

Education Secretary  
Calls for 'Comprehensive  
and Preventive Approach'

## Adult Literacy Report Shows Need for High School Reform, Says Spellings

American adults can read a newspaper or magazine about as well as they could a decade ago but have made significant strides in performing literacy tasks that involve computation, according to the first national study of adult literacy since 1992.

The *National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)*, released last month by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), found little change between 1992 and 2003 in adults' ability to understand continuous text such as newspaper articles (prose literacy) and noncontinuous text such as prescription labels (document literacy).

Americans aged 16 and over, however, showed improvement in the kind of literacy that involves simple calculations, such as understanding a bank statement (quantitative literacy).



"One adult unable to read is one too many in America," said U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, who announced plans to coordinate adult education efforts in 2006 across multiple federal agencies. "We must take a comprehensive and preventive approach, beginning with elementary schools and continuing with special emphasis in our high schools. We must focus resources toward proven, research-based methods to ensure that all adults have the necessary literacy skills to be successful."

Among other findings of the report:

- > African-Americans' scores were higher in 2003 than in 1992 in all three categories, increasing 16 points in quantitative, eight points in document and six points in prose literacy.
- > White adults' scores were up nine points in quantitative, but were unchanged in prose and document literacy.

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### "Mining Data"

## Ongoing Assessments Help Identify Gaps for Student Improvement at a Mississippi High School

“We’re able to address the needs of every single student.”

Just as miners excavate the earth in search of precious materials, school administrators at Gautier High School (pronounced Go-shay) extract valuable information from student data. Even before incoming freshmen step onto the campus of the Mississippi high school, faculty members will have already studied the test results of eighth-graders at the neighborhood middle school to identify and thus prepare for the academic needs of their new students. This process of analyzing student assessment data to target areas of improvement is what former Principal Wayne Rodolfich calls “mining data.”

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> Hispanic adults' scores declined in prose and document literacy by 18 points and 14 points, respectively, but were unchanged in quantitative literacy.

> Asian/Pacific Islanders' scores increased 16 points in prose literacy, but were unchanged in document and quantitative literacy.

The report also showed that 5 percent of U.S. adults—about 11 million people—were termed “nonliterate” in English, meaning that interviewers could not communicate with them or that they were unable to answer a minimum number of questions.

NAAL assessed a nationally representative

sample of more than 19,000 Americans aged 16 and older, most in their homes and some in prisons, and analyzed literacy results based on a variety of factors, including race/ethnicity, gender, age and level of educational attainment.

For details about the report's findings, visit <http://nces.ed.gov/naal>.

## Spellings Focuses on English Language Learners

In December, Secretary Spellings addressed the fourth annual *Celebrate Our Rising Stars* summit sponsored by the Office of English Language Acquisition at the U.S. Department of Education. The following is an excerpt of her remarks.

... As you know, English language learners are of every race, background and zip code. About 70 percent are native Spanish speakers. Some are born

Our education system is in a race to keep up with the students. If we continue running at the same pace we're running now, we won't get the job done. So we've got to pick up the pace. ...

With *No Child Left Behind*, we said we would close the achievement gap by 2014 across the board. And for the first time in history, we're shining a bright light on the annual progress of students learning English.

With states measuring our children's progress each year in reading and math, and by focusing on each student and on each group of students, we can discover where they need help before it's too late.

We now have proof that high standards and accountability are paying off. ... National reading scores for ELL fourth-graders increased by 20 points in the last five years. That's more than three times the average progress of their peers. And both fourth- and eighth-graders achieved higher math scores than in any previous year.

But we still have a long way to go. One million students are dropping out of our high schools every year. Many are leaving because they don't have English fluency. ...

When you lose a million students every year, that has a tremendous impact on our economy. And it represents the American Dream denied. ...

Photo by Paul Wood



Our country cannot afford to let these children fall behind in other subjects while they focus on learning English. Language and rigorous content must go

hand in hand. ...

That's why we must implement strategies that are proven to work. For years, we've known that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension are the keys to teaching native English speakers to read. And thanks to recent research, we now know these strategies work as effectively for most nonnative speakers.

We also know that the way these concepts are taught can make or break a child's future. In fact, instruction is one of the most important variables in the equation for student success. Teachers must be explicit. They must implement a high-quality curriculum, and adjust that curriculum to meet each child's needs.

The elephant in the dining room is that we haven't fully “cracked the code” for English language learners. We must develop a comprehensive, research-based strategy to prepare these children for the future. And we'd better do it fast. ...

... Helping every single child reach grade level is our most urgent priority.

This is our mandate, and it's also the right thing to do. Our children and our country deserve no less.

For the full speech, visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) and click on “Speeches” for the Dec. 1, 2005, remarks.

### American Education on the Globe



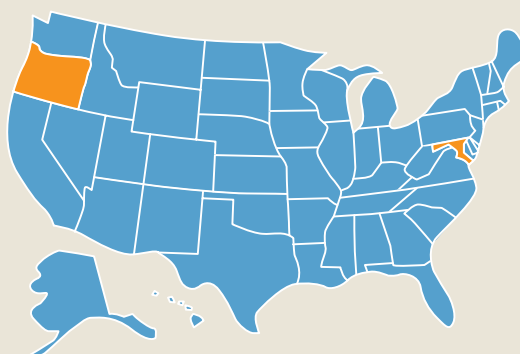
Doubling the number of bachelor's degrees in science, math and engineering, along with increasing the number of those students who become K-12 teachers by 2015, were among the recommendations offered at the National Summit on Competitiveness, held on Dec. 6, in Washington, D.C., where Secretary Spellings joined key leaders from government and industry to discuss the actions necessary to keep the United States at the forefront of an increasingly competitive global economy. For more information, visit [www.usinnovation.org](http://www.usinnovation.org).

As part of a continuing effort to bolster American education on the global front, the secretary cohosted the U.S. University Presidents Summit on International Education on Jan. 5-6, in the nation's capital, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The summit focused on how to attract foreign students to postsecondary study in the United States, as well as on how to encourage more American college students to study abroad. For more information, visit [www.exchanges.state.gov](http://www.exchanges.state.gov).

in America, and some are foreign born. But all of their families have one thing in common: Education is their number-one priority.

In fact, it's a priority for all of us. English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest-growing student population in America. Today, one out of every nine students is learning English as a second language. ... By 2025, English language learners will make up one out of every four students in our classrooms.

## AROUND THE COUNTRY



**MARYLAND**—Approximately one-third of middle school students in Maryland take at least one high school-level math course before they leave middle school. The rise of advanced math coursework in middle school is related to an increase in the number of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes offered in high schools. As schools expand access to



“Our efficiency level at identifying student need is so high that we’re able to address the needs of every single student,” said Rodolfich, who took the helm this school year as superintendent of Gautier’s school district.

The effective use of data has led to dramatic gains that have earned Gautier the state’s top ranking of “Level 5/Superior-Performing School” over the past three years and, in 2005, recognition from the U.S. Department of Education with the *No Child Left Behind*—Blue Ribbon Schools Award.

The school has made such significant strides in student achievement that, in spite

District. Credited for increasing the graduation rate from 78 percent to 84 percent during his three-year tenure at Gautier, Rodolfich said he believed that at the district level he “could make a larger contribution to a greater number of students. And I felt like I had a leader in place who could do a better job than I could.”

The reason Gautier’s staff are able to identify gaps in student learning is because they can extract data from a battery of tests administered by the state, district and school throughout the year. In other words, the wider the outcomes, the finer the scale

of the achievement gap. Within that time-frame, the gap between white students, who make up more than half of the student body, and black students, who account for the largest ethnic minority group, narrowed from 10 percentage points to a mere two percentage points.

These high scores, even among subgroups—for example, economically disadvantaged students achieved 94 percent on last year’s math exam—can also be traced to the high expectations teachers have of every student. “We start from day one telling the students that they will be successful,” said algebra



of the disruption of classes for a month and a half by Hurricane Katrina, approximately one-third of its 850 students made the honor roll for the first report card period.

“They’re very resilient,” explains Principal Bernard Rogers, whom Rodolfich brought out of retirement to be his successor. “They really were glad to get back, because to them getting back to school gave them a sense of normalcy.”

Rogers, who served 26 years as a teacher and principal in Alabama schools, replaced Rodolfich after he accepted the position as chief administrator of the Pascagoula School

for pinpointing individual strengths and weaknesses. If teachers then have a direct measure for who is learning, they can better understand what is working and adjust their instruction accordingly.

The most notable success of the staff’s data mining skills has been gains in mathematics achievement. On the Algebra I test, which Mississippi uses for its accountability system in high school, Gautier’s scores for students who tested proficient increased from 70 percent in 2001–02 to 94 percent in 2004–05. These results show not only an improvement in overall performance, but also a narrowing

teacher Yvonne Hopper. “They begin to believe that they have the power within themselves, and that they’re not just coming to school and being passed over.”

The Algebra I test, which consists of 63 multiple-choice questions and two open-ended items that require essay responses, is one of four assessments the state uses to measure student learning in key subject areas. Implemented four years ago, Mississippi’s Subject Area Testing Program

# Gautier

courses that typically have been reserved for honor students, enrollment has been swelling. In one county, for instance, the number of test takers for the state geometry exam grew from 45 students in 2002 to 714 in 2005. Moreover, 90 percent of the 23,979 middle school students passed the state’s high school assessment in algebra last school year.

**OREGON**—High school sophomores in Oregon whose academic performance does not reflect their potential for success have a new incentive to attend college, thanks to a scholarship program administered through the Oregon Department of Education. The scholarships are aimed at economically disadvantaged students who will complete their sophomore year this spring. The state depart-

ment of education will select seven high schools to participate, and each school will select 10 students who need incentives. Those students graduating from high school and being accepted into a college will receive a \$4,000 scholarship. An additional \$2,000 will be given to those completing their freshman year to help pay for college expenses.

also includes end-of-course exams in English II, Biology I and U.S. history, all of which students must pass in order to graduate.

"It keeps us on pace," said senior and honor roll student Laura Skelton about the state testing. "It gives us a point we know we have to reach. I think it drives each student to do better in class."

Gautier's staff are hoping students will do equally well on the English exam, although the school's proficiency score of 53 percent is significantly above the state average of 39 percent.

However, similar to its success in freshman algebra, Gautier's scores on the introductory biology exam have exceeded state averages, which can also be attributed to the faculty's efforts over the past few years to expand course offerings to include astronomy, zoology and marine biology, as well as to the school's location, which enables students to receive a hands-on education in the sciences.

Built on a wetland, the nine-year-old campus is equipped with a nature trail, pond, greenhouse, fruit orchard and several vegetable gardens, allowing students to explore the very specimens they read about in their textbooks. This modern facility also includes three science labs, three computer labs, a parent center, a fitness center and a multimedia room. Aided by these resources, Gautier sponsors every October a districtwide Wetlands Workshop for sixth-graders, which, unfortunately, was postponed this school year due to hurricane damage.

Just as the state assessments, based on the state standards, provide a clear pathway for academic achievement, for Carolyn Cowart, the district tests provide midpoint checkmarks for both students and educators.

"The [district assessment] system ensures that we cover everything in our state cur-

**From left to right:** Tenth-grade English teacher Carmel Grantham receives a hug from senior Lachreica; biology teacher Carolyn Cowart with freshman Kyriaki; and Principal Bernard Rogers with Superintendent Wayne Rodolfich. On the cover, algebra teacher Yvonne Hopper with freshman Sheena. Photos by Sean Gardner.

riculum," said the ninth-grade biology teacher. "So it's a checkpoint for me to make sure that I'm teaching everything I'm supposed to, and it's a check-point for the students to make sure they've learned everything they're supposed to."

Cowart serves on the committee of teachers who revise each summer Pascagoula's Anchor Learning Module Assessments, commonly called ALMAs. They are a series of practice tests, each with 40 multiple-



choice questions, given throughout a semester. The tests run parallel with the state standards for each subject assessed, as in Biology I, for instance, where each of the course's seven competencies, from the "nature of science" through "ecology," has a related test.

"The students know that when they get ready to take an ALMA, it's something we've already covered; we've mastered this. This is just our putting it on paper so that we can see how close we are to passing," explains Cowart.

Faculty members use the cumulative results from the ALMAs and their own classroom assessments that they create to identify students in need of tutoring. Gautier's tutoring program, which Rodolfich calls "the cornerstone of success," is an extensive network of extra academic help that provides preparation, enrichment and remediation services to address all skill levels.

This initiative is one of many that has contributed to a vast improvement in performance: as the school's administration acknowledges, test data alone do not drive reform. Gautier's assessment results point to the high quality of its teachers along with other intervention strategies that include a student mentoring program, a homework lottery and intensive parent communication, which amounted to 43,000 parent contacts in one school year.

"We have to make that extra effort to ensure that our students achieve," said Rogers. "We're famous for making home visits to parents we have been unable to reach to ensure

that they are part of school improvement for their children. It has been those efforts along with the traditional ones that have made a tremendous difference in improving student achievement."

—BY NICOLE ASHBY



# High School



- > **Grade Span:** 9–12
- > **Locale:** Suburb
- > **Total Students:** 850
- > **Race/Ethnicity Enrollment:** 57% white, 40% black, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian
- > **Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible:** 49%
- > **English Language Learners:** 1%
- > **Special Education Students:** 3%
- > **Percentage Proficient:** In Algebra I, 94%; in English II, 53% (based on ninth- through tenth-graders assessed on the 2004–05 state exams).
- > **Interesting Fact:** Although it was in the path of Hurricane Katrina, Gautier resumed classes a month and a half after the storm.



## January

**Fourth Anniversary of *No Child Left Behind***, an observance of the landmark education law, signed by President Bush on Jan. 8, 2002. The bipartisan legislation is predicated on four principles: accountability for results; flexibility for states and districts; research-based teaching practices; and options for parents. For more information, visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) or call (800) USA-LEARN.

**Magnet School Month**, a national initiative to highlight magnet schools. As part of the celebration, the Magnet Schools of America is inviting communities to host special events and activities and is sponsoring a poster contest that will conclude on Jan. 27. For details, visit [www.magnet.edu](http://www.magnet.edu) or call (202) 824-0672.

## February

**Black History Month**, a national celebration of the heritage of African-Americans. The Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE) Web site offers teaching and learning resources for observing black history, including a link to the *Brown vs. Board of Education* National Historic Site, which highlights the 1954 Supreme Court decision that required the desegregation of schools. To access the site, visit [www.ed.gov/free](http://www.ed.gov/free).

# Q & A GLOSSARY

## *How does a growth model measure my child's progress?*

To assist schools in meeting the goal of *No Child Left Behind* to get every child to grade level by 2014, the U.S. Department of Education has announced new flexibility for states to measure student improvement under the law.

Beginning this school year, 2005–06, as part of a pilot program, the Department will allow up to 10 states the use of “growth-based accountability models” to measure the progress of schools and school districts in making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Whereas the law currently evaluates schools and school districts based on their students’ performance against the state’s AYP goals, growth models give schools credit for student improvement over time by tracking achievement year to year. These models provide schools with an

alternative way to not only achieve AYP, but also to measure individual student progress. Growth models therefore follow students through their schooling, comparing, for instance, today’s fourth-graders with their achievement as third-graders.

States that propose a growth-based accountability model for use in AYP calculations must meet certain criteria, which include primary elements of the law, such as annual testing and reporting of subgroup data; increasing student achievement and narrowing of the achievement gap; and sound state education policies that ensure progress is being made.

For more information on this new flexibility on growth models, visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) for the Nov. 21, 2005, letter from Secretary Spellings to chief state school officers.

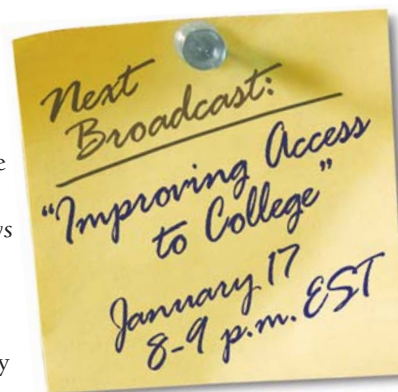
### growth model:

an accountability model that grants schools credit for student improvement over time by tracking individual achievement year to year.

## News Show Highlights College Access

Ensuring that all students gain access to a high-quality college education and succeed once they get there is the focus of the January broadcast of *Education News Parents Can Use*, the U.S. Department of Education’s monthly television show.

In light of an increasingly competitive global economy that places greater emphasis on a college degree—with today’s jobs requiring advanced skills in math, science and engineering—the discussion explores: Secretary Spellings’ Commission on the Future of Higher Education and its efforts to reform postsecondary education in the United States; federal, state and local strategies for making higher education more accessible and affordable; assistance available for preparing students, particularly minority youths, for the academic



rigors of college; and programs and resources for building a college savings fund.

Panelists include key individuals from the Secretary’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education; the Hispanic Scholarship Fund; the Department’s Federal Student Aid Office; and

College Parents of America.

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 [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) and click on “Parents,” then “News Parents Can Use,” or call toll-free (800) USA-LEARN.



## NCLB: What Parents Need to Know

Parents and community leaders looking to understand how the *No Child Left Behind* law benefits their children may glean a greater knowledge of the legislation from a new brochure published by the U.S. Department of Education.

*No Child Left Behind: What Parents Need to Know* summarizes the tenets of the 2002 law that seeks to ensure a high-quality education for every student and to close the achievement gap between children who typically perform well in school

and those who do not—many of whom are from minority racial and ethnic groups, have disabilities, live in poverty, or do not speak English as their first language.

The 12-page illustrated brochure provides, in simple language, the principles of the law that hold accountable all public K–12 schools, defining such terms as “accountability,” “adequate yearly progress” and “flexibility.” The publication also explains how schools are accountable to parents in providing report cards that reveal how a student, the school, the district and the state are faring based on test results data. Included is a sample graphic of a report card that simplifies these data.

For a copy of *No Child Left Behind: What Parents Need to Know*, visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov), or order it toll-free, while supplies last, at (877) 4ED-PUBS with identification number EAT0264P.



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