

Charter Schools, School Safety
and NCLB Drive Dialogue

Spellings, Education Community Discuss President's Agenda

Last month, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings traveled to Los Angeles for a series of events at which she discussed the importance of charter schools, school safety and reauthorizing the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*.

On May 3, following President George W. Bush's proclamation of National Charter Schools Week (April 29–May 5), Secretary Spellings began the day with a visit to Animo Inglewood Public Charter High School, whose student population is largely Hispanic. Since 2003, the percentage of students at this school who are proficient in math has risen by 40 points, and in reading by almost 18 points. In addition, 79 percent of the class of 2006 went on to attend a four-year university.

"Charter schools like Animo Inglewood High School are helping students learn through innovative, effective tools, and are proving that breaking tradition and taking risks can yield tremendous

results for students," said Spellings.

Later, the secretary conducted a roundtable discussion on campus and school safety with federal officials, local law enforcement, mental health experts, and university administrators and students at California State University, Northridge. In light of the tragic events at Virginia Tech in April, President Bush asked the federal departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services to review the broader questions raised by the shootings and find ways to help college, state and local officials confront these issues.

"As a mother of a college sophomore and a high school freshman, I know that there is nothing more important than keeping our children safe," Spellings said.

The secretary is seeking public comment about campus and school safety online at safeschools@ed.gov. Using input from this as well as from regional meetings held across the country,



INSIDE

2 Spellings Speaks on High School Dropout Crisis

Around the Country—
California and the District of Columbia

5 Calendar

Q&A—Summer Reading Opportunities

Education News Parents Can Use

6 Arts Resources at the FREE Web Site

> continued on page 2

Drawing on the Arts

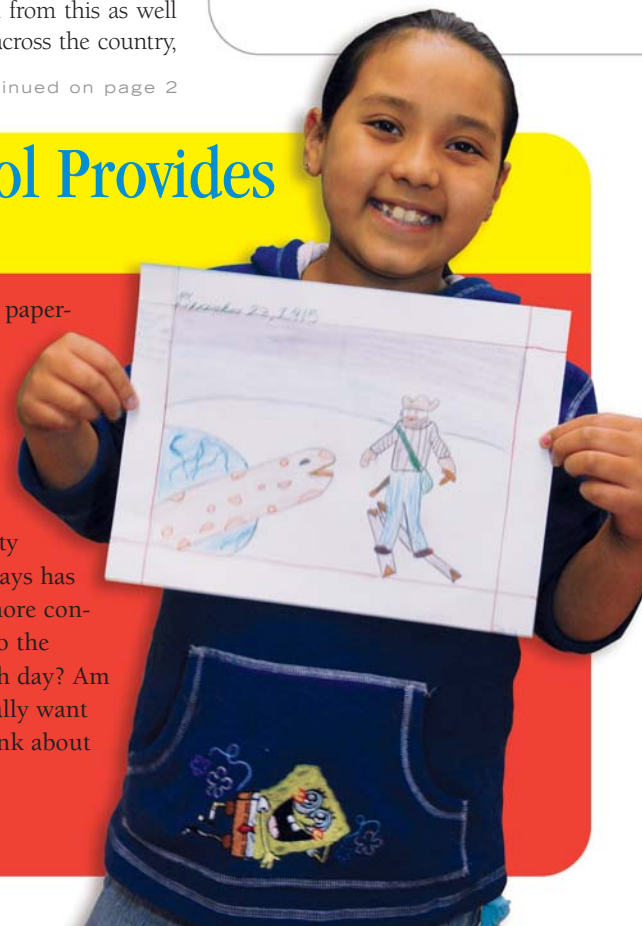
Arts Integration at Oklahoma School Provides Multiple Paths for Learning

“The arts are giving us the opportunity to expand ...”

Today's classrooms require more than the conventional paper-and-pencil approach to instruction, believes Principal Susan Combs. "We're teaching an era of children who are growing up at a fast-pace on flashy TV, video games, and things of that nature. Then we want them to come to school and sit at their desks for eight hours and focus."

Combs heads an elementary school in Oklahoma City that has adopted an arts integration program that she says has charged the senses of both students and staff. "We're more conscious when we're planning, [asking], 'Am I teaching to the different children? Am I addressing all of the skills each day? Am I making sure that it's interesting and fun?' ... If we really want children to retain what they're learning, we have to think about how we're teaching them."

> continued on page 3



she hopes to identify best practices, existing obstacles and possible solutions to report back to the president. In addition, the Education Department recently released a new Web page on school safety with related resources at <http://www.ed.gov>. To access the page, select “Administrators,” and then “Lead & Manage

My School” for the “Safe & Drug-Free Schools” link.

Also, while in Los Angeles, Spellings delivered opening remarks at the 60th annual National Education Writers Association meeting, where she spoke about the importance of reauthorizing NCLB.

“NCLB is working—student scores are on the rise and the achievement gap is closing. We must build on this progress by providing communities with new tools to turn around chronically underperforming schools and new resources to strengthen our nation’s high schools.”

Spellings Speaks on High School Dropout Crisis

On May 9, Secretary Spellings spoke at the National Summit on America’s Silent Epidemic in Washington, D.C., about the federal role in ending the high school dropout crisis. An excerpt from her speech follows.

All 50 governors have agreed to adopt a common, more rigorous graduation rate measure. ... Data is helping us shine a light on the magnitude of the crisis. And as I like to say, what gets measured gets done. ...

... This administration is already moving forward with policies to help ensure every child is given a chance to graduate, and that their diploma is a ticket to success, not just a certificate of attendance. ... Our

policy blueprint for *No Child Left Behind* [NCLB] reauthorization includes several key proposals to help meet these needs and address the dropout issue head-on.

First, we would increase Title I spending by more than \$1 billion to improve and strengthen our public high schools serving low-income students. These targeted resources will bring more equity to the system—something that’s desperately needed if we’re going to have any hope of transforming “dropout factories” into flourishing high schools.

We also propose increasing funds for reading intervention so that teachers can help struggling students get back on track before they fall too far behind. ...

A significant portion of our NCLB reauthorization calls for increased rigor in our high schools, including:

- > Strengthening math and science instruction;

- > Calling on business and higher education officials to work with states to better align curricula to meet workforce and college expectations; and

- > Creating an Adjunct Teacher Corps that will bring math and science professionals into the classroom to share their expertise. ...

We’re also calling for the expansion of AP and IB [Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate] classes. We know that rigorous course work is one of the best ways to improve student achievement. Studies show that by taking just one or two Advanced Placement courses increases a student’s chance of going to college and the odds of graduating in four years. ...

We’re also working with state and local education entities to increase the rigor of career and technical education programs to ensure that all students receive challenging academic course work and are better prepared for high-skill, high-wage occupations in current or emerging professions.

Finally, we propose to build on the governors’ call for a more accurate graduation rate. By 2012 we would require all states to disaggregate this data by race and ethnicity so we can see clearly who’s dropping out and report it as part of their accountability plans. ... Without accountability, we’re just posting numbers and hoping for the best. Our children deserve better than that. ...

For the full May 9, 2007, remarks, visit <http://www.ed.gov> and select “Press Room” and then “Speeches.”



Photo by Paul Wood

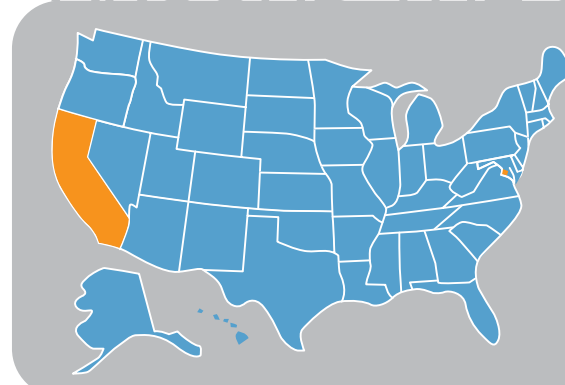


... Every year, nearly a million kids fail to graduate high school with their peers. It’s hard to believe such a pervasive problem remained in the shadows for so long. That’s in large part due to state reporting systems and data collection that masked the severity of the situation.

For example, in some districts, a student who leaves school is counted as a dropout only if he or she registers as one. In others, a dropout’s promise to get a GED [General Education Diploma] at an unspecified future date is good enough to merit “graduate” status. With such loose definitions of what it means to be a high school graduate, it’s no wonder this epidemic has been so “silent.”

Fortunately, today it’s a different story.

AROUND THE COUNTRY



CALIFORNIA—For the first time, California public schools have received state funding specifically for programs in the visual and performing arts and physical education. The first installment of a \$500 million block grant was distributed in May to provide professional development, equipment and supplies to enhance standards-based instruction

Since the program's 2002 start at Linwood Elementary School—where the majority of students qualify for federally subsidized meals and half of the children are English language learners—the school repeatedly has made adequate yearly progress (AYP). In fact, in almost every year it has exceeded the state's targets by at least a 40-percentage-point margin.

This achievement has earned Linwood the Oklahoma Title I Academic Achievement Award this year for the second time, and, in 2006, an honor from the National Center for Urban School Transformation as one of just five schools presented with the Excellence in Education Award.

On average,



80 percent of fifth-graders at Linwood have proven consistently proficient or above in reading and math. Furthermore, when third- and fourth-graders were tested in 2006, proficiency rates for grades 3–5 also outpaced those of Oklahoma City

Public Schools, with the most impressive results in grade 4: in reading, 92 percent, compared to the city's 74 percent; in math, 85 percent, compared to the city's 66 percent.

“Through those things that people may think are ‘extra,’” said Combs, “we are teaching our state's Priority Academic Student Skills, which are the minimum criteria that children should learn. So the arts are giving us the opportunity to expand that basic

knowledge even further.”

That is because the arts program is moving students beyond the rudimentary practices of memorization and recitation by providing a myriad of creative channels for learning the same subject matter, explains teacher Susan Brewer. “We have found ways to go deeper—with application, evaluation and synthesis [of the material]. Those are the real thinking skills.”

For instance, to learn about various literary genres, fourth-graders wrote a rap song about different books they have read, from fairy tales to biographies. They then designed costumes and props representing the books' characters to accompany their presentation at the monthly “Informance,” a school assembly blending academic information and artistic performance that allows students to showcase their knowledge and talents.

As another example, the younger children studying fractions created a collage of birds and flowers from simple shapes measuring one-half, one-fourth and one-eighth inch to see how math has implications in everyday life.

This fusion of the visual and performing arts with other subjects has been a common instructional strategy among teachers prior to



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in visual arts, dance, music, theatre and physical education in grades K–12. Each school district, charter school and county office of education is entitled to \$83.04 per student, and each district must use at least \$2,500 per school site. In January 2007, districts received part of an ongoing \$105 million grant to support arts and music instruction. The remaining amounts of each grant will be provided later this month.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA—The National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation brought together 51 high school students from every state and the nation's capital for a match of skills in poetry memorization and recitation—called “Poetry Out Loud”—in Washington, D.C., in late April. The top prize—a \$20,000 scholarship—went to a District of Columbia student, while

the second- and third-place prizes of \$10,000 and \$5,000 were awarded to students from Indiana and Virginia, respectively. In addition, the 12 finalists received a \$1,000 award and their schools \$500 each toward the purchase of books of poetry. Over the last year, state-level competitions nationwide have inspired more than 100,000 students at 1,000 high schools to discover classic and contemporary poetry.



the program's arrival, said Brewer, "but we wanted to improve what we were doing, the things that we've already implemented in our own disorganized way."

The arts curriculum is really part of a larger framework called Oklahoma A+ Schools. The concept was conceived as a research model in North Carolina to promote comprehensive, whole-school reform based on a commitment to eight key components:

- 1) arts; 2) curriculum;
- 3) multiple intelligences;
- 4) experiential learning;
- 5) enriched assessment;
- 6) collaboration;
- 7) infrastructure; and
- 8) climate. Results from the initial four-year evaluation of the program in 23 schools were so compelling that A+ schools began expanding beyond North Carolina, attracting the attention of education reform-minded officials in search of a model with sound arts integration and a promise for improving student learning across the board.

Jean Hendrickson was a member of the research team that brought the model to Oklahoma. "As a principal in Oklahoma City schools for 17 years, I had pretty much spent my life looking for a framework that would sustain best practices in many areas. ... We know that schools have to support all of the children all of the time in all of the areas, or they run the risk of not sustaining

Counterclockwise: Teacher Tammy Chapman speaks with second-grader Destiny about her project; Principal Susan Combs shares a laugh with students Francisco, Francisco, Vanessa, Angel and Jonathan; and teacher Susan Brewer with third-grader Ethan. On the cover, third-grader Carina presents her illustration for a class lesson. Photos by Glen Ellman.

an excellent educational environment. ... So we were looking for a system of sustainability that had within it all of the things that we should commit to in schools. And, certainly, arts instruction and the significant use of the arts should be one of those things."

Six years later, following the program's groundbreaking success in Oklahoma, the initial consortium of 15 schools, which included Linwood Elementary, has evolved into a network of 39 schools in 20 districts, with an additional seven schools slated to join this fall. Initially a project of the DaVinci Institute, a nonprofit think tank, it is currently administered by the University of Central Oklahoma.

Now the executive director of Oklahoma A+ Schools, Hendrickson was impressed immediately by the professional development provided through the model. Rather than having newly trained teachers shoulder the task of implementing a complex program with no future support—a scenario she says she has seen too many times—the A+ model provides ongoing training by a

cadre of seasoned educators, professional artists and other experts. Teachers learn to work collaboratively, using research-based practices to map the curriculum so that interdisciplinary themes emerge that foster integration across classes and the use of various learning styles. Student learning, consequently, becomes process-oriented as it draws on more advanced thinking skills.

For the instructional staff, discovering how to appeal to the different ways children learn has been the program's greatest gift. While the three learning styles—visual, auditory and kinesthetic—have long been familiar pedagogical terms, teachers were introduced to a wider spectrum of "multiple intelligences" that identify eight potential pathways to learning: from logical-mathematical to naturalistic.

"We've all been pushed out of our comfort zones so that we can find ways to reach children who don't learn the same way we do," said Brewer, a self-described "linguistic" learner.

Providing multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their strengths, she adds, has been especially successful with their Hispanic students learning English. "When you work with different ways to experience those concepts, [the students] understand them much better."

—BY NICOLE ASHBY



Linwood Elementary School



- > **Grade Span:** Pre-K-5
- > **Locale:** Urban
- > **Total Students:** 345
- > **Race/Ethnicity Enrollment:** 56% Hispanic, 21% white, 13% African-American, 6% American Indian, 4% Asian
- > **Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible:** 92%
- > **English Language Learners:** 52%
- > **Special Education Students:** 16%
- > **Percentage Proficient:** In math, 84%; in reading, 71% (based on fifth-graders assessed on the 2006 state exam).
- > **Interesting Fact:** Since the 2002 start of the arts integration program at Linwood—a school where most of the students are from low-income families and half are English language learners—it has made adequate yearly progress (AYP) each year.

June 5–Aug. 10

Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative Summer Workshops, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Held at more than a dozen sites nationwide, this free workshop series is designed for teachers to learn best practices from fellow educators who have had success in raising student achievement. For specific dates and locations, visit <https://www.t2tweb.us>, or call 1-888-831-1338.

June 25

Presidential Scholars Program Medallion Ceremony, Washington, D.C., sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. This year's ceremony will honor 141 outstanding graduating American high school seniors for their academic achievement, artistic excellence, leadership and community service. For complimentary tickets to the Kennedy Center performance by Presidential Scholars in the Arts, e-mail presidential.scholars@ed.gov, or call 202-401-0961.

September

Library Card Sign-Up Month, sponsored by the American Library Association. Launched in 1987, this observance brings national attention to using local libraries as sources of lifetime learning. Visit <http://www.ala.org> or call 1-800-545-2433.

Q&A

What reading opportunities are available for students during the summer?

Research shows that many children experience a decline in reading proficiency during summer vacation. Thirty-two percent of U.S. fourth-graders reported that they never or rarely read for fun outside of school, a significantly higher percentage than the international average of 18 percent.

To encourage students to actively read over the summer and thereby enhance student achievement the following school year, several initiatives across the country are available.

> **Reading Rockets**—an educational initiative of the flagship public television and radio station WETA, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education—offers a wealth of reading strategies, lessons and activities designed to help young children learn how to read and struggling readers improve their comprehension skills. Visit <http://readingrockets.org> or call 703-998-2001.

> **Reading Is Fundamental's National Book Program** delivers free books and literacy resources to those children and families who need them most. The program is available in all 50 states and reaches young people of all ages in a variety of settings, including schools, community centers, Boys & Girls Clubs, migrant labor camps, churches and health clinics. Visit <http://www.rif.org> or call 1-877-RIF-READ.

> **Gulf Coast Summer Reading Initiative**—a public-private partnership among the U.S. Department of Education, First Book and Scholastic, Inc.—is providing new books this year to replenish those lost in schools, libraries, community organizations and homes in areas affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Visit <http://www.bookrelief.org> or call 1-866-READ-NOW.

> **Local libraries** are good resources for additional opportunities for reading. If your child doesn't have a library card, summer is a great time to sign up for one. In addition to a wide selection of books to borrow, many libraries have high-quality, child-friendly summer reading programs. For the location of your nearest public library, visit the American Library Association at <http://www.ala.org> or call 1-800-545-2433.

News Show Highlights Summer Programs

Programs that focus on reading and learning during the summer months to ensure students return to school prepared to achieve will be the focus of the June edition of *Education News Parents Can Use*, the U.S. Department of Education's monthly television program.

After the final school bell has rung, far too few students engage in summertime activities designed to continue their practice of academic skills—particularly critical reading skills—learned during the school year. As a result, many students experience “summer learning loss,” which leaves them ill-equipped for the academic challenges of the next school year. This month's broadcast: showcases several award-winning and effective summer learning programs; explores innovative strategies to

academically engage and nurture low-income and disadvantaged youths during the summer; profiles corporate, community and library-based initiatives designed to encourage students to read and learn during the break; and spotlights the efforts of organizations dedicated to providing disadvantaged students with access to books and reading materials in the summer and throughout the year.

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.





The Achiever will be on summer vacation during July and August, and will resume production in September.

Arts Resources at the FREE Web Site

Ragtime music, Herb Block's editorial cartoons and Pakistani theatre are among the resources recently added to the federally supported Web site <http://free.ed.gov>. A one-stop shop for hundreds of teaching and learning resources from more than 35 federal agencies, the Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE) site includes the following additions, which focus on the arts.

> **Ragtime**—from the Library of Congress—presents sheet music, essays, and video and sound clips related to this distinctly American music genre that

originated in the late 19th century and influenced early jazz styles. This section includes a biography of famous ragtime composer Scott Joplin along with segments of his classic "Maple Leaf Rag," which helped spread the ragtime craze.

> **Enduring Outrage**—also from the Library of Congress—presents more than 30 cartoons by Pulitzer-Prize-winning political cartoonist Herb Block published between 1940 and 1994, which focus on a range of topics from pollution to racism.

> **Gift of the Indus: The Arts and Culture of Pakistan**—from the Kennedy Center—introduces, through various video clips, the music, theatre, dance and visual arts of Pakistan, a nation created in 1947 as a homeland for Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. This section highlights the rhythmic folk music of the Punjab, the martial dances of the Pashtun, and the elaborate geometry seen in buildings, carpets and textiles.

> **Van Gogh's Van Goghs**—from the National Gallery of Art—features, along with his life story, a sampling of paintings by this ingenious and prolific Dutch artist, who was mostly self-taught and whose works paved the way for the expressionist art of the 20th century.



U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. S.W.
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Comments? Contact Nicole Ashby, editor, at 202-401-0689 (fax), or at education@custhelp.com.

Address changes and subscriptions? Contact 1-877-4ED-PUBS, or edpubs@inet.ed.gov.

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