

Proposed Act Would Afford Private School Transfer, Intensive Tutoring

New Legislation Promises More Choices for Low-income Families

On July 18, a bill was introduced in Congress that would help economically disadvantaged students in under-performing schools transfer to the private school of their choice or sign up for intensive after-school or summer tutoring.

If enacted into law, the *America's Opportunity Scholarships for Kids Act* would authorize the U.S. Department of Education to award \$100 million in fiscal year 2007 for competitive grants to states, school districts and nonprofit organizations to provide scholarships of up to \$4,000 to children from low-income families in persistently low-performing schools to attend the private school of their choice.

Grant recipients would also be authorized to provide up to \$3,000 for tutoring services to low-income students if they choose not to attend a different school. This would include tutoring

through after-school or summer school programs designed to help improve students' academic achievement.

Under the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, schools failing to meet their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for five years are identified as needing restructuring. According to the Department's records, 1,065 schools were identified as needing restructuring in the 2004–05 school year. Preliminary estimates suggest that an additional 1,000 schools from the 2005–06 school year will be identified as needing restructuring.

"We are one step closer to ensuring that parents can make choices that strengthen their children's futures and give them a great start in life, regardless of their resources or the communities in which they live," said U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.



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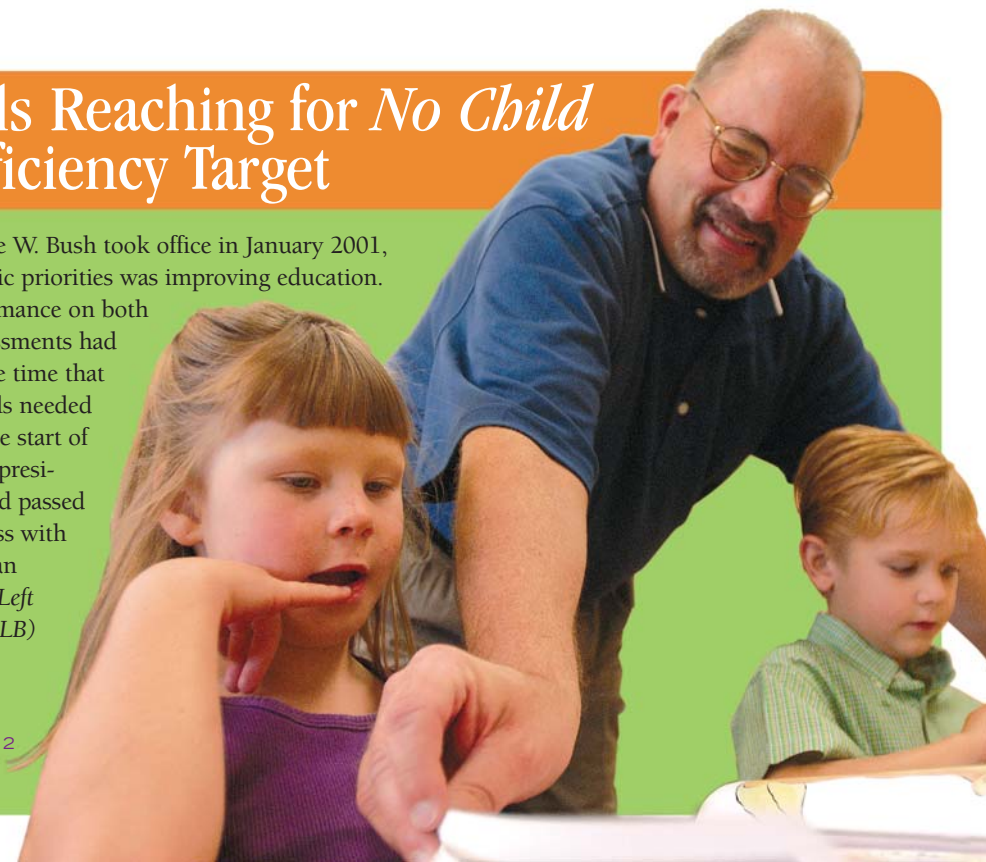
The Ultimate Goal

A Look at Three Schools Reaching for *No Child Left Behind's* Full Proficiency Target

“We are to serve the students and serve them well.”

When President George W. Bush took office in January 2001, first among his domestic priorities was improving education. Lagging student performance on both national and state assessments had been revealing for some time that America's public schools needed sweeping reform. By the start of the following year, the president's education bill had passed both houses of Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* was signed into law on Jan. 8, 2002.

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NCLB dramatically restructured the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*—the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school—by raising the achievement bar for America’s children. It represented a formidable front against what President Bush termed the “soft bigotry of low expectations” that had been hindering a staggering number of students, particularly minorities

and those from low-income families, with disabilities or with limited English proficiency. The law was based on four principles: 1) *stronger accountability for results*, by requiring annual testing in grades 3–8 and at least once in high school to track student progress, and by holding schools and districts accountable for making that progress; 2) *greater flexibility for states and communities*, by allowing school

districts to redirect certain federal funds toward financing much needed programs; 3) *proven education methods*, by focusing on teaching strategies that research has shown to be effective; and 4) *more choices for parents*, by affording options such as school transfers or free tutoring for children in low-performing schools. Ultimately, NCLB set a historic goal for the country: every child reading and doing math at grade level by 2014.

In just a few short years since its enactment, the landmark legislation has proven that raising academic standards leads to a rise in achievement. According to the 2004 Nation’s Report Card, America’s nine-year-olds posted the best scores in reading (since 1971) and math (since 1973) in the report card’s history, while the country’s 13-year-olds earned the highest math scores the test ever recorded. With such success at the primary levels, the president is looking to expand NCLB’s provisions at the high school level, beginning with his American Competitiveness Initiative to better prepare the nation’s youths for the global marketplace.

Following are a few schools that are well on their way to meeting NCLB’s 2014 target, proving that, despite the challenges communities may face, achieving full proficiency in reading and math is possible.

Spellings Speaks at Teacher Workshop



Photo by Paul Wood

In July, Secretary Spellings spoke at the Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative Workshop in Boston, as part of a summer series of training opportunities sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Following is an excerpt of her remarks.

... Last month, I had a meeting with Tom Friedman, the *New York Times* columnist and author of the bestseller *The World Is Flat*. He told me the number one skill our children will need to survive in this new flat world is learning to learn. And to learn how to learn, you’ve got to love to learn and that’s triggered by a great teacher. He said to ask your friends what classes they love, and regardless of the subject—physics, astronomy, art history—take that class, because chances are it’s being taught by a great teacher. ...

It’s no secret that teaching is one of the hardest jobs out there. ... Everywhere I go, I’m inspired by hard-working teachers who believe every child deserves a quality education. Earlier this year, I met a local Teacher of the Year in Spokane, Wash. She earned that honor after 17 years of teaching elementary school. And she told me she was a better teacher today than she was five years ago because of *No Child Left Behind*.

That’s probably the best compliment this

law could get. Because at its heart, it’s all about giving teachers the tools to help students achieve their potential. ...

And we must start rewarding teachers who get great results, especially in low-income schools, which often have the hardest time getting and keeping experienced and knowledgeable teachers. The president and Congress recently created a new \$100 million Teacher Incentive Fund to encourage more experienced teachers to take jobs in high-poverty schools, where a high-quality teacher makes all the difference. So far, 16 states ... and about 60 districts have already expressed interest in applying, and we plan to make those awards by October.

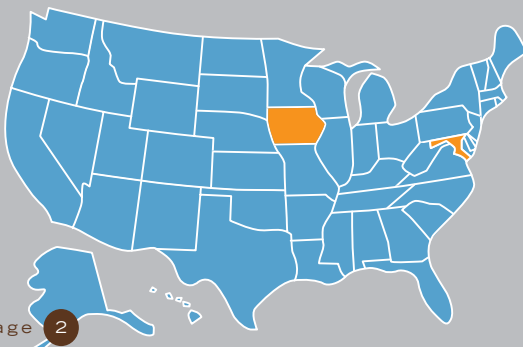
We know nothing helps a child learn as much as a great teacher. Great teachers are helping us reach our goal under *No Child Left Behind* of having every child doing grade-level work by 2014, and great teachers are the key to equipping every child to compete and thrive in the 21st century. ...

Visit www.ed.gov and click on “Speeches” for the complete July 12, 2006, remarks.

Smith Street Elementary School

A 2005 *No Child Left Behind*–Blue Ribbon Schools Award winner, Smith Street Elementary School in Uniondale, N.Y., is a dramatic example of high expectations driving success at a high-needs school. Last year, every fourth-grader achieved proficiency on the state’s math exam and almost all (98 percent) did as well in reading. The multicultural, suburban school—with significant black, Hispanic and low-income populations, as well as a relatively large number of English language learners and special education students—ranks high on New York’s inaugural list of high-performing schools that closed achievement gaps among multiple groups of students and

AROUND THE COUNTRY



IOWA—Thousands of Iowa students will benefit this school year from a new school tuition tax credit bill signed by Gov. Tom Vilsack in June. The *Educational Opportunities Act* establishes a 65-percent tax credit for individuals who make contributions to approved school tuition organizations, which distribute scholarships to families for the

school of their choice. To qualify, a family’s annual income must not exceed 300 percent of the federal poverty level. School tuition organizations must spend 90 percent of funds raised on scholarships, and the scholarships may not exceed the tuition at the private school.



Smith Street Elementary School Principal Lynnnda Nadien (left) with former Principal Marilyn Hangen and Assistant Principal Drew Olsen. Photo courtesy of Smith Street Elementary School.

met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for two consecutive years.

Smith Street has made great gains since the state assessment was first given in 1999, when just 31 percent and 65 percent scored proficient in reading and math, respectively. At the time,

Principal Lynnnda Nadien was the district's reading specialist and part of a team of administrators

to the students' low scores, the staff began to make changes by analyzing test score data, scheduling students for extra academic help, and integrating the curriculum. "Our goal was ... to have a strong balance between reading, writing, listening and speaking in order for the students to be proficient enough to pass any exam put in front of them," said Nadien, who joined Smith Street last year. She said that this "balanced approach" to learning helps students make connections between concepts, so that the skills used in language arts also apply to math. As practice, students are challenged to write their own math word problems and explain their solutions. "It's a real-life, problem-solving approach," she added.

Focusing on potential student achievement rather than on failing to meet academic expectations, said Nadien, led to a leap in scores, not just overall, but exponentially: from proficient to advanced levels. For instance, to prepare students for the state exam this past school year (the first

and teachers collaborating across school lines to improve achievement.

In response

year New York began testing all grades 3-8), the teachers assembled practice questions that were considerably challenging. "Being successful leads to higher levels of success," Nadien explained. "[Our] mentality ... is that everyone would aspire to get a 'four' [the advanced category on the state exam]. And we believe strongly that through hard work and perseverance we will be able to get to that point."

Peabody eMints Academy

Another struggle-to-success story, Peabody eMints Academy, a predominantly black school in St. Louis where 100 percent of the children qualify for federally subsidized meals, is part of a major revitalization spreading throughout the urban neighborhood. Just five years ago, not one fourth-grader passed the math exam, and only 7 percent of third-graders could read at grade level. Today, however, approximately 87 percent exceed the state standards in both subjects and nearly 96 percent in science, according to 2005 data. Peabody's progress over the years has earned it a "Top 10 Schools" recognition from Missouri and a Title I Distinguished Schools honor.

For Principal Cheryll Spann, the 2001 scores were a wake-up call. Spann, who was Peabody's instructional coordinator

that year, thought that the school's strong leadership and remarkable student attendance and behavior would

have promised better outcomes. "But I saw a need in the testing," she realized. "In order for students to do well, they at least need to know what is expected of them." She

Peabody eMints Academy Principal Cheryll Spann (center) with students Amon, Brandi, SheToya, Kaif and Diamini. Photo by David Carson.



No C

MARYLAND—This fall, Anne Arundel County will introduce 623 newly hired teachers to its public school system through its teacher support program for newcomers. Designed to ease their transition into the school system, The Right Start New Teacher Support program offers mentoring services for educators new to the profession as well as a series of

seminars on topics ranging from student discipline to data-driven instruction. Approximately 250 of the program's participants are new to teaching, while the others are new to the county. According to district officials, 90 percent of those mentored by veteran teachers continue to teach in Anne Arundel five years later.



Photo by Paul Morse

said that the expectations needed to be relayed to the teachers as well, which translated into greater professional development, collaboration and opportunities for expert educators. "You might think you're doing a wonderful job teaching, but if none of your students mastered the test, you haven't taught," Spann said.

For the students, Spann and former principal Myrtle Reed set up an after-school program to provide additional instruction in reading, math and science, which required the attendance of every child in grades 2–7, Monday through Thursday. (This fall, Peabody is adding the eighth grade as part of a district effort to address middle school issues.) The program is led by half of the teaching staff, whose commitment Spann also credits for the school's academic breakthrough.

Another critical factor in the school's success was a partnership Reed initiated with the business community that culminated to the Peabody Education Task Force. This consortium of businesses, which is helping to direct the community's economic revival, provided the funds for jump-starting the school's eMints

(enhancing Missouri's Instructional Networked Teaching Strategies) program, a state initiative that allows students to take regular online assessments of their progress and teachers to customize instruction accordingly. In addition, the task force has sent volunteers for building improvement projects and tutoring opportunities. "We are all working for the students," said Spann. "We are in the service business. We are to serve the students and serve them well."

New Plymouth Elementary School

At New Plymouth Elementary School, the key to student achievement is reading—the gateway

New Plymouth Elementary School Principal Carrie Aguas with second-grader Cody. On the cover, fourth-grade teacher Keith Gayda with Daina and Brian. Photos by Vance Green.

skill to lifelong learning. Having strong literacy skills is critical to the high-poverty, rural district of New Plymouth, Idaho, where nearly 1 in 5 students (primarily of Latino descent) are English language learners and 11 percent require special education. So to help put its children on the right path, New Plymouth was awarded, in spring 2003, a grant from Reading First, a program established by NCLB to ensure children read at or above grade level by the end of the third grade. By the second year of the program's implementation, the school found that reading performance had increased by one-third in kindergarten (from 58 percent to 90 percent) and nearly doubled in first grade (from 47 percent to 82 percent) on Idaho's early reading test. On the state's 2005 accountability exam, New Plymouth's third-graders proved just as strong as the younger students, with nearly every child (98 percent) testing proficient, while 100 percent of Hispanic students scored at grade level.

Principal Carrie Aguas believes the Reading First program provided the catalyst for change. Before the grant, New Plymouth could not meet its AYP goals. Teachers were using three different reading series and were not always able to fully cover the assigned texts. But "with Reading First, we learned fidelity to the core

program," said Aguas. Recognizing that the NCLB initiative requires comprehensive reading instruction based on scientific research, vast improvements were made to the schedule to extend blocks of time for

academics and teacher preparation, and to the curriculum, which involved pacing calendars that guaranteed everyone taught the same lesson at the same time.

The roles of supporting staff members also were affected. Instructional assistants were

now in the classrooms learning how to apply the supplemental materials. Cafeteria workers had to learn to serve students within a shorter lunch period. Even the custodian helped in the library during busy checkout times. Said Aguas, "Without everyone on board and rowing in the same direction, we could not have made improvements in student learning."

Furthermore, according to Aguas, the gains made through Reading First transferred to other subjects, such as science, social studies and especially math, where the average score is 96 percent for grades 3–5. "We used to look at test scores and go, 'Oh, great, this is where we are,'" said Aguas. "But now we look at them and say, 'Uh-oh, what can we do next?' So it's just brought [the analysis of test] scores down to individual student learning."

Note: The 2006 test results for these schools were not all publicly available at the time of publication.

—BY NICOLE ASHBY



Child Left Behind Act

- > **Enacted:** Jan. 8, 2002
- > **Goal:** To have every child reading and doing math at grade level by 2014.
- > **Major Principles:** 1) Stronger accountability for results; 2) greater flexibility for states and communities; 3) proven education methods; and 4) more choices for parents.
- > **Affects:** K–12 public schools, particularly those receiving Title I funds because of high-poverty populations

- > **Interesting Fact:** The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* passed both houses of Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support: in the House of Representatives, 381 to 41, and in the Senate, 87 to 10.
- > **Glossary of Popular Terms:** **Adequate Yearly Progress:** the annual goal of student proficiency, as set by each state and measured on state assessments, that a school must reach.
Highly qualified teacher: a teacher who has a bachelor's degree, full state certification and

content knowledge in each core academic subject taught.

Supplemental educational services: additional enrichment activities, such as tutoring, provided free-of-charge to students from low-income families in schools identified as in need of improvement for two years.

Disaggregated data: test results sorted by student classifications: poverty level, race/ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency.

September 17

Constitution and Citizenship Day, an annual observance designated by Congress in 2005 that requires any educational institution receiving federal funds to hold an education program to commemorate the day the U.S. Constitution was adopted in 1787. This year, because the 17th falls on a Sunday, schools will participate in the observance during the preceding or following week. Among resources, the Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE) Web site—www.ed.gov/free—offers teaching and learning materials about the historical document that shaped America's democratic government.

September 30

National Book Festival, sponsored by the Library of Congress and hosted by Laura Bush on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. It will feature more than 70 award-winning authors, illustrators and poets in such genres as fiction and fantasy, mysteries and thrillers, and history and biography. For details, visit www.loc.gov and click on "National Book Festival," or call 1-888-714-4696.

October 12

Lights On Afterschool, a nationwide event saluting after-school programs. For information on hosting a local event or obtaining supporting materials, visit www.afterschoolalliance.org or call 202-347-1002.



With the school year beginning, what can I do to ensure my child is successful?

Every stakeholder, from policymakers to parents, is responsible for student achievement. As their children's first teachers, parents in particular play a critical role in children's learning. According to a U.S. Department of Education study, when teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents of low-achieving third-graders, two-year growth rates for student test scores were much higher (reading: 50 percent; math: 40 percent) than when teachers reported low levels of outreach. Here are some tips to help you support your child.

> **Speak with your child about school.** Talk to your child about the importance of school. Ask him or her about teachers, assignments, friends and activities.

> **Establish a line of communication with school staff.** Keep in touch with teachers and

guidance counselors by scheduling periodic meetings or corresponding regularly to discuss academic expectations and your child's progress in meeting those expectations.

> **Examine the school's report card.** The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires that schools and districts provide "report cards" or ongoing information on student progress. These report cards also show how your child's school is doing compared to others in the district.

> **Help with homework.** Review assignments so that you will know in which subjects your child is excelling, needs help or lacks enthusiasm for what is being taught. Ask your child's teachers if classroom and homework assignments are posted on the school's Web site.

> **Attend school functions.** Participate in events such as open houses and parent-teacher conferences. Find out about volunteer opportunities and how you can become involved in school improvement efforts. Join or start a parent support network.

For more information and resources to help your child succeed in school, visit www.ed.gov and click on "Parents."

News Show Explores American Competitiveness

American competitiveness—and the ways in which schools and families can equip children with the skills to compete in a changing world—will be the focus of the September edition of *Education News Parents Can Use*, the U.S. Department of Education's monthly television program.

The show, which will also highlight back-to-school activities around the nation, will: discuss how the American Competitiveness Initiative is ensuring that students graduate with the skills they need to be successful in college or in the workforce; spotlight innovative local and national programs that strengthen learning in math, science and engineering; and pro-



vide tips for parents on what they can do to ensure that their children are ready to meet the demands of an increasingly technological and competitive global economy.

Each month, *Education News Parents Can Use* showcases: schools and school districts

from across the country; conversations with school officials, parents and education experts; and advice and free resources for parents and educators.

To learn about viewing options, including webcasts, visit www.ed.gov and click on "Parents," then "News Parents Can Use," or call toll-free at 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Tool Kit for Hispanic Families

To close the achievement gap for Hispanic children, the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans has recommended setting new and high expectations by: helping parents navigate the education system; creating partnerships to provide expanded options for children; and implementing a public awareness campaign aimed at achieving higher education.

To help fulfill this purpose, the U.S. Department of Education, in collaboration with the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, will release an updated version of the *Tool Kit for Hispanic Families* during this back-to-school season.

A colorful, illustrated resource,

the tool kit was developed with guidance from over 1,800 Hispanic parents at Parent Information and Resource Centers across the country. It includes six topical brochures, each containing additional references.

- > **You and Your Preschool Child** looks at factors such as diet, exercise and medical care that affect how well children perform in school.
- > **You and Your Elementary School-Aged Child** suggests important questions to ask educators, such as how much time is spent teaching children English, reading and math.
- > **Tips for Helping Children Learn to Read** offers literacy techniques for the early stages of learning how to read.
- > **A Challenging High School Education for All** looks at how completing advanced course work can help students to succeed in college and perhaps graduate early.
- > **School Success for Your Child** offers homework tips for parents and suggestions for helping students with disabilities.
- > **No Child Left Behind: Help for Students and Their Families** provides an overview of the options and benefits of the law.

To place an advance order for a free copy of the tool kit, call 1-877-4ED-PUBS.



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