Obama Set to Unveil Education Research Initiative
By Sarah D. Sparks

As part of a drive to ramp up education innovation, the White House in its proposed budget for the 2012 fiscal year is expected to call for creating an education research initiative modeled on the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the government agency that’s perhaps best known for creating the forerunner of the Internet.

While as of Friday afternoon details of the ARPA-ED project were still under wraps, James H. Shelton III, the U.S. Department of Education’s assistant deputy secretary for innovation and improvement, said the agency would follow DARPA’s research model, which differs from that of traditional education research groups like the Institute of Education Sciences or the National Science Foundation. DARPA operates outside of typical grant frameworks, using interdisciplinary teams and contractors working on projects.

Richard Wainess, a researcher at the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing at the University of California Los Angeles, who has researched differences between military training and civilian commercial video games, said he is not surprised that national security groups have been taking more of an interest in K-12 education in the wake of rising concerns about training needed for new military recruits.

“As they get more technology, they’re going to need fewer people able to just do the casual jobs and more people able to do complex tasks,” he said. “We keep expecting the next generation to understand more and more and more than the last generation.”