

The Opening Bell

Today's News for the National Education Association from Newspapers, TV, Radio and the Journals

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Customized Briefing for ELVIRA TIPPINS-RUSSELL

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[Leading the News
In the Classroom](#)

[On the Job
Law & Policy](#)

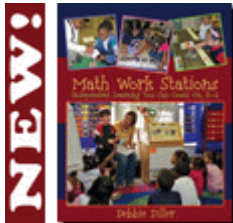
[Safety & Security
NEA in the News](#)

Leading the News

Despite Judge's Ruling, Tacoma Teachers Vote To Continue Strike.

[AP](#) (9/16) reports that despite a court order to return to the classroom, striking teachers in Tacoma, Washington, "voted overwhelmingly" to remain on the picket line on Thursday. "Some 93 percent of the nearly 1,600 teachers gathered at the Tacoma Dome arena said they wanted to keep picketing." Tacoma teachers are striking "over issues including pay, class size and how job transfers are handled." The AP places the story in a national context, noting that ED "wants every state and school district to update the way they evaluate teachers, and a weak economy has most states struggling to find enough money to pay teachers." Noting that the strike by 1,900 teachers is cancelling school for some 28,000 students, [Reuters](#) (9/16, Gorman) reports that district officials expressed disappointment, and the superintendent referred to the strike as illegal.

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In the Classroom

ED Names 305 Blue Ribbon Schools.

In response to Education Secretary Arne Duncan's announcement that 305 schools have been named National Blue Ribbon Schools, over 70 media outlets across the country are reporting on local schools having won the award. Coverage is overwhelmingly positive and congratulatory in nature, and tends to describe the award as a prestigious achievement. Despite the broad range of papers and websites covering the story from a local angle, there is a dearth of generalized coverage of the announcement. For example, the [Los Angeles Times](#) (9/16, Blume, 657K) reports that 21 schools in California earned the achievement, listing and describing a number in the Los Angeles area, and explaining that the "program honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools 'where students achieve at high levels or where the achievement gap is

narrowing,' according to the Education Department. All the L.A. County winners have high scores on the state's Academic Performance Index, which is used to measure California schools and is based largely on standardized test scores."

DC To Test Health And Sex Ed.

The [AP](#) (9/16) reports, "District of Columbia public schools are planning to test students on their knowledge of human sexuality, contraception and drug use this spring. According to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, the exam will be the first standardized test on health and sex education in the country. The 50-question exam will be given to students in grades 5, 8 and 10."

The [Washington Post](#) (9/16, Turque, 572K) reports in its "DC Schools Insider" blog, that the "state superintendent's office weighed in with a few additional points on this morning's health education testing story. ... For openers, the new testing on health and sex education is now being called a 'pilot,' which is not a word that surfaced during my conversations and e-mails with OSSE and DCPS this week. Individual students and teachers will not receive scores, unlike other DC CAS tests."

Kentucky District To Conduct Curriculum Audit.

The [Louisville Courier-Journal](#) (9/16, Konz, 160K) reports Jefferson County's 155 public schools will undergo a "curriculum management audit" by a "team of 27 outside auditors" from Phi Delta Kappa International.

On the Job

Author Refutes Christie's Logic In Linking Teacher Evaluations With Student Performance.

In a column in the [Newark \(NJ\) Star-Ledger](#) (9/16, 235K), Bob Braun writes about New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's promotion of his "plans for education overhaul, including the use of student test scores to evaluate teachers," juxtaposed with the release of "Uneducated Guesses" by Howard Wainer of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. The book, Braun writes, "raises significant questions about the premise on which much of Christie's crusade is based - using student test scores to evaluate teachers." Wainer "is no anti-test ideologue, no apologist for teacher unions. Much the opposite: For many years, he was principal research scientist at the Educational Testing Service, the people who brought us the SAT and Advanced Placement tests. He believes in tests." However, he argues that there is no evidence that tying such tests to teacher evaluations is valid.

In "Surprise Twist," New York City Gives State Teacher Evaluation Authority.

The [New York Times](#) (9/16, Otterman, Subscription Publication, 950K) reports, "New York City education officials announced Thursday that they would end their effort to rank teachers based on their students' standardized test scores, adding a surprise twist to one of the most contentious issues facing the city's teaching force." The piece notes that three years ago, then-New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein instituted "annual performance rankings of fourth- through eighth-grade teachers, in an attempt to measure a teacher's contribution to student achievement." However, new state legislation establishes a statewide system.

Student-Based Teacher Evaluations Vex RTTT Winners.

[Education Week](#) (9/16, Cavanagh, 39K) reports on the "difficult questions" that states who won Race to the Top grants are facing "about how to make good on their ambitious promises to link teacher evaluation with student performance." For example, some teachers teach subjects that are not included on current standardized tests. Education Week singles out New York, noting that in applying for its \$700 million grant, legislators "approved a measure that called for 40 percent of a teacher's evaluation to be tied to students' academic gains. The state's largest teachers' union, the 600,000-member New York State United Teachers, or NYSUT, and state education officials came together in support of the law." The piece notes that Education Secretary Arne Duncan has threatened to withdraw grants from states that don't enact their promises, thought

New York Commissioner of Education John King "said he believes New York state and its union could avoid that fate."

Baby Boomers Using Alternative Certification To Launch Teaching Careers.

The [New York Times](#) (9/16, Olson, Subscription Publication, 950K) reports that many "baby boomers" are "enrolling at community colleges and in state-approved or private programs to convert their professional expertise to the classroom," after having completed their previous careers. "Even the recent public criticism of teachers and cuts in school budgets have not deterred retirees from getting teaching credentials - and finding paying jobs, especially in math, science and special education." Noting that the Department of Education's Teach.gov website "lists each state's alternative certification programs," the Times adds, "'There is an incredible opportunity here for those who are pursuing encore careers,' said Brad Jupp, senior program aide to the education secretary, Arne Duncan, who helped start the site."

Newark Invests In New Principals.

The [New York Times](#) (9/16, Hu, Subscription Publication, 950K) reports on Newark's 17 new principals. The Times says, "They were hired by Cami Anderson, the new schools superintendent, as part of an ambitious plan to rebuild the 39,000-student district, which has long been crippled by low achievement and high dropout rates, but now is flush with up to \$200 million from prominent donors, including Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook." The Times quotes Anderson, "I believe a strong principal is the key to almost everything. ... Where you have great performance, you have great principals, period, full stop. Where you have low performance, you have struggling principals. It's not that complicated."

Expert: Test Bank Idea Might Reduce Teacher Cheating.

[NPR](#) (9/16, Stokes) reports that a Stanford education expert has a plan to reduce teacher cheating scandals for testing: "Create a massive bank of thousands of possible test items, make those questions public, let teachers offer feedback, and then pick a few at random for the actual test."

New Mexico Invests In Program To Detect Test Cheating.

The [AP](#) (9/16) reports, New Mexico "is checking for possible cheating by teachers who may be changing student test scores." It plans "to spend about \$70,000 on an erasure-analysis program to check for suspiciously high numbers of erasures on standardized tests."

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Law & Policy

GOP Senators Introduce NCLB Overhaul Package.

The [Huffington Post](#) (9/16) reports on legislation introduced by a group of Republican Senators led by Lamar Alexander of

Tennessee intended to "fix" NCLB by strengthening state accountability systems, improving teacher and principal professional development programs, combining federal education programs and increasing the number of charter schools." The Post describes the individual segments of the legislative package, and describes the congressional "deadlock" which has prompted Education Secretary Arne Duncan to "announce this summer that he would unilaterally grant states waivers from some of its provisions in exchange for signing on to his preferred reforms." The piece notes that Republicans have balked at Duncan's move, and that "Alexander is also set to introduce a bill today that would 'clarify' Duncan's authority over granting waivers," expressing the opinion that they should not be tied to "Washington mandate."

Safety & Security

Psychiatrist Association Publishes Study On Bullying Prevention.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) (9/16, Healy, 657K) reports on a new comprehensive study of anti-bullying programs published by the American Psychiatric Association which describes bullying as "a process that arises out of toxic group dynamics, not a problem originating with a single troubled person." For this reason, the study concludes, "that virtually none of the hundreds of anti-bullying programs marketed briskly across the world has a record of consistent, well-documented success." The Times notes that the study's lead author believes this is "because they are devised outside of the school system in which they're implemented and because they're imposed, usually from the top down, by well-meaning school committees or administrators without a wellspring of community support."

NEA in the News

NEA President Criticizes Florida Reform.

The [Miami Herald](#) (9/16, Lisensee, 157K) reports NEA President Dennis Van Roekel visited Miami and "criticized the state's changes to how Florida teachers are paid and evaluated, tying them to student scores." The Herald quotes him, "If you only deal with inputs and outputs, you will fail. Process matters."

Kansas NEA Vice President Supports Going Beyond Testing.

The [Baldwin City \(KS\) Signal](#) (9/16, Thomas, 1K) reports, "Karen Godfrey, Vice President of the Kansas National Education Association," gave a speech "on the education system in Kansas." The Signal writes, "One of Godfrey's main concerns with the ESEA and No Child Left Behind Act reauthorization was the importance the acts have previously placed on standardized and state testing. 'There's a lot of emphasis on things like 'let's just judge teachers by their test scores,' Godfrey said. 'We don't want to ignore test scores, but that is a pretty limited way to look at a teacher.'"

Critics Seek Changes To NCLB.

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A [McClatchy](#) (9/16, Vickers, Arkin, Bansal) article about the impact of No Child Left Behind over the past decade presents the views of a number of education experts on the disconnect between the law's intentions and its actual results. American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, McClatchy reports, says that while the law had laudable goals, it failed to adequately fund its mandates, leading to hardships for districts. Meanwhile, education historian and former ED official Diane Ravitch argues that the law's "unrealistic" requirements of universal student proficiency-in addition to its narrow curricular focus- "has been detrimental for schools." McClatchy notes that Education Secretary Arne Duncan has moved to lessen the punitive impact of the law, but has been criticized by Ravitch and others for tying relief to his own education agenda. Meanwhile, Donna Harris-Aikens, director of education policy and practice for the National Education Association, dismissed the law's benchmarks as "arbitrary."

Thursday's Lead Stories

- [Rhode Island Judge Ruling Upholds Public Worker Pension Rights.](#)
- [Scores Slide As More Students Take SATs.](#)
- [Judge Orders Striking Washington State Teachers Back To Work.](#)
- [Group Of Senators Announces NCLB Renewal Bills.](#)
- [Bachmann's District, School District Being Investigated Over Bullying.](#)
- [Brown Introduces School Construction Funding Portion Of Jobs Bill.](#)
- [NEA's Van Roekel Visits Orlando, Pans Merit Pay Law.](#)