



# No Child Left Behind

Federal Grant Opportunities • NCLB Implementation  
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# Alert

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## Teaching Strategies

# Boost Test Scores With Interdisciplinary, Themed Units

*Push past plain old math, reading instruction to restore curriculum balance.*

In the rush to make AYP, efforts to integrate the curriculum and provide hands-on learning experiences often get pushed aside in favor of a standardized math/reading focus.

**Consider this:** Prioritizing a rich, coordinated curriculum is helping some schools make big achievement gains that do actually register on NCLB-mandated tests.

**Where:** Students at **Port Chester Middle School** in New York improved test scores dramatically with the help of interdisciplinary programming — eighth graders' math and reading proficiency shot up from 35 to 85 percent over five years, according to an **Achievement Alliance** report, and also published in **Karin Chenoweth's** book titled "It's Being Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools."

Find out how you can avoid "teaching to the test" and get real results. Read on for a breakdown on how to boost your interdisciplinary efforts.

### *Step #1: Prize Content Over Test Prep*

It's hard not to get harried when end-of-year assessments come around, but sacrificing content won't get students very far. Instead, start now on weaving key skill building, like reading development, into other subject areas so that content isn't a separate lesson.

**Problem:** Often we pay lip service to the idea of a balanced education, but then resort to "cramming" with students before accountability assessments at the expense of creative, participatory learning, laments **Michelle Capen**, curriculum coach at **Whitnel Elementary** in Lenoir, NC and 11-year teaching veteran.

**What to do:** Connect the dots between content areas. When teachers work closely with one another to integrate the school's curriculum, students have a chance to spend enough time on a particular topic to acquire new vocabulary, which is essential to building reading proficiency, says the Achievement Alliance report.

A student will perform better on a reading comprehension test if he has had prior exposure to the topic, agrees **Daria Hall**, assistant director of K-12 policy at the Washington, D.C.-based **Education Trust**, an education research, analysis and advocacy organization.

**Example:** If two students are equally proficient in reading but only one knows about the American

Revolution, the student with the related background knowledge will likely score higher when tested on an American history story.

**Bottom line:** Teaching content alongside reading mechanics is crucial to learning — and to improving test performance.

### *Step #2: Gather Science, Art and Language Development Under One Umbrella*

Design overarching themes to link previously disconnected lessons. This effort will give your curriculum a much-needed interdisciplinary flair, and still exercise the skills students need at testing time.

**First:** Select an idea and brainstorm lesson plans around the theme in each curricular area. If Africa is the theme, students may read African authors for English class, measure and compare the continent's rainfall for math, and study African percussion instruments in music, offers Hall.

**Advice:** Find ways for reading and math instruction to infuse science, social studies and art lessons. Get the ball rolling by designing one interdisciplinary unit, so teachers don't get overwhelmed by the time it would take to plan 10, suggests Capen. Build up the number of units over time. Encourage teachers to share these lesson plans with their peers and talk about what worked and what needs tweaking.

**Try this:** Take a cue from Port Chester's thematic instruction style to see similar growth with your students. When covering colonial American history, the math class studied the geometry of colonial quilts, the science class made soap and candles, the social studies class built a model of a colonial village, and the language arts class learned colonial riddles.

### *Step #3: Make Shared Planning Time More Than 'Coffee Talk'*

In order for your thematic curriculum to really shine, you need to put all of your teachers' heads together.

Provide teachers with common planning time, so your science, art and reading teachers have the opportunity to

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design interconnected, non-repetitive lessons that are consistent across the respective grade levels, says Hall. Don't rely on informal meetings during breaks to allow for the kind of collaboration you'll need to pull off this effort.

**Model:** Plan the daily schedule so teacher teams can meet together often. Teachers convene every day at Port Chester Middle School, according to the Achievement Alliance report.

Port Chester divided its sixth, seventh and eighth grades into two teams at each grade level; each team leads approximately 120 students. Administrators build the school's schedule around the daily team meetings so that students

are at "specials" (such as art and physical education) while their core academic teachers plan coordinated lessons.

**Good idea:** Designate a lead teacher to manage the agendas and direct the meetings, and pay this teacher an extra stipend for his/her time.

**Takeaway:** Promote an attitude of shared ownership of the school's curriculum among your staff. Your math teachers should feel responsible for teaching reading (e.g., word problems), and your science teachers should incorporate math (e.g., measurements for experiments). Advance learning further by having grade-level teams design an integrated curriculum, one unit at a time. ■

## Policy Update

# Make Science, Social Studies Scores Count To Keep Curriculum Balanced, Says CEP

*Study finds 42% jump in math and reading, fall off in other subjects.*

It isn't your imagination — for the sake of reading and math test preparation, most schools have cut back substantially on everything else.

Students on average receive 31 percent less instruction time in science, social studies, art and music since NCLB came into effect, according to the **Center on Education Policy (CEP)** report titled "Choices, Changes, Challenges: Curriculum and Instruction in the NCLB Era." Meanwhile, schools have increased instruction time in reading and math by an average of 42 percent.

**Recommendations:** To stem this tide before subjects other than reading and math wash away, CEP proposes:

- \* Inclusion of social studies and science in accountability testing in grades 4, 6, 8 and once in high school, staggered with English language arts and math testing in grades 3, 5, 7 and once in high school.
- \* An independent review of each state's curriculum standards and tests at least once every three years to ensure that they are of high quality and rigor.
- \* Adequate emphasis on art and music, and measures of knowledge and skills in these areas as one of the multiple measures used for NCLB accountability.
- \* Federal funding for research to determine the best ways to incorporate and support the teaching of reading and math skills into social studies, science and other subjects to ensure access to a rich and balanced curriculum.

**Your reality:** The fact is what's tested is what's taught, says **Diane Rentner**, CEP's director of national programs. If schools are accountable for science and social studies scores, those disciplines will rebound in the curriculum and students will finish school with a more well-rounded education, she continues.

Teachers need training to teach a range of topics in an integrated fashion effectively, says **Jack Jennings**, CEP president and CEO. The alternative — a rudimentary focus on reading and math — puts students in danger of losing their interest in education, he adds.

**Resource:** Access the CEP report at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org). Look under "What's New." ■

## Grant Corner

# Win Tech Tools With Qwest Grants — 4 Inside Tips Help You Snag Cash

*Hint: Request funding to support large student groups, pilot programs.*

If you knew grant writing could be this easy, you would have asked for more money long ago. The **Qwest Foundation** offers a quick grant application and rapid response time for education and technology needs. Tune in to this from-the-source advice to boost your funding chances.

### *Sell Yourself As A Pilot Program*

Hit the right note with Qwest by showing that your funding request will plant district-wide seeds if approved.

The foundation usually doesn't fund single schools, except when the program is positioned as a pilot or model for the district, says Qwest Foundation director **Carey Wirtzfeld**.

Think about which technological tools could catch on in neighboring schools after your teachers use them successfully.

**Example:** Four classes at **Roosevelt Elementary** in Dickinson, ND are benefiting this fall from interactive whiteboards (which project 3-D opaque objects — such as books and coins — in color on a large screen,) says **Susan Biesiot**, Roosevelt kindergarten teacher and successful grant applicant.

### *Design Cool Projects That Incorporate New Technology*

Catch attention by eclipsing mundane technology needs, like desktops for the computer lab.

Qwest has a special interest in projects that teach students about technology's impacts in the real world, says Wirtzfeld.

**Example:** A science teacher in Idaho requested Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) to help make his class field trips to study wetlands more structured and exciting. The foundation approved his application and his students use the PDAs to record field data and organize information into graphs, says Wirtzfeld.

**Tip:** Call your central office's technology department if you need help researching product options before firming up your budget proposal, advises Biesiot.

### *Reach Out To More Students*

Don't keep the scope of your funding request too small — aim to help more students for longer terms.

The number of students who benefit is an important criterion to Qwest, says Wirtzfeld. Also, your program should aim to increase academic success substantially, with a longitudinal target such as increased graduation rates, she says.

**Example:** Biesiot went after funding not just for her kindergarten class, but also for three other classrooms, reaching a total of approximately 80 students.

### *Get Educator And Administrator On Same Page*

Make sure that both the teacher and principal sign the grant application, and list contact information for both.

**Why?** “We need to know that there is administrative support” to implement the program and potentially spur its growth, says Wirtzfeld.

**Editor's Note:** Look to the sidebar for more details, including average awards and contact information. ■

## Everything You Need To Know About Qwest Education Grants

### Teacher and Technology Mini Grant Program

(e.g., classroom technology purchases)

**Eligibility:** Any teacher or principal in a public or private (non-profit) school.

**Awards:** Average ranges from \$2,500 to \$7,500.

**Deadline:** Applications accepted on rolling basis; award decision dates differ by state. More detailed state-by-state information is available online (see website address below.)

### Qwest Grants For Education

(e.g., curriculum advancement, teacher training)

**Eligibility:** Public school districts and, in some cases, single public or private (non-profit) schools.

**Award:** Average ranges from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

**Deadline:** Open.

**Note:** The Qwest Foundation gives preference to applicants in its 14 major operating states: AZ, CO, IA, ID, MN, MO, NE, NM, ND, OR, SD, UT, WA and WY. However, applicants in other states are not dissuaded from applying.

**Resource:** Visit [www.qwest.com/foundation](http://www.qwest.com/foundation) for more information and to download a grant application. View state-by-state contact information for Teacher and Technology Mini Grants at [www.qwest.com/about/company/community/teachers\\_and\\_technology.html](http://www.qwest.com/about/company/community/teachers_and_technology.html).

**Contact:** 303-896-1266, [Qwest.Foundation@qwest.com](mailto:Qwest.Foundation@qwest.com). ■

## English Language Learners

# Get ELLs On The Inside Track With High Goals And Strong Content

*Tip: Assess English learners with content and language tests.*

If your English Language Learner (ELL) education program isn't built on sound instructional strategies, even daylong English instruction won't help your students reach curriculum standards. Help ELL students soar over language barriers with these five field-tested strategies.

### *Have Students Spell Out Lesson Goals*

Include in your English language curriculum specific targets for reaching language development goals and learning content, regardless of the subject or teacher.

**In practice:** Start each class by reviewing what the ELL students are supposed to learn, recommends **Elena Silva**, senior policy analyst at the Washington, D.C.-based **Education Sector**, an independent education policy think tank.

Be explicit by saying: "We aim to master these vocabulary words, and be able to converse about our opinions on these three issues." Then make sure your ELL students understand — and can express — these goals, she adds.

**Key:** Keep achievement objectives high and don't underestimate ELL students' capacities.

Research shows that learning languishes when expectations are low, reminds **Linda Carstens**, director of the **Stanford University**-based **LEADS** (Leadership, Equity and Accountability in Districts and Schools) network, which connects district leaders, practitioners and researchers in search of sustainable reforms.

### *Correct Colloquial Talk*

Be careful to teach ELL students correct use of the academic language they need to succeed, instead of allowing them to slide by on conversational proficiency alone.

**Important:** Make sure students know more than just how to spell and technically define words.

Help students discover the context of how these words are used, says Silva. Help students distinguish between academic and colloquial vocabulary, syntax and uses, which will affect their ability to test well, she adds.

Also, provide bountiful opportunities for students to practice using "correct" language in class.

### *Don't Drop The Ball On Content*

Your students won't learn to communicate proficiently if they don't have something substantial to speak and write about.

**Pitfall:** Don't think that ELL students need to learn English first, and then learn content later, emphasizes Carstens.

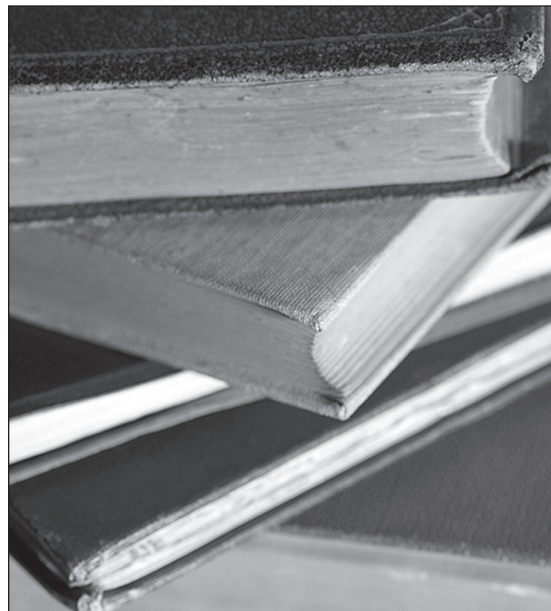
Students need access to content area at the same time they are learning English; putting them in a language-only tract is ineffective and demoralizes the student, she adds.

**What to do:** Expose ELL students to literature, even if it's beyond their level. ELL students benefit from modeled reading exercises, such as teacher/class read alouds, Carstens says.

Recent research confirms that content is key. Extensive exposure to the school's core academic curriculum, when accompanied by assistance to ensure that the curriculum was accessible, was associated with higher ELL-population achievement, according to the report titled "Similar English Learner Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better," by CA-based **EdSource**, an independent education research and policy group.

The study suggests that students do better if they have access to someone who speaks their native language and can help explain content, says **Mary Perry**, EdSource deputy director. To know who can best provide

*'ELL' continued on page 71*



## Compliance Tool

# Start The School Year Off Right With This Communication Checklist

*Don't neglect to inform parents when their child's teacher is not highly qualified.*

Refresh your grasp of NCLB's parent reporting requirements with the help of this resource, developed by the **National Association of State Directors of Special Education's (NASDSE) Project Forum**.

**Remember:** Even if you aren't directly responsible for some notifications, you'll still want to be informed when parents arrive with NCLB-related questions.

### 🔗 TEACHERS:

- ✓ Inform parents in a timely fashion if their child's core academic subject teacher is not highly qualified (for durations of four or more consecutive weeks).
- ✓ If you are a Title I school, notify parents that they may request and obtain information regarding the professional qualifications of their student's classroom teachers. (See NCLB Section 200.61(a) for additional information).

### 🔗 ASSESSMENTS:

- ✓ Deliver individual standardized assessment and diagnostic data to parents in an understandable and uniform format, as soon as practical after the assessment.
- ✓ Ensure that the assessment data helps parents to understand and address the specific academic needs of their children.
- ✓ Provide parents, upon request, with assessment results in an alternative format and (when practical) in a language that parents can understand.
- ✓ In the case of alternate assessments, make sure parents know that their child's achievement will be based on alternate achievement standards and reported separately.

### 🔗 ACCOUNTABILITY:

- ✓ Publicize and disseminate to parents (and public) annual progress review results.
- ✓ Make available to parents (and public) the school-wide program plan, in an understandable and uniform format. Upon request, distribute alternative formats and versions in languages parents can understand (when practical).

### 🔗 IMPROVEMENT:

- ✓ Promptly notify parents if the school is identified for improvement or subject to corrective action or restructuring. The notice must include the following:
  - ☞ An explanation of what the identification means.
  - ☞ How the school compares in terms of academic achievement to other elementary and secondary schools.
  - ☞ The reasons for the identification.
  - ☞ An explanation of how parents can become involved in addressing academic issues that led to identification.
  - ☞ An explanation of the parents' option to transfer their child to another public school, including the provision of transportation to the new school.
- ✓ If your school is in its second year of improvement, or subject to corrective action or restructuring, you must give parents a notice explaining how they can obtain supplemental educational services in accordance with Sec. 200.45.
- ✓ Publish and disseminate to parents (and public) information regarding any action taken to address the problems that led to the improvement identification, corrective action or restructuring.

### 🔗 COMMUNICATION:

- ✓ Remember you must provide information to parents directly, through means such as regular mail or e-mail.

**Editor's note:** These parent notification requirements are not guaranteed to be all-inclusive. Contact your district supervisors if you have questions about your parent communication obligations.

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**Source:** NASDSE's Project Forum report titled "Public and Parent Reporting Requirements: NCLB and IDEA Regulations" February 2007. Excerpted with permission. Full document at <http://projectforum.org/docs/PublicandParentReportingRequirements-NCLBandIDEARegulations.pdf>. ■

*'ELL' continued from page 69*

this support (e.g., a bilingual aide or trained teacher), and how much support to give, we need more investigation, she adds.

### *Don't Lump Testing Together*

You can't assess ELLs' English literacy levels and content knowledge with one test. Many districts are making this mistake, Silva states.

**Instead:** Use multiple assessments to capture students' various language and curriculum competency levels. Then, respond appropriately with targeted additional support.

But don't expect consensus on which are the "right" tests. It's possible that high-quality assessments for the ELL population haven't been developed yet, Silva says. Consider using homegrown tests, or search around for commercially available ones you think might meet your needs.

### *Take Teacher Training Beyond First ESL Certificate*

Don't count solely on a resource teacher to provide quality English language development. Instead give across-the-board training to teachers in ELL strategies.

Know what makes an effective teacher of ELL students and cultivate those qualities among your staff, says Silva.

Look for the ability to teach content and develop language skills concurrently. Staff also should be able to coordinate with other teachers — this is particularly important if you have an ESL resource teacher for pull-out instruction, Silva adds.

**Surprising?** An ESL certification isn't enough (or perhaps even necessary). A higher proportion of teachers with CLAD certification (an ESL credential) in a school doesn't correlate with higher student performance, found the EdSource report.

**Takeaway:** Teachers are struggling to know how to help ELL students. Even if they have the basic certifications, they need more strategies than the typical credential program offers, stresses Perry. Staff development and core curriculum access are critical to ELL success.

### **Resources:**

- ❑ **Center On Instruction**, [www.centeroninstruction.org](http://www.centeroninstruction.org), click the "ELL" link on the left for research-based recommendations;
- ❑ **The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance** report titled "Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades," <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20074011.asp>; and
- ❑ **Department of Education** ELL resources, [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html). ■

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**Got an idea for an article?**

**Want to get the grant you won featured in "Grant Corner?" (pg. 68)**

Contact Stacie Majoria, Senior Editor, at 888-779-3718, ext. 325 or [staciem@eliresearch.com](mailto:staciem@eliresearch.com).

## News You Can Use...

### Weigh In On Half-Day English For ELLs

How much daily English instruction do your ELL students need to succeed? — that is the question. Arizona schools think the majority of the school day is the answer, and the state is paying for it.

ELLs in K-12 Arizona schools will attend segregated English instruction for four hours per day (out of five to six total classroom hours) starting this fall — currently they receive one hour a day of English instruction, says a *July Arizona Republic* article. The heightened ESL curriculum will focus on grammar, phonetics, conversation, reading and writing.

**Funding:** The state of Arizona passed a law last summer that made the increased English language instruction possible. Any school that takes on this change will receive state funding to reimburse for program-implementation costs, such as teacher training, curriculum changes and class scheduling, reports *The Arizona Republic*.

**Pros:** Officials who support the new instruction point to the benefits of a structured, focused curriculum with a consistent language-learning model. They hope that the intense instruction will help students learn the language in only a year or two, and then more quickly move on to master other subjects without language barriers, according to the article.

ELLs fall behind once they get past primary grades, and their state test scores reflect this lag, said **Mike Martinez**, the superintendent of Phoenix's **Cartwright School District**. Martinez hopes that the new approach will correct that negative trend.

**Objections:** Not everyone is thrilled about the switch to four-hour English instruction. Critics say that ELLs shouldn't be socially segregated and that their studies in other subjects will suffer, according to the article.

### Consider True Value Of Teaching Credential Before Hiring, Hiking Pay

Participation in a rigorous certification process produces a more highly qualified teacher, right? Some say, "Maybe not."

During the last few years there has been a sharp growth in the number of teachers who have tackled the demanding **National Board For Professional Teaching Standards** certification process, says an August *Education Week* article. But the group's success has raised concerns about the credential's future value — and how to pay for

promised salary incentives as the board-certified teaching pool grows.

**By the numbers:** Sixty thousand teachers will have won this credential by year's end, and if the current trend continues, about 2 percent of the nation's teachers will hold the credential by 2008, National Board officials told *Education Week*. The figures have been spurred by rewards for the credential from more than 30 states and scores of districts, according to the article.

**More qualified?** One question is whether the extensive assessment changes a teacher's practice for the better over the long haul. In a 2004 paper, **Dan D. Goldhaber**, a research professor at the **University of Washington** in Seattle, reported that while North Carolina teachers who receive national certification are more effective than other teachers in the first year after certification, the effect wanes thereafter.

**Still hope:** There is other evidence that the credential signals effectiveness, especially when it comes to educating poor and minority children in the lower grades, according to the *Education Week* article. ■

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