

Funds Provide Increased Access to Rigorous Course Work for Economically Disadvantaged Students

## \$17 Million Awarded in Advanced Placement Grants

Last month, the U.S. Department of Education awarded 33 grants totaling \$17 million to states, school districts and national education nonprofit organizations to boost participation of students from low-income families in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and tests.

Under the Department's Advanced Placement Incentive Program, which was created as part of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, these grants are to be used for professional development for teachers, curriculum development, books and supplies, and other activities directly related to increasing access to and participation in AP courses and tests for students from low-income families.

Since 1955, the College Board's AP program has enabled secondary students to participate in college-level courses in high school and earn

credit toward or advanced standing in their college programs. In addition, through the years, programs like Advanced Placement have helped to raise high school academic standards and levels of student achievement by encouraging more students to pursue and master advanced course work.

Traditionally, 11th- and 12th-graders take an AP examination after completing the corresponding AP course. However, participation in an exam is open to any student regardless of course participation or grade level. Last spring, 1.2 million students took more than 2 million AP exams, according to the College Board.

In the U.S., more than 90 percent of colleges and universities have a policy of granting incoming students credit, advanced placement or both, for qualifying AP test scores.



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### After the Storm

## New Orleans School Maintains High Standards In the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

Parents still want their children in good schools.

Friday, Aug. 26, 2005, will forever be remembered by Edna Karr High School Principal John Hiser as the last “normal” school day of the year before Hurricane Katrina struck that fateful Monday. Prior to the storm, Karr was a magnet school, long esteemed as one of New Orleans’ academic flagships, attracting some of the brightest seventh- through 12th-graders in the city. By the time classes resumed in mid-December, Karr had been converted into a charter school, scrapping its competitive admissions policy to open its doors to every district student, regardless of prior academic performance.

One thing remained constant, however: the mission to prepare students for higher education and beyond. “We’re a college preparatory school, whether we’re a magnet school or not,” said Hiser.

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Karr still offers the same rigorous curriculum it did when it began as a magnet school in 1990. All core subjects are taught at either the honors or gifted level, with Advanced Placement (AP) courses available to juniors and seniors. Graduation requirements are still a step ahead of the state's: four units of English, math, science and social studies; two units of foreign language; and one unit of computer science.

Because of this continued commitment to high standards, even in the wake of one of the nation's worst natural disasters, Karr has served as a cornerstone of the community.

"For most of our students, Karr is a second home," explained Hiser, its chief administrator for the past 22 years. "When your home is destroyed, the need for that second home becomes even more significant."

The desire to reestablish an alternative home for displaced students was the reason Hiser returned to New Orleans. During that tumultuous 2005 fall semester, a number of students were scattered across the nation, from Florida to as far away as Alaska. Some were living with relatives and friends, others in homeless shelters; however, they soon began coming home.

By spring semester, 60 percent of the students enrolled there prior to Katrina had come back to Karr. "For families to return to New Orleans, there are three basic things they have to have: a place to put their heads; a place to put their children; and a place to pick up a check," said Hiser. "We can give them one of those three."



This school year, enrollment is up to 770 students, despite the fact that the district moved the middle school grades to K-8 schools to have two full-fledged high schools. "I've been at Karr since the seventh grade, so it was never a question of where I wanted to go after the storm,"

said senior Blair Thomas, who reenrolled at Karr this fall.

Located in Algiers, a small community within New Orleans west of the Mississippi River, Karr was among the first batch of schools to reopen after the hurricane. Sitting above sea level, Algiers escaped the flooding that enveloped the east bank of the city and was therefore—withstanding some downed power lines and fallen trees—the first major section of New Orleans to welcome returning residents at the end of September.

Crucial to the area's recovery, as Hiser pointed out, was the restoration of several homes and some schools.

## Hurricane Relief Update

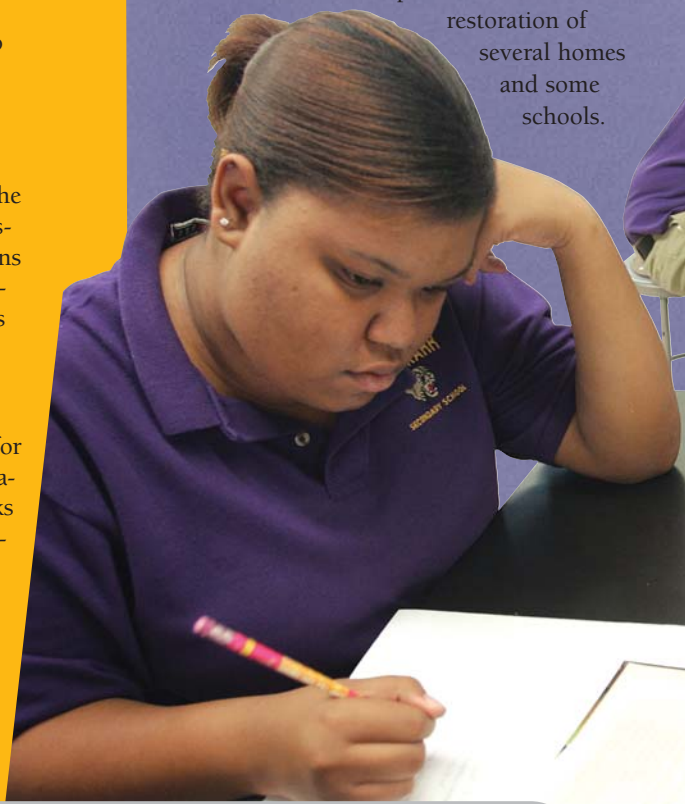
To date, more than \$1.6 billion in funds from the *Hurricane Education Recovery Act*, signed by President George W. Bush last December, has been made available to reopen schools in the Gulf Coast region and to help educate students across the country who were displaced or affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Among other efforts to help schools recover from the hurricanes:

- > In August, the U.S. Department of Education announced the availability of \$235 million in additional funding from the Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students Program to assist 49 states (Hawaii did not apply) and the District of Columbia in paying for the cost of educating displaced students who were enrolled in public and nonpublic schools. The allotment follows the earlier disbursement of \$645 million in Emergency Impact Aid funds. Other funding efforts have helped to reopen damaged schools, address the needs of children rendered homeless by the storms, and support borrowers of federal student loans impacted by the disaster.
- > Foreign-aid donations totaling \$60 million were awarded to support the reconstruction of higher education institutions as well as public school libraries, science laboratories and other school facilities.
- > This summer, the Department joined First Book—a nonprofit organization whose mission is to give children from

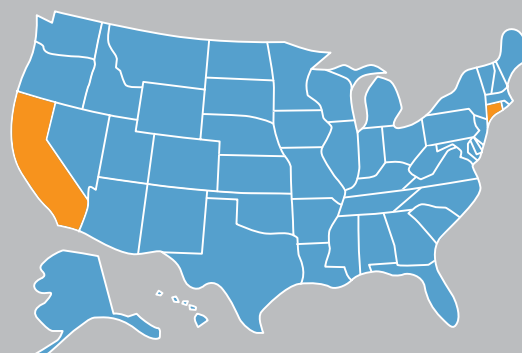
low-income families the opportunity to own their first books—in distributing more than 250,000 new books across the region. The books were made available through donations secured by First Book from publishers, and the Department provided storage and distribution services. The book donations were sent to replenish reading collections in schools, community libraries and homes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama and Florida.

> In preparation for opening schools this year, the Department's Furniture for Schools Program coordinated the donations of more than 12,000 school desks and other furniture valued at \$4.6 million to hurricane-impacted schools, thanks to contributions from school districts and federal agencies.

For more information on the U.S. Department of Education's support for the Gulf Coast region, visit <http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov>.



## AROUND THE COUNTRY

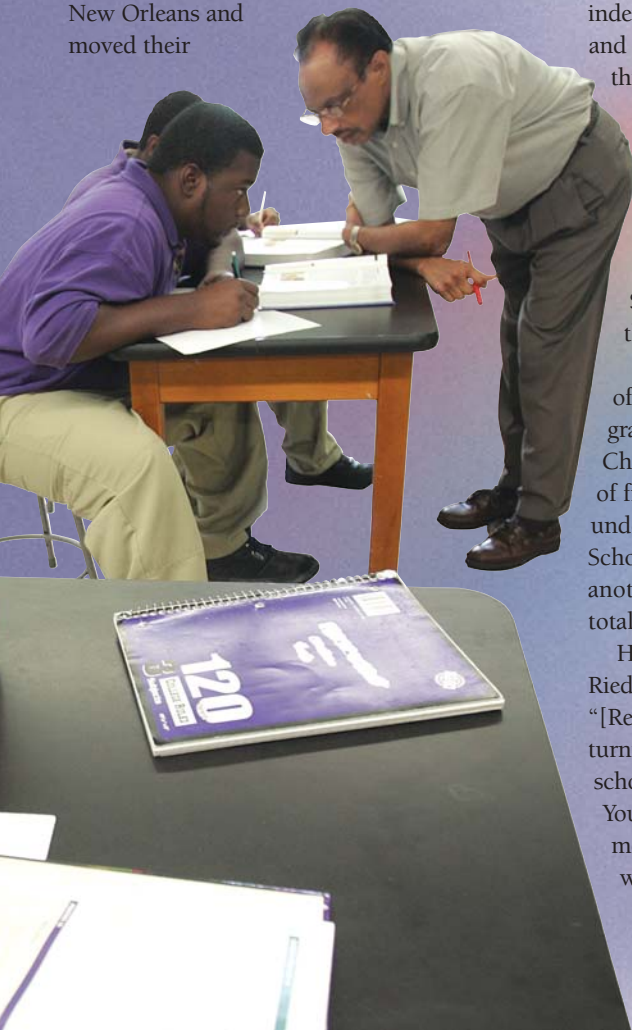


**CALIFORNIA**—On Sept. 7, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed legislation to expand preschool opportunities for thousands of children from low-income families. *Assembly Bill 172* authorizes half of the \$100 million earmarked in the governor's budget for early education to help California's lowest-performing schools hire and



**From top left to right:** Principal John Hiser; senior Blair Thomas completes her assignment while science teacher Koshy John speaks with Christopher Ball; English teacher Judith Johnson Blackman; and Coach Douglas Blackman with student Claude Hawkins. On the cover, social studies teacher Bill Robinson with sophomore Roy Simmons. Photos by Sean Gardner.

Even before Hurricane Katrina hit, plans to charter all 13 schools in Algiers were already under way, with the goal of introducing a new charter school association for the 2006–07 school year. The onslaught of Hurricane Katrina accelerated those plans, ushering in a stream of charter school applications from local groups and education agencies seeking to meet enrollment demands and save a large crop of city schools. Immediately after the hurricane, Louisiana had taken control of 112 of the 128 low-performing schools in New Orleans and moved their



operations to the state's newly created Recovery School District. Five schools were already under state control pre-Katrina, which meant that 117 were now slated for restructuring.

The local charter school movement, which gave community partners greater control over public schools, seemed ideal in a city recovering from a disaster and already looking to revive its school system. As public schools of choice managed by mostly grassroots organizations but authorized by either local or state school boards, charter schools could operate independently of traditional public schools and begin classes much sooner. To support this effort, the U.S. Department of Education awarded the state a \$20.9 million grant to help reopen charter schools damaged by hurricanes, expand existing charter schools to accommodate displaced students and create 10 new charter schools. (An additional \$23.9 million grant was awarded this June.)

By early November, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education granted approval to the fledgling Algiers Charter Schools Association for the opening of five charter schools that were formerly under the jurisdiction of the Orleans Parish School Board. Later, the association gained another three schools, which brought the total to eight.

Hired to oversee its operations, Brian Riedlinger saw a silver lining in the storm: “[Reforming] a 128-school system is like turning an ocean liner, whereas with eight schools it’s more like [steering] a speedboat. You can make mid-course corrections much more easily with eight schools than you can with 128.”

Administrators were then hired over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend—Hiser would be the only principal

retained at his previous school—followed by the screening of 600 teachers to fill 150 slots. On Dec. 16, 2005, Karr reopened with 21 fully certified teachers and 125 students.

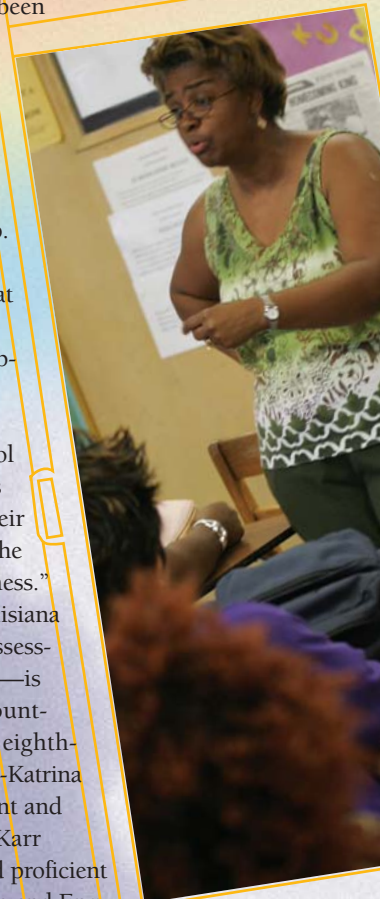
Judith Johnson Blackman was one of the veteran teachers who returned to Karr after having evacuated to Columbus, Ga., and then having found a teaching job in Monroe, La., during the two-month hiatus when Algiers schools were closed.

“I’ve enjoyed working here the past 11 years,” said Johnson Blackman, who teaches 10th-grade English. “It’s been a wonderful place to work. The faculty has always been outstanding, and the students have been

a pleasure to teach. And we’ve just had a lot of success. Our LEAP scores were at the top. Students came in knowing that LEAP would never be a problem for them, because they were at a school where teachers made LEAP their business, not the students’ business.”

LEAP—Louisiana Educational Assessment Program—is the state’s accountability test for eighth-graders. In pre-Katrina 2005, 94 percent and 84 percent of Karr students scored proficient on LEAP’s math and English tests, respectively. For the past several years, at least 80 percent of the students have reached the proficient level.

On another high-stakes test, approximately



train more teachers as well as develop literacy and outreach programs aimed at encouraging parents to read to their children. While current enrollment in state-funded preschools is close to 100,000, the new law is expected to benefit an additional 12,000 children who are not yet enrolled in preschool. The other \$50 million from the current budget will go to improving preschool facilities.

**CONNECTICUT**—A new magnet school that is teaching core subjects from a global perspective opened this fall in Danbury with 267 students. The Western Connecticut Academy of International Studies Magnet School offers kindergartners through fourth-graders an intensive Spanish immersion program as part of a multinational education. (Fifth grade will be added in 2007.) Housed

on the campus of Western Connecticut State University, the school has an amphitheater, a planetarium, SMARTboards and wireless connections to the Internet; also, in keeping with its mission, the hallways represent the seven continents. As a result of the college connection, the university’s professors and students will contribute to enriching the curriculum at the school.



95 percent of Karr's 10th-graders proved proficient on Louisiana's Graduate Exit Exam in spring 2005. Although this year's proficiency rate dropped to about 58 percent, not far from the state level of 65 percent, "considering the circumstances," said Johnson Blackman, "that was not bad."

For quite some time Karr has been the pride of New Orleans. Traditionally, student performance has ranked well above state and local averages and, last year, the school had one of the lowest dropout rates in the state. In both 2000 and 2005, it earned a

are just as impressive: the choir was invited to perform at the Vatican several years ago, and a student video project was nominated for an Emmy Award after airing on a local television station.

It is this record of achievement as well as Karr's pledge to maintain high standards that continue to attract families. "This summer, I saw parents line up outside the door to get their children into this school. That's saying a lot. Parents still want their children in good schools. I was very encouraged to see that," said Douglas Blackman, Judith's husband,

in high school.

The greater mission, said Riedlinger, is "to improve the capacity of the adults" and consequently that of the students. "In Algiers, we're trying to make sure we understand that if part of the boat sinks, the whole boat sinks," he said. "Everybody has to do well."

Improving the quality of staff involves providing professional development opportunities for the district's educators. This fall, Algiers will introduce to six schools the Teacher Advancement Program launched by the Milken Family Foundation in which

**"As we mark the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, we can look back on a year where significant progress was made to help the Gulf Coast region and its citizens recover from one of the worst natural disasters in our nation's history. ... As the region continues to move forward, we at the Department will do all we can to ensure the resources and support needed are available to help this vibrant area once again thrive."**

—U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION MARGARET SPELLINGS, AUG. 29, 2006.

who also works at Karr as a health and physical education teacher.

The future of Karr—how it will continue to promote rigor amid a shift in student population and an increasing poverty rate (from 48 percent to 68 percent)—will receive greater focus this year. "Last year was basically structural," said Hiser. "We had to get roofs back on, desks set up and kids in the building. We had to find teachers to teach. This year, we're much more visionary."

Up for discussion will be whether or not to again implement the High Schools That Work Initiative, which previously organized the school into seven small learning communities, or to pursue another model that can meet its present needs. Karr nonetheless will continue its partnership with Delgado Community College, which offers seniors an opportunity to earn college credit while

master teachers are devoted entirely to helping their colleagues enhance instruction. In addition, a partnership with Our Lady of Holy Cross College will provide a selected group of teachers an opportunity to earn a master's degree at little or no cost. For the principals, the School Leadership Center of Greater New Orleans, a nonprofit organization of which Riedlinger is also CEO, is providing an intensive training and mentoring program.

For the director of Algiers' charter schools, these efforts are just part of the dramatic reforms taking place across New Orleans in hopes of a much brighter future. "I think New Orleans has a chance," Riedlinger said. "I really think that if we do this right ... we can give our kids what they deserve, and that is a good start in life. ... Education is the great equalizer."

—BY NICOLE ASHBY



No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools Award from the U.S. Department of Education. Artistically, the students

# Edna Karr High School



- > **Grade Span:** 9–12
- > **Locale:** Large central city
- > **Total Students:** 770
- > **Race/Ethnicity Enrollment:** 91% black, 4% Asian, 3% white, 2% Hispanic
- > **Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible:** 68%
- > **English Language Learners:** 2%
- > **Special Education Students:** 14%
- > **Percentage Proficient:** In English, 60%; in math, 56% (based on 10th-graders assessed on the 2006 state exam).
- > **Interesting Fact:** Located in a section of New Orleans that sits above sea level, Karr was one of the first schools to resume classes after Hurricane Katrina.



**October 8-14**

**Fire Prevention Week**, an observance to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Sponsored by the National Fire Protection Association, this year's theme, "Preventing Cooking Fires: Watch What You Heat," focuses on safety for families and children in the kitchen. For fire prevention tips, visit <http://www.nfpa.org>, or the Web site for the U.S. Fire Administration for Kids at <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov>.

**October 15-22**

**National Character Counts! Week**, a celebration of the importance of developing good character in youths, sponsored by the Josephson Institute of Ethics. To receive free resources for conducting local activities, visit <http://www.charactercounts.org> or call 1-800-711-2670.

**November 13-17**

**International Education Week**, a celebration jointly sponsored by the departments of Education and State. Founded in 2000, the weeklong observance provides an opportunity for foreign students living in the United States to share their cultures with American classmates. For event ideas and materials, as well as an online quiz that tests one's global knowledge, visit <http://iew.state.gov>.

# Q & A GLOSSARY

## *What is the difference between charter schools and other public schools?*

**C**harter schools are independent public schools that provide families an alternative to their traditional neighborhood schools. They offer options particularly in areas where a large number of public schools have been identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring. Charter schools are commonly founded by educators, parents and community leaders or they may be existing schools converted to charter status. They often feature innovative approaches to instruction. Since the first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992, the charter school movement has grown to more than 3,600 schools nationwide serving more than 1 million students.

Charter schools are primarily characterized by their agreement to be accountable for academic results in exchange for increased autonomy. While they operate with freedom from many of the regulations that

apply to traditional public schools, they must meet the academic standards set forth in their charter—the performance contract that establishes the school. In addition, charter schools must satisfy, as other public schools, the same accountability requirements outlined in the *No Child Left Behind Act*. And, as public schools receiving taxpayer dollars, they must offer open admission and enrollment free of charge.

Most charters are granted for three to five years and are subject to renewal by the entity chartering them, usually a state or local school board. As of the 2005–06 school year, 40 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws to authorize the establishment of charter schools.

For additional information, or to find a charter school in your area, visit <http://www.uscharterschools.org>.

**charter school:** an independent public school established by a charter that promises academic results in return for greater freedom from select rules and regulations applied to traditional public schools.

## News Show Looks at Emergency Preparedness

**T**he ways in which schools and families can begin planning now to help keep children safe and secure in the event of a health crisis such as a pandemic influenza (flu) outbreak—or other emergency—will be the focus of the October edition of *Education News Parents Can Use*, the U.S. Department of Education's monthly television program.

The 20th century saw three flu pandemics that resulted in the widespread loss of life. Although it is difficult to predict when the next one will occur or how severe it will be, educators, parents and community leaders can prepare now to lessen the impact of such an outbreak. October's show, which will include experts from the departments of Education and Health and Human Services (including



the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), will focus on the resources needed to successfully prepare for emergencies by: spotlighting exemplary flu and emergency preparedness programs; answering questions about the different strains of influenza and how they spread; and providing user-friendly

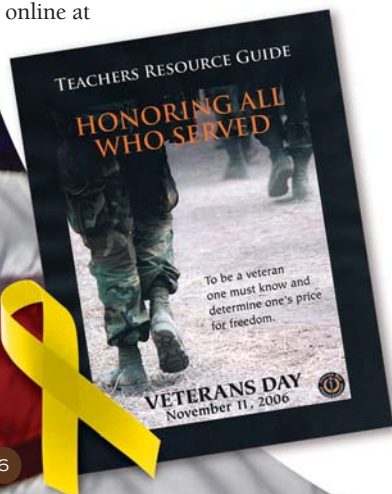
tips for parents on ensuring the safety, health and security of children. Each month, *Education News Parents Can Use* showcases: schools and school districts from across the country; conversations with school officials, parents and education experts; and advice and free resources for parents and educators.

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.

## Celebrating Veterans Day in the Classroom

Veterans Day marks the time appointed each year on Nov. 11 to pay tribute to the nation's veterans who have honorably served our country. To commemorate this occasion, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently released an updated version of its resource guide to help elementary through high school teachers educate their students on the contributions 25 million living veterans have made toward ensuring America's freedom.

*Honoring All Who Served* is available online at



<http://www.va.gov/vetsday> and includes:

- > **Teacher Resources**—suggested programs for celebrating this holiday, such as a school assembly, musical performance or flag-raising ceremony.
- > **Kid's Packet**—activities for students in grades 4–7, including a word scramble, a maze and pages for coloring, along with directions for how to treat the American flag.
- > **Student Resources**—information for students in grades 8–12, including the history of Veterans Day, the story of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, statistics on America's wars and contacts to scholarships for dependent students of American veterans.

Schools across the country received a CD-ROM of the resource guide in September, which also included five video segments featuring, among them, actress Jennifer Love Hewitt describing ways students can help veterans by volunteering at VA hospitals or with veterans service organizations such as Disabled American Veterans. Another video segment highlights a youth volunteer from Michigan who wrote a book about the veterans he met. And one segment focuses on wounded veterans who served in Iraq and how they are learning to overcome new challenges through participation in VA's National Rehabilitation Special Events.



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