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New Wave of Syrian Refugees

As if enrollment growth in Texas schools wasn't challenging enough, [a recent Texas Tribune article](#) put educational leaders on notice of another potential wave. As part of the massive exodus from the Middle East, the Lone Star State could soon become home to hundreds of Syrian refugees fleeing their war-stricken country. Despite the extensive vetting process for refugees, State Department officials have said the agency is on target to admit 10,000 Syrian refugees in the next year because many applicants have already started the admissions process. While no one knows how many will head to the Southwest, in recent years about 10% of the 70,000 refugees admitted into the country annually have wound up in Texas. And so far, more Syrians have been resettled in Texas than any other state. Stay tuned.

Spotlight on Region 10 Schools

"Prosper is where Frisco was 20 years ago," a major land broker in northern Collin County recently observed. "And the same thing is going to happen here." Rex Glendenning was commenting on the staggering rate of residential growth and the challenge of meeting the need for additional schools it brings. The discussion was part of a *Dallas Morning News* look at Prosper's challenges which have been faced by a number of suburban areas north of Dallas, and are also impacting neighboring communities along the U.S. Route 380 corridor. Like many fast growing districts, the race to keep up has put Prosper ISD at its bonding limits. But a healthy fund balance and community partnerships have helped. The newest school exists because a developer provided the land and \$2 million to help build it. The next elementary school is benefitting from a \$4 million donation. The good news is that along with residential growth, commercial development is beginning to take off. [Read how Prosper is living up to its name.](#)

Based on input from residents and staff, the [Garland ISD created a new Department of Family and Community Engagement which debuted this year](#) as part of the district's strategic plan. The new

structure brings together staff from across the district who do outreach. One of the main services is the *Parents as Teachers* program, which got its start in the district as one of several pilot programs in the state more than 25 years ago. Four PAT instructors work with about 30 families each on parenting skills and educational activities. Other services include employees such as counselors and liaisons for the Hispanic and African-American communities. Officials say creating the new department, which involved moving under the same roof this summer, [has improved communication among staff](#) who share a similar goal: To engage all families and community members in enhancing the educational success of each child.

A group of students from DeSoto ISD recently got a unique chance learn from engineers at Texas Instruments. Some 30 eighth graders from McCowan Middle School boarded a charter bus headed to the TI headquarters where they spent the day learning the basics of coding and integrated circuit technology. [The initiative is part of an annual celebration designed to expose students to the technology company's history, programs and staff](#). Next steps offer plenty of possibilities, now with new mentors in place to help guide students' paths. One of the mentors was Jill Burrow, a Texas Instruments software engineer by training and a 1998 graduate of DeSoto High School. TI gave each of the students a new calculator, and the engineers have since made a follow-up visit with the students at their school.

Scanning the News

Around Texas: [School districts across the state](#) are responding to bus safety concerns following [this week's tragic accident](#) that claimed the lives of two Houston students. The incident has [heightened the long standing issue of seat belt use](#) on school buses...A New Braunfels school is under fire for [giving a homework assignment on terrorism third graders](#). The worksheet instructions asked students to fill in the blanks using words like "Islam," "terrorist" and "hijack." Parents said their children are not mature enough to understand the violence associated with terrorism, but NBISD officials said [the assignment is in line with TEA standards](#) for third graders... Arlington ISD is [partnering with seven day care centers this year to offer pre-K classes at those locations](#). District officials made the decision after realizing [many parents found it more convenient](#) to send their 3 and 4-year-olds to one day-long site. Students will spend half the day with a state certified Arlington ISD teacher and the other half in traditional day care.

Delaware continues to move ahead on its [ambitious effort to change the way it pays teachers](#). Like most states, its teacher payment system is based on steps and lanes, tied to experience and level of education. Delaware leaders—including educators and politicians—are committed to making two major changes: (1) Raise starting teacher salaries to attract the best, and (2) create hybrid teacher-leader roles to allow expert educators to take on additional responsibilities while keeping a foot in the classroom. Cities like [Baltimore](#) and [Houston](#) have created new career pathways for teachers, but no other state has tried to remake teacher compensation in this manner. The legislature [created a special committee to shape the concept](#) last year, and [it recently issued a set of recommendations](#). Two new working groups have been created to work out the details of a final plan.

The entire student body at a Minnesota high school, accompanied by teachers and the principal, walked out the front doors of school this week after the school board voted to retain [a trustee accused of making disparaging comments online about Muslims](#). Classes resumed after a half-hour peaceful protest. Grant Nichols, the board member in question, has denied he wrote the remarks which said that Muslims are unsanitary and do not clean up after themselves. The comments—posted using his Facebook identity—have since been deleted. Nichols claims his cellphone was hacked, and he did not attend the board meeting out of concern for his safety.

Items of Interest

Progress is being made toward a more diverse teaching force, but at a relatively modest pace. A [sweeping study](#) by the Albert Shanker Institute shows that over the last 25 years, the growth in the

number of minority teachers has outpaced growth in the number of minority students, but there is still not parity between the proportions of minority students and minority teachers in schools. Indeed, [at a time when minority students now account for more than half of all students in public schools, just 17% of the teachers who serve them are minorities](#). Surprisingly, the most significant impediment to increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce is not difficulty in recruiting and hiring minority teachers as the report shows they are being hired at a higher proportional rate than others. But minority teachers are leaving the profession at a higher rate than other teachers. The report outlines a series of recommendations to help federal, state and local governments and school districts increase educator diversity. [Check it out.](#)

As part of [a yearlong series of articles](#) examining efforts to recognize and overcome discrimination in schools, *Education Week* includes a survey tool for gauging bias. The *Implicit Association Test*, developed more than a decade ago by a University of Washington social psychologist, uses a person's reaction times to measure how closely two concepts are linked in the person's mind. A participant quickly matches pairs of pictures or words—for example, the words “scientist” and “nurse” with male and female names, or “high-achieving” with black and white faces. Over thousands of trials, teams of researchers have found people take longer to match items that run counter to their own mental bias. Those interested in finding out how they would score on the measure can try a [short online test](#) adapted for *Education Week* readers. Answers are confidential and will also serve as data for *Project Implicit*, an ongoing, international research project aimed at gauging levels of racial bias.

The number of homeless children in public schools has doubled since before the recession, [reaching a record national total of 1.36 million in the 2013-2014 school year](#). The latest homeless count, an 8 percent increase over the 2012-2013 school year, is a sign that many families continue to struggle financially. And it provides a glimpse of the growing challenges that public schools face nationwide as they seek to educate an increasing number of low-income children. The impact is profound on schools that often find themselves working not only to help children learn but also to clothe them, keep them clean and counsel them through problems — including stress and trauma — that interfere with classroom progress. California had the largest number of homeless children, with Texas third behind New York. [Read more.](#)

Looking Ahead

There was once a time when school officials could supplement employees' lower salaries with generous benefits, but today's financial constraints make such a practice unsustainable. Indeed, a new generation of teachers, administrators and support staff has to cope with an economy that's vastly different from that of the generation nearing retirement. While the private sector offers some examples for how to deal with the challenge, educational leaders are restricted in what can be done while remaining compliant with state and federal laws. But some districts are getting creative in how they address the need to rein in costs and still provide employees with good benefits. *District Administration* magazine recently took a look at some of the unconventional thinking that is yielding ideas that other districts can learn from. [Check it out here.](#)

Resource Bank

Steve Knagg served 30 years on the school communications staff in Garland ISD. And after a few years of retirement, he successfully ran for the GISD school board. In a recent column for members of the National School Public Relations Association, Knagg shared the story of his transition from administrator to board member and offered some good advice for trustees and staff members. His [“The Other Side of the Horseshoe”](#) is today's [Resource Bank](#) item.



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