



Letter from the Director

Amid the controversies over Common Core, choice, testing, racial disparities, and teacher unions, PEPG and Education Next continue to report research on major developments and track the public's and teachers' responses as part of its annual poll.

We are especially proud of the talented scholars who are participating in our training and research programs. Featured in this issue are snapshots of research by undergraduate students, graduate and postdoctoral fellows, and colleagues, including:

- Matthew Ackerman (Harvard) reports that Common Core may have enhanced the rigor of states' proficiency standards.
• Anna J. Egalite (North Carolina State University) demonstrates that inclusion of classmates with emotional and behavioral disabilities has unintended consequences for classmates' absenteeism rates.
• Michael Henderson (Louisiana State University) finds little evidence of a public backlash against standardized testing.
• R. Shep Melnick (Boston College) argues that the current federal equity initiative is the wrong solution to the problem of low educational outcomes among minority children.
• Martin R. West (Harvard) shows that public schools reap unexpected benefits from an economic downturn when entry-level teacher salaries look more enticing.



Paul E. Litwin signature

Weak Markets, Strong Teachers

Economic recessions offer a window of opportunity for public schools to recruit top-quality teachers

Markus Nagler, Marc Piopiniuk, and Martin R. West



Martin R. West presenting his work on teacher labor markets at a conference in Munich, Germany

Even though it is well established that effective teachers are critical to the future success of their students, it remains challenging to attract top-quality U.S. college graduates into teaching. One strategy that has been proposed is to increase the relative pay for incoming teachers, in the hopes of raising the average quality of teacher applicants. Some worry, however, that great teachers are intrinsically motivated and increasing teacher pay might attract more extrinsically motivated but less effective individuals into the teaching profession. This study shows that the opposite is true.

Job opportunities for college graduates contract when an economic recession occurs. This narrowing of options is equivalent to raising relative wages for incoming teachers, given the general imperviousness of salary schedules to changing economic conditions. This study exploits that fact to estimate the impact of changes in teaching starting salaries. The findings suggest that higher salaries attract better teachers.

Employing a sample of 33,000 4th- and 5th-grade teachers in Florida public schools between 2000-01 and 2008-09, the authors generate value-added measures of teacher quality to investigate whether teachers hired during business cycle downturns are more effective than other teachers. They find that such teachers are more effective at raising test scores and that the effect is twice as large in math as in reading. The authors estimate the difference in students' lifetime earnings to be around \$13,000 per classroom taught each year, if the students are fortunate enough to have a teacher hired during a recession.

Martin R. West, PEPG Deputy Director, is an associate professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

# Inclusive Classrooms Associated with Higher Absences

*Research finds a link between the inclusion of classmates with emotional and behavioral disabilities and other students' absences*

*Anna J. Egalite and Colleagues*

*Any benefits to the disabled student must be weighed against potential disruptions to the education of other students in the classroom.*

Advocates for inclusive classrooms point to the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which mandates that students with special needs should be educated in the “least restrictive environment.” That is often interpreted to mean that most disabled students should be placed in the same classroom as other students. But critics say that the benefits of “mainstreaming” are uncertain, and, in any case, the benefits to the disabled student should be weighed against potential disruptions to the education of classmates.

What are the impacts of the presence of a student with an emotional or behavioral disability (EBD)? This question was examined by analyzing data from a nationally representative sample of no more than 18,000 students in the kindergarten class of 2010–11. Controlling for a wide range of variables to isolate the

effect of having a peer with an EBD and comparing classrooms within the same schools, we estimate that a kindergarten student’s odds of being chronically absent from school (i.e., more than 10 days of absence) are 138% higher if that student is educated in the same classroom as a child with an emotional or behavioral disability.



*Anna J. Egalite presenting her research at a PEPG colloquium*

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# States Raise Proficiency Bar in Math and Reading

*Commitments to Common Core may be driving the proficiency bar upward*

*Paul E. Peterson and Matthew Ackerman*

Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted into federal law in 2002, states have been required to administer a test of their choosing to students in grades 3 through 8, and again in high school. The federal law also asks states to choose the performance level students must reach on the exams in order to be identified as “proficient.”

By comparing the percentages of students identified as proficient by the state and the percentages identified by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), it is possible to identify the rigor of state proficiency standards. *Education Next* regularly uses this information to grade each state on a traditional A–F scale.

Data for 2013 reveal that substantially more states have raised their proficiency standards than have let those standards slip to lower levels. Between 2011 and 2013, the average difference between NAEP and state proficiency levels decreased from 35 to 30 percent, the largest tightening of state standards in any two-year period since NCLB was first established.

One indication that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) may be driving these changes is that the six states that are not implementing CCSS for reading or math all continue to set low proficiency standards. Their grades: Virginia, C+; Nebraska, C; Indiana, C-; Texas, C-; Alaska, D+; and Oklahoma, D.

It remains to be seen whether the recent changes are a precursor of what is to come or merely a temporary spike in official state policies.

*The full article by Paul E. Peterson and Matthew Ackerman appears in the Summer 2015 issue of Education Next.*

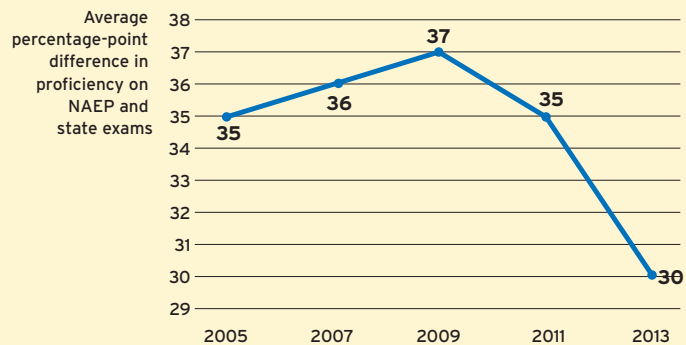


*Matthew Ackerman presenting research on state standards at the advisory committee meeting with then committee chair Jeb Bush looking on*

*Data for 2013 reveal that substantially more states have raised their proficiency standards than have let those standards slip to lower levels.*

## Difference between NAEP and State Proficiency Standards Decreases

*The largest two-year tightening in standards since NCLB's establishment*



# The 2015 *Education Next* Poll on School Reform

*Public thinking on testing, Common Core, opt out, unions, and more*

Michael Henderson, Paul E. Peterson, and Martin R. West

In July 2015, an overwhelming bipartisan Senate majority passed a revision of a federal law that requires all students to be tested in math and reading each year in grades 3 to 8 and again in high school. Has the Senate ignored the people’s will? Or, is the public’s appetite for

***Only 25% of the public like the idea of letting parents decide whether their children are tested, while 59% oppose it***

the information provided by regular student testing broader and more robust than recent media coverage would suggest?

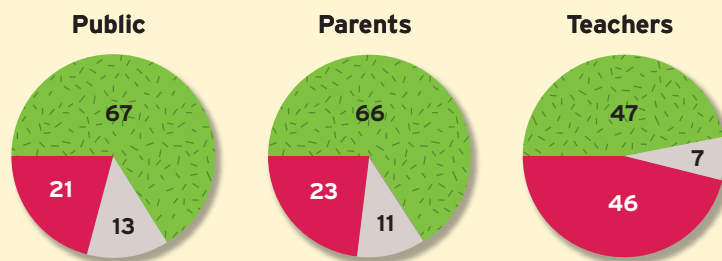
The 2015 *EdNext* poll suggests the latter. No less than 67% of the public said they supported continuing the federal requirement for annual testing, while just 21% opposed the idea, with the remainder taking a neutral position. The backlash against standardized testing appears to be far narrower than the media’s breathless coverage would suggest.

The House of Representatives also passed a reauthorization bill, but its version allows parents to “opt out” of state tests. What does the public make of the opt-out movement? To obtain respondents’ reactions, we asked whether they thought parents should be able to decide whether their children should take annual state tests. Our results reveal little public sympathy for the opt-out movement. Only 25% of the public like the idea of letting parents decide whether their children are tested, while 59% oppose it.

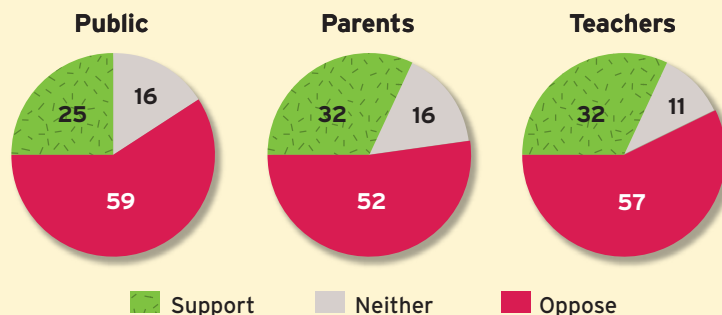
Meanwhile, the public’s views on the most prominent initiative to improve the quality and rigor of state’s academic standards are increasingly muddled. Support for using the Common Core State Standards, after falling from 65% to

## Public Supports Testing (Percentage)

*Among the public and parents, more than two-thirds support a federal requirement for annual testing, while opinion among teachers is evenly split.*



*A majority of the public, parents, and teachers oppose the opt-out movement.*



53% between 2013 and 2014, has dropped another four points in 2015 to just 49%. Thirty-five percent of the public now express opposition to using the standards, with the remaining 16% undecided.

Teacher support for the Common Core is also sliding. In 2013, 76% of teachers supported Common Core—far higher than the general public. But that collapsed to 46% in 2014, and it has fallen another 6 points to just 40% in 2015. Meanwhile, the share of teachers expressing opposition has risen to 50%, leaving just 10% undecided.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

# Even Teachers Are No Fans of Forced Union Payments

An “agency fee” levied on those who refuse to join a union isn’t popular in schools or with the public

Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West

**“Th’ Supreme Court follows th’ election returns.”**

So said Mr. Dooley, the bartender created by cartoonist Finley Peter Dunne at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those who follow the court today often say that nothing much has changed. Yet if the justices consider public opinion next term, it will be a straightforward decision in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, a case challenging the California law that levies an agency fee on all teachers who refuse to join a union.

Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, defends the law on the grounds that “unions have a right to collect a fair share from the people [they] represent.” But teacher Rebecca Friedrichs, the plaintiff, contends that the union shop denies her constitutional right of free speech by using her money to speak for purposes with which she disagrees.

A plurality of the American public seem to agree with Ms. Friedrichs. What’s more, an equally large share of teachers opposes the agency fees imposed upon them by California and about half of all states.

According to the EdNext survey, 34% of the public support agency fees, while 43% oppose them. The remaining 23% declined to take a position. If this latter

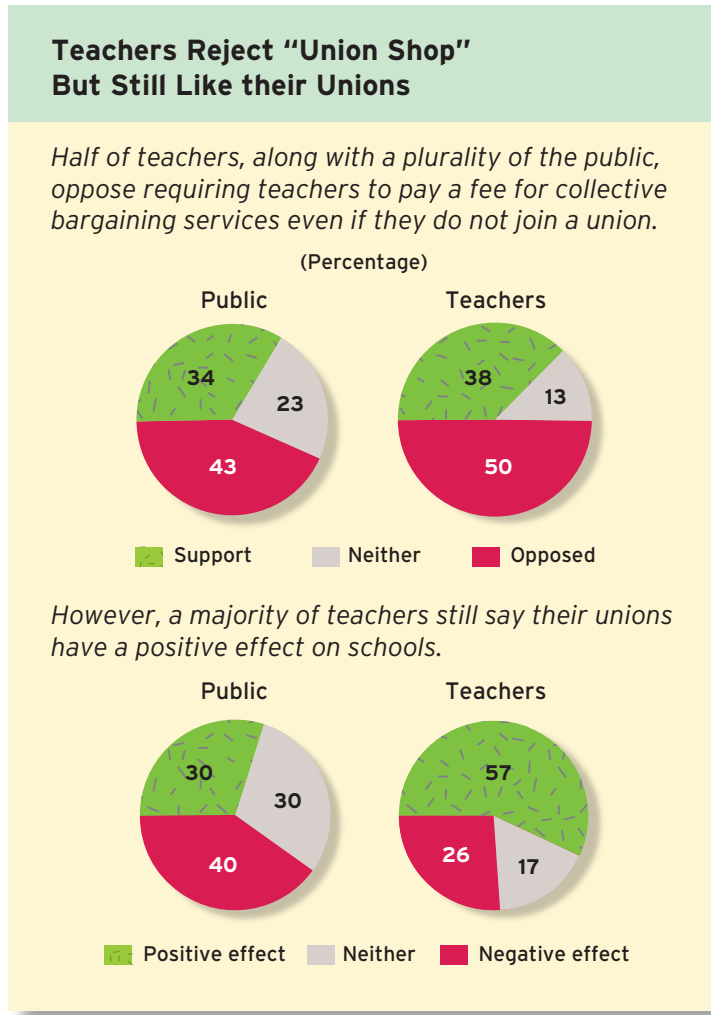
group are put to one side, a clear majority, 56%, favor ending the union shop.

The more startling results came from the teachers. Only 38% of teachers favor the agency fee, while 50% oppose it, with the remaining 13% expressing no opinion. In other words, 57% of teachers with an opinion on agency fees disagree with the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association.

*A large share of teachers opposes the agency fees imposed upon them by California and about half of all states*

The Supreme Court should ignore political pressures and decide *Friedrichs* on the merits. But if, as many suspect, political realities influence jurisprudence as often today as they did in Mr. Dooley’s time, justices should note that any judgment that concludes Ms. Friedrichs’s rights were violated will not constitute an affront to public—or even teacher—opinion.

*This is an abridged version of an op-ed that appeared in the Wall Street Journal on July 15, 2015.*





Antonio Wendland, PEPG associate director, discusses policy with Senator Lamar Alexander

### Moynihan Report's 50th Anniversary

In March 2015, PEPG revisited Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" on its 50th anniversary. In the keynote, Tennessee senator Lamar Alexander emphasized the "dramatic" rise in single-parent families that now "cuts across all racial groups." In panel discussions, William Julius Wilson recommended strong steps to promote young male employment, Paul Peterson urged redesign of entitlement programs so as to avoid the "poverty trap," and Isabel Sawhill recommended measures that would encourage use of more effective birth control.

### Public Opinion Workshop

In May 2015, PEPG jointly hosted a workshop on public opinion and the political economy of education with the Ifo Institute for Economic Research at the University of Munich. Key findings included:

- German 15-year-old students outperform their U.S. peers by 32 points in math, while disparities in student performance are similar in the two countries.
- U.S. per-pupil expenditures for elementary schools are 45% higher than German expenditures, but, oddly, U.S. teacher salaries trail by 41%.



Andreas Schleicher of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development discusses future developments in international testing at the Munich Conference

## Federal Policy Proves Unpopular

Public and teachers oppose forcing racial balance in suspension rates

Paul E. Peterson

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice, acting together, sent every school district a letter asking local officials to avoid racial bias when suspending or expelling students. District officials were advised that they risk legal action if school disciplinary policies have "a disparate impact," i.e., a disproportionate and unjustified effect on students of a particular race.

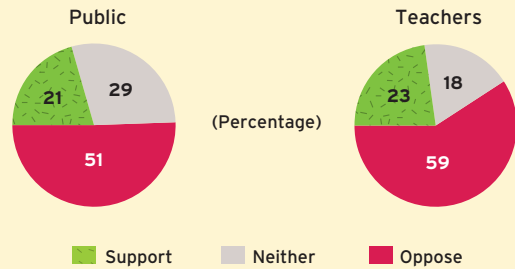
What do people think of "no disparate impact" disciplinary policies? We asked the public whether they support or oppose "federal policies that prevent schools from expelling or suspending black and Hispanic students at higher rates than other students."

Half of the public oppose "no disparate impact" policies, while just 21% back the idea, with the remaining 29% taking no position one way or the other.

**Half of the public oppose "no disparate impact" policies, while just 21 percent back the idea**

### "No-Racially-Disparate-Discipline" Policies Opposed by Both Teachers and General Public

Half of the public and over half of teachers oppose policies requiring similar suspension rates across racial groups



**Question:** Do you support or oppose federal policies that prevent schools from expelling or suspending black and hispanic students at higher rates than other students?

That division of opinion is broadly similar among teachers. No less than 59% of teachers oppose "no disparate impact" policies, while only 23% are in favor, with 18% taking the neutral position

Higher levels of support are observed among African Americans—41% are in favor, while 23% oppose it. Only 31% of Hispanic respondents like the policy, however, with 44% in opposition.

Given the opposition among the general public, one suspects that federal efforts to impose such policies will be tempered by political realities. But if the civil rights attorneys inside the Departments of Justice and Education are eager to press forward, and if school districts resist such pressures, the latter are likely to find a sympathetic audience.

Adapted from an article that appeared in the National Review on August 24, 2015.

# Civil Wrongs

*Federal equity initiative promotes paperwork, not equality*

R. Shep Melnick

In October 2014, the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) issued a 37-page "Dear Colleague" letter detailing what public schools must do to ensure that all children have "equal access to educational resources without regard to race, color, or national origin." Unfortunately, the mandate is more likely to produce intense political controversy and a blizzard of paperwork than to improve the education of minority children.

OCR has made its investigatory power so open-ended that it can look at everything that goes on in a school, and it has created a disparate impact standard so rigid that it can always find a violation. But OCR simply does not have the resources or political capital to undertake the massive investigations proposed, and it cannot rely on cooperation from the federal courts, given how far the agency has strayed from the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act.

How will schools respond? On the one hand, they can devote abundant resources to collecting the information demanded, massaging the data to make themselves look good, and shifting money around to show they are making "progress." On the other hand, they can say, "We applaud your goals but we do not intend to engage in the extensive bean counting that you demand. If you attempt to terminate our federal funds, we will seek judicial review and will almost surely win in federal court. Go ahead—make our day."

*R. Shep Melnick is Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Professor of American Politics at Boston College. Adapted from an op-ed that appeared in the Wall Street Journal on September 14, 2015. His full article appears in the Fall 2015 issue of Education Next.*

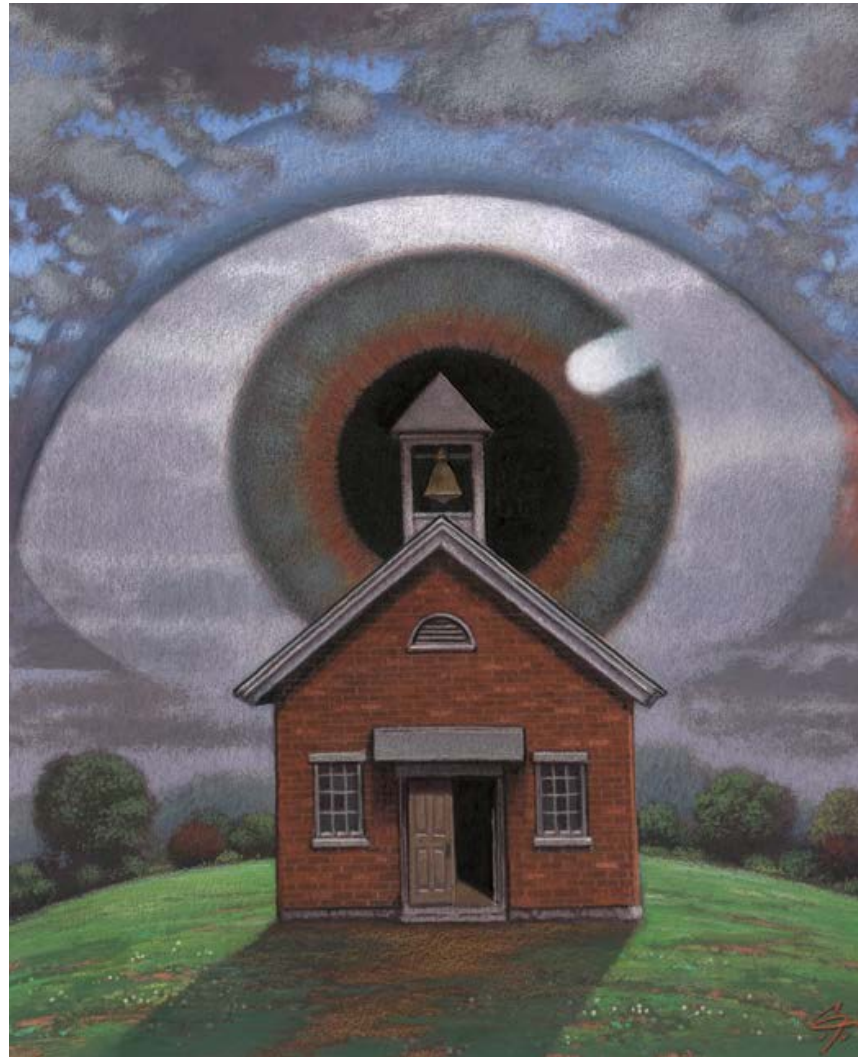


ILLUSTRATION BY PAYNE

***The mandate is more likely to produce intense political controversy and a blizzard of paperwork than to improve the education of minority children***

*“Underneath the daily howling at the moon that goes on in education blogs and on Twitter, there is a much smaller group of people who are trying to figure out what works and what doesn’t ...*

*Education Next provides that context that people want to read.”*

—Andrew J. Rotherham, former White House education aide to President Bill Clinton

**Was Moynihan Right?**

– Sara McLanahan and Christopher Jencks



Moynihan’s claim that growing up in a fatherless family reduced a child’s chances of educational and economic success was furiously denounced in 1965. The problem is more serious today.

**The Rise of AltSchool and Other Micro-schools**

– Michael B. Horn



New forms of schooling termed micro-schools are popping up. These combinations of private, blended, and at-home schooling are well equipped to meet the needs of individual students.

**Does Better Observation Make Better Teachers?**

– Matthew P. Steinberg and Lauren Sartain



New evidence from a teacher evaluation pilot in Chicago shows that a system incorporating highly structured classroom observations has large effects on reading performance.

**What Explains Success at Success Academy?**

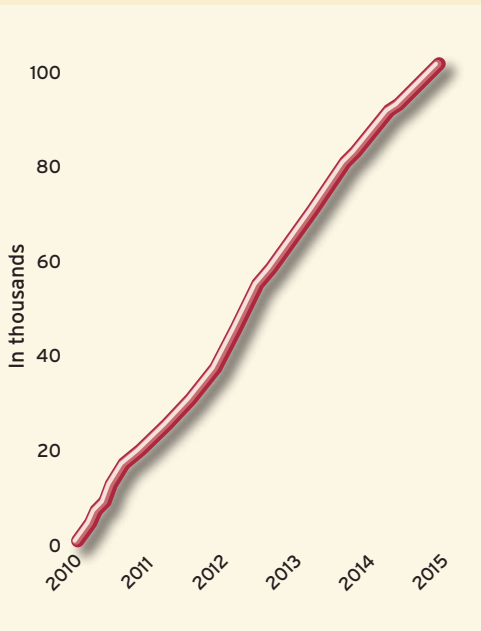
– Charles Sahn



Outwardly, Success is similar to other “no excuses” charter schools, but what separates this charter network is laser focus on what is being taught, and how.

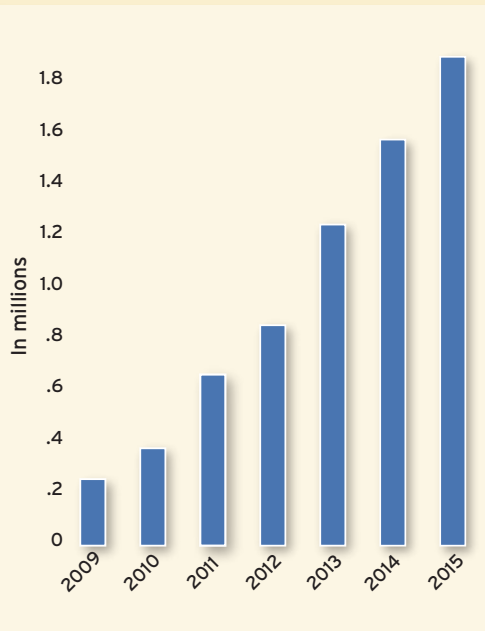
Followers on Twitter have increased to more than 95,000.

Twitter Followers



Since 2009, web site traffic has increased nearly tenfold, surpassing 1.8 million visits annually.

Web Site Visits



In the social media, Education Next ranks fourth.

Social Media Klout Score

