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Education

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Educational Rundown: Tests, Technology And Tuscaloosa

By [SUSAN HEGGER](#) (/PEOPLE/SUSAN-HEGGER)

Once a week, our team of education reporters would like to share stories that look at trends in education here and across the country. In particular, we want to focus on people, research and even gizmos that may help make kids learn better.

Testy parents

In this season of standardized testing, new research from the University of Massachusetts Amherst should hit home in a lot of area households. It found that in states with extensive and stringent student testing systems, parents of public school students have less trust in government, less confidence in government’s efficiency and more negative views of their children’s schools.



<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kwmu/files/1848355-800148309.jpg>

According to a story about the study published in [Science Daily](#) (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/04/140407130927.htm>), when schools have highly developed testing policies, parents are discouraged from getting involved in their kids’ education – a process that researcher Jesse Rhodes calls “demobilization.” The decreased interest, he said, comes because a heavy concentration on testing reduces parents’ opportunities to have a say in how schools are run. In turn, he added, the process leads to a smaller likelihood that parents will become in activities like contacting their children’s teachers or taking part in school fundraisers. Rhodes found that parents in states with highly developed testing policies are more likely to attend school board meetings, but he concludes that this result stems from greater anger and dissatisfaction, not greater interest. *(Dale Singer)*

Back to the future

Sixty years ago this month, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its landmark decision in Brown vs. the Board of Education. Now, in ["Resegregation in the American South," Pro Publica and the Atlantic report that "separate but unequal education is making a comeback."](#) (<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/04/segregation-now/359813/>) The article looks at segregation, integration and resegregation in Tuscaloosa, Al., through the eyes of three generations of one African-American family.

"Certainly what happened in Tuscaloosa was no accident. Nor was it isolated. Schools in

the South, once the most segregated in the country, had by the 1970s become the most integrated, typically as a result of federal court orders. But since 2000, judges have released hundreds of school districts... from court-enforced integration, and many of these districts have followed the same path as Tuscaloosa’s — back toward segregation. Black children across the South now attend majority-black schools at levels not seen in four decades."

Reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones tells the story in such rich, vivid -- and heart-breaking - detail that you can almost feel the hope and promise drained from the lives of the Dents. Their personal stories are woven so skillfully into the larger fabric of the social, political and economic history of Tuscaloosa that you realize that Tuscaloosa's failure is in fact a defining national tragedy. (NPR also collaborated with Pro Publica on an [audio version](http://www.npr.org/2014/04/18/304194508/six-words-segregation-should-not-determine-our-future) (<http://www.npr.org/2014/04/18/304194508/six-words-segregation-should-not-determine-our-future>) of this story.) *(Susan Hegger)*

A six-year high school?

Even though Pathways in Technology Early College High School in Brooklyn, N.Y., hasn’t graduated a single student yet, it sure is getting a lot of buzz. [Time](http://time.com/10038/the-school-that-is-changing-american-education/) (<http://time.com/10038/the-school-that-is-changing-american-education/>) magazine has profiled the school, and this past semester President Barrack Obama [stopped by](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcUc9KjnNaU) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcUc9KjnNaU>) and called it “outstanding.” Students are encouraged to stick around a couple extra years and get training for jobs while earning an associate’s degree. The idea is to give poor students a head start on a career and college. That's piqued the curiosity of educators from across the country, who want to learn more about the school's programs and partnership with IBM. Check it out for yourself in this PBS NewsHour profile. *(Tim Lloyd)*

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Libraries, schools push for faster broadband

Amid concerns over a growing technology gap, libraries and schools want to reboot the federal subsidy for high-speed internet access. It’s called [E-Rate](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/e-rate-schools-libraries-usf-program) (<http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/e-rate-schools-libraries-usf-program>), a program established under the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that collects fees from telecommunications companies and then funnels the money toward schools and libraries. Education groups have been pushing for [changes](http://thejournal.com/articles/2014/04/11/nsba-makes-erate-recommendations.aspx) (<http://thejournal.com/articles/2014/04/11/nsba-makes-erate-recommendations.aspx>) and say the way E-Rate allocates funds is outdated.

Meanwhile, a recent [study](#)

(http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2014/04/vast_divide_between_wealthy_po.html) by Education SuperHighway, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that advocates for improved school connections, analyzed E-Rate data and concluded that there is a big gap between poor and wealthy communities when it comes to access to high-speed broadband. Tom Wheeler, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, has said the agency may [change](http://www.bna.com/fcc-vote-modernize-n17179885877/) (<http://www.bna.com/fcc-vote-modernize-n17179885877/>) E-Rate rules in the fall. Wheeler added that regulators could “ruffle feathers” as they phase out subsidies for pagers, land-lines and some cell phones to pave the way for greater access to the Web. Some school districts have started [partnering](http://www.edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2014/04/bridging-divide-districts-provide-home-internet-access) (<http://www.edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2014/04/bridging-divide-districts-provide-home-internet-access>) with cellular companies to provide low-income students with 4G web access when they take home school issued tablets. And high-speed internet access will likely be of increasing interest as Common Core State Standards are fully implemented and more tests move online next school year. *(Tim Lloyd)*

By the numbers

After Missouri lawmakers passed a tax-cut bill, Gov. Jay Nixon wasted no time branding it a measure that would hurt the state, particularly students from public schools to college campuses. Calling the bill an "all-out attack on public education," Nixon asked: "Why should we give lawyers and lobbyists tax cuts and raise tuitions on kids going to college?"


Then the governor's office sent out a chart that showed how much each of the 520-plus school districts in the state would lose if the bill were to become law, compared with his recommendation for schools. He proposed \$223 million for the foundation formula than the tax-cut bill would provide.

The chart, put together by the [Missouri School Boards Association](http://www.msbanet.org/files/news/SB509Impact.pdf) (<http://www.msbanet.org/files/news/SB509Impact.pdf>), puts the potential loss in state money for St. Louis Public Schools, for example, at \$2.5 million. In St. Louis County, the shortfalls range from \$5.5 million in Hazelwood and \$5.1 million in Rockwood down to \$6,600 in Brentwood. ([We mapped these shortfalls as well.](http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/missouri-tax-cut-could-cost-some-districts-20-percent-their-state-appropriation)) (<http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/missouri-tax-cut-could-cost-some-districts-20-percent-their-state-appropriation>)

The chart isn't the only graphic representation of possible harm to public schools. The Children's Education Alliance of Missouri has a [new map](http://www.ceamteam.org/policy/why-ed-reform/) (<http://www.ceamteam.org/policy/why-ed-reform/>) showing school districts that are either unaccredited, provisionally accredited or in danger of falling into that territory. It's a pretty graphic representation to show that the troubled districts aren't just in the St. Louis and Kansas City areas but can be found throughout the state. *(Dale Singer)*


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