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President Urges Congress To Reauthorize Law

State Address, 2009 Budget Focus on Strengthening NCLB

In his eighth and final State of the Union address on Jan. 28, President Bush urged Congress to pass bipartisan legislation that would strengthen the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*.



"Six years ago, we came together to pass the *No Child Left Behind Act*, and today no one can deny its results," he said. "Last year, fourth- and eighth-graders

achieved the highest math scores on record. Reading scores are on the rise. African-American and Hispanic students posted all-time highs. Now we must work together to increase accountability, add flexibility for states and districts, reduce the number of high school dropouts, provide extra help for struggling schools.

"Members of Congress: The *No Child Left Behind Act* is a bipartisan achievement. It is succeeding. And we owe it to America's children,

their parents, and their teachers to strengthen this good law."

Demonstrating his continued commitment to improving education, which ranked first among his domestic priorities upon taking office, the president proposed an increase in funding for *NCLB* to \$24.5 billion in his 2009 budget request, representing an increase of 41 percent since 2001. In addition, now that *NCLB* has helped identify the areas of greatest need, the budget aims to help build on this progress by focusing resources where they will make the greatest difference. Among the highlights:

- > \$14.3 billion for **Title I Grants** to ensure high-poverty schools have the resources needed to help all students reach proficiency;
- > \$491.3 million for **Title I School Improvement Grants** to help turn around low-performing schools;
- > \$1 billion for **Reading First State Grants** to improve the reading skills of K–3 students in high-poverty,

> continued on page 2

Standing on Solid Ground

New Orleans School Reopens to High Demand

"It does my heart glad to know that a school can be more than a school."

Consider a school in one of the most challenging districts in the country, where unemployment, dropout and poverty rates surpass national levels. Then picture one of the worst hurricanes in American history hitting the area—displacing the school's 715 students and their families along with hundreds of thousands of residents, destroying blocks of homes and taking countless lives. Suppose that the storm forced the closing of this relatively new public school,

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low-performing elementary schools through research-based instructional methods;

> \$300 million for **Pell Grants for Kids**, a new K-12 scholarship program that would allow low-income students attending schools in

restructuring or that have high dropout rates to transfer to local private schools or out-of-district public schools;

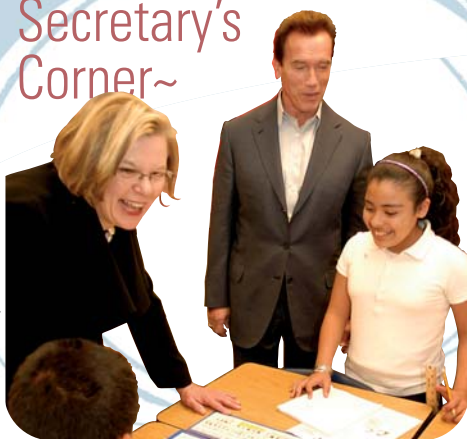
> \$200 million for the **Teacher Incentive Fund** to reward principals and teachers who raise student achievement and work in hard-to-staff schools;
> \$11.3 billion to maintain the federal contri-

tribution toward meeting the cost of special education under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**; and
> \$175 million for **programs aimed at improving math and science instruction.**

A full summary of President Bush's 2009 education budget request is available at <http://www.ed.gov>.

Secretary's Corner~

Photo by Paul Wood



While *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* continues to await congressional reauthorization, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings (pictured above with California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and students at Otay Elementary School in San Diego) is traveling the country to carry forward the "movement to use standards and measurement to drive reform for every single student."

On Jan. 10, Secretary Spellings delivered remarks on *NCLB* and the administration's K-12 priorities for 2008 at the National Press Club Newsmaker Luncheon in Washington, D.C. Following is an excerpt of her remarks.

"... Just six years ago, we finally made a commitment to leave no child behind. Agree or disagree with this law, without *NCLB*, we wouldn't even be talking about how to get every student on grade level. ...

"After decades of doling out federal dollars and hoping for the best, we're now expecting and getting results. ...

"We must stay true to the core principles of reform: annual testing, publishing data, helping students and schools that fall behind, and holding ourselves accountable for our goal of all children achieving. ...

"We must make sure educators have the best ways to chart student progress over time, the flexibility to improve struggling schools and more accurate ways to measure dropout rates. We must make sure students who need extra help can access free tutoring. ... Congress has had over a year to consider these reforms, but students and teachers need help now. So if Congress doesn't produce a strong bill quickly, I will move forward. ...

"As I've done since taking office, I will partner with states and districts to support innovation. Just this week I've been to Chicago and Tallahassee. Next week I'll head west to California, Oregon and Washington. I intend to visit as many places as possible to build on the foundation we've laid.

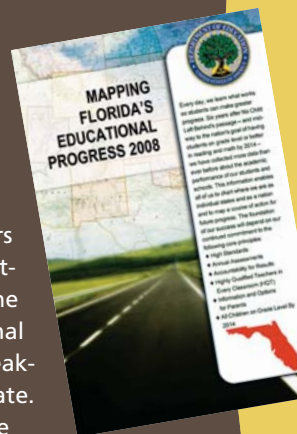
"Instead of questioning our children's potential, let's get experienced teachers in our neediest schools and reward them for results. Let's use research, data and technology to guide innovation like we do in business and medicine. Let's make a college degree affordable and accessible to all."

For the full Jan. 10, 2008, remarks, visit <http://www.ed.gov> and select "Press Room," then "Speeches."

Mapping Progress

Six years after the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*—and midway to the national goal of having students on grade level or better in reading and math by 2014—the U.S. Department of Education recently unveiled a new resource that charts the educational progress of the country as a whole as well as by each state. The "National Dashboard: Mapping America's Educational Progress 2008" is the title of brochures aimed at helping parents, policymakers and taxpayers better understand the unique educational strengths and weaknesses of each state.

The brochures are available online for easy distribution and include data on key indicators such as student populations, schools that have made adequate yearly progress and those in need of improvement, funding, the number of highly qualified teachers and student performance on state exams. To view this new resource, visit <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/results/progress/index.html>. ■



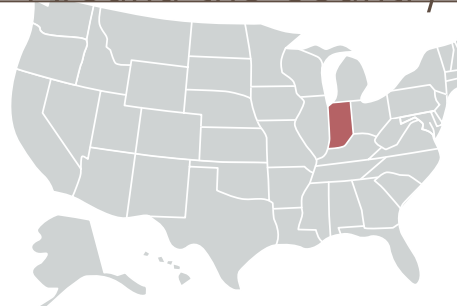
Teacher Ambassadors

Through April 7, the U.S. Department of Education is accepting applications for new fellowship positions that will give outstanding educators an opportunity to contribute their knowledge and experience to the national dialogue about public education as well as learn more about the process of education policymaking. Participants in the Teaching Ambassador Fellowships will collaborate with Department and other education officials to explore the most effective strategies and policies for improving public education. The program will offer

two tracks: 1) up to 20 Classroom Fellows will continue teaching in their schools and be paid to perform additional fellowship duties for the Department; and 2) up to five Washington Fellows will become full-time employees of the Department in Washington, D.C. for the 2008-09 school year. Highly qualified K-12 public school teachers of all subjects who have spent at least three years in the classroom are eligible to apply. The selected candidates will be named by this summer and begin their terms in the fall. To learn more and find links to the application, visit <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherfellowship/>. ■



<< Around the Country >>



which stood as the hope of a community where no major bank, supermarket or large commercial investment existed.

Now imagine its students' futures.

Yet, despite the waters of Hurricane Katrina that flooded more than 80 percent of the students' city in August 2005, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology now stands "on solid ground," says Principal Doris Hicks. King is the first—and, so far, the only—school to reopen this school year in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward.

"Because of the fact that each year we have made improvements," adds Hicks, who has been King's leader since its 1995 opening. "We think we have everything to be a very, very effective school."

Over the last several years, the percentage of King students reading on or above grade level has improved dramatically, from 44 percent of fourth-graders in 2002 to 84 percent last year. Gains in math and science have been just as impressive: from 36 percent to 77 percent, and 27 percent to 74 percent, respectively, during that time. Scores for eighth-graders were comparatively lower yet were still above state and district averages.

King has registered three-fourths of its pre-Katrina enrollment (compared to 40 percent at other city public schools) and an astonishing 98 percent of the original faculty, most of whom commute from Baton Rouge and other outlying areas where they have sought temporary housing. To accommodate displaced students, buses pick up children throughout the city.

Tonya Lewis, a native and

resident of the Lower Ninth Ward, has three children at King. After evacuating to Houston with her family and remaining there for almost a



year, she returned to New Orleans in July 2006 when she heard King would be reopening—even if it meant they would be living in a trailer. "I didn't want to take my kids from a comfortable environment, and come back home and try to settle if I didn't have anywhere really for them to go to school. ... But

Martin Luther King has such a strong foundation for the kids to come back to and at which to get an education," says Lewis, who moved back into her newly roofed home earlier this year.

"It's the nurturing and the kind of environment that Ms. Hicks has created here in this community—not just the school, but the community"—that has residents flocking back to the most heavily devastated area of the Crescent City, explains Hilda Young, who presides over the

school's governing board.

In the midst of boarded houses and empty lots—a landscape that still bears the damage from the costliest hurricane in the nation's history—the two-story modern school building stands prominently. The state-of-the-art facility is equipped with several science and computer labs and a music room furnished with eight new pianos donated in honor of homegrown jazz artist Ellis Marsalis. A public library was also built onto the school and a classroom dedicated as the Community Outreach Center. Open to the public during school hours, the center has been a meeting ground and resource for parents and community members.

Teacher Joseph Recasner, who joined King eight years ago after leaving a career as a firefighter, says, "It does my heart glad to know that a school can be more than a school. It can be more than an institution. It can be part of a person's life."

During King's year-long closing, staff met at Recasner's home and other places to discuss the future of the school.

Although they were scattered across the country, through phone calls and small meetings in hotel rooms, Principal Hicks and



INDIANA—The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation recently announced a state initiative in Indiana that will award aspiring math and science teachers a \$30,000 stipend each to earn a master's degree. Awardees subsequently will teach for a minimum of three years in low-income schools. Through its \$10.2-million Indiana Teaching Fellowship, the foundation targets college seniors and those who want to change careers with outstanding achievement in math or science. Initially, this

program will prepare 80 new math and science teachers each year and later scale up to 400 per year. In addition, the foundation has teamed up with four of the nation's top teaching colleges to offer its \$6-million Leonore Annenberg Teaching Fellowship—intended to be a "Rhodes Scholarship" for teaching and a national counterpart to the state model. The first Indiana and Annenberg candidates will be named in spring 2009.

her teachers worked on the most viable solution they thought would save their school: converting to a charter and joining the state-led Recovery School District, which promised higher standards. In return for greater accountability, charters, which must be approved by either local or state school boards, give community partners greater control over school operations, and give parents greater options in the public school system. (To support these efforts, the U.S. Department of Education awarded Louisiana nearly \$40 million to bolster the charter school movement.)

With the new charter status, King added two middle school grades, becoming a pre-K–8 school. Still, while the old facility was being evaluated, the King team continued to work feverishly to find another location. Overturned desks and other furniture mired in mud obstructed the walkway on the first floor, and lab equipment and library books were lost in the 13 feet of water that engulfed the school. While awaiting restoration, King was temporarily housed on the second floor of a school a few miles away. On Sept. 18,

2006, King officially started classes, welcoming back to New Orleans 200 students.

“Early on in this journey we picked up the motto that we would come this far by faith,” says Recasner. “We couldn’t see our way.

We didn’t know what we were going to face. But we knew what our objective was: to come home and provide a quality education for our children.”

By fall 2007, the King family was back in their home school. Enrollment had almost quadrupled to 560 students.

Hicks also believes they were able to overcome such obstacles because of the bonds they formed, long before Katrina, through a school model known as the “Comer Process.” Developed nearly four decades ago by renowned child psychiatrist James

Comer, the program uses an integrated approach to learning that relies on collaborative working relationships among parents, educators, policy-makers and community members to strengthen the education environment for disadvantaged youths. It “is the umbrella that makes this school run so

smoothly,” says Hicks, who introduced the model

at the opening of King. Decisions—on curriculum, textbooks, budget, etc.—are built on a consensus rather than a decree, extending beyond just involving parents to empowering them as decision makers.

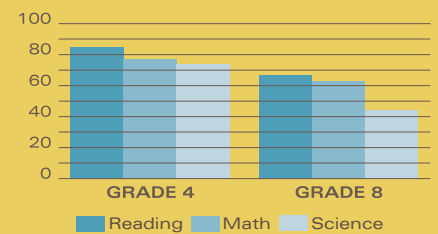
So it was fairly easy to reassemble after the storm, though some had evacuated as far away as California, for what they deemed as an essential mission. “We thought we were on a roll. We still think that,” says Hicks, who was born and raised in the neighborhood where King is located. “And we knew that, if we were not here to service the kids in the Lower Ninth Ward, well, who else was going to do that? ... It’s about us coming back and hopefully making a difference.”



King Charter School for Science and Technology



- > **Grade Span:** Pre-K–8
- > **Locale:** Urban
- > **Total Students:** 560
- > **Race/Ethnicity Enrollment:** 98% African-American, 2% white
- > **Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible:** 96%
- > **English Language Learners:** 2%
- > **Special Education Students:** 5%
- > **Percentage Proficient*:**



*According to 2007 results on the state exam.

- > **Interesting Fact:** Although King is filled to capacity due to its new charter limiting class size to 25 students, the school has restored three-fourths of its pre-Katrina enrollment (compared to 40 percent at other city public schools) and an astonishing 98 percent of the original faculty.

Photos, from left to right: Teacher Joseph Recasner with fourth-grader Chad'veionta; Principal Doris Hicks poses with a group of kindergarteners; and parent Tonya Lewis with her children (clockwise from left) Kendall, Kiara and Tanyelle. On the cover, third-grader Terrence. Photos by Sean Gardner.

NATIONWIDE—The National Endowment for the Humanities is offering a new free resource that is designed to promote the teaching, study and understanding of American history and culture. “Picturing America” is available to public, private, parochial, and charter schools and home school consortia, as well as public libraries. Participants will receive a set of 40 high-quality reproductions representing a diverse selection of American art, including Emanuel Leutze’s painting *Wash-*

ington Crossing the Delaware, Martin Puryear’s wood sculpture *Ladder for Booker T. Washington* and panels from Amish quilts. The program—which is intended to enhance the study of American history, social studies, language arts, literature and civics—also offers an illustrated teachers resource book and a comprehensive Web site at <http://PicturingAmerica.neh.gov> with additional information about the artwork. Applications are being accepted through April 15 for fall 2008 delivery.

April 13-19

National Environmental Education Week, sponsored by the National Environmental Education Foundation to increase the impact of Earth Day through a full week of activities in classrooms, nature centers, zoos, museums and aquariums. For a participant tool kit, visit <http://www.eeweek.org>, or call 202-261-6484.

National Library Week, an observance sponsored by the American Library Association since 1958. This year's theme, "Join the Circle of Knowledge @ 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, ext. 5046.

April 27-May 3

National Volunteer Week, sponsored by the Points of Light & Hands On Network with Target Corporation, to recognize millions of volunteers who are helping to solve social problems in communities nationwide. For a tool kit, visit <http://www.pointsoflight.org>, or call 404-979-2900.

May 29-30

White House Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Conference, New Orleans, sponsored by a consortium of federal agencies for grassroots leaders interested in federal grant opportunities. To register online, visit <http://www.fbc.gov> or call 202-456-6708.

Q & A

Are my college expenses tax-deductible?

As the 2007 tax-filing season draws to a close on April 15, a record number of students are looking into the tax benefits available to make higher education more affordable. Following is a summary of some of these benefits.

> **Tax credits.** The Hope Credit and the Lifetime Learning Credit reduce federal income taxes based on qualified education expenses, which include tuition and certain required fees, less certain grants and scholarships received. The Hope Credit is available for only the first two years up to \$1,650 per student, while the Lifetime Learning Credit is unlimited in years for up to \$2,000 per tax return.

> **Tuition and fees deduction.** Capped at

\$4,000, this deduction is based on qualified education expenses, including student activity fees and costs for supplies and equipment that must be paid to a post-secondary institution as a condition of attendance or enrollment. Students who do not qualify for either the Hope or Lifetime Learning credits because of their income level may be eligible to take this deduction.

> **Student loan interest deductions.**

The interest paid on student loans—Federal Stafford, PLUS and Perkins loans; federal and direct consolidation loans; federal loans for health care professionals; and private education loans issued by schools, banks and nonprofit associations—may be tax-deductible up to \$2,500.

For more information about these tax benefits, visit <http://www.irs.gov> or call 1-800-829-1040 for a copy of the Internal Revenue Service's *Publication 970: Tax Benefits for Education*.

News Show on Math Education

The March edition of *Education News Parents Can Use*—the U.S. Department of Education's live, monthly television program—discussed the strong foundation in math, science and technology education that every student needs to succeed in the global economy.

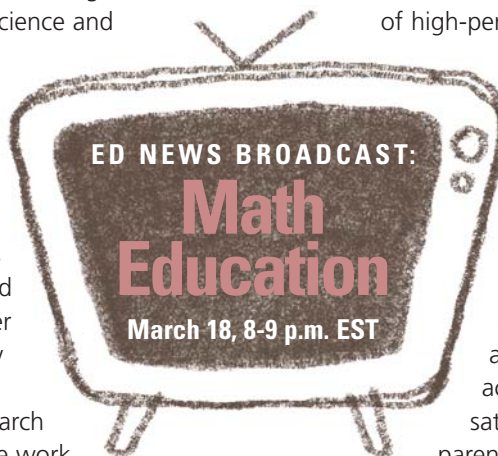
It is increasingly important for today's high school graduates to have solid math and science skills—whether they are going directly to college or entering the workforce. The March broadcast featured the work of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel and included a discussion about the panel's final report and how its findings will lead to more effective math instruction in classrooms nationwide. The show also spotlighted what

the Department and other key partners are doing to promote math and science literacy through the American Competitiveness Initiative, and showcased the work of high-performing schools from around the country

that are excelling in math education and already implementing the panel's recommendations.

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 this broadcast via webcast, visit <http://www.ed.gov/edtv> or call toll-free 1-800-USA-LEARN.



The Achiever Is Moving ... To the World Wide Web!

Starting with the next issue, The Achiever will be available solely in electronic form. To sign up for the new online version, visit <http://www.ed.gov/news/newsletters/achiever/subscribe.html>.

College Search Tool Among Top Web Sites

The U.S. Department of Education's "College Navigator" has been named by Money magazine as "the best first screen" to use for researching colleges online because it is "one of the simplest." In the magazine's Dec. 4, 2007, issue naming the 28 Best Money Web sites in seven categories, the College Navigator was praised for providing "a good comparison tool" and "a full set of the latest data on expenses, aid, enrollment, admissions and graduation rates, majors and more, along with a Google map for pinpointing school locations.

Hosted by the Department's National Center for Education Statistics, the site can be accessed at <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>. It allows users to:

- > Refine search criteria;
- > Build a list of favorite schools;
- > Search by such specifics as distance from home, size of school and SAT/ACT scores; and
- > Export search results into a spreadsheet.

In addition, for adult learners, the site finds programs that offer extended learning opportunities such as weekend or evening courses, distance learning and credit for life experiences.

The College Navigator is one of several new online resources the Department has developed to provide the public with clear and reliable information about federal financial aid and the college selection process. Last year, it unveiled the FAFSA4caster (<http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov>), which instantly calculates the federal financial aid that a student is likely to receive.



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Information on ED programs, resources and events? Contact 1-800-USA-LEARN or education@custhelp.com.

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