THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

# NO READER LEFT BEHIND:

# IMPROVING MEDIA COVERAGE OF EDUCATION

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WEST: Good afternoon. I'm Darrell West. I'm Vice President and Director of Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution, and I would like to welcome you to this forum on No Reader Left Behind: Improving Media Coverage of Education, and I want to start by saying that media and education are two of my favorite topics. One of my very first jobs many years ago was being a reporter on a daily newspaper in Richmond, Indiana. It was a very small newspaper, so you did lots of differing things. So I had a range of assignments, but it always was fun to cover stories related to schools.

Now, back then, education issues seemed much simpler, although this could reflect the haziness of my memory due to advancing age. But reporters would go to school board meetings, write stories about what schools were doing, and we would pay a lot of attention to school policies and how they were affecting education.

Today, Americans are full of angst, both about education and media coverage. There is great anxiety over the effectiveness of education. Many of us worry about students who are slipping behind. Some people fear that a current generation is not going to reap the same advantages from education that our generation was able to get.

We also have seen dramatic changes in the news media in recent years. We all are familiar with the statistics, the declining numbers of readers and viewers, the dropping ad revenues that have led to financial crises for many outlets, leading newspapers have laid off reporters and downsized their coverage, and there is rising competition in the form of web sites and blogging.

With all these challenges in media and education, my colleagues and I decided to undertake a project looking at media coverage of education. Our premise was that good news coverage is critical to public understanding of the issues. It's important for civic engagement and for knowing what actually goes on inside schools. We wanted to look at what was being covered in terms of the quantity as well as the coverage, the quality of the coverage, and also to reflect on how we can do a better job of thinking about education.

Today, we are issuing a report that was written by Russ Whitehurst, E.J. Dionne and myself. It is entitled "Invisible: 1.4 Percent Coverage for Education is Not Enough." I think we should have an exclamation point at the end of that title. This project is supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, thank you very much. We appreciate that support.

I think the title of our report summarizes our major finding. As my colleagues are going to elaborate on in a minute, there isn't much

coverage of education by newspapers, radio or television. During the first nine months of 2009, education coverage constituted only 1.4 percent of all of the reporting. If you've not already seen a copy of our report, you can pick up one on your way out.

In a minute, my colleagues, Russ Whitehurst and E.J. Dionne, will review our findings in greater detail. Russ holds the Herman and George Brown Chair at Brookings. He also directs our Brown Center on Education. He's very distinguished in the field of education. He's a former director of the Institute of Education Sciences.

E.J. Dionne is a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies at Brookings. He is a nationally syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*. He's the University Professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture at Georgetown University. And, if that is not enough, he's the author of many distinguished books on various aspects of American politics and public policy.

Their presentations will be followed by an expert panel that will give its own take on this topic, and we're pleased to welcome three distinguished thinkers on education. Dale Mezzacappa is the President of the Education Writers Association. She is a former reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and now writes for the Philadelphia Public School Network. Richard Colvin is Director of the Hechinger Institute on

Education and the Media at Teachers College of Columbia University. And Andrew Rotherham is Co-founder of a nonprofit organization, Education Sector, and also is a leading blogger at Eduwonk.com.

So we're going to start with presentations from Russ and E.J., and then we will hear from our panel. First, Russ Whitehurst will talk about our study.

MR. WHITEHURST: Good afternoon. I'm pleased to be the one presenting data to you. I sit among political scientists here at Brookings, and the office arrangement is one in which a number of us share a printer that happens to sit outside my office. There are times when we're all hitting the print key more or less simultaneously, and so there are jobs in the out tray in the printer. A couple of weeks after I arrived, I heard somebody out there sorting through it, and they said, "It's all tables of numbers. It must be Whitehurst."

So I'm here to talk to you about the data that were collected as part of this project and provide some comments on the data in terms of my own prospectus, but I'll leave to E.J. and to the panel the primary responsibility for talking about what the data mean for the coverage of education by the media.

It's always important when you're thinking about numbers to pay some attention to the circumstances under which the numbers were gathered, the methods for collecting the numbers, and I think that's quite important here. We have really three sources of information in the report that's released today.

A major portion of the information is data that were collected by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. The data were collected as part of their ongoing effort. Many of you will be aware that they publish information annually on the state of journalism. That includes counts on the degree to which various topics are being covered, their frequency in the news, and this particular project was embedded in the methodology that is used for their ongoing projects. They have people, I presume, with green eyeshades, sitting over computer screens, that are counting content on a daily basis.

And, in this case, as is the case for their larger project, they coded content from newspapers in three tiers: major national papers like the *New York Times*, medium tier circulation papers and a few small community papers; network news shows, cable news shows, news and talk radio; and online news.

If you want, as I did, to see exactly which sources are being coded, I've given you a slide. This information is also available in our report, and more information on methods is available from their web site.

It's important, in thinking about the sources of information, to understand that their method is a purposeful sample rather than a representative sample. So that takes many forms. The papers themselves are not chosen because, or weighted, to represent coverage nationally. They are representative of the tiers of newspapers, for example, that are covered.

And the purpose of the sample doesn't generate a set of numbers that necessarily represents the overall state of coverage. For example, the *New York Times* is coded daily, whereas the *Washington Post* is coded twice a week. So, again, the methods are important for interpreting the numbers that are generated.

Most important, there's a strong bias in the Project for Excellence in Journalism's methods. There's a strong bias towards important stories, so that in print they code stories that begin on page A1, or the first page, of newspapers. For web coverage, they cover the five top listings in a particular web site. So you can think of these numbers as numbers reflecting national coverage of what's considered to be important news --

news that comes to the fore either in the first page of print or early in the listings of web content or the first 30 minutes of the morning news shows.

The two other sources of data that we present are a coding we did ourselves here at Brookings on AP wire news stories on education. We looked at every AP report this year, January through September. The Pew data are also for this year, January through September. Then we present qualitative information on blogs, citizen journalism, and also case studies for local newspapers and how they are handling coverage of education.

So this is the takeaway that Darrell has already given you in a graphic form. So this is national news coverage for 2009 from the Pew Research Center, and education is ranked 23rd on the list. This is the 1.4 percent number that you've seen previously. It pales in terms of coverage given to government, to economics, to foreign affairs, to business, to crime, to a number of other topics. The point here is simply the point that education in terms of important stories has a low place in the hierarchy.

One of my reflections as I looked at these data was the effort that some of you, or perhaps many of you, will be aware of. It was a campaign called Ed in '08 that was heavily funded by the Gates Foundation, by the Broad Foundation and others to try to bring to the fore education coverage in the '08 campaign. I think about $60 million went into it. Even despite

that investment, one did not see a great deal of coverage of education in the campaign.

So this low place on the totem pole has been resistant to efforts to move it up, and we present data in our report showing that it hasn't changed over the last few years. Its coverage has been relatively low this year. It was relatively low the previous year, relatively low the year before that.

Our report breaks down coverage of education by topic. There's actually more detailed information in the report that aren't presented in the figure because I've lopped off the coverage of topics at anything that is less than 2 percent of the coverage of education. So what you see here are the topics that represent anything more than 2 percent coverage of the 1.4 percent coverage of education, nationally.

So leading the list is school finance and budget. That's probably true in any year. One would expect it to be a prominent story this year because of the recession and the resultant impact on school budgets that has flowed from the general economic situation that states and localities are in.

Politics in education is an important topic. Swine flu has been very important this year. I'll come back to that in a second. And you see the list of topics tailing off.

It's interesting to think about some of the topics that are not on this list, that didn't make it above my 2 percent threshold. Technology in the schools doesn't make it into the coverage. Charter schools don't make it into the coverage, even though that's one of the hottest topics in education. The one that I cry most over, education research, doesn't make it over the threshold either.

Here, I present differences in coverage of education topics by sector. If you look only at this figure, it will distort I think the general findings which are, at least as I see them, that there is a great deal more similarities across sector and coverage than dissimilarities.

That being said, these are areas where there seem to be some interesting differences in how the different sectors of the media focus on education. So you see, for example, that cable TV is much more interested in the politics of education than is the case for the other sectors. So you can imagine Rachel Maddow or Bill O'Reilly discussing the President's back-to-school address as archetypical of what kind of coverage you get on cable TV of politics in education.

Online seems to be a bit more interested in education reform. What I think about here is Jay Mathews's online column and discussions of AP examinations and their role in education reform.

Network news loves the swine flu. I don't guess any of us would be surprised that network news loves disasters, and this has the potential to be one. It has nearly everything. It has a threat of calamity. It has easily obtained footage of appealing mothers and children. It has a populace play against mismanagement by government and medical elites. If it only had a celebrity angle, I imagine Angelina Jolie must be standing in line somewhere waiting for a flu shot for one of her kids. If we could only get that to be part of this, it would be off the charts.

Newspapers seem to be more likely to cover budget and finance issues, and maybe that's because it's easier to write about numbers where people can read them than it is to talk about them on a radio show or talk about them on cable TV.

As I indicated, we looked at the Associated Press, and I've just broken it out here compared to the coverage of the other media that I previously presented. Again, this graph just illustrates differences. There are more commonalities than differences. It looks like the AP is more interested in politics than the other media, more interested in international education, more interested in crime in school. And there were two categories that we coded for AP that aren't coded at all by the Project on Excellence in Journalism -- scandals and accidents -- and they seem to be really popular stories with AP.

In terms of the qualitative coverage, there's a lot of innovation going on there, both in the traditional media that are doing their best to expand into digital formats, in terms of citizen journalism and in terms of blogs. It's my final point in the summary, but it is a wild west out there in terms of digital media -- great variations in quality and coverage, and niche markets that just don't take the place of the mass media markets, that don't serve the general citizen who we think needs to be better informed about education.

The other summary points are, as we've said:

Education receives scant national media attention as an important story.

Much of the educational coverage has to do with things that aren't about the core business of schools. It would be like reading reviews of restaurants that talk about the economics of the restaurant business and how you get to be trained to be a chef, but never talk about food itself. There's not much food-like coverage in the national coverage of education.

There are interesting differences across the media sectors in focus.

And, again, education research seems to be missing in action.

Thank you very much.

E.J.?

MR. DIONNE: Thank you all for coming. I just want to start with a few quick thank yous -- first to Darrell, without whose work from beginning to end, this report would never have seen the light of day. He was both the prime mover and ultimate actor, I think. So thank you to Darrell.

And to Russ, a gifted education scholar, we love you, Russ, for loving numbers so much, and that was a very helpful presentation.

I also have to thank the folks who pulled together all these data -- Tom Rosenstiel and the extraordinary people at the Project for Excellence in Journalism, who do work no one else does or really can because of the nature of the database.

And last, but not least, our gifted team of Brookings researchers who pulled together so much data for the other two components of our studies. The people who read and study and count and code, and read and study and count and code again, are the unsung heroes of social science research. Without them, there are no data. Computers on their own are powerless without the input of these human beings. So, thanks to every single one of them.

The three of us come from different backgrounds. Darrell is one of the country's most respected scholars on the media, old and new. Russ is one of our respected education scholars. I bring to this the perspective of

a person who, in one form or another, has spent 35 years as a journalistic working stiff, and I want to speak from that perspective first.

I, first of all, know what it's like to have researchers and representatives of interest groups, good interest groups and maybe not so good interest groups, come to reporters and say, "Why aren't you covering my favorite subject, which is so crucial to everything that is true and good and right in the world? We need more coverage."

Like all of us in journalism, I recoil from that, at least initially. The response is "Yes, but is your subject more important than war? More important than a huge economic downturn? More important than one of the most extraordinary elections in history? More important than acts of terrorism and balloon boy and Tiger Woods?" Okay, forget balloon boy and Tiger Woods.

I think it's important to make clear that we did not, going into this study, expect that stories about education would overwhelm all these other subjects. Coming to this data with that very skepticism, I was still honestly surprised at how little prominent coverage there is of core education questions. I'll come back to this, but it is worth underscoring that this year, especially on cable, if it were not for stories about President Obama's, wrongly I think, controversial speech to incoming students and

stories about the swine flu, education coverage would have been cut in about half in some cases, a third in other cases.

I did not come to these numbers with any special interest except perhaps as a parent of two high school students and a middle school student. But however you slice these numbers, and even bearing in mind, as Russ was careful to mention, that the PEJ analysis was based only on prominent stories, it is still remarkable that the amount of education coverage simply does not match our own rhetoric about how important education is. Once in a while, a report -- and this is once if Russ gets his wishes on research -- a report such as a Nation at Risk grabs the country's attention, but on the whole education is a subject that is always there but gets pushed behind some other subject.

By the way, there is a comforting thought. This is not at all new. I ran across this lovely observation from Thomas Jefferson in 1807. "People generally have more feeling for canals and roads, than education. However, I hope we can advance them with equal pace." So our report is offered in Jefferson's spirit, even if canals and roads do have certain advantages on balloon boy.

The second thing that's important is that nothing in this report should be seen as a criticism of those reporters and columnists and editors and writers who actually do spend enormous amounts of time and

energy covering core education issues. On the contrary, they are really the heroes of the piece. They are the people fighting for space and attention, for stories about good teaching and the needs of students, and education success and failure, and the findings on what works and what doesn't. My hope, at least, is that our report strengthens their ongoing efforts to make sure that education gets the coverage it deserves, both in quality and in quantity.

Third, I think it's especially important to emphasize what I see as one of the central and, in some ways, positive findings of our study. If I may quote from page two of the report: "Local outlets are more likely to cover the substance of school policy than national media."

The report goes on, "Local journalists go to school board meetings, interview local education officials, and keep track of debates that unfold over curricula, teacher quality and structural reforms. They are more closely tied to the actual content of education because people in the community worry about the education young people are receiving, especially parents who read their publications and watch their broadcasts."

I think this is a good news, bad news story -- the local/national split -- that we might try to turn into a good news, good news story. At one level, it's not surprising that local education is more complete than national

coverage. Education is dealt with in principle as a national issue and a national problem, but most of the power to affect it exists at the state and local levels. So much of the coverage is necessarily about the state and local level, and much of it is necessarily balkanized.

We don't do enough, I think, to link the problems faced by our local elementary schools or high schools or middle schools or community colleges or universities to national policy because the journalistic systems we have, or at least have had up to this point, tend to make doing so difficult.

Federal funding is important, of course, but not nearly as important as state and local funding, and I say that, by the way, as somebody who has spent three years of my life obsessed with state budgets and education funding formulas. It's hard to make the link between the federal, or national, and the local.

There's also great diversity in the problems faced by different kinds of public schools. Some public school systems really are excellent. Some are good. Some are mediocre. And some are in catastrophic shape.

Some school systems really are short of money. Some have money and need reform. Some need both reform and money.

We rarely have the opportunity to pay enough attention to the reasons why good schools are good, why not so good schools are not so

good. So we rarely have the chance to see what we can learn from success and what we can learn from failure.

Of course, again, stories get written about all these things, but it's awfully hard to explore these questions systematically when there is a five-car fatal on the Beltway or on Route 128, or, as we learn from that AP coverage, an accident in one of the schools, let alone a car bomb in Afghanistan or a precipitous drop in the stock market or a flu epidemic.

There is also -- and this is very clear in our study -- a great bias toward covering ideological and partisan issues that often have only a marginal impact on what teachers do in the classroom day after day, and what students learn in those classrooms day after day. It's a lot easier to get a story in the paper or on cable when that story is about Barack Obama's speech to school children.

I aggregated some of those numbers that Russ showed you. In our study, 7.4 percent of all education stories that got major attention had to do with the politics of education, notably whether schools were too liberal -- apparently, there wasn't a lot about whether schools were too conservative -- or whether Obama was trying to indoctrinate students. Another 7.3 were about H1N1, 6.4 were about the stimulus package, another largely political story, and 11.1 percent of the stories were about school finance and budget cutbacks.

Wipe out all of these stories, and you eliminate one-third of all of the prominent education stories in the Project for Excellence in Journalism sample.

Our education coverage too often mirrors political coverage. Believe me, as anyone who knows me knows, I love political coverage. It's my bread and butter, which is rather important during a time of recession. But politically charged issues in education are often not, I think we can say usually not, the most important issues to kids or to parents or to teachers, but you will likely get more space for those kinds of stories than the substantive stories get in publications that we hail, such as *Education Week* or the *Chronicles of Higher Education*.

But again I want to suggest that there is some very good news here. I think the most heartening part of our report focused on what local papers are doing to expand the attention that they are giving education. I'd urge everybody to take a look at our case studies in Providence, Des Moines, Minneapolis and Phoenix; they're on pages 18 to 22 of the report. These outlets are using the unlimited space made available by the web to expand reporting, discussion and debate and argument about the schools.

Again, I think it's very important to think about how exciting that unlimited space is, something that was recently underscored to me by our

*Washington Post* policy blogger, Ezra Klein. We really don't have the same limits on us as we used to. We don't have the same limits on our imagination, on content, on the amount of space we can give things. When space is limitless, there are a lot of possibilities.

Just to pick one example, the School Grounds blog in the *Arizona Republic* that we mention, and I pray they are still doing it, is an impressive example of what I'm talking about. The web clearly holds promise in many respects, and I suspect we'll hear more about that as we go on.

Media outlets around the country should learn to share all this good local reporting. The web has torn down, or at least lowered the walls, between the national and the local. There is no reason why people in New York or Philadelphia and Dallas cannot learn from what's happening in Phoenix or Denver or Seattle. Education is a classic area where bubbling up from the local can vastly improve what is going on nationally.

There are also some promising developments which we talk about, in the growth of specialty journalistic outlets that now include those focusing on education. We have some of the folks involved in that in this room, and I very much hope they will tell us in the discussion period about what they are doing and what they hope to do.

Because our conclusions are in the report, which you have, I won't go through them in detail. I just want to call attention to the last four of them:

Number five, very dear to Russ's heart, reporters should draw on education research in the way that health reporters use medical research. That is a very interesting thing to think about. Think of how much coverage medicine gets. Good Lord, think of how much coverage the mammogram study got recently. I think using the health research as a model for the kind of coverage education research could be given is a very good idea.

We urge, not surprisingly, that newspapers and other media outlets that have cut back on education reporting should reconsider those decisions, not only on public interest grounds but also because there really is widespread concern about these issues. I don't think our friends in the local media that we covered in our study would be expanding their coverage online of these subjects if they didn't know that there was vast interest in their communities in these subjects.

Therefore, we also think that newspapers and publishers and editors and broadcasters, and they're trying to do this, should find ways to integrate the great work online with other forms of their product.

And, lastly, foundations and nonprofits, particularly in these difficult economic times, could help not only in starting new enterprises but also I think in partnering with traditional education to solve the problem of insufficient coverage, which I think in the end we quite effectively document here.

The easiest thing in the world is to blame the media for all that ails us. I regularly thank my wife, who is a lawyer, for the fact that her profession exists because lawyers and used car dealers help keep us journalists out of the cellar in all of those rankings of professional respect and prestige. God bless the lawyers.

But journalism has always been about helping people understand the world around them, and, in democratic countries, journalism provides citizens with the information and, dare I say it, the knowledge and the understanding that they need to act as responsible and engaged citizens. We help identify problems. We help in laying out solutions to those problems and the debates over those solutions.

We need to improve the way we educate ourselves as a country. That means we need to improve the way in which we educate ourselves about education. There are a lot of journalists, of the old and new variety, who are doing that right now. I hope our report encourages them, and I hope it encourage editors and proprietors and producers and

foundation heads and educators and politicians to think harder about how we do and promote this good work of encouraging real reporting and discussion on education.

I mentioned Jefferson earlier, so I'll close with him. Jefferson once said, "In a republican nation whose citizens are to be led by reason and persuasion, and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance."

Let us reason together about how to improve the art of reasoning about education itself."

Thank you.

MR. WEST: Okay, we're going to take a minute to get our guests wired, and then we're going to hear from our expert panel.

Russ was pointing out the over-time data in terms of the national news coverage, and it's interesting. You could be a real optimist or a real pessimist on this because we are pointing out that in the first 9 months of 2009 the national news covered education to the tune of 1.4 percent, but if you go back to 2008 the number was 0.7 percent. So we've doubled the numbers from 2008 to 2009. So maybe that trend line will keep moving.

But if you kind of want the longer perspective, if you go back to 2007, there the number was 1 percent of all the coverage was devoted to education.

Okay, first, I'd like to turn to our expert panel, and I'm going to start with Dale.

You are a practicing journalist. You lead the Education Writers Association. So you are very much on the front lines of this debate. What do you see as the barriers to better education writing?

MS. MEZZACAPPA: Well, I think the report certainly laid out many of them.

I think that there are issues both in the media and in education.

I think that obviously the newspaper industry is changing rapidly. I mean I'm an example of that. I left the *Philadelphia Inquirer* after 27 years, and so a lot of the institutional memory of the longtime education reporters is the people who left the newspapers essentially. The higher paid reporters are the ones who they are trying to, as they try to navigate this new world. I think the new world, though, is also a great opportunity.

So the reporters are constantly being asked to do more with less, and swine flu is very important. These things obviously news, but the issue is: Is the education reporter writing about it, or is the health reporter, or GA reporter writing about those things? How much time is devoted to actually writing about education policy? And I think that newspapers, especially when it comes to national issues, are not set up to do that very well.

But I think another really important issue relating to if in fact we need to write more on classrooms -- and I always tried to do that as a journalist, writing a series on teacher quality, for instance, in 1998 before it became part of the national discourse to the extent that it is today -- I think we need more access to classrooms and schools than we normally get. That is cited in the report as well. In my experience covering education now for more than 20 years, it's still difficult.

The educators and superintendents and principals and teachers, they tend to operate from the point of view that the media is only interested in blaming the educators for whatever is wrong. It's very hard to get into the buildings, and if you want to build up an expertise, if you want to write about what programs work, for instance, you need really to have access to the classroom, more so than we do now. So I think it's very important to try to get educators to see that.

The other issue I think -- and E.J. also mentioned this -- is the idea of nationalizing the local story. In EWA, the Education Writers Association, we are in the process of rethinking our mission and expanding our community and looking at different ways to help education writers do a better job.

Also, we have, for instance, the public editor who's sitting in the room, Linda Perlstein, a former reporter for the *Washington Post*, and one

of her missions is to really fill in and help reporters, who don't have the kind of editing that they may have had at one time at their local newspapers, figure out how to do exactly what E.J. said about nationalizing the local story -- how to help a reporter in Denver, for instance, where there is some pay for performance that is now a part of the national discourse, and how to write stories that would make people see through the eyes of a teacher or a school, how this actually works in practice.

And the other main issue is how to basically allow beat reporters to find new venues for getting out to do the writing. There are a lot of these new ventures that are starting up and ventures that have been around a while, like the Notebook, for instance, that I write for now, which really does intense local coverage that gets a wider readership but needs to be sustained. They can get a wider readership beyond their own borders of like Gotham schools in New York, for instance, but need to find new ways of sustaining and supporting these reporting ventures.

MR. WEST: Okay, thank you very much.

Richard, we are seeing a lot of alternative sources of news now -- universities, think tanks and nonprofit organizations. At the Hechinger Institute on Education and Media at Columbia that you direct, you have a foundation-supported strategy designed to produce content for and with

news organization. So can you tell us a little bit how this operates, and is this a viable way to improve news coverage?

MR. COLVIN: Thanks, Darrell. Let me just say, just really quickly, on the report I think it basically is right. I think pointing out the lack of coverage of community colleges is absolutely on point.

The work that we've done over the last three years with an ongoing fellowship that we've had, where we basically underwrite journalists to do in-depth coverage, has produced 29 projects about community colleges of some substance over the last 3 years, and we've got 10 more in the pipeline. So, over the years, through these fellowships and other mechanisms such as our seminars, we've tried to improve the quality and the quantity of coverage.

But, over time, we recognized that these methods, even though they were useful and met our goals, they weren't serving a larger purpose. They were of a big enough scale response to the needs. So, a year ago, we started putting together a strategy where we will have a small editorial team, an additional editor, a couple staff writers, will have a national network of freelance people who myself and the other editors have met over the years, and we will recruit many more. Then the first priority for us in using the editorial team will be in doing collaboration with mainstream media.

I counted. If you think of the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, AP and *Time* and *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*, there are 10.8 reporters who are full-time on education among those publications, and the *Wall Street Journal* just closed its Boston bureau as of the end of this month, and there will be less. There will be fewer positions entirely.

So our team can go to a *Washington Post*, a *New York Times*, a number of other potential partners and say, "You know what? We can collaborate with you. We can help you augment your coverage. We can bring in our network of freelancers. We can bring in our editing talent. Some of our staff writers can work directly with you reporters, in a model that is popping up in a number of other areas."

Whether it's the health news that's underwritten by the Kaiser Health News, Kaiser Foundation, or whether it's investigative reporting or whether it's environmental reporter, these models are emerging.

Ours is somewhat different from that. We will also have a very active online portal which will have blogs and direct coverage produced directly for that web site. But we're trying to create this model. Well, we have created this model for the world of education, to supplement what's going on in mainstream media.

MR. WEST: Thank you and thank you for mentioning this finding on the community colleges. I just want to note, to draw your attention in the report on this. Community colleges educate 6.7 million students compared to 11.2 million who are educated through colleges and universities. But when you look at the national news coverage, community colleges only get one-tenth the national news coverage of colleges and universities. They're educating almost the same number. They get far less attention. So that's something we wanted to highlight in our report.

Andrew, I want to turn you. Among your many roles in the education field, you are a blogger. Can blogs or other types of digital outlets fill the void left by the decline of traditional news organizations?

MR. ROTHERHAM: Well, thanks and let me say thank you for having me here. I feel like if I'm supposed to be the blogger, I should have really worn pajamas as solidarity with my brethren around the country.

It's a great report. I'm glad you guys put it out. I hope we can get into some of the other issues.

I was less concerned by some of the frequency analyses about the coverage. As a parent, I wanted to read about H1N1, frankly, more than I wanted to read about No Child Left Behind reauthorization. So I understand that.

But there are some problems here, I think particularly, and you guys allude to this in the report a couple places and then hit it kind of directly. There are quality problems, and there are quantity problems, and I think it's important we attack both of those.

But, if I'm here to speak for sort of the blogs as guys who are going to solve the quality problem, then you've got the wrong panelist because I don't think the blogs --

MR. WEST: Okay, do it.

MR. ROTHERHAM: I don't think the blogs can solve it. Look, there are some obvious reasons for that, which, let's be clear, in the blogs there's an awful lot of tendentiousness. There's an awful lot of stuff that's not transparent, where people are sort of wielding various grievances and so forth. It's just a very messy space that's often not very illuminating. That's the obvious part.

I think there are two more sort of subtle reasons that are really important, and I'll use my blog as an example. I've been at this for almost six years now, which is sort of amazing, in terms of doing Eduwonk, and we've grown from a blog with a couple hundred, literally a couple hundred, readers when we started to a blog that will do well north of three million page views this year -- which in the big blogosphere is nothing, in the education blogosphere is pretty dominant market share.

So I'll tell you about sort of why I don't think, from my own first person. Darrell mentioned I do other things in this space. I have a going concern, a think tank education sector. I'm in the process of launching a new venture. I sit on boards and so forth. I don't have the time to cover this stuff at the level of quality that you need from good journalists, and that's why I look to good journalists when I really want to find out what's going on. I think a lot of people are in that situation.

So, the report, it talked a little about my blog and mentioned a lot of my posts are short. Well, if you actually sort of look at that, you can get a sense from reading my blog of my daily work flow. If I'm not busy and I have other things, I have time I can put in, I'll write much longer posts. I like to do that. But often I'm busy, and so you'll see just a snippet: "Here's a report I read. I think it's good. You might like it too."

That's not coverage. That's me sort of providing a service. Readers like it. They obviously come. But it's not sort of the quality of coverage that you need in this space.

Then the second is I'm self-interested. I've never made a secret of that. So there are things I simply don't write about. I make a commitment to my readers that they get transparency, but that means there are certain topics I just lay off of.

So, in addition to not having the time to write about some stuff -- and I've got always an email box full of angry publicists upset about that, why aren't I writing about this or the other -- I also just simply lay off of some things because I couldn't write about them in a way that either didn't violate confidences that I need to maintain professionally or didn't break faith with readers.

So I'll speak for journalists, and I'll speak for newspapers. I think what's happening in the industry is a real tragedy.

The editing process, it's not perfect, and we all can point out the examples where the really bad, flawed study got through 20 layers of editing and lands on the front page of a major newspaper. There's, unfortunately, more than an isolated example of that. But it's a human process, things happen. Overall, the editing process is hugely important.

The capacity that newspapers have to cover news, they don't get busy. They have redundancy. So they can get people at the things that are going on, the things you want to know about in a way that the individual blogger, no matter how much they care, simply can't do.

So the blogs are interesting. The big thing they bring to the table, I think, is sort of a wisdom of crowds. And, to the extent they've serve as sort of a fact-checking function around some things in journalism, that's a

valuable function. I think this medium, that's a big thing it brings to the table.

But as a replacement and for people who say, well, print journalism and the old legacy papers are dying, but the blogs are going to fill it in -- it's an exciting time, this whole idea of an army of Davids and this sort of thing. I don't think it's going to be able to replicate what we have. I think we're losing some things that are very valuable, and we're not necessarily going to be able to replace them.

I'll close with my crazy idea on this, which is NBC has this amazing program where they've taken all their video footage and they've tied it to the AP curriculum at the high school level. So all this stuff that was just sitting, gathering dust in the vaults at 30 Rockefeller, is now available. Teachers can use it. It's a blend. Some of it is free, and some of it is online.

I think the newspapers have this too. They have this incredible chronicle of American history that we can use. In terms of monetizing something that would allow us to address the problems that Richard put on the table, I think there are actually ways that they could help with our curriculum problem, our civics education problem, and get in the game and help start to generate revenue, so we can get back to doing.

The story Richard told is a really unfortunate one, particularly if you follow. The Boston bureau of the *Wall Street Journal* broke some of the best education stories and really some good long-form stuff. If we want to address that, we need to come up with alternative revenue models, and I think they're sitting on a national treasure that could be unlocked to help us in education with some of our problems, and also start to generate some more sustainable alternative revenue models because this idea of living off of clicks, it's ultimately bad for everybody and does not serve a long-term solution.

MR. WEST: Okay, thank you. In a minute, we're going to turn to the audience and get your questions and comments. But I want to have a short what I would call a free-for-all session on the panel, where I'm just going to throw out a couple questions and people can jump in as they would like.

Andrew was mentioning this quality problem, just not necessarily in terms of how much they cover things but what is it that gets covered and in what way does it get covered. It seems like in our study that little of the coverage relates to the actual school policy, school reform, education research or ways to improve the curriculum or learning processes. How can we inject more substance into the coverage?

Then secondly, you know we have a lot of czars in this town. So I'm going to turn each of you into a czar, and, if you could implement any solution that you desired in this area, what would it be?

The floor is open. Czars, please speak. Nothing is worse than shy czars.

MR. COLVIN: I a small-world Republican. I'm against monarchy.

Well, I think the quality problem goes to some of what Dale was saying. This is really hard stuff to cover. I mean we all went to school. So, in some sense, we feel like we kind of know schooling. But how many of us really know what it means to teach someone to read and what the importance of vocabulary and fluency and phonological knowledge? I mean how many people really understand all that?

And then a subset of that then, as journalists, is how many people can then take that very technical knowledge and make it into compelling stories? The coin of the realm here is stories, compelling stories that people are going to read just because they're good stories.

There's a huge hurdle both in terms of knowledge and then technical, professional skill in being able to make those into stories. So I think the quality one is a very difficult one.

Russ, one time, came to a Hechinger Institute seminar, and he was very, very generous, and he said, "You know what? I am willing to have a

member of my staff at the ready, at the phone, ready to pick up that hotline if you as journalists have a study that you want to write about, but you're not sure about the technical quality of it. You're not sure about where it comes from, what the sample size is, what are the implications you can draw. Off the record, before deadline, I'm willing to have somebody there walk you through it."

And I think you told me almost a year later that not a single person had taken advantage of that incredibly generous offer.

MR. WEST: That's correct.

MR. COLVIN: So there's a skill problem, and there's a will problem.

We've done things. The Education Writers Association has done a lot of seminars. There is this knowledge building, but I think it actually goes to the editors, while there's been a reduction in the number of reporters who cover education. We used to do a seminar every year and have 30 or 40 educator editors come. We abandoned that two years ago because there aren't enough people whose job is education editor anymore. So they can't assign more sophisticated stories because they themselves don't understand.

And reporters always bash editors, right, E.J.? I mean that's what we do, but I think that's a significant problem.

As far as being a czar, I just think that, as Dale said, I mean I think this is a really exciting time, despite all the sort of negative things that are being said. We don't know what technology is going to allow us to do. We don't know what crowd sourcing is going to allow us to do.

I mean there are great things going on. For example, Gotham schools has a blog in New York City. They have mapped budget cuts. So you can look at New York City as a map, and you can figure out where the deepest budget cuts have come.

And how did they do that? Well, people from individual schools twittered or emailed, oh, we cut, there was this cut here, this cut there, and then they were able to geo-map it to the location. That's just one example. There are a lot of things that could be done.

I'm just very grateful that with the support of the Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, the Joyce Foundation and a number of other foundations who are supporting work, that we have an opportunity to try out those new technologies and those new methods.

But Andy is right, you know. Ultimately, we've got to figure out a revenue model, and I think somebody is going to figure it out.

MR. WEST: Other thoughts from the panel?

MR. ROTHERHAM: Yes, I'll jump in. First, I think we should be honest. There is a quality problem, we should be honest. Journalism is tricky.

So a lot of us, like I basically write professionally, but I get to write on a fairly narrow set of issues. You get to get deep on it. Being a generalist, which a lot of reporters end up being able to write on a number of things, it's challenging. We should acknowledge that, and you're going to get some things wrong and so forth. If you're an expert in the field and a trained eye, you're always going to see stuff that's a little off-key. I think that sometimes gets overlooked, and we should give it its due.

It's also a hard-to-cover issue, as Richard said. So, last week, I spent a fascinating day on Rikers Island, in the maximum security facility there. It was amazing, talking with inmates, watching the instruction, the school there and so forth. It would be very difficult for me to convey a lot of that. I know the policy implications. I'm going to do work on that. But to convey that in a way to readers, that experience, teaching, it's hard to describe.

I mean even on TV, it's frankly not particularly good television. It's worse print.

MR. WEST: What were you in prison for?

MR. ROTHERHAM: I was there voluntarily, I should point out.

MR. WEST: Oh, okay. I just wanted to clarify.

MR. ROTHERHAM: But, all that said, I will be very critical in the sense I think it's now what Richard talked about, there's a lot of really bad coverage. I mean I get extremely frustrated when you have these issues that are completed settled in the social science literature, for instance, or settled in the research literature, and instead we have these raging debates about them in education.

It really is a lot of reporters approach this stuff as if -- and this is why I thought the recommendation about treating this like medical research was so important. Someone will say that the Earth or the moon is made of rock, and someone else will put out a study and say, no, the Earth is made of green cheese. You can count on a lot of reporters, unfortunately, to write the story that the debate over the lunar surface continues with two new studies.

We have to get past that as a field, and that comes to this issue of training. It comes to editors and so forth.

So I think there are two things, if I were a czar. One is money for training, and this is really hard. And Richard, he did a pretty good job in giving himself a commercial, but I'll add to it. What he does is invaluable. It's a real problem, and editors don't want to send reporters if

someone is going to be moving off the beat. We've got to start investing much more in training. This is a beat that is complicated to cover.

And a White House thing that always sort of discouraged me is if the President was doing something on national security, the Pentagon reporters would come over to back it up for the briefing. If they were doing something on health care, the *New York Times* would send somebody like Robert Pear. If you're doing something on education, they never sent the education reporters. The White House reporter could always cover it. We need to increase the idea that these are complicated issues and not anyone can just parachute in. So we need that training.

Then finally we need paths up. This is not a beat, let's be honest, that really leads to a lot of places. So what you see is, and I'll single out Siobhan Gorman whom many of you problem know. Siobhan came on the scene, was writing at *National Journal*, some of the best coverage on the elementary and secondary education act, No Child Left Behind.

What happened to her? Well, she wanted to get onto a beat that had a bigger path up. She ended up at the *Baltimore Sun* covering national security and now at the *Wall Street Journal* covering national security. She's won awards for her coverage. She's broken some major stories about the spy scandals, the intelligence stuff that's been going on and so forth. I mean she's really had a huge impact.

That's the path you see with a lot of young reporters. Now they've got a new reporter at the *National Journal* covering education, a young reporter that has all the makings of being another rock star. We'll see how long she stays on the beat before she decides. So the way up professionally in that field is away from this.

That's a problem, and we have to start -- this is one that's on the newspapers -- start making education a beat where people want to be like Jay Mathews, who has shown that you can have a career, an impactful career, writing about this stuff. Or, Richard Colvin, although he's now doing something else. We've got to build it internally that way or you're going to continue to have this churn that leads to all these bad things with the externalities and so forth that we're talking about here.

MR. WEST: Actually, at Brookings, we all want to be like E.J.

MS. MEZZACAPPA: If I could have just one second, Andy is right, education reporting has come a long way from when I started. I mean it was clearly in the past just a political beat really. You covered the school boards, and there really wasn't even recognition that education policy was an important thing for newspapers to cover on a day-to-day basis. So there has been some progress definitely in that regard.

And I think while the training is very important, certainly that's one of the things that EWA does, the other thing is just the time. I mean you can

get reporters who have developed a pretty good expertise of how to observe a classroom and know good research from bad research and everything, but they don't get the time the way newspapers are structured today to actually spend what's needed to really do in-depth stories that advance the issues and inform the public, enlighten the public. They always get pulled off on the daily stories, which are not unimportant but which prevent the longer-term projects.

MR. DIONNE: Can I say a few things?

First, thanks to Andy for mentioning Jay Mathews, who is both a great reporter and a great human being, and the *Post* actually does have a long obsession, honorable obsession, with education.

One point I wanted to make is that the way in which politicians choose to make education important or not clearly has a major impact on coverage. Look at how much attention Obama got to education because a Republican in Florida decided to attack him for giving that speech.

Now it doesn't have to be just cases like that. The *Post*, I learned from a paper that one of my students wrote, has done extraordinary, a lot of, coverage on what's going on in the schools here because of the controversy surrounding Michelle Rhee, the fact that the mayor decided to make this a major issue.

My student even learned that there is quite a difference of view implicit in the news reporting from what's on the op-ed page, which is actually great. The people get a bunch of points of view.

So I do think that political leadership can matter if somebody chooses to make this an issue. Now it's not necessarily my business as a journalist to tell them what to do, but as a citizen I would not mind at all to have this made a major issue.

Secondly, on the point that Andy made about blogs, he's absolutely right that certain kinds of blogs do not lend themselves to anything like the reporting we're talking about. I think the problem always is the problem with, to paraphrase President Clinton, it depends on what the meaning of the word blog is because what I was struck by in some of our looks at the local papers is some of these areas on local newspaper web sites are not simply blogs. They are comprehensive areas where they can become homes to blogging and controversy and discussion, but also reports, news reports and links to other education resources.

Everybody in the news business is trying to figure out new revenue models. I'd be very curious if indeed the education area, because there is this built-in body of parents out there and we're in the middle of an echo baby boom, might not be an area that could pay off if there were

investments made in it. I won't claim I know that to be true, but I sure would love to see media outlets try that.

The third is on access. I'm really glad you raise that. That's exactly the right issue. I wanted to go to my little recommendation in the report, which is that there are all kinds of cutbacks going on in extracurricular activities and one of them is school newspapers.

I fully confess bias here. My son is on the *Black & White* at Whitman High School. It's actually amazing how much kids, when given room to report by the school, can produce on what's going on in the school, which in turn can be helpful to people covering from the outside. I know that *Black & White* reporters do chat occasionally with education reporters. That's a good feedback loop, but access is really critical.

MS. MEZZACAPPA: Well, one of the other things I do is work with a program in Philadelphia called Prime Movers which is funded by Knight and which is trying to revive high school newspapers in Philadelphia schools. Last year, there was a conference of the journalism association, the high school journalism association, and it was in Philadelphia, and it was the first time students from Philadelphia public schools actually attended. I think that's very important to not only encourage the next generation of journalists but also to use them much than we do as sources for our own reporting.

MR. WHITEHURST: Can I quickly respond to what E.J. said? So it's a matter of access and getting into classes and getting into schools, and that's very, very difficult. It's also not investing or allowing these extracurricular activities. But it's also a leadership issue.

We did a survey of superintendents to figure out what they thought of media coverage, and they said, well, it's marginally okay.

Then we asked them, well, how much time do you spend explaining education issues to reporters when they call? And they said, oh, you know, 15 minutes a week.

I thought, you know what -- and I've said this to many superintendents over the years. You're an educator. You have to educate the press the same way you educate your parents directly, your students, about what's going on. You can't expect. You can't say on one hand, well, the coverage isn't all that helpful, and then not help improve that coverage by making yourself available and by reaching out to journalists when you have time.

I think that's reflected in one of your recommendations as well.

MR. ROTHERHAM: Let's be honest, it's actually even worse than that. So you see a lot in the public sector, efforts to make data not transparent, to sort of obscure things and so forth. So it's even worse than not spending time.

In education, there's a huge school of thought that the real problem is a public relations problem, not a substantive problem with the schools. So journalists are on the receiving end of that, which is just data that are put out in ways as not to be useful, things that are obscure. For instance, when the data come out, every state can find some little nugget that's always good news. Even if everything else is bad, that will be the top of their press release. So people who are in a hurry, they write off of that.

It's a deeper sort of systemic problem in terms of how people think about the press, and that's obviously not unique to our field. We're no more or less friendly than other fields.

MS. MEZZACAPPA: And a lot of superintendents, like in other fields, also feel they don't need the press anymore because they have their own web sites and they have other means of getting their information out. They just blow off talking to the press in any substantive way because there does exist this continued adversarial relationship.

MR. WEST: Okay, why don't we move to the audience participation stage? You've been very patient in listening to us. We want to give you a chance to ask questions and make comments. If you could, when you ask your question, give us your name and your organization and if you could keep your questions brief just so we can get to more people.

We have some microphones around, right there. We have a microphone coming up for you.

QUESTIONER: Hi. I'm Peggy Orchowski, and I'm the Congressional correspondent for the Hispanic Outlook Magazine, which is the real name. It's Hispanic Outlook on Higher Education. I also have a Ph.D. in public finance with an emphasis on education. So I come at it from a lot of different angles, which is my comment here.

It seems to me that when people think about education reporting, they mainly think about K through 12, but I think higher education is a huge element that hooks into so many different issues. It's almost when you're talking about jobs and now the job crisis, you can't help but get into the education issue.

One of my big issues, as E.J. knows and a lot of people, is immigration, and I come to it through higher ed because there are so many issues in higher ed. I think you can say that with almost every issue we have. There should be more specialists now in education, particularly in higher education. Yet, when I asked NPR a few years ago, when I was an intern there, why they didn't have someone covering higher ed -- I don't know if Claudio is here, but mainly he covers K through 12 -- it's like, oh, well, that's just minor.

I'm wondering if you looked at all in the report about a specialist of issues in higher ed.

I just came from a thing at Stanford American Progress where the theme was "Is Higher Education Now Just for the Rich." It's getting to be a huge issue, and I think you could get a lot more coverage on higher ed and education in general if you cover it in conjunction with some of the most crucial issues in our politics right now.

MR. WEST: I think that's a very good point. I mean certainly higher education. I spent 26 years teaching at Brown University, and I know at Brown, as well as a lot of colleges and universities, they see themselves as engines of economic development, engines of innovation, of all sorts of great things happening. But when you look at the news coverage, first of all, there's not much coverage of elementary and secondary. There's even less coverage of higher education.

But oftentimes, when you think about the local news coverage of higher education, it's the student parties on the weekends that get out of control. It's really episodic things as opposed to some of these more structural things that you're talking about.

MR. WHITEHURST: I think the Project for Excellence in Journalism singled out higher education as an area that had taken a noticeable hit in

the terms of the specialist, that this was an area in the newsroom that had been reduced significantly, even more so than K-12 education.

And then you're right, I mean the coverage is also the weekend parties. But most of the higher education coverage in America is about individual colleges. It's about institutions. It's about institutional issues rather than about these broad economic, social class kinds of issues that you're referring to.

MR. DIONNE: One of the findings in the study which goes to your point is that when we looked at our local papers the *Providence Journal* had quite a bit of coverage of higher ed, but Brown University, Providence College and a number of other institutions are very important to the Providence economy. They recognize that. Therefore, they gave it the coverage.

It appears, again I don't pretend that we can speak for every paper in the country, but it does appear from the evidence we looked at, that a lot depends on how important it is as, if you will, a local industry -- which again is why it's too bad when people shut Boston bureaus that tends to do damage to higher ed coverage.

MR. ROTHERHAM: Although it does, but I will say that Boston is part of the problem. My colleague, Kevin Kerry , makes this point quite a bit. As bad as K-12 coverage is about being driven by people's person

bias, higher ed is worse. Essentially, the whole conversation is about the schools in the top 100 in *U.S. News*, which everybody in this room went to one of those schools. There are thousands of degree-granting institutions that most Americans go, and nothing about their experience, nothing about the experience of nontraditional students. So the story is the Boston story.

You can count on the *New York Times*, every couple years, to get the profile of the stressed out parents who have to choose between should the child go to Princeton or should they go to Harvard and how this is just the angst this is causing for the family, the tremendous spring semester and senior year of high school and how hard this is, when most Americans, sort of their kingdom for that choice.

MR. DIONNE: In the PEJ data, if education in general can be seen maybe as a media stepchild, community colleges are exiled to Antarctica somewhere. I mean there's almost no coverage in terms of the prominent stories. I bet those will bump up in the next couple years if the Obama obsession with them continues, but even with a substantial push from a high profile President I still think those numbers will stay low.

I'm curious what Russ's reading of that was.

MR. WHITEHURST: Well, I think the issue for me and the important issue here is that the coverage of colleges, whether they be

community colleges or four-year schools, has little to do with the pressing policy issues that the nation is facing in higher education. We have escalating costs. We have specialization issues. We have whether there's going to be a digital revolution and whether the current industry is going to be substantially changed. We have the fact that we spend more per student than any other nation in the world and generally produce mediocre results in terms of graduation rates. Those stories, which are pressing stories for the nation's interest, are hardly covered at all, whereas the expansion of the community college into an adjacent cornfield will be fully covered because of the prospect that it might bring some jobs to the region.

MR. WEST: We had a question right there in the aisle, if we can get a microphone there. Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Hi. My name is Emily Bloomfield, and I work for Stanford Children as a senior policy advisor. We mobilize communities to advocate for reforms that improve public education. So, in that context, I look for news articles and research about what works in public education. So I can attest to the scant quantity of articles that really actually do inform us about what works, and so I rely a lot on research and a bit on news stories, and the Education Quality Project helps roll some of that up.

What I want to know is I think there are other advocacy organizations that do the same. I produce a little newsletter for our organization that provides links to these.

Are there things that advocacy organizations, like ours, can do to encourage the media or work together to help inform parents who really want to know what works, and what can they do to pressure school boards, legislators and others to actually implement reforms?

Andy, to your point, I mean sometimes these things that appear in the press are really surfacing debates that aren't debates. In the interest of "balance," they quote two opposing points of view about issues that really, I mean, shouldn't be debates. It's not really balance at all. So I mean I wonder if you could speak to that.

MR. ROTHERHAM: I guess the only thing is I'm a big fan of Stan. Full disclosure, I'm on their advisory board for a project they have, but I'll say a little bit about the job of advocacy groups. I do worry we're having this strange conversation a little bit where journalism is imploding, and that's a shame, and here are all these things that they should do that are good for the republic.

I mean the job of newspapers is to sell newspapers. And let's be honest, they're not doing a very good job of that right now, right? So some of these things we're talking about may be ways to get at that, but

their job is not necessarily to influence public officials to create better education policy, and so we should be realistic about how they approach it.

Some of this, I think, is that advocacy groups can work with them, provide material and so forth. I mean provide information. Again, as reporters get more and more stretched, the more you can provide information. That's a challenge because a lot of what they're going to get is biased and tainted, but people can still do their best and support them.

But at some level, we should also think about what are other organizations and what's their responsibility here. So, if you have an initiative you really want to educate people on, what are other ways, especially in this new environment, to reach people? Obviously, in different communities, there are different degrees to which technology and so forth is going to do that. So I would just offer a caution that we not put everything on journalists and remain cognizant of what their function is.

Look, I love the crusading journalist. I mean at home I have a pictured, a framed front page from the day Nixon resigned that Ben Bradlee signed. It's one of my favorite possessions. So I grew up sort of worshipping at that temple. I think it's great, but we should also be realistic.

MR. WEST: But was that because of Ben Bradlee's signature or the Nixon resignation?

MR. ROTHERHAM: It was actually he said it was the only one he'd ever signed. It was ironic because it was actually the day Nixon died by total coincidence.

MR. WEST: E.J.?

MR. DIONNE: I just want to make a small correction. The job of newspapers in economic terms is to sell advertising. That's the problem.

MR. WEST: Right.

MR. DIONNE: If you measure it simply by readership banks online, many outlets have more readers than ever, but they can't figure out how to make this product pay. So, because we always subsidize journalism with advertising, that's why we're at sea.

Now I don't know how advocacy organizations can possibly solve that except to buy a lot of newspaper advertising, but I think it's just always worth noting that it is an advertising crisis even more than a circulation crisis.

MR. WEST: Right. Okay, we have another question right there on the aisle.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Liza Craigman , *National Journal*.

I have two questions, one for Andy. I'd like you to flesh out your idea about that new prof model a little bit more.

Then for the whole panel, is charging for content hopeless? If it is or it isn't, I'd like to hear views on that.

And then what are your thoughts on what the next prof model should be for journalism? Because I think that's the solution to a lot of the problems about coverage, not just about education, about everything. If there was more money in the industry to have more reporters, we wouldn't need to beat our heads against the wall about why there isn't.

MR. WEST: Okay, I'm going to go out on a limb. I'm going to say it's not hopeless because in fact many newspapers are starting to move towards that model. Some of the newspapers that I read, I've been getting notices that in spring of next year they're going to start to charging.

The other big thing that has happened just in the last couple of days is Google, which of course puts a lot of news content online for free, has announced a new policy where they are going to allow newspapers and other organizations to restrict the content. I think the road there they proposed is you can get up to five articles from a particular newspaper for free, and if you want to read more than that from that item it's no longer going to be free, and that paper can charge. That will have an enormous impact on newspapers.

MR. ROTHERHAM: I thought you were going to ask my question on your career path.

MR. DIONNE: Well, I assumed she is the new young education reporter.

MR. ROTHERHAM: The future rock star, yes. What NBC did is they realized they had this huge video, this vault of video, all their coverage literally since the dawn of television. So all these events we want to teach kids about, whether it's the Civil Rights Movement or Neil Armstrong's first walking on the moon, the Apollo project, all this, and it was just sitting there, and no one was using it.

What they realized is you can link that to an AP history curriculum. You could link that to the AP government curriculum. You could link that to the AP literature curriculum in some cases, in English. So they invested very heavily in bringing in content specialists, curricula specialists, and built this model, so teachers can use this. As you're teaching about the Civil Rights Movement, you can actually get contemporaneous coverage of these events, and you can weave that into your teaching. I mean good teachers use this in their classrooms, and it's very powerful.

And some of it's free. So there's free activities where kids can get on and do things, and schools can participate. Some of it there, they're going to sell. It's a fee for service. So it's a blend.

It's just one approach, but it seems to me newspapers, if you're a major legacy paper, you're sitting on just an incredible archive of your local history and things that have happened in your community, and then obviously national history as well, and then some stuff that crosses. So there are things that happen, for example, right here in this city that would be in the *Post* archives, that are both very salient to our local history here in the city but are also big elements of major national events.

There are ways, I think, as a potential revenue model to package some of that up because schools, everybody knows, are desperate for good curriculum. Teachers are asked to bootstrap it themselves, and this is a way to tie that content together. So that's what I was getting at.

On your larger question, I don't know. I agree, it can't be hopeless.

E.J.'s point is well taken, on advertising, but there's a newspaper or a major paper we're all familiar with that has done a lot of focus groups and has found younger people just don't want. It's not an issue of price point. It's not an issue of access online. They just don't want some of the content.

I do think that portends to -- I will fetishize Jefferson as much as anyone. That sort of portends, if you believe some of the way he thought about this, that portends trouble for us.

MR. DIONNE: Two quick thoughts, one, this report has actually made me start thinking about how newspapers are fighting the trend toward niches in everything. However, newspapers themselves are full of excellent niches. There is great sports coverage. There are people who look at the *Washington Post* just to read Kornheiser, Wilbon and some of the other great folks, or people who read the *Post* just to read about politics, or people who read it for other things, for media.

Is there a way we can make each a niche pay by way of supporting the collection of niches which is otherwise known as a newspaper? That's when I was thinking of what these local papers were doing on education.

Imagine if there was -- what if people selling stuff to kids going back to school bought advertising on education sites? I don't know, but that's one thought.

The other, and this is a little bit like your point, is what do media sell? They sell information. What if we could become the sales people for all kinds of data sets?

Now the problem is there is so much available free, so much free data out there, that trying to sell it may not be helpful, but maybe as the organizers of data sets that are free that make them more accessible.

And those are two things that I have been thinking about, but I am not in the capitalist business of trying to make our business survive. I'm

all for that business, but those are the two sort of capitalist thoughts I have been having on this subject.

MR. WHITEHURST: My thought and my only request is I receive half the proceeds if this works.

I now read all of my newspapers online. I travel around a lot. I don't want the newspapers piled up in the front yard when I'm away.

MR. DIONNE: Recycling was a killer for us.

MR. WHITEHURST: The tremendous burden is that I have to spend a lot of time dealing with ads to read what I want to read. I would gladly pay $25 a year to get access to the content without the ads, and I think I'm not alone as a portion of the market that would like the newspaper experience as it's delivered in print and conveniently and would pay for it, and I'd like to see somebody try that.

MR. WEST: Actually, the Kindle is on the verge of allowing you to do that.

We're running out of time. Let's take two or three quick questions, and we can ask the panel to respond en masse to them. Here's a question.

QUESTIONER: Gena Fitzgerald; I'm with the Journalism Center on Children and Families.

I suspect last night had the President announced that he was sending 30,000 public school teachers into the nation's school next summer, that everybody today would be covering an education story.

What I'm trying to get a sense out of this report is how are you proposing that the issue of education get raised as a profile?

I mean it's kind of a chicken and egg question. Sometimes journalists don't cover stories because they're not enough of a public policy issue yet. Is it that it's not getting enough attention? I'm just curious.

MR. WEST: Okay, let's take two or three more questions, and then we'll get responses to each of these. Right here.

QUESTIONER: My name is Linda Perlstein. I'm the public editor for EWA, and my question is in my job I help reporters look at research, and, if they were looking at this particular piece of research, I would ask them to ask the clarifying question I'm about to ask. When you were calculating that 1.4 percent, were you actually only counting A1 stories because for every one A1 story in the *Washington Post*, for example, where I used to work, on education, there were at least 10 on the Metro front and would not be considered unimportant stories. So I'm just questioning about the methods.

MR. WEST: Okay. Any other quick questions? Right here in the front.

QUESTIONER: Hi. I'm Rodney Ferguson.

My question is this: What if we quadrupled the amount of education coverage tomorrow? Let's say we increased it 10-fold. What would be the social outcome that you would like to see?

I mean if all your wishes came true and we had massively increased amounts of education coverage, what would be the outcome that we would hope to see? Because I would argue that by the logic of volume there should be peace in Gaza and the West Bank should be Gardens of Eden because there's no lack of coverage of the issues around peace in the Middle East.

Just as sort of a corollary to that, the difficulty in thinking about what the outcome would be, isn't it just a mirror of the fragmentation you see in all sorts of issues?

I mean 30 years ago, think about the environment then, now. There were no charter schools. How many of your parents knew the difference in whole language and phonemic awareness. How many of your parents knew what a voucher was, what you got when you went to theater? You know the little thing that was left after they tore the ticket. And just on and

on and on, and that represents a fragmentation of our political and social fabric, not a lack of awareness.

I'm curious as to your views as what would more awareness of these issues do to help create? If consensus is in fact what we are trying to create, would it in fact help create that?

MR. WEST: Okay, quick responses from our panel to any of those questions.

MR. COLVIN: Let me just quickly respond to what Rodney said. One of the observations or recommendations in the report is that coverage, in addition to lack of volume, is episodic, that the coverage sort of touches down on an issue and then we've covered that issue, so they don't come back to it.

So you mentioned charter schools. It's always stunning to me that when you survey parents and ask them, well, what's a charter school, they have no idea, most people. This was a survey done in Ohio, which has a lot of charter schools -- very low awareness. So I think part of the answer is it's an aggregating stories by topic, so that you can build a body of knowledge.

As to what would happen, I don't think what we're trying -- I mean certainly as a journalist I don't think my goal is to build consensus around anything. I do think that I want people to be aware, so that they can vote

properly in their school board election, that they can know enough to be good citizens. That's my goal.

MR. WHITEHURST: If I could pick up on that, the history of education reform is a history of fad and fancy. A politician will advance an idea, and the nation or the state or the local school district runs with it. If you don't know what a charter school is, how can you contribute to the public discourse about whether the nation ought to be making a big bet on the expansion of charter schools? So more coverage would presumably put some brakes on tendencies to fly off in every possible direction and not learn from what we're doing.

On the methodology point, I think it's an important one. Before I came into this event today, I went to the *Washington Post*, and I Googled education for 2009, and there were 260 pieces on the Metro pages of the *Post* about education that wouldn't have been picked up in the methodology of the data we reported today at all. But recall we counted every AP story, and the message really wasn't that different. So I think the most interesting data here are in the distribution of story topics and how they're covered rather than whether we're underestimating.

Remember almost every other topic that's covered in other sections of the newspaper as well. So I think the proportionality is probably about right, though you do have to worry a little bit about the A1 bias.

MR. WEST: Any other responses?

MS. MEZZACAPPA: I've thought about Rodney's question in terms of what do you want to accomplish with getting more education coverage, and I think what I've come to the conclusion of after thinking about how people read about education is that, for most people, education touches everybody in the country. You would think they would be dying for education news, but what people really want is to read about their kids, their school, their school district. As Richard said, as I said, you just want to make them as informed as possible.

On the charter school issue, I mean people who do know what charter schools are don't know a good charter school from a bad charter school. I think one of the things that reporters should do is help them figure that out, so that they can make informed choices.

And staying on that subject, the *Inquirer*, my old paper, they wrote a lot of stuff about how charter school operators are abusing charter schools, led to indictments, led to some -- at least they're thinking about changing the law. I'm not so sure about it yet.

So that kind of thing I think is the more people know and the more people are expert in certain subjects they can inform the public in ways that lead to positive changes for them and their kids.

MR. ROTHERHAM: I think we see that. So, Rodney, I take your point. For you, personally, I think this would be a new boat or a new wing on your house or something. It's obviously you're self-interested in seeing a quadrupling of coverage.

MR. DIONNE: On the second house.

QUESTIONER: Feed my children.

MR. ROTHERHAM: For society, more generally, I think the Middle East, that's a little bit of an outlier as an example. I think we can see areas on social policy where greater awareness, greater understanding has led.

And I think Russ said it right, it's a messy process. That's just life in a liberal democracy. But you can see where better information, better awareness has led to better policy and better outcomes on a range of social issues. This is one where I don't think we're there yet, but this is the worst way to get at it probably than all the others.

MR. DIONNE: Three quick thoughts: Linda, as an excellent methodologist, your point is well taken. But, if you look at the other studies and also look at the differences we discovered among media, I think it's still a valuable tool to look at those stories, but I take your point.

Second, to Rodney's point, we tend to do things about, we tend to do more things about issues that are in our faces. I mean there's a whole

political science literature about who controls the agenda and what gets on the agenda. For some reason, when a nation at risk caught the country's imagination, we got involved in this.

Now it doesn't necessarily make all the schools better all the time, but I think that calling problems and solutions to people's attention can have a modest impact on getting things done. And certainly having better information, for example, on what the studies actually works, on what works or what doesn't can lead to at least a modestly better debate about fixing things.

So, on the third question, in a way, we're talking about there are a whole bunch of actors here. We do think that we want -- we know. Believe me, we know the economic troubles facing media, but we're alarmed at how rapidly this coverage is declining and wonder if editors could take a look at that.

We know that a lot of foundations are interested in this. And, if my theory is right, about coverage leading to at least some improvement, then outside supports, I think we're going to be looking at a lot more for-profit, not-for-profit partnerships in producing information in the coming years, just like think tanks operate that way. That's another area.

Then the third is what school administrators can do through openness, politicians can do when they want to put this on the

agenda. So there are a whole bunch of different, and there are a lot of different actions that different actors can take, and there is so much improvement for improvement that we can really make a lot of improvement.

MR. WEST: Okay, we're out of time, but I would like to thank our panelists -- Dale Mezzacappa, Richard Colvin, Andrew Rotherham, E.J. Dionne and Russ Whitehurst. Thank you very much.

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