IDEAS for Education

Student Voting in School Board Elections
Policy of the Year Nominee
10 Ideas for Education
2013

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10 IDEAS FOR EDUCATION
Congratulations to Tatiana Eldore, author of Civics in Context: Student Voting in School Board Elections

Nominee for Policy of the Year
You will see pieces scattered throughout this document that connect directly to the Government By and For Millennial America project, the recent initiative from the Campus Network that projects the values of this generation onto the systems of American government, and seeks to imagine and then build an ideal version of what our government can - and must - be. Marked by this logo,

these pieces represent the sort of ideas that fit within the structure our Millennial vision for government. They are focused and specific plans for change that can make government more innovative, more engaging, and more democratic.

To learn more about the Government By and For project, please visit our website www.rooseveltcampusnetwork.org.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restructuring Public School Funding in North Carolina</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ioan Bolohan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing Discipline in American Schools</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katy Bullard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics in Context: Student Voting in School Board Elections</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiana Eldore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speedy and Standardized Licensing: The Incentive to Innovate</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake Falk &amp; Rangoli Bhattacharjee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Second Wave: Extended-Day Enrichment Programs for Low-Income Schools</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayley Heller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Legal Education: Making Afterschool Programs Relevant</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Lapaix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Ethnic Studies Programs into South Bronx High Schools</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Martinez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Rural Education by Relieving Student Loans</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith Morrison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded Access to Tutoring to Improve Academic Performance</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Selbach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “2-2-2” Program: Improving Dual Enrollment in Virginia</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhinav Tyagarajan et al</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network was established in 2004 in response to the deep and pervasive sense that young people were overlooked in the policymaking process – that we could put boots on the ground and donate what little money we had to support leaders that promoted our progressive values, but our ideas, opinions, and priorities were not represented in our public discourse or electoral system. It was this realization and subsequent rejection of the status quo that led to the founding of what is now the nation’s largest student policy organization.

That original purpose has endured as the Campus Network has grown to over 100 chapters. Yet at a recent gathering, one of our top leaders noted that the challenges we face in the wake of the 2012 election are similar to the ones that first brought us together. We are increasingly powerful actors in our public debates, but despite the bold ideas and ambitious agendas we’ve envisioned, designed, supported, and fought for, we are still beholden to a political process more focused on scoring partisan points than moving our country forward.

What emerged from that moment of collective reflection was the recognition of our unrealized potential as a movement. While our members’ student-generated ideas and solutions-oriented action have redefined youth participation in the political process, it will take constant renewal and commitment to fresh ideas, rigorous engagement, and long-term action to achieve what we know is possible.

The 2013 10 Ideas series represents that ongoing effort to build the infrastructure, communities, and platforms that will allow us to realize the vision that was first laid out in dorm rooms across the country eight years ago. This year, our premier journals represent unique ideas from 83 authors at 30 different schools. As they go to press, our members are already translating those ideas into action by initiating petitions, collaborating with local partners and stakeholders, and lobbying on Capitol Hill.

Last year, we proudly presented the 10 Ideas series as a powerful reminder that this generation is not only willing to build a better future, but has already begun. This year, we put these solutions forward to demonstrate that members of this generation are in it for the long haul as part of an initiative that is always growing, always evolving, and always looking toward the future in the pursuit of progress.

Taylor Jo Isenberg
National Director
Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network
We are pleased to share the fifth edition of the Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network’s flagship 10 Ideas series. These journals, encompassing the best student ideas from our six policy centers, are filled with game-changing public policy suggestions that we can and must implement now.

We are in desperate need of these ideas. Rising healthcare costs, increasing inequality, global climate change, and a government that often seems unable or unwilling to address the things that matter most are challenges that require the very best and the very brightest.

At the same time, we are told that Millennials are checked out, have lost interest, and are waiting for someone else to solve our problems. These journals are an answer to that narrative, making the clear case that we are engaged and active citizens, putting forward ideas to change the problems we see in the world around us. We believe in the power of people working together to solve problems.

Each year, the 10 Ideas journals provide a vision for change that addresses the needs of our neighborhoods, our cities, and our country. Working with community members, local nonprofits, professors, and lawmakers, these student authors have identified the policies that can make the most difference. Yet this journal represents just the tip of the iceberg, with many hours of organizing, researching, fundraising, and developing public campaigns hidden below the surface.

This year’s Education journal reveals both the problems with our current education system and Millennial ideals for what education could be. Students seek to improve educational opportunities in underserved communities through afterschool programs, teacher training, and cultural engagement. Other pieces look to education as an opportunity to engage students in our democratic process, connecting the system back to the need for well-rounded citizens in any democracy.

Taken on its own, each idea is a simple solution. These journals and the 10 Ideas series taken together are a library of ideas that can help us build toward a more equal, accessible, and community-minded world.

Join us in seeing these ideas realized.

Alan Smith                                    Lydia Bowers
Program and Policy Director                        Deputy Program and Policy Director
Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network               Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network
Restructuring Public School Funding in North Carolina

Ioan Bolohan - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

To ensure that adequate funding is available to all schools in the state, North Carolina should shift from a flat grant appropriations approach to the foundation funding model.

Despite its importance, there is no standard for school system financing in the United States and several models are in effect throughout the country. North Carolina’s flat grant funding structure provides state aid for some of its school systems’ basic costs but leaves much of the additional financing burden on local populations, relying on district property taxes to support education. Geographic socioeconomic differences lead to inequalities in the resources available to schools, resulting in inadequate funding and disparities in educational opportunities for students. This poses significant obstacles for low-income districts.

Instead of using flat grants, North Carolina should implement the foundation finance model and join the 38 states already employing this funding structure. This approach defines the cost of educating each student in the state and sets a minimum tax rate for supporting schools in all districts. Local tax revenue is then combined with adjusted state contributions to meet the foundation spending level for each student, ensuring sufficient funds to establish quality schools. States employing this system, such as Texas, Ohio, and Massachusetts, have less inequality among districts, smaller achievement gaps, and higher test scores.

Analysis

Foundation funding would have varied implications for local districts. Currently, North Carolina’s state government contributes about $5,162 for every student—roughly 62 percent of the average per pupil expenditure in the state—leaving 22 percent to be paid by districts on average. By mandating a minimum local tax rate, wealthier school systems—those collecting more than the foundation amount through minimal taxation—that receive financial aid under the flat grant structure would stop benefitting from state support, freeing funds for use in low-income districts incapable of generating sufficient revenue to finance education. This makes state allocations more efficient and, at the 2010 level of spending per student, the shift to the foundation system leads to a projected savings of about 5 percent, or $420 per pupil, and over $592 million in total. Foundation funding also addresses the needs of school systems by accounting for local capacity, based on the total value of taxable property, and effort, measured by additional edu-

Key Facts

• North Carolina had a per pupil expenditure of $8,451 in 2009-2010, 20 percent below the national average.
• Among districts in North Carolina, inequality in school financing, as measured by standard deviation in funding, was 8.4 percent in 2010 compared to about 4 percent for states using foundation funding systems.
• According to 8th grade test scores, nine of the ten states with the smallest achievement gaps use foundation funding systems.
cation taxes. This allows districts to set tax rates above the minimum requirement and use the resulting extra funding to augment the foundation amount for higher spending levels.  

**Next Steps**

Before reforms can be instituted, officials must project each district’s potential for meeting local tax requirements as well as the sustainability of such measures. Current supplemental funding for specific educational initiatives such as English as a second language, academically gifted, and special needs programs should be maintained, and a gradual reduction in flat grants must take place to ease school districts into the foundation funding system. Over time, the foundation level can be raised until a balance in spending per student is reached between state and local governments and each district has established a tax rate equilibrium designed to support desired per pupil expenditures at the local level. Additionally, legislation should include mechanisms tied to inflation to adjust the foundation amount and allow for continued support at the level required to provide quality education to students across the state. Measures of district finance equality should also be used to ensure effective implementation. Together, these steps allow for increased education spending, reduced inequalities between districts, and overall bolstered scholastic achievement for North Carolina’s schools.

**Endnotes**

Reframing Discipline in American Schools
Katy Bullard, Tufts University

Congress should ban corporal punishment in schools in favor of nonviolent alternatives.

In schools, corporal punishment often takes the form of beating and paddling as punishment for both minor infractions (such as chewing gum, tardiness, and dress code violations) and more serious behavior (such as fighting). The Eighth Amendment protects inmates from violence in prisons. American students, however, are not afforded the same protection. In Ingraham v. Wright (1977), the Supreme Court ruled that neither the cruel and unusual punishment clause nor the right to due process should be applied to corporal punishment in public schools, and corporal punishment remains legal in 19 American states. The American school system is at a critical juncture, as school violence and academic underachievement threaten the wellbeing and competitiveness of American students. A nation-wide ban on corporal punishment is necessary for our students’ success.

Analysis

While intended to improve student behavior, corporal punishment instead humiliates students and teaches violence as an acceptable way to solve problems. Thus, school corporal punishment leads to higher rates of school violence, domestic violence, and incarceration. It also weakens students’ academic engagement and attendance. As former Assistant Surgeon General Dr. Daniel F. Whiteside explained, “corporal punishment of children actually interferes with the process of learning and with their optimal development as socially responsible adults.” Nonviolent practices – including mediation, peer courts, clearer expectations for behavior, and restorative practices – have been successfully implemented in American schools of various demographics. Two years after implementing peer courts, suspensions at Davidson Middle School in California dropped by more than 90 percent. Requiring teacher training in positive disciplinary practices as part of the accreditation process for education schools would cost little for state and federal governments. Training in restorative practices for current teachers and school administrators could also be incorporated into professional development with minimal cost. Currently, schools may be sued for students’ physical injuries, and the medical treatment sought by tens of thousands of students annually incurs additional costs. Additionally, the costs of lost economic productivity from dropouts are enormous, costing $8 billion annually in public services. Training in nonviolent disciplinary practices would improve attendance and school achievement, lessening these costs.

Key Facts
- In the 2006-2007 school year, at least 223,190 American students received physical punishment; accounting for unreported incidents, this number could be as high as three million. The same year, 10,000-20,000 students sought treatment for injuries resulting from punishment at school.
- The Society for Adolescent Medicine found severe medical dangers associated with corporal punishment, including whiplash, hemorrhaging, and blood clotting.
- Corporal punishment in schools results in reduced school achievement, greater absenteeism, and higher dropout rates.
Next Steps
School violence and academic underachievement cannot be tackled as long as students’ fundamental dignity and safety remain at risk. Congress should move immediately to ban school corporal punishment. All new teachers should be required to undergo training in positive disciplinary practices as part of the certification process. Accreditation for education schools should require training in positive discipline. Accredited schools should demonstrate to the Departments of Education and Justice that training in positive discipline has been incorporated into their programs no later than July 2014. Alternative certification and teacher entry programs should incorporate these trainings by July 2016.

Federal and state-level departments of education, justice, and health should fund these training programs for existing teachers and school officials together. Pediatric, psychological, and education specialists should be engaged in the design and implementation of training programs, modeled after successful programs in City Springs Elementary/Middle School (Baltimore, MD), Christian Fenger Academy High School (Chicago, IL), and Davidson Middle School (San Rafael, CA), among others. Experts may be drawn from such organizations as the Center for Effective Discipline and the International Institute for Restorative Practices.

Endnotes
5. Ibid 1, 2
6. Ibid 4
7. Ibid 2.
8. Ibid 1.
12. Ibid 1, 10.
13. Ibid 1
14. Ibid 1
15. Ibid 2.
16. Ibid 1
17. Ibid 2.
18. Ibid 1, 4
19. Ibid 1, 2, 4, 11
**Civics in Context: Student Voting in School Board Elections**

**Tatiana Eldore - Mount Holyoke College**

Washington State should promote youth civic engagement and increase the accountability of lawmakers by permitting students 16 and older to vote in local school board elections.

Students across Washington State learn according to decisions made by publicly elected school board members, yet a majority of students have no control in the selection process. Board members develop policies that influence everything from budgets to lunch menus, but despite this significant decision making influence on student life, only students 18 years and older can vote to choose their leaders. In response, the late State Senator Scott White introduced SB 5621 in 2011, which proposed that students 14 years and older should be able to vote in “school board elections for the district in which they are enrolled and in good standing.” While the bill is retained as of 2012, it lacks a sponsor, and its chances of passing are low.

States may determine minimum voting ages for non-federal elections. Therefore, Washington should set its voting age at 16 for state school board elections. The Washington Student Achievement Council, which issues statewide graduation requirements, mandates three years of social studies, ensuring that students will be prepared to make educated voting decisions. Voter registration forms in Washington require verification either with the last four digits of the registrant’s Social Security number or a valid driver’s license number, so combining registration with licensure at Driver’s Licensing Offices (DLOs) would simplify voter registration and make it easily accessible.

**Analysis**

Costs associated with creating and distributing a separate ballot would be contained. Running polling center elections in Pierce County in 2009 cost approximately $25 per voter in the primary election and $4.27 in the general election—figures that were, according to the Secretary of State, “much higher than the vote by mail average.” Washington switched to a universal vote by mail system in 2011, and no cost comparison data yet exists. However, costs in Oregon, the only other universal vote by mail state, decreased from $3.07 to $2.21 per voter in the six years after the last polling center elections.

When given the opportunity, young people will vote. In the 2008 general election, 84 percent of registered youth ages 18-29 voted. Data suggests that one-time voters are more likely to vote in future elections, implying that voting may be habit-forming.
tering student participation in the democratic process at a young age will further ensure that youth political engagement remains strong in Washington for decades to come.

Empowering student voices in school board elections will also increase board member responsiveness. While many school boards, including those of three largest districts of Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane, have created advisory programs composed of students to gain input on their concerns, boards are not required to implement or even consider student ideas. Allowing students to vote would encourage these officials to listen more closely to these young constituents, creating policies in line with the opinions of those directly affected.

On a practical level, Washington should create two ballots – one with complete election material and one with only school board election material – and check ballot distribution against birthdates of registered voters. Since Washington votes by mail, student voters are unlikely to accidently receive full ballots.

**Next Steps**

Washington policymakers should pass an amended SB 5621 to adjust the school board voting age to 16 and then create an amendment to the state constitution stating this provision.

**Endnotes**

15. Ibid., Oregon v. Mitchell.
Speedy and Standardized Licensing: The Incentive to Innovate
Blake Falk & Rangoli Bhattacharjee
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill

American research universities should implement standardized, express licensing agreements specific to their campuses and provide researchers with greater autonomy in choosing licensing agents.

Universities have long been hubs of innovation in the fields of science and technology due to their research and human capital resources. For example, Stanford filed for more than 300 patents in 2003, and approximately 150 MIT-based companies are founded each year.1 This symbiotic relationship between universities and innovation was recognized and reinforced in the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980. The act allowed universities to claim title to inventions resulting from federally funded research, which incentivized universities to encourage inventors within the system to bring their product to market.2

Despite the initial success of the Bayh-Dole Act in fostering commercialization, the current inefficient negotiation of licensing agreements stifles innovation. Each invention is handled on a non-standardized, case-by-case basis, resulting in a prolonged negotiation process that significantly delays commercialization and ultimately deters inventors from the outset.3

Analysis
At most universities, licensing can take upward of several months.4 Each inventor must negotiate royalty rates, mergers, initial public offerings (IPOs), asset sales, and stock sales with the university on a case-by-case basis. However, an express licensing agreement such as the one implemented in 2009 at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) addresses the Bayh-Dole Act’s failure to create a speedy negotiation process. The express licensing agreement outlines pre-negotiated terms and sets standardized royalty rates for the products.5 One successful example is that of Synereca, which completed the negotiation and legal processes and received its license in less than one business week under the UNC-CH model.6 By significantly shortening the time and resources needed for commercialization, the UNC-CH express license would ultimately address a failure in the universities’ implementation of the Bayh-Dole Act.

Next Steps
Like the UNC-CH model, a predetermined and standardized licensing agreement would be implemented by the technology transfer offices. Expansion of the model could be-

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Key Facts
- The average commercialization process requires multiple steps and involves disclosing the invention, record keeping and management, patent prosecution, negotiation and drafting licensing agreements, and managing licenses.7
- Under current policies, licensing can take several months to negotiate and execute.8
- UNC-CH’s Express Licensing Agreement can issue a license in as little as one business week.9
gin with innovation hubs such as Southern California and Boston. Given the diverse research cultures at each university, each would host a panel of entrepreneurs, university researchers, and legal representatives that would assist in drafting the agreement on a university-by-university basis. The licensing process would be evaluated periodically to remain current with university and industry standards. Also, the offices of technology transfers would have resources to facilitate, but not force, contracts between licensing agents and the researchers. Lastly, an evaluation protocol would be put in place, led by the offices of technology transfer, which would monitor the progress of the start-ups and projects.

**ENDNOTES**

6. Ibid 5
8. Ibid 4
9. Ibid 5

**TALKING POINTS**

- Under most university protocols, each invention is handled on a case-by-case basis, resulting in a prolonged negotiation process that delays commercialization and deters inventors from the outset.
- Under the UNC-CH model, faculty members would be allowed to choose their own licensing agents instead of relying on the universities. An “express licensing agreement” would outline the obligations of the faculty members and outline set royalty rates on the products.
A recent study found that the achievement gap between high- and low-income students has increased by about 40 percent since the 1960s.\(^1\) This widening gap is a threat to the American values of opportunity, mobility, and equality. Further, most low-income households lack the educational and financial resources to support their children’s education through homework help and extracurricular activities.\(^2\) Thus, New York City should fund extended-day programming at low-income schools to provide students with access to homework help and enrichment activities.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 addresses the widening income achievement gap by creating accountability mandates. Under NCLB, students take standardized exams and schools are held accountable for the results through threats of reduced funding. NCLB’s mandates led some schools, especially low-income schools, to eliminate recess or enrichment programs in favor of additional classroom time.\(^3,4,5\)

Much of the income achievement gap is driven by the fact that lower-income households generally have lower levels of education and fewer financial resources than affluent households. Parents with lower educational attainment often find it more difficult to help their children with homework, which is significant given the 50 percent increase in homework among elementary school students from 1980 to 2000.\(^6\) Additionally, fewer financial resources means that lower-income households invest less in extracurricular activities. Extended-day programming at low-income schools would help overcome these obstacles by providing such opportunities.

**Analysis**

A recent study found that students who participated in afterschool programs had more positive attitudes toward school, higher educational aspirations, better attendance rates, fewer disciplinary issues, lower dropout rates, and greater levels of engagement.\(^7\) For example, 80 percent of students surveyed at New York City’s Beacon Community Center felt they finished their homework more often and 75 percent reported better grades in school because of the center’s afterschool program.\(^8,9\) Also, research shows that 46 percent of students not currently enrolled in NYC’s afterschool programs would likely participate if there were programs in their community.\(^10\)
Apart from academics and social skills, afterschool programming helps quell juvenile delinquency by keeping students supervised for a longer period of time. Supervised programs keep students off the streets and reduce their potential for drug use.

**Next Steps**
The NYC Department of Education should fund extended-day enrichment programming in low-income schools. The goals of extended-day programs should be to offer enrichment activities and educational services to complement students’ academic learning. These programs should provide access to extracurricular activities, such as math clubs, sports, chess, tutoring, and photography. Specifically, the programming should emphasize homework help, art, and music programs that schools may have reduced or eliminated.

To fund and staff these programs, NYC should encourage partnerships between the programs, local universities, and community organizations. For example, college students could become involved through student teaching, internships, and mentoring. Additionally, national mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, could provide staff and training on how to create a friendly and well-supervised afterschool environment.

**Endnotes**


A citizen’s lack of knowledge of a law does not excuse his or her liability for breaking the law. This is the legal principle of ignorantia juris non excusat, Latin for “ignorance is no excuse.” However, the United States lacks a comprehensive legal education program to help citizens understand the laws and legal rights applicable to daily life. The number of laws enforced in the United States steadily increases each year. For example, in 2012, 40,000 new laws were enacted. Most laws are complex and use legal terminology that only lawyers and other legal professionals can understand. Thus, public knowledge about the law and legal rights is low.

New York State law requires public schools to teach at least two hours of civics a week. Still, the current New York civics curriculum focuses more on the functions of government and the bill of rights than on the laws that students encounter every day. Street Law, a program based in Washington, DC, teaches public school students across the country about the laws relevant to their daily lives, including contract law, housing law, criminal law, police procedures, employment law, and consumer protection law.

**Analysis**

Practical legal education afterschool programs help ensure that students understand their legal obligations and rights. Additionally, understanding the origins and purposes of laws allows students to develop constructive relationships with systems of authority and to improve their perceptions of the legal system. These positive influences could ultimately lead to a decline in preventable convictions.

An innovation of this nature could also have a favorable influence on students academically and socially by piquing their interest and raising their academic achievement. Studies show that youth legal education programs improve academic participation, increase student enthusiasm for school, and build a sense of self-sufficiency. For example, Teens, Crime and Community (TCC), a program that includes law-related education in urban areas, found effective changes in delinquents’ attitudes to authority figures and
for urban students toward pro-social norms.\textsuperscript{5}

To fund these legal education afterschool programs, the NYC Department of Education should seek supplemental funding from the federal government and sponsorships from local law firms. The NYC Department of Education should partner with the Skadden Arps legal program at City College and the New York Bar Association\textsuperscript{6} to implement this program and provide internship credit and scholarships to college students who volunteer as teachers.

**Next Steps**
The NYC Department of Education should implement a comprehensive afterschool program that allows students to learn the law and solve and avoid potential legal problems. This program should focus on teaching students the laws they are most likely to encounter in their everyday adult lives. To supplement this program, the New York State Legislature and the NYC Department of Education should collaborate to produce and circulate simplified versions of laws for all citizens. Simplifying laws facilitates general public understanding and will help students contextualize their relevant legal requirements.\textsuperscript{7,10,11,12}

**Endnotes**
3. New York State Assembly Bill 8310. (June 2011).
15. Ibid. “Americans Don’t Know Civics.”

**Talking Points**
- Most K-12 students are not proficient in civics or the law.\textsuperscript{16}
- Laws are often written in complex legal jargon that mostly lawyers and other legal professionals are able to understand.\textsuperscript{16}
- A practical legal education afterschool program could increase academic engagement, build social skills, raise legal awareness, and increase positive interactions with law enforcement.\textsuperscript{17,18,19,20}
- By implementing a legal education program, New York City can work to prevent potential legal problems and convictions that students might face in adulthood.\textsuperscript{21,22}
Integration of Ethnic Studies Programs into South Bronx High Schools
Evelyn Martinez, Mount Holyoke College

Ethnic Studies programs should be incorporated into academics to ensure that minority students are reflected in and engaged with what they are learning.

Discourses of deficiency and failure concerning Latina/o student populations in the U.S. do not acknowledge the reasons why these “underachieving” minority students have difficulty engaging with their education. Current classroom textbooks disregard the scholarship of and by ethnic and racial minorities and over represent Euro-American historical narratives. One of the poorest districts in New York City, the South Bronx, is 72 percent Hispanic, yet 48.3 percent have less than a high school diploma or GED equivalent. Latina/o students want their experiences and their communities’ social contributions to be acknowledged—they need positive historical and social representations of themselves in their curriculum.

South Bronx public high schools should establish Ethnic Studies Programs with departments in Chicana/o Studies, Caribbean Studies, Asian American Studies and African American and African Studies to offer culturally relevant classes focused on historic and contemporary social contributions of minority groups in the U.S. The Mexican American Studies (MAS) program, an Ethnic Studies Program in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), demonstrates the potential benefits of inclusive and representative courses like Chicana/o Studies because the curriculum fosters positive understanding and appreciation from non-Latina/o and non-Mexican American students by addressing students’ attitudes concerning their own distinct racial and ethnic identities. Both Latina/o and non-Latina/o students gain role models and learn how to think critically about how history is constructed—skills critical for college readiness. TUSD graduation rates and student achievement scores demonstrate the benefits of ethnic studies: In 2010, students who took MAS courses graduated at almost a 94 percent rate compared to the 83 percent rate of students who did not take MAS courses. The continual growth of ethnic studies programs would help eliminate disparities in dropout rates, detention rates, special education, grade retention, college acceptances, enrollment in Advanced Placement classes, and college retention rates.

Analysis
The New York City Department of Education’s “Raising the Bar” initiative gives generous grants to schools that demonstrate highly effective education reform. Since “Raising the Bar” also replaces failing schools, it should design new curricula with Ethnic Studies Programs to complement these new schools. Ethnic Studies Programs would be piloted
in 25 Bronx high schools (approximately 17,000 students) that received a C, D, or F in the 2011-2012 Progress Report Results. Most of the costs of this program would be covered by the “Raising the Bar” program and through regular funding.

Next Steps
To guarantee extensive impact, communication and collaboration between students, staff, school administrators, students, families, and community members is crucial to make Chicana/o Studies an approved use of “Raising the Bar” funds. Teachers would be trained to use a multidisciplinary pedagogy, create safe classroom environments, and encourage students to be civically engaged citizens and critical consumers of knowledge. Long-term investments in students, teachers, and ethnic studies programs will be recovered through an exponential growth of minority students entering and graduating from college, thereby contributing to economic vitality.

Endnotes
5. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
Supporting Rural Education by Relieving Student Loans

Meredith Morrison, Hendrix College

To persuade qualified teachers to work in rural school districts teaching honors-level courses, Missouri should implement a teacher loan repayment program.

Public high schools, specifically those in Missouri, face an urban-rural achievement gap. Many rural schools lack an adequate selection of honors-level courses, such as AP and college credit classes. Additionally, teachers at rural schools are often not qualified to teach honors-level courses because Missouri requires teachers of college credit classes to have Masters degrees and prefers that AP teachers also have Masters degrees.

To increase the number of qualified teachers and honors-level courses in rural schools, Missouri should implement a loan repayment program that provides tax credits or loan reimbursements for qualified, honors-level teachers who teach in rural schools.

In Missouri, 67 percent of school districts are rural. Most schools require teachers for honors-level courses to have a Masters degree. But only one-third of teachers in rural school districts nationally have graduate degrees, compared to half of teachers in urban schools. To compound this problem, teachers are often less attracted to teaching in a rural school district because of geographic isolation, lower salaries, and additional classes and extracurricular activities.

Analysis

Honors-level courses provide many educational benefits for students. A study of New York and Florida schools found that taking college credit classes increased a student’s likelihood of graduating from high school, enrolling full-time in a four-year college, and completing college on time. Also, students who take college credit classes often have higher college GPAs than their peers. Learning from teachers with graduate-level and specialized degrees also provides educational benefits. For example, students whose teachers are certified and hold graduate degrees in math and science have higher test scores in those areas.

These academic benefits suggest that Missouri should implement more honors-level courses taught by qualified teachers throughout the state. However, because rural schools have the strongest need for these courses and teachers, a program to attract and reward qualified, honors-level teachers should focus first on rural schools.

Forty-three percent of Missouri’s students reside in rural areas and small towns. These students would directly benefit from a program designed to attract highly qualified teachers.
teachers and honors courses to rural schools. Additionally, graduate students who teach in rural Missouri would directly benefit from the loan repayment program’s tax credits or reimbursements. The state legislature, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and local school boards would be the government bodies responsible for creating, funding, and administering the loan repayment program.

**Next Steps**

Missouri should implement a teacher loan repayment program to attract highly qualified teachers to teach honors-level courses in rural public schools. The program would provide a tax credit or reimbursement to these teachers for each year they teach an honors-level course in a rural school.

The program would be similar to the Opportunity Maine Program, which provides a tax credit to graduates of Maine colleges who accept jobs in the state. This tax credit helps cover the cost of student loan payments. The Opportunity Maine Program expects a financial net benefit of $30 million per year, as it encourages more college graduates to remain in the state.10

**Endnotes**

4. Ibid.2.
8. Ibid.7.
9. Ibid.3.
11. Ibid.3.
13. Ibid.12.
Expanded Access to Tutoring to Improve Academic Performance

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To improve the academic performance of its middle school students, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) should expand quality tutoring opportunities by providing access to the ASSISTments software program.

DCPS is an education system in crisis. Only 22 percent of DCPS students in fourth grade scored “proficient” or higher in math on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), an assessment of student academic achievement conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. Academic achievement levels, particularly for at-risk students, frequently decline in the transition from elementary to middle school. DCPS data reflects this trend. While only 22 percent of fourth graders in DCPS scored “proficient” or “advanced” for math on the 2011 NAEP, even fewer (17 percent) of eighth graders did. Greater access to quality tutoring during these middle school years should help DCPS raise its students’ academic performance.

In 1984, a landmark paper published by the University of Chicago demonstrated that individual tutoring is a far more effective tool for learning than conventional classroom instruction. The paper’s authors ran experiments showing that the tutored students on average outperformed 98 percent of students who were not tutored. Since 1975, Higher Achievement, a rigorous individualized tutoring program for students in grades five through eight that operates in DC, Baltimore, Richmond, and Pittsburgh, has seen its participants increase their GPAs by an average of one letter grade by the end of their middle school years. Clearly, tutoring is an invaluable tool in helping students achieve their academic potential.

Unfortunately, hiring a professional tutor is prohibitively expensive for lower-income families, as some tutors can charge up to $400 an hour. For many families with children in DCPS, professional tutoring is unaffordable, with over 72 percent of the students in DCPS qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Students and families need an alternative to these expensive private tutors.

Analysis

ASSISTments, a computerized tutoring program developed at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University, incorporates common techniques used by teachers and tutors to assist students in their homework and additional schoolwork. ASSISTments offers hints to move students in the right direction on assigned work while also incorporating automatic feedback to teachers so they can identify which students need additional assistance with the work in class. In addition, the program’s developers are working on an upgrade that allows the software to recognize...
and respond to students’ emotions (such as boredom or frustration) while doing work.\footnote{25}

ASSISTments is already used by schools across the United States, including nearly 10,000 public school students in Maine.\footnote{11} A randomized controlled trial found that, on average, students who used the program raised their performance in math by a full letter grade compared to students who did not use the program.\footnote{13}

The developers of ASSISTments do not charge school systems for their software.\footnote{14} The challenge of expanding student access to the program is ensuring that all students, regardless of socio-economic status, have access to a computer with ASSISTments software so they can complete assigned homework and supplementary classroom work.

**Next Steps**

In order for every student to use the program, DCPS will have to devise a way for all students to have access to a computer. Firstly, DCPS can provide access to the program for every student with a home computer or laptop. In addition, DCPS could partner with the District of Columbia Public Library system to provide ASSISTments on the computers available in their facilities for students who do not have access to a personal computer at home.

**Endnotes**

5. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Ibid
12. Ibid
13. Ibid
16. Ibid., “Results and Evaluation”.
17. Ibid., Paul, “The Machines Are Taking Over”.

**Talking Points**

- The ASSISTments program can provide low-income students with access to quality tutoring services.
- District of Columbia Public Schools can obtain ASSISTments free of charge.
- DCPS can partner with the library system to provide ASSISTments on library computers so all students have access.
The “2-2-2” Program: Improving Dual Enrollment in Virginia

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The “2-2-2” program can help increase college accessibility and affordability for low-income students in Virginia.

Low-income students continually face challenges accessing higher education in the United States, including lower rates of academic preparation and college affordability. Current traditional dual enrollment programs like those in Virginia and Florida allow high school students to enroll in courses in a local community college and earn college credit, thus acclimating students to a more rigorous college curriculum while saving them money. To improve this concurrent enrollment model, Virginia should develop a “2-2-2” program in which students can dual enroll for two years at a community college while in high school, directly matriculate for two years of community college after high school, and finish their degree with two years at a traditional four-year college or university.

Analysis

Research shows that students, especially those from low-income households, graduate high school and attend college at far higher rates when concurrently enrolled in a community college during high school. Higher education that spans six years like the “2-2-2” program gives students additional time to develop the necessary skills to complete a bachelor’s degree, which are often underdeveloped for low-income or ESL students. Thus, it would significantly help lower the achievement gap between lower and high-income students.

The “2-2-2” program is grounded in the success of current dual enrollment programs. Studies of Virginia’s transfer articulation agreements (dual enrollment courses taken during high school that fully transfer to community college) have shown that it has dramatically reduced college expenses and has increased the likelihood that students enroll in a degree program and graduate. The “2-2-2” program improves the Virginia model by seamlessly integrating disparate segments into one cohesive program. Given that Virginia’s high school dropout rate is 6.5 percent and its community college retention rate is 42 percent, combining dual-enrollment agreements and transfer articulation agreements into one concrete program could help improve student retention. By easing the transition between high school and college fiscally, administratively, and academically, the continuous nature of the “2-2-2” program encourages enrollment and retention of low-income students. The program would also lessen the financial burden on low-income students, as the average community college costs $8,734 per year while the average four-year school costs $21,657. In addition to the

Key Facts

- Virginia’s community college retention rate is 42 percent.9
- Virginia’s high school dropout rate is 6.5 percent.10
- Dual enrolled students earn 15.1 more credits on average than their non-dual enrolled peers.11
- The average community college costs $8,734 per year while the average four-year school costs $21,657.12
lower cost, students will directly benefit by having a streamlined program in which they will have automatic admission to a four-year university.

This plan could help reduce financial aid expenditures, as students would spend less time at more expensive four-year schools. Individual school districts or states like Virginia could continue to fund dual-enrolled students at existing levels. Since this program would merely create a streamlined set of transfer agreements between schools, the financial burden to state governments should not be significantly more than current spending.7

Next Steps
With its record of success in dual enrollment, Virginia should pass a proposal that creates a statewide “2-2-2” program through the state legislature. To do this, Virginia would need to get legislators in its general assembly to pass legislation supporting the creation of this program. In terms of implementing the program, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia must work with the Virginia Community College System to jointly administer and coordinate it. Ideally, if the program is a success, the policy could be scaled up by creating a federal incentive grant program. The distribution of federal aid to states and universities would help defray the administrative costs of running these programs.8

By improving the Virginia model and using it as a benchmark for success, states can save money while making education more affordable and accessible for all.

Endnotes
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