

# Kanawha schools receive innovation grants

By Ryan Quinn  
Staff writer

Of the 14 public schools awarded grants in the past couple months under the new Innovation in Education grant program, five are in Kanawha County.

The West Virginia Board of Education awarded three of the Kanawha schools the full amount of money they requested: \$276,000 for Dunbar Intermediate, \$163,680 for Mary Ingles Elementary and \$190,491 for George Washington High.

The other two, Grandview Elementary and Richmond Elementary, each received about a fifth of what they requested. Grandview got \$24,113 and Richmond got \$40,719.

State Department of Education Chief Academic Officer Clayton Burch said there wasn't enough money to completely fulfill every request. He said a review committee and the department's Office of Middle and Secondary learning felt that Grandview and Richmond were among five schools across the state whose applications were still good but who could use partial grant awards this year to better develop their ideas and request more money later.

So the state board, in a voice vote with no nays heard, gave each of the five schools 22.5 percent of the dollars they requested.

In last year's legislative session, lawmakers passed a bill (HB 4295) that ended funding for the existing Innovation Zones and Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zones and reallocated that \$2.4 million to the Innovation in Education program.

Former Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin backed the bill, describing the program as an alternative to charter schools that offers similar flexibilities. The Republican-controlled Legislature had expressed interest in finally legalizing charter schools in West Virginia, but a bill filed last year to do so didn't move forward.

Some Republicans, including House Education Committee Chairman Paul Espinosa, R-Jefferson, have publicly expressed support for possibly expanding "school choice" initiatives — which could include charter schools or private school vouchers — in the legislative session that started Wednesday.

Dunbar Intermediate Principal Jenny Spencer said her school's \$276,000 will partly go toward dividing the daily schedule into one section consisting of traditional instruction separated by normal grade levels, and another section consisting of project- and program-based learning (PBL),



Gazette-Mail file photo

Tyren Taylor, an 8-year-old student at Dunbar Intermediate School, uses his iPad to solve math problems in 2015.

during which students will work in groups based not on grade levels, but on areas of interest.

"We find students are more engaged when they produce something, rather than write a paper turn it in and get a grade," Spencer said of PBL, a method of what she called "learning by doing" and demonstrating that learning by solving a problem or creating a project.

She said the school has 300 students, all just in grades three through five.

Though she's still designing the way the schedule will work,

she said she envisions that traditional instruction (teachers standing before the classroom and teaching, with interventions for smaller groups of students) would occur in the morning, but after lunch the students would work in the PBL groups.

Spencer said the interest groups could focus on topics like conservation, global warming, the water cycle and health and fitness. The state-mandated education standards would still have to be at the center of instruction, Spencer said, but through PBL "students, instead

of being told what they're going to do, have more of a voice and

a choice in what they learn." Spencer said the money will also go toward buying desktops, laptops and other equipment to turn the school library and computer lab into what she's preliminarily calling an "Ed Hub."

The Ed Hub equipment could include sewing machines, three-dimensional object printers and green screens — all things that could be used in PBL projects. The school received a separate grant for a kiln to make pottery.

"To my mind I picture little elves in a workshop," Spencer said. "And they're just going after it."

She also plans to assign each of her 44 employees, including cooks and custodians, as advisers who will build relationships with small groups of children. She said that perhaps weekly, advisers would check in on their kids about their grades, attendance and other things.

The advisers would also try to make sure no one felt friendless, and if no parent showed up to see a child's presentations and projects, at least the adviser would be there.

Mary Ingles Elementary Principal Melissa Wilfong said her school's \$163,680 will likely support field trips and employee training related to PBL, plus a "makerspace" classroom with things like a Lego wall.

Wilfong said the money will also allow her to offer on a larger scale something she was previously planning: providing computer time and high school equivalence degree classes for adults in the community. West Virginia used to use the GED as the high school equivalence degree, but now it uses the TASC.

She said part of the money will go toward buying new iPad tablet computers for the school's 168 students, allowing the roughly 50 existing iPads to be used in the adult program. Unlike for older students, the elementary students won't get to take their iPads home with them.

Wilfong said that likely one evening per week, adults will be able to use the school's computers to do things like pay bills and fill out job applications.

She said Fifth Third Bank

will provide financial literacy classes; Regional Education Service Agency 3 will help adults write resumes, learn job interview skills and earn their TASC; and Carver Career and Technical Education Center, which also provides adult education, will provide tours of its facility.

Wilfong said the school will be providing transportation, child care and meals for the adults who attend.

"So there's really no excuses," she said. "We're trying to take care of everything for them so they can meet their goals and be good role models for their kids as well."

She said she didn't yet have worked out who will provide the child care and how the transportation will be provided, be it through school buses, rented vans or other means.

Wilfong said the program would aim to serve adults beyond just the parents at her school. She said the transportation would perhaps serve the Campbells Creek, Malden and Rand areas, and she hopes to send information about the program home to families of children at Riverside High, Dupont Middle, Malden Elementary and possibly more elementary schools.

George Washington High Principal George Aulenbacher didn't return the Gazette-Mail's requests for comment for this story. An education department document indicates that his school will use its \$190,491 to, among other things, help transform the current library into a "multi-media collaboration and fabrication space."

"GWHS will require all incoming freshmen to take a foundational course, Intro to STEM," the document says, using the acronym for science, technology, engineering and math. "Engineering courses will use Tinkercard to design two and three dimensional programming robotic equipment. VEX robotics will also be incorporated. Community partners will promote the STEM curriculum."

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## Study explores link between college debt, 'boomerang' effect

By Holly Ramer  
The Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. — While both college debt and the "boomerang" phenomenon are growing, a new study casts doubt on the notion that staggering student loans are driving young adults back to their parents' doorsteps.

In the past decade, student debt has doubled, with the average 2015 college graduate owing \$30,000. The rate at which young adults "boomerang" also is increasing — recent studies report that between 20 and 50 percent are returning home. Many assume the former causes the latter, but Jason Houle and Cody Warner — assistant sociology professors at Dartmouth College and Montana State University, respectively — found the opposite.

Their study, published Thursday in *Sociology of Education* and based on annual surveys of more than 5,000 people born between 1980 and 1984, found that so-called boomerangers had less student loan debt than young adults who didn't return home.

"We're trying to have an important corrective to the narrative that's out there," Houle said.

While many in policy and academic circles subscribe to what Houle called the Chicken Little idea that "The sky is falling, student debt is destroying the dreams of a generation," others believe there is not so much a college debt crisis as there is a college completion

crisis. The study backs up the latter idea, he said. The authors found a strong association between college completion and the boomerang effect: Young adults who did not finish their degrees had at least a 40 percent higher risk of returning home than those who graduated, likely due to limited options to finding a job.

Corey Dowe, who graduated from Cornell University in 2015, has been living with her parents in Barrington, New Hampshire, for just under a year. She said she did not leave college with significant debt, but said it makes more sense for her to live with her parents as she completes an online master's degree program.

"They don't mind me being here, and I don't mind being here," said Dowe, 23. "I'm just trying to be smart with money right now, so it's somewhat money-oriented, but it's not because of debt."

But Mike Rocchio, also 23, said debt was a huge factor in his decision to live with his parents in Cranston, Rhode Island. He graduated from Quinnipiac University in 2015 with more than \$150,000 in debt and works as a clinical research coordinator in Boston.

"It was pretty much a no-brainer," he said. "There was no way I was going to be able to make loan payments and afford rent on an apartment, especially in Boston."

Rocchio said he was surprised by the study's findings.

"In my close group of friends, with few exceptions, we all pretty much live at home," he

said. "Out of six kids that I'm really close with, three of them live in an apartment together, and three of us live at home, and it really depends on loans. I know for the three of us who live at home, [our debt] was in the six figures."

The new study is among only a few that has examined the link between student debt and boomeranging. A 2015 report by the Federal Reserve Board used credit-report data to conclude that student debt is positively associated with boomeranging. The authors of that report did not respond to a request for comment. Houle said that research was limited in that it only included young adults who had credit reports, and therefore didn't include those without debt, and used less precise methods of determining whether the subjects lived with their parents.

Houle's study used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 Cohort, a sample of 8,984 respondents across the country who were born between 1980 and 1984, and aside from two years, have been interviewed by the U.S. Department of Labor every year since 1997. For this study, the sample was restricted to the 5,025 who had attended college and had lived apart from their parents at some point. The authors acknowledge several limitations, including that there may be other differences between respondents with different debt amounts that may affect boomeranging.

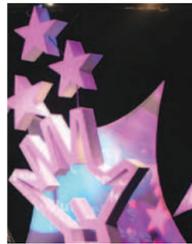


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