorship to study in China. From 1956 to the end of 2003, China sent 523 teachers to 35 African countries, who gave courses in more than 10 subjects and specialized fields, which included science, engineering, agriculture, arts and physical training, in order to help African countries develop the weaker disciplines, train technological talents, and develop middle school and university education. From 1995 to 2003, China administered 43 sessions of the "Advanced Education and Scientific Research Program" in 21 African countries, and under the program, 21 comparatively advanced laboratories in biology, micro-biology, computer science, physics, analytical chemistry, food refreshment and processing were set up in universities in those countries.

IV. Curriculum

1. Virginia schools criticize No Child Left Behind rule for English learners

Monday, February 19, 2007, from cnn.com

Officials in some high-immigrant school districts are threatening to defy a federal law that requires all children to take the same reading tests, even those struggling to learn English. This month, the U.S. Department of Education threatened sanctions against Virginia -- including the possibility of withholding funds -- if the state doesn't enforce the provision, which is part of the No Child Left Behind law. The Virginia Department of Education had sought an exemption for another year, contending that the rule is unfair. Immigrants who have been in the U.S. a short time "are simply unable to take a test written in English and produce results that are meaningful in any way," said Donald J. Ford, superintendent of the Harrisonburg city school division. The federal government denied the state's request, saying Virginia has known about the act's guidelines for some time and have had time to prod schools into compliance. The five-year-old federal law is scheduled to be rewritten this year, and lawmakers have said they will try to change the rules for recent immigrants and special-education students. The aim is to inject more common sense into the law while sticking with its promise to leave no child behind his or her peers. The issue is part of a larger debate over the law, which seeks to have all students, regardless of race, poverty or disability, proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014.

2. [Chinese pupils shine in English exam system](#)

Saturday, February 17, 2007, from China Daily

Children of Chinese origin are the best-performing ethnic group in England's education system, government statistics have shown. In last year's national curriculum tests at age 11, 86 percent -- including recent immigrants whose first language is not English -- reached the required standard, compared to 80 percent of white children. The Department for Education and Skills' breakdown also showed pupils of Indian origin also outperformed their white British counterparts. The Independent newspaper said family culture in Chinese and Indian homes, with its greater emphasis on the importance of education, was a reason for the results.

V. Family and Community

1. [Shanghai schools axe study hours](#)

Wednesday, February 28, 2007 from Xinhua Net

Shanghai's primary and secondary schools began to reduce class hours and introduce more exercise when the new semester started on Monday, hoping that students will get more sleep and improve their health. Some schools in Shanghai's Hongkou District axed a morning study session and advanced the time students are expected to arrive at school from 7:30 to 8:00. Morning classes will begin at 8:20, 10 minutes later than last semester. Chinese schools are famous for their intense and long days which have led to a decline in the health of young students. A study completed by China Youth and Children Research Center in 2005, showed more than two thirds of the primary and secondary schools students were not getting enough sleep and 20 percent of them slept poorly. The survey contacted 2,500 students in six major cities including Beijing and Shanghai. In Shanghai, the rate of obesity among students is higher than the national average and the city has the highest percentage of students with bad eyesight, according to a recent Shanghai Education Commission report. This year the commission is requiring all primary and secondary schools to ensure students have at least an hour of sports a day.

2. [Length of school day under review across nation, in Congress](#)

Saturday, February 25, 2007, from [cnn.com](#)

While Massachusetts is leading in putting in place the longer-day model, lawmakers in Minnesota, New Mexico, New York and Washington, D.C., also have debated whether to lengthen the school day or year. In addition, individual districts such as Miami-Dade in Florida are experimenting with added hours in some schools. On average, U.S. students go to school 6.5 hours a day, 180 days a year, fewer than in many other industrialized countries, according to a report by the Education Sector, a Washington-based think tank. One model that traditional public schools are looking to is the Knowledge is Power Program, which oversees public charter schools nationwide. Those schools typically serve low-income middle-school students, and their test scores show success. Students generally go from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the week and for a few hours every other Saturday. They also go to school for several weeks in the summer. That amounts to at least 50 percent more instructional time for students in such programs than in traditional public schools, according to the report. The extended-day schedule costs on average

about \$1,200 extra per student, program spokesman Stephen Mancini said. Massachusetts is spending about \$1,300 per student extra on its extended-day effort. Most of the extra cost goes into added pay for teachers. At Fletcher-Maynard, senior teachers can make up to \$20,000 more per year for the extended hours. Not all of the school's teachers have opted to work longer hours. An important impetus for the debate around extending school hours is the federal No Child Left Behind law. The five-year-old law requires annual testing in reading and math for grades three through eight, and again in high school. All students are expected to be working on grade level by 2014. Schools that fail to meet annual benchmarks are labeled as needing improvement and have to take steps to address the problem.

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