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FIRST CLASS



"When it comes to
the education of our
children . . . failure is
not an option."

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

HELPING CHILDREN DURING THE WAR

A Letter from U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige



Many of our nation's schoolchildren find their lives deeply touched during this time of war. This is especially true for children in military families, who sacrifice their personal comfort and experience tremendous upheaval when their parents are called upon to serve our country at home or abroad.

Our schools can be an anchor for children during these challenging times. Schools provide stability and a normal routine. The predictability of the classroom helps to cushion the impact of deployment on children and the entire school community.

A new handbook is available to help educators guide their students during these trying times. This handbook can help educators build coping skills in their students during and after a military deployment. The goal is to bring needed support and understanding to the process and to maintain an optimal learning environment in the classroom and the school.

This handbook contains specific and practical guidelines for administrators, counselors, teachers and other school employees that identify age-related reactions and focus on appropriate intervention strategies.

I encourage you to check www.ed.gov/inits/homefront for more information, including helpful links to organizations that may be of assistance. We will continually update this site with new information that parents, educators and others should find useful.



THE ACHIEVER

www.NoChildLeftBehind.gov • May 15, 2003 • Vol. 2, No. 9

Guidance for Homeless Students Issued under No Child Left Behind

The U.S. Department of Education released last month preliminary guidance to help states and school districts ensure that every homeless child or youth receives the same educational opportunities, including public preschool education, as other children.

Reauthorized under the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the Education for Homeless Children and Youths program addresses the problems that homeless children face in school, such as low enrollment, poor attendance and academic failure.

The guidance outlines new mandates for this program, including—

- School districts or schools cannot segregate homeless children in a separate school program within a school, based on homelessness alone.

- Schools must immediately enroll homeless students even if the students are unable to produce the records normally required of non-homeless students for enrollment.
- States and their school districts must ensure that homeless children are provided transportation—at the request of parents or guardians—to and from the school they attended prior to becoming homeless.
- School districts must designate a local liaison for homeless children and youths.

To review the guidance, please visit www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SASA/hmlsprogresp.html or call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

From Red Flag to Flagship Once Slated to Close, a Bronx High School Becomes Premiere Place for Vocational, Technical Learning

By Maggie Riechers



Mary Ann Hawthorne sees solutions, not problems, so when she took over as principal of the Samuel Gompers Vocational and Technical High School in the South Bronx, in the early 1990s, she immediately set out to change the operations and the educational culture of the school in need of improvement. The fact that Gompers is located in the congressional district with the lowest per capita income in the nation didn't phase her.

"The school looked like *Lean on Me*," she said, referring to the 1989 film. "There were students in the halls and on the school grounds but nothing was going on in the classrooms." She soon found out the school was slated to close the following June.

Twelve years later, Gompers is still open but it is a completely different place. It has a daily attendance rate of nearly 90 percent—up from 69 percent when Hawthorne first got there. A team from the school recently took second place in a national robotics competition. Between 75 and 80 percent of its graduates go on to a two- or four-year college. And

continued on page 2

Students want to be challenged," said Hawthorne. "If you have high expectations, students will try and meet them." Above right, Tyro Dillion and his classmates test a robot project. Gompers won second place this year at a national robotics competition.

U.S. Department of Education

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Hawthorne has been lauded by local, state and federal officials, including President Bush and Secretary Paige, who named her as one of the top eight principals in the nation.

When she first came to Gompers, however, Hawthorne had difficulty just getting the custodian to hang a poster or the security guard to clear the school grounds of loiterers.

"The first area I attacked was safety and security," she said. "I fired 10 of 11 security officers." She set up staff development workshops. Some teachers left as Hawthorne introduced her new program, which she says uses cooperative learning and is student-centered and student-driven.

Patricia Ann Murphy, a social studies teacher at the school for 20 years before she retired in 2001, admired Hawthorne for coming and asking teachers to work with her as a team. "She asked, 'How do we turn this school around?'" recalled Murphy, who still works at the school as a consultant. "The principal is the prime catalyst in determining the educational culture. She brought everyone together."

Gompers, which is roughly 60 percent Hispanic and 40 percent African American, is a technical school that accepts students from anywhere in New York City through an application process. Hawthorne quickly realized the school's curriculum needed to be revamped to include new areas of technology and to encourage more girls to apply. She started classes in computer-aided design, desktop publishing, pre-engineering and electronics. She also asked for community support by setting up an advisory committee. Today, business leaders from companies such as Con Edison, Verizon, IBM and Cablevision work with the school and offer training, scholarships and internships.

That was just the beginning. Hawthorne realized students were not being recognized for achievement or even given a chance to achieve. "Students want to be challenged," she said. For example, the school offered

no Advanced Placement courses. Today, there are AP classes in English, history, Spanish and environmental science. "If you have high expectations, students will try and meet them." Hawthorne also added extracurricular activities, including clubs, sports teams, cheerleaders and a school chorus, to increase school spirit.

As all the new programs and activities were added, academics were never neglected. Starting with the class of 2000, to graduate high school in New York state, students were required to achieve a 55 (out of 100) percent or better score on the New York State Regents Examinations. That figure rises to 65 percent beginning this year. In 2000, nearly 77 percent of Gompers' students achieved 55 percent or greater in English, and 92 percent achieved 55 percent or greater in math. By 2002, the figure had risen to nearly 87 percent in English. The math figure was nearly 88 percent, after the state initiated new testing procedures.

The school is proud of its global history class, which uses a multimedia approach to teaching history. The students are required to prepare four PowerPoint presentations during the semester and also incorporate video projects into their studies. Teacher Raemon Matthews said, "We want to create an atmosphere so that in college the students do not run into academic culture shock." One hundred percent of last year's students passed the global history and geography portions of the state assessment.

Last year Gompers received more than 3,500 applications for 400 spots, which are filled through a lottery system, and indeed students feel fortunate to get one of these openings. "To me Gompers is an opportunity to get a step closer to college," said 10th-grader Joseph Casiano. "Gompers was my first choice. The school tests your limits in each field and gives an in-depth look at what college is like."

At one time red-flagged by the New York City Department of Education for closing, Samuel Gompers received last year more than 3,500 applications for 400 slots.

" ... [B]e tough customers, be demanding on behalf of your child, at the same time that you're supportive of our teachers, recognizing that they are the greatest public servants in America."

Advice to parents from Alan Bersin, superintendent of San Diego City Schools, in an interview with Secretary Paige for the April 15 broadcast of *Education News Parents Can Use*.

Tips for Parents



Parents often feel uncertain about how to approach their adolescent or the school when their teenager seems to be having difficulty. However, it is important to remember that adolescents need their parents not only to set appropriate expectations and boundaries, but also to advocate for them. To be effective in this regard, parents may:

- Emphasize the importance of study skills, hard work and follow-through at home and in school.
- Arrange tutoring or study support for the teenager at the school or in the community through organizations such as the local YMCA or a local college or university.
- Become more involved in school activities by attending school functions, such as sporting events, concerts, science fairs and plays, to show their support for the school.
- Help the teenager think about career options by arranging for visits to local companies and colleges, providing information about careers and vocational or college courses, and encouraging the teenager to participate in an internship or a career-oriented part-time job.
- Encourage the teenager to volunteer in the community or to participate in community groups such as scouting, 4-H, religious organizations or other service-oriented groups to provide an out-of-school support system.

Source: ERIC Clearinghouse.

Close-Up:



No Child Left Behind Advanced Placement

The Advanced Placement (AP) programs of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* are designed to increase the number of low-income students participating in AP classes and taking AP tests. For example, there is support for paying the test fees for low-income students taking the AP tests administered by the College Board and the tests administered by the International Baccalaureate Organization and for expanding access to AP and International Baccalaureate classes through teacher training and other activities.

Increasing AP course participation and test completion is one of several key department goals for improving the rigor of high school curricula and students' readiness for college. Participation in college-level courses while in high school allows students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college. The tests provide students who pass the exams with a certain score the opportunity to receive college credit. As parents and school and college personnel have come to view AP courses as a mark of educational excellence, the number of exams taken has risen from fewer than 200,000 in 1981, to more than 1.4 million in 2001. Of that number, 114,112 exams were taken by low-income students—an 11-percent increase over the number of test takers in 2000.

Under Title I, Part G, the new law reduces bureaucracy and increases flexibility by (1) moving authorization for the program from the Higher Education Amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which allows the program to be better integrated with other efforts to raise standards and increase academic achievement at the secondary school level; and (2) designating more entities, in addition to the states, as eligible to receive grants and provide services so that local school districts and national nonprofit educational entities with expertise in AP services are now eligible to receive competitive grants.

State education agencies must disseminate information on the availability of AP test fee payments for low-income students through secondary school teachers and guidance counselors.

Grant applications for providing AP services to schools will be available for FY 2003 in early summer. For more information, contact Madeline Baggett at 202-260-2502 or at Madeline.Baggett@ed.gov, or visit www.ed.gov/offices/OII/portfolio/ap.html.

Number of U.S. Students Who Took AP Examinations

Per 1,000-12th graders
by sex and race-ethnicity, 1984 and 2001

Sex and Race-Ethnicity	1984	2001*
TOTAL	50	175
Sex		
Male	50	150
Female	50	202
Race-ethnicity		
White.....	48	185
Black.....	8	52
Hispanic.....	24	130

Source: The College Board. *Unpublished tabulations from National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.