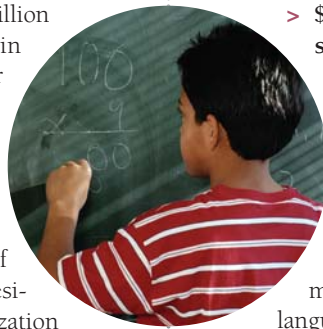


## President's Plan Calls for Largest Pell Grant Increase Since 1974

On Feb. 5, President Bush revealed his education budget proposal for fiscal year 2008, which would provide an increase in resources to improve the nation's public schools overall, promote rigor in high schools and help more students afford college.

The president's request of \$56 billion would make bold investments in education by increasing funding for the landmark *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* to \$24.5 billion—up 41 percent since 2001—to reach the goal of every child reading and doing math at grade level by 2014. Overall, it would be an increase of \$1.2 billion to help fund the president's priorities for *NCLB* reauthorization this year, as outlined in his plan *Building on Results*.

Among the highlights of his budget request are:  
> **\$13.9 billion for the Title I Program**—up 59 percent since 2001—to increase support for



high schools serving large numbers of students from low-income families, while continuing to fund Title I elementary and middle schools;

> **\$500 million for School Improvement grants** to help states restructure, reform and re-staff chronically underperforming schools;

> **\$300 million for Promise scholarships** (\$250 million) and **Opportunity scholarships** (\$50 million) to expand school choice options for students in low-performing schools;  
> **\$365 million for the American Competitiveness Initiative** to promote early instruction and high school rigor in core subjects like math, science and critical foreign languages;

> **\$199 million for the Teacher Incentive Fund** to reward educators raising student achievement, as well as those who choose to serve in the neediest schools;

> **\$10.5 billion for the Special Education**

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# Proposed Budget Invests More Into *NCLB*, Neediest Students

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## Making History

# L.A. County School With Disadvantaged Ethnic Populations Scores Record Achievement

For her first Christmas at Ralph J. Bunche Elementary, an inner-city school in Los Angeles County, Principal Mikara Solomon-Davis gave the teachers framed inspirational quotes, which they hung in their classrooms. One quotation stood above the rest, becoming a motto for the entire school: "Let's give the historians something to write about."

Seven years later, following the staff's innovative and persistent efforts to create a culture of excellence, Bunche has made history. In 2006, it became the first school ever in the Compton Unified School District to win the esteemed California Distinguished School Award. It was also the first in the district to earn the state's Title I Academic Achievement Award, an honor it has held for the past three years. Bunche has merited these recognitions particularly in light of serving mostly disadvantaged African-American and Latino student populations, of which four in 10 are

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Let's give the historians something to write about.

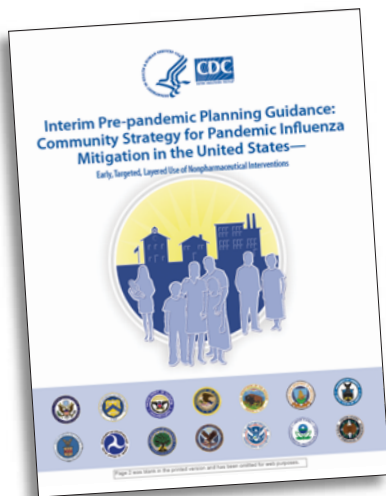


**Grants to States Program**—up 66 percent since 2001—to help students with disabilities reach their full potential;  
**> \$671 million for English Language Acquisition support**—up 50 percent since 2001—to help limited English proficient students achieve academic success; and  
**> \$15.4 billion for the Pell Grant Program**—a 76-percent increase since 2001—to raise the maximum amount per student to \$4,600 in 2008, the largest increase in the program's more than 30-year history; and to \$5,400 by 2012.

For a fact sheet on President Bush's budget proposal and for Building on Results, visit <http://www.ed.gov>.

## A Healthy Approach

An essential new resource for communities, schools and colleges that offers guidance on strategies to help delay or limit the spread of an influenza pandemic until a



vaccine is available was just released by the departments of Education and Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, along with other federal agencies. The publication, *Interim Pre-pandemic Planning Guidance: Community Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Mitigation in the United States*, suggests intervention measures such as avoiding large crowds, encouraging telework and closing schools, if necessary.

For an online copy, visit <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>. Later this year, the Education Department plans to offer additional guidelines to explain how requirements and implementation of federal education programs may be affected.

nonnative English speakers.

Proving that neither poverty nor limited English proficiency is necessarily the cause of poor performance, Bunche has doubled overall the percentage of students in grades 2–5 doing math and reading at grade level—from 39 percent in 2003 to 84 percent in 2006, and from 34 percent to 65 percent, respectively. In fact, according to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measures for the last three years, Bunche is on par with schools in the more affluent districts of Santa Monica and Torrance. Even more impressive is that virtually no achievement gap exists among its subgroups, which means nearly all of the students are performing equally well.

“Everybody is addressing this economic divide as the biggest crisis our country and our world are facing,” said Principal Solomon-Davis. “If you want to solve that, you have to educate the people on the downside of that divide ... this way they can lift up themselves and their communities, which is true empowerment.”

It was the quality of education that children in impoverished schools were receiving that compelled Solomon-Davis to become an administrator. After teaching three years at a school in Compton, where she had been assigned by Teach for America—the

national corps of teachers that places recent college graduates in high-need areas—she set out to unravel the systemic causes of inferior schooling. Believing she could effect change better at the leadership level, she enrolled in Columbia University's Teachers College in New York City to pursue a master's degree in education.

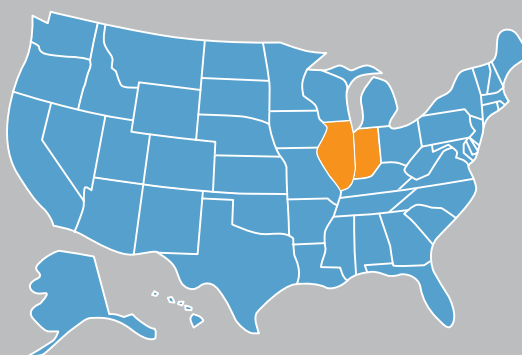
“I was totally impassioned by [teaching], but outraged by what was happening,” said Solomon-Davis, who abandoned her plans for law school in favor of the calling to teach.

In 2000, she returned to Compton, a city notorious for its gang violence and abject poverty, this time hired to lead the



faltering Bunche Elementary. Undeterred by the issues in the community, which she viewed simply as obstacles to overcome, Solomon-Davis first worked on raising the level of expectations regarding not only what the children could do, but also what the teachers, parents and she could do. “You really have to create a

## AROUND THE COUNTRY



**ILLINOIS**—A set of donations totaling \$4.2 million will help open Chicago's first math and science public high school this fall, city officials announced in February. Named in honor of its donors—Exelon Chairman John Rowe and fellow utility company executive ComEd Chairman Frank Clark—the Rowe-Clark Math and

culture of 'no excuses,' which in essence results in a culture of excellence," she asserted.

Those who were not committed to the new changes left that year, thus opening the door for a new crop of teachers. Amber Young, another Teach for America placement, came to the school in fall 2001 and stayed well past her two-year pledge. Now the interim principal until Solomon-Davis returns full-time from maternity leave, Young has become one of the major players credited with the school's progress.

"I do believe what is happening here can be replicated. I don't believe that this is an anomaly," said Young. "It's definitely challenging. It's a lot of hard work. But our children deserve the hard work."



That is why the school has a strict hiring process: to ensure that new teachers are committed to the school's mission, she said, and that they understand a culture of "whatever my kids need, I'm going to do." Before a selection is made, applicants are interviewed

by a panel of faculty members and parents and must do a mock lesson to demonstrate their instructional skills.

Given the importance of high-quality teaching to student achievement, resource teacher Angella Martinez says she is always astonished when others ask about the staff's formula for success as if it were a secret. "We get questions like, 'What are you doing with your [English Language Learners]?' We're kind of like, 'Well, it's what we do with all of our students—good teaching.'" Martinez, a Teach for America alum who came to Bunche at the same time as Young and who is now responsible for teacher training, said the staff work hard to address the needs of every single student, "so it's not ... a blanket lesson."

The result is instruction that Young describes as "wonderful, engaging and differentiated," which often includes manipulatives such as Skittles candy, to illustrate a lesson on fractions.

At Bunche, the devotion to teaching extends considerably beyond the regular school day. Nearly all 21 teachers stay after school several days a week to tutor students from 2:30 to 4 p.m., while some stay later as part of another program that allows working parents to let their children remain at school until 6 p.m. to



receive homework assistance and participate in extracurricular activities in a safe environment.

What's more, these educational opportunities carry over into the summer with a program that substitutes as a day camp for many of the children who cannot afford other summer enrichment experiences. Solomon-Davis, who initiated both the after-school and summer programs, said these efforts have provided invaluable time for remediation and intervention, as proven by the number of

participating students who score high on the state exam.

Behind the scenes, there is a lot of teacher collaboration taking place, which is fostered in weekly meetings, where faculty members analyze data, share best practices

# Ralph J. Bunche Elementary

Science Academy will serve about 530 students when fully enrolled, and offer a rigorous curriculum that requires six instead of four credits of math and four lab sciences. The academy's school day and school year will be extended to provide for about 33 percent more reading and math instruction. On the Noble Street Charter School campus, the school will be open to all graduating eighth-graders in the city.

**INDIANA**—Two virtual public charter schools, the first of their kind in Indiana, received approval last month from officials at Ball State University, the chartering authority, to open for the 2007–08 school year. Created to serve students statewide, the Indiana Virtual Charter School and the Indiana Connections Academy will start with grades K–10 and K–11, respectively.

Each student will receive a loaned computer and an Internet connection, and textbooks and other supporting materials throughout the year. State-certified teachers will assign lessons and monitor student progress, communicating online or in person. Thousands of families have already expressed interest in applying for one of the 2,200 slots.

and brainstorm about future projects for improving student achievement. One extraordinary endeavor borne of these sessions is the adoption of the College Bound initiative designed to introduce children early on to the possibility of higher education. Support for the initiative is evidenced throughout the building, with every classroom and office adopting a college name and their doors decorated with related paraphernalia. For instance, the computer lab is referred to as “Cal Tech” (for the California Institute of Technology) and Young’s office is under the banner of the University of Virginia, Solomon-Davis’ alma mater. Also, at the beginning of the year, the school hosts a pep rally, at which children wear their classrooms’ college colors and get their faces painted with, for instance, a little wildcat’s paw to symbolize Northwestern University.

And, in a further attempt to familiarize the students with college life, they are taken on tours of area campuses, primarily those of the University of Southern California and the University of California—Los Angeles, the latter being the institution from which the school’s namesake, Ralph Bunche, graduated and went on to become the first African-American to receive a Nobel Peace Prize. Financial aid representatives are also invited to Bunche Elementary to

**From left to right:** Fourth-grader Alexous stands at the door of the “Princeton University” classroom; Principal Mikara Solomon-Davis; Interim Principal Amber Young; and Resource Teacher Angella Martinez with fourth-graders Juan and Alexous. On the cover, first-grader Starr. Photos by Ann Johansson.

speak to the parents of fourth- and fifth-graders about various resources for funding a college education.

Next to improving teacher quality and raising expectations as measures for closing the achievement gap, Solomon-Davis says that increasing accountability for student progress through constant assessments is equally important. “You have to measure on a continual basis [to know] where you are in terms of reaching your goals,” she said.

Every Friday students at Bunche take a teacher-developed skills test to check their mastery of the material taught that week. The staff receive the results the following Monday. Based on the same scale as the state’s accountability report, student performance is rated from “far below basic” to “advanced.” The specifics of the outcomes, discussed in grade-level meetings, inform teachers where they need to adjust instruction.

At the same time that students are working to achieve the state and school’s goals, they are also trying to reach their own. At the start of the school year, all of the children fill out a goals sheet that lists their short- and long-term plans—from what they will accomplish

this year to where they will attend college. The sheets, which are decoratively attached to their photos, are posted on the classroom walls, keeping company with the framed quotes Solomon-Davis gave the teachers as well as other reminders of the school’s vision for success.

Martinez says that hearing the children talk about their dreams has made her proudest. “Hearing them say, ‘When I’m in college, I’m going to take this class,’ or ‘When I become a doctor, I’m going to work at this hospital’—those sorts of things, where they’re thinking about their future, about their community, about their place in the world, and they know that they’re valued.”

—BY NICOLE ASHBY



# Elementary School



- > **Grade Span:** K–5
- > **Locale:** Urban
- > **Total Students:** 417
- > **Race/Ethnicity Enrollment:** 50% Latino, 48% African-American, 2% multiracial
- > **Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible:** 93%
- > **English Language Learners:** 42%
- > **Special Education Students:** 10%
- > **Percentage Proficient:** In math, 84%; in reading, 65% (based on second- through fifth-graders assessed on the 2006 state exam)
- > **Interesting Fact:** In 2006, Bunche became the first school ever in the Compton Unified School District to win the California Distinguished School Award. It was also the first in the district to earn the state’s Title I Academic Achievement Award, an honor it has held for the past three years.

## March

**National Women's History Month**, an observance sponsored by the National Women's History Project to recognize the contributions of women to American culture. In light of this year's theme, "Generations of Women Moving History Forward," the project's online resource center includes links to research about the Women's Rights Movement, notable Latinas, famous speeches and biographies of female pioneers. Visit <http://www.nwhp.org> or call 707-636-2888.

### March 1–20

#### Supplemental Educational Services Regional Workshops,

sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. This workshop series provides free technical assistance for organizations interested in becoming approved providers of supplemental educational services for disadvantaged students. Locations and dates include: March 1, Bridgeport, Conn.; March 7, Detroit; March 13, Oklahoma City; and March 20, Baltimore. Visit <http://www.ed.gov> or call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

### April 15–21

**National Library Week**, an observance sponsored by the American Library Association since 1958. This year's theme, "Come Together @ Your Library," is part of a public awareness campaign to promote the value of libraries and their staffs. Visit <http://www.ala.org> or call 1-800-545-2433.



## How do I apply for student financial aid?

**M**ore than \$80 billion in federal grants, loans and work-study assistance is available to help students pay for postsecondary education. To receive financial aid for the 2007–08 academic year, students are encouraged to apply as soon as possible to take advantage of these funds. Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov> is the first step in the process. While the application is also available in paper form, filing online eliminates mail delays and identifies errors that can be corrected immediately. It's as easy as 1-2-3.

**1. Before applying.** Register for a Federal Student Aid PIN at <http://www.pin.ed.gov>. Your PIN—which you will need throughout your college career—serves as your electronic signature on your application, secures your data and allows you to make changes to your application as well as view and print your Student Aid Report. Your PIN application will take 1-3 days to process if an e-mail address is provided, and 7-10 days when only a postal address is submitted.

Meanwhile, assemble the documents needed to fill out the FAFSA, including: your most recent income tax return and W-2 forms; driver's license; proof of citizenship; and statements verifying family investments and assets. You may use the FAFSA on the Web Worksheet to help you organize your data before entering it online.

**2. Completing the FAFSA.** Once you have gathered the pertinent information, fill out the financial aid form and submit it. If you do not complete the application all at once, the system will save your data and allow you to resume filing later. In addition, once your FAFSA is processed, the information entered will be available next year to file a Renewal FAFSA online.

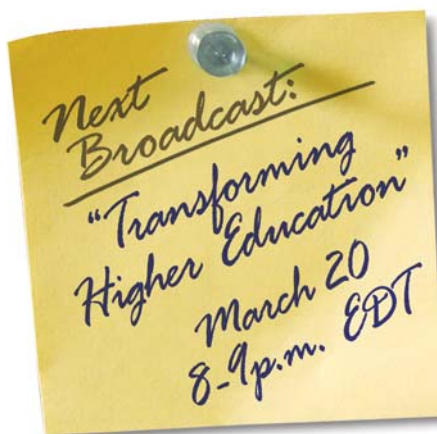
**3. After applying.** Within 72 hours of filing, a Student Aid Report will be generated, listing all of the answers provided on the application. If changes need to be made, select "Make Corrections to a Processed FAFSA" from the "FAFSA Follow-up" section on the FAFSA home page. You may also check the status of your application online at any time.

For more information, contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4FED AID (1-800-433-3243).

## News Show Looks at Higher Education

**M**aking college education more affordable and accessible for all students in today's global economy will be the focus of the March edition of *Education News Parents Can Use*, the Department's monthly television program.

Over a year and a half ago, in recognition of the emerging demands of the global marketplace and the vital role that colleges play in helping our students meet such demands, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings launched the Commission on the Future of Higher Education with a very clear purpose: to launch a healthy, national dialogue on the vital issues of accessibility, affordability and accountability. (On March 21–22, the secretary will hold a Higher Education Summit to build on the recommendations of the commission.) Guests on the March show will: discuss



the commission's recently released final report, which provides recommendations about how college can be made more accessible to and less costly for students; and explore how the Department, parents, schools and higher education institutions together can put the commission's recommendations into action to better prepare

students for college and help them to succeed once enrolled.

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 <http://www.ed.gov> and click on "Parents," then "News Parents Can Use," or call toll-free 1-800-USA-LEARN

## Frequently Asked Questions About Education

For quick answers to frequently asked questions about education, the U.S. Department of Education offers an online resource filled with up-to-date information on numerous aspects of federal law, policy and initiatives.

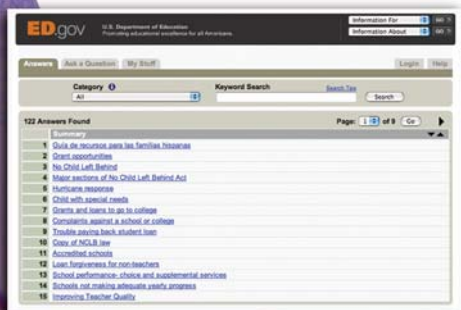
The Web site <http://answers.ed.gov> answers more than 100 questions related to topics addressed by the Department, including *No Child Left Behind*, financial aid, special education, school choice, grants and research. Topics are available in a fully searchable format that includes responses with links to

additional information from internal and external sources. In addition, some answers are available in Spanish.

Among the questions listed on the site are:

- > How do I find out how my child's school is performing and if my child is eligible for school choice or supplemental educational services?
- > What impact does testing have on children?
- > I have a child with special needs. How do I determine if the school is providing my child with an appropriate education and services?
- > What kinds of programs do you have to help teachers pay back their loans?
- > How do I determine if a school is accredited by the U.S. Department of Education?

As an added feature, users can submit an e-mail inquiry to the Department's Information Resource Center, which manages the site, and track the responses to all the questions they have submitted through the "My Stuff" tab.



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**Address changes and subscriptions?** Contact 1-877-4ED-PUBS, or [edpubs@inet.ed.gov](mailto:edpubs@inet.ed.gov).

**Information on ED programs, resources and events?** Contact 1-800-USA-LEARN, or [education@custhelp.com](mailto:education@custhelp.com).

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