February 2, 2018 News Round-up

TEACHING & LEARNING

How Tech Is Changing the Role of the Teacher
Technology is helping support teachers in the classroom, not replacing them, educators said at the recent NY EdTech Week global innovation festival. Chris Rush of the nonprofit New Classrooms suggested that technology could be used for grading, which would allow teachers to spend more time with students. Tara Garcia Mathewson. “As schools continue to digitize and automate, where do teachers fit in?” Hechinger Report. January 24, 2018

Preschool Removals Primarily Affect Children with Disabilities
Three-quarters of preschool suspensions and expulsions affect children with disabilities although they comprise only 13% of total enrollment, according to a report. Children ages 3 to 5 with behavioral problems are 43 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers, notes the Center for American Progress. Shaun Heasley. “Preschoolers With Disabilities Inordinately Suspended, Report Finds.” Disability Scoop. January 22, 2018

Teachers Mull Best Practices for Tech in Class
Educators nationwide are considering whether laptops and students’ phones should be allowed in the classroom. One chemistry teacher says the devices are distracting and potentially unhealthy, but director of a university division of teaching technologies says devices can be useful in the classroom and calls bans on technology divisive. Anya Kamenetz. “Laptops And Phones In The Classroom: Yea, Nay Or A Third Way?” National Public Radio. January 24, 2018

What Matters Most to Parents?
Family and community engagement may be important factors in boosting parents’ satisfaction with schools, according to a survey of 7,200 parents by researchers at Rice University. The study found that 43% of those surveyed said they are satisfied with schools overall. Alison DeNisco. “Report: Parents value engagement, but say schools fall short.” District Administration. January 26, 2018

Playtime Is Essential and Needs to Be Taken Seriously
Play is a universal, cross-cultural and necessary attribute of childhood, essential for development and essential for learning; and children need time and space to play. Experts say that play is intrinsic to children’s natures, but still needs support and attention from adults around them. Play can be threatened, either by too little attention and responsiveness from distracted adults or by too much attention and teaching of the not-so-playful kind. Perri Klass, MD. “Taking Playtime Seriously.” NY Times. January 29, 2018

Tips to Integrate Creativity in the Classroom
Creativity will be an essential skill for future jobs, asserts this instructional technology specialist who shares ideas for helping students develop creativity, such as letting them take the lead. Dianne Pappafotopoulos. “Can creativity be taught?” eSchool News. January 29, 2018

Where Teachers Get Ideas for Lessons
Original Education Week research takes a look at how educators hear about trends and new ideas that could be worth pursuing in their classroom. “Data: Where Do Teachers Get Their Ideas?” Education Week. January 10, 2018

Educators Rank Trending Literacy Initiatives
Reading experts say there’s hot, and then there's important. In K-12 reading and writing, digital literacy may be hot, but it's hardly important. Participants in an International Literacy Association survey ranked digital literacy as hot. However, they also ranked early literacy as the most important topic of the moment.
Why Special Education Teachers Leave
It's not just about paperwork, parents, and hard-to-manage students. Special educators say their jobs are also made difficult by factors that are well within school and district leaders' power to change.
Christina Samuels. “Why Special Educators Really Leave the Classroom.” Education Week. January 24, 2018

Antibias Education for Early Childhood
Important lessons about race, diversity, and equity can and should be taught to children in early childhood and preschool settings.
Jennifer Hooven, Katherine Runkle, Laurie Strouse, Misty Woods, and Erica Frankenberg. “Never too early to learn: Antibias education for young children.” Kappan online. February 2018

Improving Civility in Classrooms
A study of classroom deliberations in four high schools shows what can go wrong when teachers neglect to prepare students to argue in a civil manner — and it suggests ways to do better.
Margaret Crocco, Anne-Lise Halvorsen, Rebecca Jacobsen, and Avner Segall. “Less arguing, more listening: Improving civility in classrooms.” Kappan online. February 2018
http://www.kappanonline.org/cocco-less-arguing-more-listening-improving-civility-classrooms/utm_source=PDK+International&utm_campaign=0037ba4435 EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_01_25&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_867590c86a-0037ba4435-30101921

Community Schools and Early Childhood Education
The most successful elementary schools partner with community organizations to support children and their families beginning in early childhood.
David Jacobson. “A powerful convergence: Community schools and early childhood education.” Kappan online. February 2018

How One School Teaches Digital Citizenship
A technology-integration specialist at a Texas school explains why she recast digital citizenship lessons as citizenship lessons. She describes her school's approach to the lessons, which include 5- to 10-minute activities and talks, plus breakfast conversations.

Puerto Rican Schools Still not Recovered from Hurricane
Hurricane Maria’s aftermath continues to pose physical and educational challenges for educators. As of last week, about 340 of the island’s 1,100 public schools still did not have power, and between 25,000 to 30,000 students had left Puerto Rico. Some schools only have power or water for a few days a week. Even in schools where power, water, and even the Internet are back on, students can be found milling in the hallways during class, evidence of the difficulty in maintaining an orderly school environment, but more specifically in finding substitute teachers.
Andrew Ujifusa. “Crumbling Classrooms and Power Outages: Inside Puerto Rico’s Storm-Damaged Schools.” Education Week. February 1, 2018

NATIONAL / FEDERAL

Charter Movement Paved Way for Vouchers
The author argues that when parents are convinced by propaganda that their public schools are "failing," they are more supportive of consumer choice and that some of the leading charter chains are fronts for religious fundamentalists. The largest number of vouchers are used by fundamentalist Christian schools.
http://prospect.org/article/proselytizers-and-privatizers

Beliefs and Goals of the DeVos Family
The author describes the DeVos Family as the most “powerful manifestation of the systems of power and oppression in West Michigan.” He notes that Amway was originally going to be called The American Way. The DeVos Family embraces a form of Christian Reconstruction, believing that society should be governed by biblical rather than secular values. Therefore, the family funds groups committed to homophobia, anti-reproductive rights, patriarchy, white supremacy and free market capitalism.
Jeff Smith. “We’re Rich and We Do What We Want: A DeVos Family Reader.” Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy. December 4, 2017
https://grii.org/2017/12/04/were-rich-and-we-do-what-we-want-a-devos-family-reader/
Opinion: 10 (More) Reasons Why the U.S. Education System Is Failing
The author argues that some urgent concerns needs to be addressed, including digital equity, year-round schooling, and gender parity in STEM.

8,800 Teachers at Risk if DACA Expires
About 8,800 schoolteachers in the US could face deportation if the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program expires. Some teachers unions and the National School Boards Association are backing a lawsuit in NYS that would prevent districts from firing teachers whose DACA protections expire.
Claudio Sanchez. “Nearly 9,000 DACA Teachers Face An Uncertain Future.” National Public Radio. January 29, 2018

Koch Brothers Target K-12 Public Schools
The multi-billionaire Koch Brothers have announced their intention to dismantle public education as we know it and replace it with publicly supported private parent-selected alternatives. “Making a long-term play, the billionaire industrialist Charles Koch and his like-minded friends on the right are increasingly focused on molding the minds of the next generation by making massive, targeted investments in both K-12 and higher education…Leaders of the network dreamed of disrupting the status quo, customizing learning and breaking the teacher unions. One initial priority is expanding educational saving accounts and developing technologies that would let parents pick and choose private classes or tutors for their kids the same way people shop on Amazon.”

SOS Arizona Won a Legal Victory over Koch Brothers
After the Arizona legislature passed a bill expanding vouchers, SOS Arizona collected enough signatures to force a referendum on the expansion. The Koch brothers hired a legal team to knock the referendum off the ballot. The Koch brothers even got the legislature to pass a bill denying the tight of parents to sue, but it was too late. SOS Arizona a group of parents who support public schools, sued to gain the right to vote on the Koch proposal and Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Margaret Mahoney has ruled that the law in effect last year when a referendum on voucher expansion was filed did not give individuals the right to challenge petition drives and that there is no legal basis for the challenge to those petitions.
http://tucson.com/news/local/judge-rules-voters-will-get-last-word-on-expanding-arizona/article_a3f43dd6-047d-514a-b7f3-27389029d12d.html

Teacher Unions Present Case to US Supreme Court
The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers both filed amicus briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court in the Janus v. AFSCME case, a case that could cause a major blow to their membership numbers and revenue. In their brief, they laid out their arguments in support of public-sector workers being mandated to pay monthly union fees. The case was brought by Illinois health-care worker Mark Janus who argues that he shouldn't have to pay monthly union fees to keep his job, especially because the fees may go toward advocacy that he disagrees with. He pays about $540 a year in compulsory fees to union.
Adeline Will. “Here Are the Teachers' Unions' Arguments in the Supreme Court Case on Union Fees.” Education Week. January 29, 2018

Federal Education Bill Supports Conservative Social Agenda
The bill contains measures sought by religious schools and free-speech advocates, worrying some college administrators and gay-rights groups. Religious colleges would be able to bar openly same-sex relationships without fear of repercussions. Religious student groups could block people who do not share their faith from becoming members. Controversial speakers would have more leverage when they want to appear at colleges. A 590-page higher-education bill working its way through Congress is a wish list for a wide range of people, groups and colleges saying that their First Amendment rights are being trampled.
Anemona Hartocollis. “Republicans Stuff Education Bill With Conservative Social Agenda.” NY Times. February 1, 2018

NEW YORK STATE
NYS Education Officials Seek Legislative Support for More Education Aid
NYS school officials are “very concerned” about the Governor’s proposed 3% increase in school aid next year. Some education leaders are upset they weren’t consulted about what schools will need before Cuomo released his
NYC Chancellor Criticizes Governor’s Proposal for Funding Plans per School

Under the governor’s budget proposal, school systems would be required to submit funding plans per school to the SED and Budget Vision for approval each year. NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña said the proposed reporting requirement is “almost a sign of disrespect.” Testifying at a state budget hearing Wednesday, Fariña told lawmakers the requirements contained in the governor’s 2018-19 proposed budget would add another layer of paperwork and take away from the mission of educating students: “We believe the proposed budget reporting mandate that would allow the state to veto our budget is unnecessary and a violation of the principle of local control of education decisions.”


One Way to Be Heard on Federal Issues: Join POSTCARD FRIDAYS

If you are looking for a way to express your opinions about some of the major issues affecting our nation, you might want to consider Postcard Fridays. Participants receive an email packet mid-week every week outlining issues, suggested comments on these issues, and contact information for postcard recipients. Group members then meet every Friday from 9:15 – 10:30 A.M. at the Soul Café in Village Gate on Goodman Street near the Memorial Art Gallery. [Enter Village Gate through the back entrance near the Children’s Institute. The tables outside Soul Cafe will be straight ahead.]

At the Friday sessions, participants write their comments on provided postcards and leave them with leaders for mailing. Since February 2017, group members have sent about 7,500 postcards, an average of about 170 per week. Those who cannot attend the Friday session can send postcards from home.

To learn more, send an email to postcardfridays@gmail.com. This is just one such group in our region; there are perhaps others. If you know of another group please let me know by return email.