

Obama pushes for longer school year

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WASHINGTON — Back into the new school year, President Barack Obama issued a tough-love message to students and teachers alike Monday. The longer, and potentially more, teachers should work.

American students are falling behind their counterparts, especially in math and science, and that's not because, Obama said, "we're not doing a good enough job of teaching."

"We're not doing a good enough job of teaching," Obama said. "We're not doing a good enough job of teaching."

American people, is going to depend on whether or not we can do something about these schools," the president said in an interview on NBC's "Today" show.

U.S. schools through high school offer an average of 180 instruction days per year, according to the Education Commission of the States, compared to an average of 197 days for lower grades and 196 days for upper grades in countries with the best student achievement levels, including Japan, South Korea, Germany and New Zealand.

"That month makes a difference," the president said. "It means that kids are losing a lot of what they learn during the school year during the summer. It's especially severe for poorer kids who may not see as many books in the house during the summers. aren't

getting as many educational opportunities."

Obama said teachers and their profession should be more highly honored — as in China and some other countries, he said — and he said he wanted to work with the teachers' unions. But he also said that unions should not defend a status quo in which one-third of children are dropping out.

And the president ordered the firing of teachers who, once given the chance and the help to improve, are still falling short.

"We have got to identify teachers who are doing well. Teachers who are not doing well, we have got to give them the support and the training to do well. And if some teachers aren't doing a good job, they've got to go," Obama said.

They're goals the president has articulated in the past, but his abil-

ity to see them realized is limited. States set the minimum length of school years, and although there's experimentation in some places, there's not been wholesale change since Obama issued the same challenge for more classroom time at the start of the past school year.

One issue is money, and although the president said that lengthening school years would be "money well spent," that doesn't mean cash-strapped states and districts can afford it.

"It comes down to the old bug-a-boo, resources. It costs money to keep kids in school," said Mayor Scott Smith of Mesa, Ariz. "Everyone believes we can achieve greater things if we have a longer school year. The question is how do you pay for it?"

One model is Massachusetts,



Susan Walsh/Associated Press

President Barack Obama speaks in the East Room of the White House Monday.

where the state issues grants to districts that set out clear plans on how they would use the money to constructively lengthen instructional class time, said Kathy Christie, chief of staff at the Education Commission of the States.

Flood turns community into island

POPEL

POPEL, Wis. — Floodwaters from the Wisconsin River in the Portage neighborhood in Portage Monday, cutting off the area from the outside world.

The floodwaters came through and surrounded the houses, protecting the houses. Park neighborhood in Portage, Wis. of Portage, Wis. was covered in floodwaters.

A new road through the neighborhood's floodwaters surrounded the houses and remained closed Monday afternoon.

Emergency workers on the river bank said that in the week-long flood, the neighborhood's houses were washed away. The houses were washed away, said a Portage official.

A new road through the floodwaters was washed away, said a Portage official.



Andy Mans/Associated Press

Randy Lloyd, front, and Trevor Hurst drive an all-terrain vehicle out of a flooded area Monday. The Wisconsin river surged around a levee in Caledonia, Wis. and flooded a neighborhood after heavy rains.

so high and so forcefully it surged around the dike and poured into the bottom lands around the neighborhood, said Steve Miller, director of the state Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Facilities and Lands.

The rising water chipped away at portions of the berm system Monday afternoon. Much of the levee protects forest and farmland but a breach in the Blackhawk Park portion could make matters far worse for the neighborhood by potentially washing away the access road.

DNR patrolled the length of the berm Monday, using sandbags to control the seepage.

The woods around Forrest Travis' fishing camp were a bog on Monday. Water rushed across the gravel service road a few steps from his camp, but Travis, a

53-year-old part-time construction worker, said he spent Sunday night at the camp and didn't have any plans to go anywhere.

"I'm not worried about it," Travis said. "It would have to get a lot higher to get where we're standing."

Diana O'Neill, 56, a retired DeForest police officer, evacuated on Sunday.

On Monday, she inched her truck along the access road, creating a wake, to get back to her house.

Her place was still dry when she arrived. She grabbed three dozen eggs and her Chicago Bears shirt for the big Green Bay Packers-Chicago Bears game on Monday-Night Football and inched her way back out. The water was easily an inch higher than when she drove in.

Philly tow truck driver charged in rival's death

Maryclaire Dale
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PHILADELPHIA — Turf wars among tow truck drivers are nothing new in Philadelphia, but they have turned unusually violent — and now deadly — in 2010.

A now deadly feud reportedly led one driver to repeatedly run over a rival with his truck at a gas station early Sunday, killing him, police said.

Ray Santiago's death comes months after authorities charged another tow-truck driver with shooting a competitor at an accident scene. Both firms involved in that case were then vandalized, one with a barrage of bullets and the other with a fire that tore through 13 vehicles.

"It runs in cycles, but 2010 has been the most violent year I've seen in almost a quarter century," said lawyer William J. Brennan, who has defended several tow operators charged in on-the-job scrapes. "Maybe it's the economy. Maybe people are getting desperate."

Glen McDaniel, 25, of Philadelphia, was being held without bail on murder, drunken-driving and other charges in Santiago's death. It was not clear if he has an attorney.

Philadelphia police try to rotate tow jobs among a list of approved operators, but they don't do so if a

tow truck beats officers to a crashing scene. That leaves rivals racing dangerously through narrow city streets to claim jobs before police give them away, critics say.

That cutthroat competition explains why TV producers seized on Philadelphia for an upcoming TLC network show called "Wreck Chasers," which is following several drivers with a unidentified firm for a series set to start next month.

The city was chosen because of the unusual and competitive nature of its towing businesses, the show's executive producer, Jim Kowats, told The Associated Press earlier this month.

A TLC spokeswoman did not immediately return a message Monday.

Santiago, 30, may have been involved in a towing-related film project, but police did not know if it was the TLC program, Lt. Frank Vanore said. And no film was under way when the fatal argument erupted, said Vanore, a police spokesman.

City Councilman Jim Kenney wants oversight of the industry moved from police to the Philadelphia Parking Authority. The authority has dispatchers and eliminate lots of available, and could eliminate the dubious practice of drivers getting cash from auto-body shops to bring in wrecked cars, Kenney said.

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