

... more national news & notes

■ A Florida state court of appeals has ruled that the state's "Opportunity Scholarship" voucher program violates the state constitution's "no-aid" provision, which prohibits the expenditure of public funds "directly or indirectly" to aid sectarian institutions. To the extent the program authorizes state funds to be paid to sectarian schools, it is unconstitutional, the court held. The court rejected the state's argument that the Florida constitution provides no greater restrictions on taxpayer support of public institutions than does the federal Establishment Clause.

■ The Barrington School Board (NH) has billed the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in the amount of \$2 million for "services rendered" to express its dissatisfaction with the level of federal funding provided for special education. The board also sent a letter to both of its U.S. Senators, Judd Gregg and John Sununu, criticizing Congress for not doing enough to assist school districts in obtaining the funding they need to meet federal requirements. When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975, Congress promised to fund 40% of the per pupil costs for students in the program. However, according to special education experts, the federal contribution currently amounts to only about 18% to 20% of the costs. Barrington spent \$1.9 million on special education this year, but received only \$67,929 in federal IDEA funding, well short of the 40% reimbursement. "Year after year, after year, local taxpayers are forced to compensate for the inadequacies of Congressional funding," the board's letter states. "Year after year, politicians make promises and still do not properly fund these mandated services."

■ North Carolina Governor Mike Easley has signed legislation mandating extended summer vacations for public school students. The law requires most school districts to start

Dream Job

Percentage of workers by industry who say they have their dream job

Education



Government



Health services



Hospitality



Retail



Food & beverage service



(Source: CareerBuilder.com)

CONFRONTING CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is harassing, humiliating, intimidating and/or threatening others on the Internet. Although the Internet is most often used for healthy social communications, teens are increasingly using the Internet to deliver cruel and harmful messages and photographs. Cyberbullying sometimes involves racial, religious or cultural slurs. It can also be sexual in nature. It can involve someone your child knows or a complete stranger. Cyberbullying can include cruel jokes, malicious gossip, embarrassing information or photographs, and/or websites designed to target a specific child or teacher. Bullying is a widespread problem that has affected most of us at some point in our lives. It is especially difficult, even traumatic, for young people. Unfortunately, bullies have begun using the Internet as a means for reaching their victims at home via instant messaging, chat rooms, websites, and blogs. The MindOH! Foundation has created cyberbullying and other bullying resources for the victims of bullying, those who bully, and for bystanders. These activity worksheets are designed to help youth understand the full meaning and consequences of bullying, to reflect on the choices they are making with regard to this issue, and to explore ways of stopping online social cruelty.

Visit <http://www.mindohfoundation.org/bullying.htm> for more information

classes no earlier than August 25 and to end by June 10, adding about two weeks of vacation. Supporters of the changes, including enthusiastic business groups and the North Carolina Association of Educators, argued that the state mandate would let students work summer jobs and would preserve family vacations, with benefits for tourism.

■ A survey conducted in the spring by Teenage Research Unlimited found that 50% of the nation's teenagers say they own a cell phone. For 18- and 19-year-olds, the percentage is 67%. Among 12- to 15-year-olds, the percentage is 37%.

■ As the issue of school-beverage partnerships gains prominence in the media and in community discussions, NASSP has issued guidelines to assist school leaders as they address the school-beverage issue and related health concerns, engage their communities in informed discussions, and initiate decisions. Visit www.principals.org/schoolimprove/school_beverage_partnerships.cfm for more information.

■ Teenagers who watch a lot of television with sexual content are twice as likely to engage in intercourse than those who watch few such programs, according to a study in the September issue of *Pediatrics* (electronic pages). The study covered 1,792 adolescents aged 12 to 17 who were asked about viewing habits and sexual activity and then surveyed again a year later. Both regular and cable television were included. The study found that youths who watched large amounts of programming with sexual content were also more likely to initiate sexual activities short of intercourse, such as oral sex. It found that shows where sex was talked about but not depicted had just as much impact as the more explicit shows. "Both affect adolescents' perceptions of what is normal sexual behavior and propels their own sexual behavior," said Dr. Rebecca Collins, the psychologist who headed the study. "The impact of TV viewing is so large that even a moderate shift in the sexual content of adolescent TV watching could have a substantial effect on their sexual behavior," she added.

■ A new study suggests that the biology underlying reading disorders may vary by culture. The study, published in a recent issue of the journal *Nature*, found that Chinese speakers who suffer from dyslexia have different brain abnormalities than English speakers who suffer from dyslexia. The findings suggest that a person can be dyslexic in one language but not in another and that treatments for English speakers with dyslexia might not be effective for those who speak other languages and have the disability.

■ Some 2004 high school graduates who thought they were finished being judged by colleges and universities were in for a big surprise this summer. Last spring, in the admissions offices of schools across the country, officials pored over second-semester senior transcripts in a hunt for students who slacked off so much that their grades dropped like a stone, or who dropped tough courses for easy ones. Thousands of students received a stern letter warning them to shape up for college. Many more were required to explain the slip in their academic performance. Some were even bounced from an honors program or had their admissions postponed. And some, though the numbers were small, had their acceptances revoked. Colleges and universities inform students on the application or the acceptance letter that admission is contingent on their performance throughout their senior year, though some seniors admit to glossing over that part, or don't believe it when they do read it.

CT's 2004 REPORT CARD

Preparation	A
Participation	A
Affordability	F
Completion	B
Benefits	A
Learning	I

STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Connecticut consistently performs well in preparing students for and enrolling them in college. However, this good record masks several substantial disparities in performance based on ethnicity and income. The state has lost ground in providing students and families with an affordable higher education, which may undercut state efforts

to send clear messages to students about the importance of taking rigorous courses during high school. (Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education)