



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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March, 2008

I. Teachers and Teaching

1. [The Professor as Open Book](#)

March 20, 2008 from The New York Times

When scholars were recently given the chance to refute student criticism posted on the Web site RateMyProfessors.com, a cult-hit television series, "Professors Strike Back," was born. The show, which has professors responding on camera to undergraduate gripes such as "boring beyond belief," made its debut in October on mtvU, a 24-hour network broadcast to more than 7.5 million students on American college campuses. There was a time when professors did not outrank music premieres on television.

They were buttoned-up authority figures, like the legendary fictional Professor Kingsfield, portrayed by John Houseman in "The Paper Chase." The personal lives of professors could only be imagined from the sparse clues of clothing, handwriting and the contents of offices.

2. **[China's college teachers to be graded on results](#)**

March 6, 2008 from www.chinaview.cn

A new rating system will soon be introduced in China to grade college teachers based on their teaching and research performance, replacing the long-standing practice of seniority-based titles at universities, according to a government notice. Jointly issued by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Personnel, the notice said college teaching staff would be graded according to 13 additional levels, besides the present four positional titles of professor, associate professor, lecturer and teaching assistant, China Daily reported Thursday. The different levels mean different income and treatment. The new rating system will guarantee professors and lecturers treatment in accordance with their achievements. Moreover, schools can also try to set up teaching-oriented and research-oriented posts under a reward system that better reflects the different contributions made by teachers with the same title, the notice said. The present positional title system for university professors offers life tenure with the same titles enjoying the same treatment. Consequently, a teacher's income does not reflect different teaching and research contributions.

II. **Learners and Learning**

1. **[Next Question: Can Students Be Paid to Excel?](#)**

March 5, 2008 from *The New York Times*

School districts nationwide have seized on the idea that a key to improving schools is to pay for performance, whether through bonuses for teachers and principals, or rewards like cash prizes for students. New York City, with the largest public school system in the country, is in the forefront of this movement, with more than 200 schools experimenting with one incentive or another. In more than a dozen schools, students, teachers and principals are all eligible for extra money, based on students' performance on standardized tests. Each of these schools has become a test to measure whether, as Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg posits, tangible cash rewards can turn a school around. Can money make academic success cool for students disdainful of achievement? Will teachers

pressure one another to do better to get a school wide bonus? So far, the city has handed out more than \$500,000 to 5,237 students in 58 schools as rewards for taking several of the 10 standardized tests on the schedule for this school year. The schools, which had to choose to participate in the program, are all over the city.

2. [Passing Eighth Grade Gets a Little Harder](#)

March 18, 2008 from The New York Times

The city's stricter policy would require next year's eighth graders to pass classes in core subject areas and to score at a basic level on standardized English and math exams. The Bloomberg administration won approval for a new eighth-grade promotion policy last night at a meeting repeatedly interrupted by the chanting and heckling of parents who contend that the policy amounts to blaming students for the failings of the city's middle schools. But the eighth-grade policy has once again hit a nerve. One of the key criticisms of grade retention policies is that they demoralize students to the point that they may be more likely to drop out. Some parents say this could be a particularly acute problem for eighth graders who are told they cannot advance to high school.

3. [China's "prodigy program" to mark 30th anniversary](#)

March 18, 2008 from www.chinaview.cn

China's first program for gifted youngsters is to celebrate its 30th birthday on Friday in east China's Anhui Province. The prodigy program, or the "Juvenile Class", was set up at the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) in 1978 at the suggestion of Yang Chen-ning and Lee Tsung-dao, two Nobel laureates in physics. It was specially set up to train talented children as quickly as possible and shorten the period needed to produce top-class scientists. Students in the program skipped years of primary and secondary school to enter college early -- mostly under 15 with the youngest being 11. Most of the children in the program had continued to succeed academically and professionally.

III. **Leaders and Leadership**

1. [U.S. Eases 'No Child' Law as Applied to Some States](#)

March 19, 2008 from The New York Times

The Bush administration, acknowledging that the federal No Child Left Behind law is diagnosing too many public schools as failing, said Tuesday that it would relax the law's provisions for some states, allowing them to

distinguish schools with a few problems from those that need major surgery. Under the new program, the federal Department of Education will give up to 10 states permission to focus reform efforts on schools that are drastically underperforming and intervene less forcefully in schools that are raising the test scores of most students but struggling with one group, like the disabled, for instance.

2. **[Ministry denies reports on China's compulsory education scheme](#)**

March 10, 2006 from www.chinaview.cn

China's Ministry of Education has moved to deny widely published media reports that the country's compulsory education scheme would be extended from nine to 13 years. Compulsory education would remain at nine years, said a statement on the ministry's official website. China was still a developing country and the primary task was to consolidate nine-year compulsory education and improve education quality, said the ministry statement. The extension of compulsory education was not in line with China's economic conditions. China's Education Law stipulated all citizens were to receive nine years of compulsory full-time education -- six years of primary school and three of middle school. The government promises free nine-year compulsory education for 150 million rural children, and the policy is to benefit urban children this autumn.

3. **[Schools change class ring to "therapeutic"](#)**

March 31, 2008 from www.chinaview.cn

The "call to the classroom" - a chime, a bell, a buzzer - it may energize some. But among many, the sound, in whatever form it takes, evokes a sense of dread as it signals an end to playtime. A middle school in Shashi city, in central China's Hubei Province has replaced its old monotone with sounds intended to be "therapeutic." Students at the school in Shashi are the beneficiaries of some research undertaken by the school. The old monotone call-to-class has been replaced with music. Administrators believe the new arrangement will serve as therapy, helping to ease the students' minds and relax their bodies. Students say they feel a sense of calm when the music plays. And the music becomes a catalyst for inspiring enlivening images in their minds. The teacher in charge of the project says the standard, sonorous ring, evoked feelings of ennui and entrapment among students. The light music that students hear now, extends a sense of coziness all across the campus. There's another benefit too. Students will learn music appreciation, by listening to world famous music everyday.

IV. Curriculum

1. [Report Urges Changes in Teaching Math](#)

March 14, 2008 from The New York Times

American students' math achievement is "at a mediocre level" compared with that of their peers worldwide, according to a new report by a federal panel, which recommended that schools focus on key skills that prepare students to learn algebra. The report, adopted unanimously by the panel on Thursday and presented to Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, said that prekindergarten-to-eighth-grade math curriculums should be streamlined and put focused attention on skills like the handling of whole numbers and fractions and certain aspects of geometry and measurement.

2. [Foreign language courses in China draw 50 million](#)

March 31, 2008 from www.chinaview.cn

China has nearly 50 million people who are learning foreign languages at schools and language institutes, an official of the Ministry of Education (MOE) said. Colleges offer courses in more than 60 foreign languages, Dai Weidong, professor with the MOE advisory board for foreign language teaching, told an international symposium that concluded over the weekend. More than 900 colleges offer an English major, he said, and of those, more than 600 can confer a bachelor's degree and more than 200 can confer master's degrees. There are more than 800,000 students majoring in English in China. The number of people taking the English proficiency test, the Test for English Majors (TEM), had risen by 10 percent annually since 2004, he said. TEM tests are conducted by the MOE advisory board for foreign language teaching and are considered the highest-level English tests in China.

V. Family and Community

1. [U.S. Universities Join Saudis in Partnerships](#)

March 6, 2008 from The New York Times

Three prominent American universities — the University of Texas at Austin, the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University — are starting five-year partnerships, worth \$25 million or more, with King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, a graduate-level research university being built in Saudi Arabia. Under the agreements, the mechanical engineering department at Berkeley, the computer-science department and Institute for Computational and Mathematical Engineering at Stanford, and the Institute for Computational Engineering

and Sciences at the University of Texas will help pick the faculty and develop the curriculum for the new university, known by the acronym Kaust, which is scheduled to open next year with a \$10 billion endowment. Over the five years, each university will receive a \$10 million gift, \$10 million for research on their home campus and \$5 million for research at Kaust, as well as administrative costs.

2. [China earmarks more food subsidies to college students to offset rising inflation](#)

March 12, 2008 from www.chinaview.cn

China on Wednesday allocated more funds to college students as a temporary food subsidy to offset the burden of rising inflation. According to the ministries of education and finance, the money will be given out "as soon as possible" to students from financially vulnerable homes. Several days earlier, the two ministries had channeled a subsidy of 189.28 million yuan to students of universities managed by the central government. The size was calculated by 20 yuan per person during each of the four months from March to June. Local governments had also been directed to allocate subsidies to colleges they manage in accordance with the same criteria. With the move, all college students across the country will get at least 20 yuan each month during the period, with about 20 percent of them from financially vulnerable families receiving 40 yuan, said an education ministry spokesman.

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Hot Topics is produced by the US-China Center for Research on Educational Excellence which is funded by the Sun Wah Education Foundation.