



# THE ACHIEVER

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## Black Alliance Receives Funds for Parent Outreach

The U.S. Department of Education last month awarded the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) a \$2.5 million five-year grant to continue its outreach to parents about their options under the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

The grant will be used to further the activities of the organization's Project Clarion, an outreach and communications campaign designed to educate parents about the law, public school choice, charter schools and free academic services such as tutoring; to motivate them to exercise their rights; and to connect parents to educational options in their communities. BAEO hopes to reach some 30,000 eligible parents in cities such as Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Detroit, Richmond, Va., Atlanta, Tampa, Fla., and Dayton, Ohio.

The grant is from the Department's Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE), which supports nationally significant programs and projects to improve the quality of education and to help all students meet challenging standards.

Activities funded by FIE provide professional, curriculum and assessment development as well as demonstration programs aimed at improving elementary and secondary education.

BAEO, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a national nonprofit membership organization whose mission is to actively support parental choice so that families can be empowered to increase educational options for their children. Established in 2000, the alliance has chapters in 30 cities nationwide. For more information, visit [www.baeo.org](http://www.baeo.org), or call 202-429-2236.

*"It's definitely an on-the-job process, but I know I'm not in this by myself," said first-year teacher Elisa Harrison (pictured below with her student Christopher) about the mentoring efforts at Capitol View.*



### Training the Front Line Atlanta Elementary School Proves Professional Development Improves Student Learning

"We try to make everyone a success story." That statement, by Principal Marcene Thornton, eloquently captures the efforts of faculty and staff at Capitol View Elementary School, the only Atlanta public school to be named a 2004 *No Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon School.

For three consecutive years, Capitol View students have made adequate yearly progress. But that fact, like Principal Thornton's statement, doesn't reveal the school's only achievements. For the 2002-03 school year, 98 percent of Capitol View's fourth-graders met or exceeded the standard level in reading and math on the state exam. These figures put the school in the top 5 percent of all Georgia public schools in scholastic achievement based on test data from the 2002-03 school year.

But there is a more telling statistic at this predominantly African-American, economically disadvantaged school that provides insight into Capitol View's success: The average daily student attendance rate for the past five years has been more than 95 percent.

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Photo by Louis Sohn



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“Our students don’t want to miss a day,” explained April Gomez, a fifth-year kindergarten teacher. “They know they’ll miss out if they do.” This excitement about learning is the result of teachers who work together to keep students engaged and learning activities that blend a curriculum focusing on core knowledge skills with Georgia’s state standards.

For students at Capitol View Elementary, this means exposure to fine arts, classical music

and the French language, along with an emphasis on reading and concept-based learning. For teachers, the challenge is to develop a yearlong lesson plan that includes each of the state requirements and then to mesh it with weekly plans that outline day-to-day instruction in the core knowledge areas.

“It’s definitely an on-the-job process,” said Elisa Harrison, a new second-grade teacher. “But I know I’m not in this by myself. I can always talk to the other teachers. They give me tips to achieve what I need to do.”

With the belief that success comes from exposure to other good teachers, Thornton has built time into the school day for teachers to interact by having teachers arrive at 7:30, a half-hour before the first bell rings.

First-year teachers also are assigned a mentor—an experienced teacher who usually teaches at the same grade level. Mentors are there to help with everything from specific tasks, such as fixing a roll book, to issues that arise in the classroom.

As a mentor to a new teacher last year, Gomez said she was happy to be there for whatever was needed. “As mentors, we want to keep new teachers from feeling left out.”

Once a week, all teachers at the same grade level meet for a two-hour collaborative planning session to discuss strategies for

teaching curriculum components. They also meet with the French teacher, for example, to identify ways to integrate classroom lessons across the curriculum. “Students may learn a song in French that reinforces a history lesson or how to say in French the human organs they studied in science,” said Thornton. “All of our subjects are integrated and focused on the concept being taught.”

Teachers also meet every third Tuesday after school for a staff development program. The agenda is teacher-driven, focusing on strategies and pedagogy about which teachers are interested in learning more.

“Different people research different techniques or attend different workshops,” said Gomez, noting that all strategies considered are recognized, researched models that are coordinated with student data. “We look at new things and how they could help us engage our students.”

Perhaps the greatest challenge for new teachers at Capitol View is the requirement that each class, once students master a concept, present that concept in the form of a game, model or activity. For example, the second-grade students made chocolate chip cookies using their fraction and measuring skills.

“We try to find activities that let students show off their skills and incorporate their own personalities,” said Gomez.

“These opportunities help us set them up to succeed.”

“When teachers are comfortable in their roles and able to engage students,” said Thornton, commenting on the creativity required for these presentations, “their interest and enthusiasm flow to the students—and everyone is successful.”

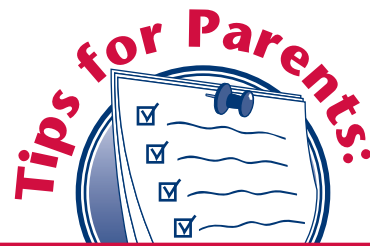
*“We try to find activities that let students show off their skills and incorporate their own personalities,” said teacher mentor April Gomez, pictured at left with her kindergarten class.*

Photo by Louis Sohn



“... If you’re not happy with what your child is being served, don’t accept it. And don’t just say... ‘that’s the way it is,’ because that’s not the way it is. You have options today. Parents need to understand they have options. They need to explore them. They’re not locked into a box anymore.”

Kevin Teasley, president of the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation, in his remarks on the Oct. 19 *Education News Parents Can Use* broadcast highlighting supplemental educational services.



Parents and community members can support their neighborhood schools by helping to prevent or by responding to any potential crisis that would endanger children’s lives. The following is a sample checklist that schools and communities can employ for effective crisis management:

#### Mitigation and Prevention

- Connect with community emergency responders to identify local hazards.
- Determine who is responsible for overseeing violence prevention strategies in your school.

#### Preparedness

- Establish procedures to account for students during a crisis.
- Gather existing information about the school facility, such as maps and the location of utility shutoffs.

#### Response

- Ascertain whether an evacuation, reverse evacuation, lockdown, or shelter-in-place needs to be implemented.
- Monitor how emergency first aid is being administered to the injured.

#### Recovery

- Monitor how staff are assessing students for the emotional impact of the crisis.
- Capture “lessons learned” and incorporate them into revisions and trainings.

Source: Excerpted from *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities*, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2003.

Close-Up:



## No Child Left Behind School Emergency Preparedness

The harrowing event at Columbine High School in 1999 made most Americans focus on the safety of our schools, while the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, left the entire nation feeling vulnerable. Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and tornadoes can also strike a community with little or no warning. However, thanks to the efforts of millions of teachers, principals and staff across America, the majority of schools remain a safe haven for our nation’s youths.

To ensure the safety of America’s children, schools need to be ready to handle crises, both large and small. Last month, the U.S. Department of Education awarded 109 school districts \$28.6 million in grants to strengthen their emergency preparation and response plans and train school personnel and students in emergency response procedures.

The Emergency Response and Crisis Management program is managed by the Department’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, which supports efforts to create safe schools, respond to crises, prevent drug and alcohol abuse, help ensure the health and well being of students, and teach students good citizenship and character.

As part of the No Child Left Behind Act, local school districts must provide assurances that they have plans that outline how they are working to keep their schools safe and drug free.

For tips on keeping teachers and students safe, the Department offers the guide *Practical Information on Crisis Planning*, which also describes how several districts across the country have approached crisis planning. To download a copy, visit [www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf/](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf/).

For more information about the Emergency Response and Crisis Management program, visit [www.ed.gov/programs/dvpemergencyresponse/index.html/](http://www.ed.gov/programs/dvpemergencyresponse/index.html/).

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**FIRST CLASS**



**“When it comes to the education of our children ... failure is not an option.”**

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

## **NEW RESOURCE!** **Online Tool Offers Teacher Training**

In its continuing effort to support classroom teachers, the U.S. Department of Education recently unveiled a new online tool that offers elementary and secondary school teachers on-demand professional development training for improving student achievement.

The **Teacher-to-Teacher e-Learning** resource, offered free of charge, links educators to a collection of videos from the Department's summer workshops for teachers. Available online or via satellite TV, the workshops are taught by exemplary teachers and education experts who demonstrate practical examples of successfully translating scientifically based research into classroom practice and using data to inform instruction.

The sessions cover a variety of subject areas, from reading instruction to science and mathematics, and may be taken for credit for a possible two hours of in-service work. Most of the video workshops include an overview, note-taking guide, course assessment, follow-up activities, principal's implementation checklist and additional resources.

The e-Learning program is part of the Department's Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative to help educators share best practices for putting research to work in the classroom. The initiative includes regional workshops, a national summit, roundtable discussions with teachers about the support they need to meet the academic needs of their students, a teacher toolkit, and electronic updates of useful information for teachers.

To access the Web site for the Teacher-to-Teacher e-Learning tool, visit [www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/initiative/index.html/](http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/initiative/index.html/).

