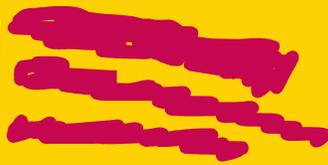


# Taking a Closer Look



**NoChild**  
LeftBehind



U.S. Department of Education



## **U.S. Department of Education**

Margaret Spellings  
*Secretary*

### **Office of Communications and Outreach**

Lauren Maddox  
*Assistant Secretary*

September 2007

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This booklet contains more detailed information about topics related to opportunities offered by *No Child Left Behind*: closing the achievement gap, parental involvement, school choice, tutoring and financial aid for college.

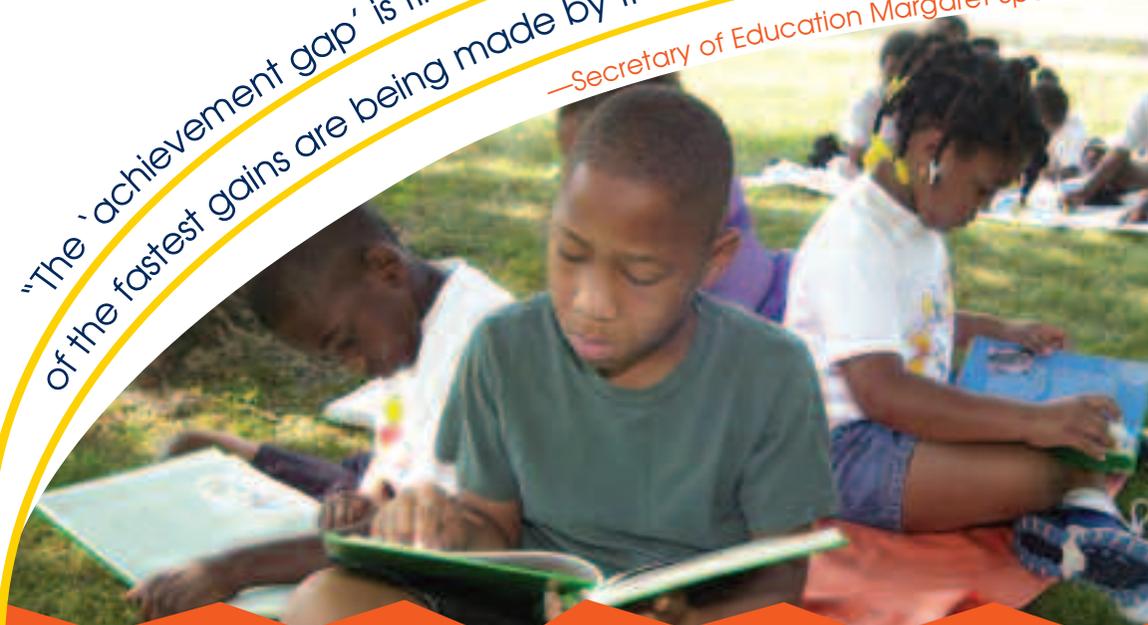
## Closing the Achievement Gap

*No Child Left Behind* challenges us to close the achievement gap by assuring that all America's children can do grade-level schoolwork by the year 2014. The "achievement gap" is the difference in performance between groups of students, especially groups defined by race/ethnicity and family income.

*No Child Left Behind* is helping the country learn about what works in our schools. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, from 1999 to 2004, U.S. 9-year-olds made more progress in reading than in the previous 28 years combined, and math scores have reached record highs across the board. Test scores are at all-time highs for African-American and Hispanic students. Under *No Child Left Behind*, students in grades 3-8

"The 'achievement gap' is finally beginning to close! Some of the fastest gains are being made by those once left behind."

—Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings



are tested each year with one additional test in high school to confirm how students are doing. Progress has been made in many school districts, but more needs to be done to continue improving our educational system. The requirements of *No Child Left Behind* will help schools close the achievement gap and prepare all students for success. Bringing about comprehensive change in our educational system is difficult; here are some examples of schools that have made great strides in closing the achievement gap.

## Lincoln Elementary School

Lincoln Elementary School in Mount Vernon, N.Y., has increasingly attracted both local and national attention for its rigorous, yet innovative, approach to elementary education. The largest elementary school in the Mount Vernon City School District, with nearly 800 children, Lincoln has reached capacity due largely to the out-of-boundary enrollment of students by parents who have heard of its remarkable reputation. Lincoln is seated in a racially and economically diverse suburb of New York City and faces challenges similar to its city counterparts. Fifty percent of the students are African-American with 25 percent Hispanic, 23 percent white and 2 percent Asian. Of those attending, 54 percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. When fourth-graders were assessed in 2006 using the state exam, 100 percent were proficient in reading and 99 percent in math. Since 2002, nearly every fourth-grader at Lincoln has met or exceeded state standards in reading and math.

Lincoln's educational accomplishments are attributed to:

- ④ Parents hearing of its remarkable success and enrolling their children;
- ④ Community involvement through generous donations from science institutes, other organizations and private donors;
- ④ Interdisciplinary classes where different subjects are taught together—for example, math using art;
- ④ Collaboration among faculty members across disciplines and grade levels to prepare lesson plans; and
- ④ Strong instructional leadership, which brings out the best in the faculty and school personnel.

*Note:* This information is reliable as of May 2007. [*The Achiever*, U.S. Department of Education, Volume 6, No. 5, Washington D.C., 2007.]

## Peabody eMints Academy

Peabody eMints Academy, a predominantly African-American school in St. Louis, Mo., struggled for more than five years to succeed. In 2001, only 7 percent of third-graders could read, and not one fourth-grader passed the state's math exam. According to 2005 data, 87 percent of the students exceed state standards in both subjects and nearly 96 percent in science.

Peabody eMints Academy turned its performance around by:

- ④ Defining expectations for students and teachers;
- ④ Providing greater professional development for teachers;
- ④ Requiring every child in grades 2–7 to attend an after-school program in reading, math and science, Monday through Thursday;
- ④ Having students take regular online tests to gauge their progress;
- ④ Allowing teachers to customize instruction according to the results of these tests; and
- ④ Working with the local business community, which provided volunteer tutors, helped build improvement projects and provided funding for the school's eMints\* program.

\*eMints stands for “enhancing Missouri’s Instructional Networked Teaching Strategies,” a state initiative that supports online testing and customized instruction.

*Note:* This information is reliable as of September 2006. [*The Achiever*, U.S. Department of Education, Volume 5, No. 7, Washington D.C., 2006.]

## Norview High School

Norview High School, located in Norfolk, Va., is a high poverty, urban high school of over 1,800 students. In 1998, when Norview’s students first took Virginia’s standardized exams, about 70 percent passed the reading exam and only 60 percent passed the one in writing. Results were worse for other subjects: roughly 30 percent passed algebra and geometry. Moreover, on every subject test, African-American students’ scores were lower than those of their white peers.



In 2005–06, the difference between African-American and white students' scores in reading was only 1 percent, with 95 percent of white students and 94 percent of African-American students passing the reading exam. On the writing test, 95 percent of white students passed, and 91 percent of African-American students passed. In math, 90 percent of all students passed, with 89 percent of those identified as disadvantaged passing, and 78 percent of students with disabilities passing.

What has Norview done to make these advances in closing the achievement gap?

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- ④ The school developed an academic focus and became the “Leadership Center for Sciences and Engineering;”
  - ④ Teachers came together to improve academic achievement;
  - ④ Test data were reviewed regularly and analyzed;
  - ④ More effective teaching strategies were created;
  - ④ Education was customized to each student;
  - ④ Specialized academic programs were introduced, such as the Dodson Scholars Program;\*
  - ④ During the 2005–06 school year, Norview introduced dual enrollment courses so that students could begin earning college credit while still in high school;
  - ④ Students were offered after-school remediation sessions, as well as “learning portals” during the school day for additional help in academic areas; and
  - ④ The school’s primary objective has been “Continuous Growth of Student Achievement for All.”

\*Anna Dodson of Norfolk Public Schools received a \$10,000 Richard R. Green Award to present to a deserving high school senior of her choice from the Norfolk school system or from her alma mater, Norview High School. Dodson chose to give the \$10,000 to four students over four years, giving each a \$2,500 scholarship.

*Note:* This information is reliable as of August 2007. [Source: Virginia Department of Education, 2005–06 and 2005–06 Norview High School Performance Report. See also *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*, Alliance for Excellent Education, Washington D.C., 2004.]



## Parental Involvement

Work with your child's teacher and school to keep the lines of communication open.

Partner with the teacher to enhance the academic success and social well being of your child. Attend parent-teacher meetings and stay informed about your child's academic progress. Discuss with your child's teacher what you can do at home to help your child. Go on field trips with your child's class and volunteer to help the teacher in the classroom, on the playground or at special events.

Talk with your child daily about school. Ask your child what he or she learned that day. Ask how the day went, and ask about your child's friends. Review your child's homework each evening, and consult homework Web sites if available. Be sure that your child completes all of his or her assignments.

### Be a Positive Voice for Your Child

Remember, teachers, principals and others who work for the school are there to help you. Be a voice for your child. That is your right. Also, work with the school to make sure your child's needs are being met. Becoming a voice for your child makes you an advocate.

As a parent, you are the advocate who speaks out for your child and the one who supports your child, not just financially but also emotionally, socially and academically.



Who knows your child better than you do? The teacher may know many things about your son or daughter, but the things that happen at home or have happened in your child's life, only you know. You can voice your concerns and your dreams for your child. You are the adult best able to help your child succeed. By so doing, you become your child's strongest supporter.

Under federal law, you have certain rights related to information that the school has about your child. Under the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*, the school must notify parents each year that they are allowed to see their children's education records; they can seek to change inaccurate information in the records; and they must provide consent for the school to disclose personally identifiable information from their children's education records, except under certain circumstances. For more information about *FERPA*, see "Examples of Resources."

### **If a Problem Comes Up**

If your child is having some problems with schoolwork, talk to him or her about the problem. Talk to the teacher, too. Meet with the teacher at a time that is convenient for you, the teacher and the school principal or vice principal. You may want to write a note, send an e-mail, telephone or visit the school in person to make an appointment. When you contact the school, explain to the staff person that you want to make an appointment to see the teacher, and thank the person for his or her help.

Be prepared for the meeting. Write down your notes and questions ahead of time. Discuss with the teacher what he or she can do to help. Ask how you may assist in helping your child. Remember to ask the teacher where you might get additional resources. Take careful notes. After the meeting, be sure to explain to your child what he or she may need to do to improve the situation or take advantage of help that is available. Check with the teacher in a few days to see if the situation has changed.

Here are some questions to consider when trying to solve a problem with your child.

### **Help for You**

- ④ Have you asked other parents about your child's teacher and the school?
- ④ Have you asked a teacher or staff person to introduce you to the teacher or principal?
- ④ Have you talked with the parent-teacher association or parent advisory council?

- ☻ Have you attended parent-teacher conferences at school?
- ☻ What is the best time to go to the school?
- ☻ What is the best way to approach a particular teacher or principal?

### Your Answers

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### Help for a Social Problem

- ☻ What seems to be wrong with your child?
- ☻ Is your child disruptive in class?
- ☻ Has a situation come up at home or at school that is a problem for your child?
- ☻ Is the teacher aware of the problem or situation?
- ☻ Is the teacher aware of the needs of your child?
- ☻ Is your child afraid to go to school?
- ☻ Is your child being treated fairly?
- ☻ Does your child need to change his or her seat?

*"Adults, and especially parents, should be reminded that they teach their kids healthy behavior by their own good example."*

*—First Lady Laura Bush*



## Your Answers

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### Help for an Academic Problem

- Is your child doing his or her homework?
- If your child needs additional help, what do you want the teacher to do?
- Does the school have a tutoring program?
- Do you suspect that your child may have a disability?
- If so, have you requested that your child be evaluated?

## Your Answers

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### Parental Involvement and *No Child Left Behind*

*No Child Left Behind* requires Title I schools to extend a hand to parents to become involved by encouraging:

- Parental involvement in Title I schools;
- Parent participation in school planning;
- Parent contribution to policy development;



- ④ Building parents' skills and parenting training;
- ④ Parent feedback on the quality of the school; and
- ④ Meetings with parents on a regular basis.

Research has shown that higher student achievement can result when:

- ④ Parents and families support their children's learning at home and in school.
- ④ Parents and families stay involved throughout their children's education.
- ④ Schools create programs that support families in guiding their children's education.

White House photo by Paul Morse



Here are some schools where parental involvement made a difference.

## Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School is a predominantly African-American school in a section of Boston, Mass., where 66 percent of the children who enter are reading one or more grade levels below the norm. In 1999, a team of educators proposed a charter college preparatory program for a middle school in the poverty-ridden Roxbury neighborhood. The coeducational school emphasizes a rigorous curriculum, character development and family involvement. Roxbury Prep invites family involvement by requiring parents to sign a “Family and School Contract” at the beginning of each school year. By signing this document, parents agree to communicate with their children’s teachers every two weeks. In 2003, Roxbury Prep’s Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores were the highest of any predominantly African-American school in Massachusetts on sixth- and eighth-grade math and eighth-grade science exams, and second best on sixth-through-eighth-grade English exams. An impressive 82 percent of seventh-grade students scored “advanced” or “proficient” on the English exam. On the 2006 eighth-grade math test, Roxbury Prep outperformed every school district in the entire state of Massachusetts. While test scores have risen, so have graduation rates.

How was this accomplished?

- ④ Parents were expected to be involved and committed.
- ④ Parent-teacher communication was strong and frequent.
- ④ The curriculum was rigorous.
- ④ Teachers had the approach that all students could succeed.

*Note:* This information is reliable as of September 2006. [*The Education Innovator*, U.S. Department of Education, Volume II, No. 22, Washington D.C., 2004.]

## Viers Mill Elementary School

Each day, Viers Mill Elementary School in Silver Spring, Md., welcomes students from 44 countries who speak 32 languages. Of the 658 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, 54 percent are Hispanic, 22 percent African-American, 14 percent white, 9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native. Even with the challenges of diversity and language, an achievement gap hardly exists, and the school has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress. Scores on standardized tests have gone up: in one



year, the percentage of students scoring proficient/advanced on the Maryland School Assessment increased from 60.2 to 76.7 percent in reading and 79 to 85.3 percent in mathematics.

Once a month, the school holds a “Family Learning Night.” Students who attend with their parents are escorted to classrooms for reading activities with teachers. Their parents remain for a parent-teacher association meeting and a training session on techniques to use when reading with their children. Then, the students, bringing books with them, join their parents and read together. The books, which students may keep and take home, come from the school’s Title I Family Involvement Fund.

What else has the school done to involve parents?

- ④ Translators were provided at meetings for parents who do not speak English;
- ④ The computer laboratory and media center, where families worked together on language arts activities, homework and accessing information on the Internet, were kept open after school;
- ④ Once a week, students were given a parent bulletin to take home;
- ④ Individual Student Progress Reports were sent to parents at the midpoint of each marking period; and
- ④ A frequently updated Web site provided families with announcements about upcoming events, school projects and activities.

Note: This information is reliable as of February 2006. [*The Education Innovator*, U.S. Department of Education, Volume IV, No. 3, Washington, D.C. 2006.]

## If You Want to Choose a School for Your Child

### What to Look for in a School

If your child attends a Title I school that has not met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the third year, you may want to transfer your child to another school. You may start by looking at the options offered by your school district. If your state says your child’s public school is in need of improvement, the school district must give you the choice of having your child stay in that school or sending him or her to another public school. Also, if your state says your neighborhood school is “persistently dangerous,” or if your child has been the victim of a violent crime at school, you can transfer your child to another school



in the district. In addition, many school districts offer parents a range of choices based on academic need or interest—to attend a magnet school or charter school, for example, or to go to a school with an honors or advanced placement emphasis. And some places offer scholarships for students to attend private schools.

In choosing a public school for your child, ask the school district office what the public school choice policies and procedures are and how to enroll your child. Here are some steps to help you find the right fit for your child's needs:

- 12  Consider your child and your family. Think about what you want a school to do for your child. Your child may have special talents, interests or education needs. Consider your child's learning style: does he learn best by listening or by reading; or, does she like to work in groups or work alone? You may want to look at the location of the school: is it better to be close to your house or close to your work; or, do you want the school to be close to an after-school or tutoring program?
-  Gather information about the different schools. You may want to talk to friends or neighbors to find out about the schools their children

*"Thanks to No Child Left Behind, parents have more information than ever before on how their children and local schools are performing."*

*—Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings*



attend. Also, look for local newspaper articles about how the public schools in the area are performing. You may want to call schools and ask about their school report cards, and you may want to go to parent fairs and school open houses. Take a look at the school's curriculum, approach to learning, behavior policy and safety record. Look too, at any special activities or programs the school might offer, such as sports or arts programs, and the services the school provides, such as access to computers, a school nurse on-site or after-school programs.

- ④ Visit and observe schools. If possible, tour a school during regular school hours and visit a few classes. Schedule an appointment with the school principal to discuss any questions you have. Try to understand the “culture” of the school—how does it feel being there? Do the students look happy? Are the teachers friendly and involved? Is the school building cheerful and clean? Does the school display student artwork, writings or awards?
- ④ Talk with the principal. Find out his or her approach to education and whether parent involvement is welcomed at the school. If so, what ways may a parent be active? Does the school have a parent-teacher association? If the school is a Title I school, does it have an active parent advisory council (PAC)? (If it is a Title I school, money is set aside to assist parents in helping their child.) What programs does the school have for Title I parents?

When you have decided on which school you would like your child to attend, contact your school district, or the school you have chosen, to explain that you are interested in enrolling your child. Confirm what paperwork is required from the previous school and if other information is needed for your child to be admitted.

### One Parent's Story

Kisha was a very active child. She had been in preschool, and her mother knew she would need a stimulating and expressive environment when she started kindergarten. Kisha's mother looked at the different types of schools in her district. She worked with the school system to enroll Kisha in an arts magnet elementary school, which met Kisha's need to be creative while learning reading, math and science.\*

\*This anecdote is based on an interview with a parent conducted during the preparation of the *Empowering Parents School Box*. The story is for illustration only. The child's name has been changed to protect her privacy.



## What are the different types of schools?

### Public schools

Public schools are funded by tax dollars.

- 🌀 **Neighborhood public schools** are traditional public schools where your child is assigned by the school district, based on where you live.
- 🌀 **Charter schools** are public schools of choice, which generally operate free of many local and state regulations but are accountable to organizations that monitor their academic results and financial management.
- 🌀 **Magnet schools** are public schools designed to attract students from diverse social, economic, ethnic and racial backgrounds by focusing on a specific area such as science, technology or the arts.

### Private schools

Private schools are elementary or secondary schools run and supported by private individuals, groups or corporations rather than by a government or public agency. Some are affiliated with religious organizations. Families pay a fee or tuition to attend private schools. Some private schools have scholarships for low-income families.





## Using Supplemental Educational Services (Tutoring)

A tutor may be able to help your child do better in school. Your child may be eligible to get “supplemental educational services,” or free tutoring, through *No Child Left Behind*. If your family income is below a certain level and your child is enrolled in a Title I school that has been placed on the state’s “in need of improvement” list, he or she may be eligible to receive free tutoring.

A tutor may be a person who works one-on-one with your child or may be someone who is hired by a company to work with a small group of students. This company may also offer computer-based teaching in your home or school, community center or library. Information on tutoring services is available from your school district, the library, places of worship or community groups.

What should you expect from tutoring? You should expect your child’s performance in school to improve. Tutoring usually focuses on a particular subject area, such as reading or math. It helps your child learn different strategies for remembering and retaining information. As a result, your child

“We must help parents take advantage of new options like free tutoring.”  
—Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings



may learn how to organize his or her time better and may be more motivated and self-confident. Tutoring should be tied to what your child is learning in school.

The tutor, along with the parent, teacher and child, should set goals. Setting goals keeps the child focused and gives the parent and teacher a way to judge progress. Have the tutor discuss with your child's teacher what skills the tutor should work on. If several skills are lacking, goals should be set to master them within a specific time. Keep a record of the tutoring sessions and the skills that are covered during those sessions. Sit in on a session so that you can track the tutoring with schoolwork and homework.

## Expect a Professional Educational Service

If your child is eligible for free tutoring under *No Child Left Behind*, your school district should provide you with a list of state-approved tutoring services in your area. You may choose from this list. Different kinds of organizations may be on the list, including private educational groups, public schools, charter schools, private schools, school districts, community organizations and religious groups.

## Take into Consideration

### Program

- ☉ What subject matter will the tutoring cover?
- ☉ How long will your child be tutored? How many hours per week?
- ☉ What additional services will you get (such as books, college counseling, access to computer programs)?
- ☉ Do your expectations match those of the program?
- ☉ Is there a connection between what is being taught in your child's classroom and what is taught at tutoring?

### Qualifications

- ☉ How long has the tutor been teaching or how long has the company been in business?
- ☉ What are the educational qualifications of the tutor?
- ☉ Is the tutor or program licensed or accredited by any organization?



## Reputation

- ⊙ Do you know anyone whose child has been taught by the tutor?
- ⊙ Does the tutor have a list of references you can call?
- ⊙ Does the tutor offer any guarantees? What happens if expectations are not met?

## Practical Questions

- ⊙ Where is the tutor located? Is he/she near your home, school or work?
- ⊙ What does the tutoring cost? What services are provided?
- ⊙ Does the tutoring fall under free “supplemental educational services” provided by the school district?

## Safety

- ⊙ Have the tutors gone through a police background check?
- ⊙ How will the students be supervised?
- ⊙ What rules of behavior are required of students? Of tutors?
- ⊙ How will you be notified if there is an emergency?

## Progress

- ⊙ Is there a tutoring plan just for your child?
- ⊙ How will you know the tutoring is helping your child?
- ⊙ Does the program test your child on a regular basis?
- ⊙ Will you get a report on your child’s progress?
- ⊙ Are there parent-tutor conferences to discuss your child’s progress?

## One Parent’s Story

“Bluebirds” was the name of the top math group in the class. Delron wanted to become a Bluebird, but he was having trouble keeping up with his math lessons. His mother called a local high school and was given the name of a tutor, who worked with Delron. Eventually, Delron was able to join the Bluebirds. Even though he had achieved his goal, Delron continued to work with the tutor to help him stay ahead of the class.\*

\*This anecdote is based on an interview with a parent conducted during the preparation of the *Empowering Parents School Box*. The story is for illustration only. The child’s name has been changed to protect his privacy.





# Financial Aid and Scholarships for College

All parents are concerned about the cost of a college education, but help is available from many sources, including the federal government. Your child's high school guidance counselor, as well as the financial aid officer at your child's future college, can provide information about scholarships and grants, which is money that you do not have to repay, as well as federally guaranteed student and parent loans, which you do need to repay but at a competitive rate. The place to start when looking for college financial aid is the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid Center, which can be reached at 1-800-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) or <http://studentaid.ed.gov>. Access to federal, state and even institutional financial aid begins with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Before your child even applies for college, it is possible to get a sense of the federal aid available to your child by using the online FAFSA4caster. Not only will this tool provide you with an estimate of the amount of federal aid your child is likely to receive, it will reduce the amount of time it takes to complete the official FAFSA form when the time comes.

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The U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid (FSA) program provides students with grants, loans and work-study opportunities based on the student's demonstrated financial need. In addition, low-income students who have completed a rigorous high school curriculum may also be eligible for Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACG's) of up to \$750 in their first year of college and \$1,300 in their second year of college, as long as they maintain the necessary grade point average. Low-income college juniors and seniors who major in science, technology, engineering, mathematics or critical foreign languages, and who maintain a minimum grade point average, may also be eligible for National SMART grants of up to \$4,000 per year. To learn more about these programs, visit <http://studentaid.ed.gov> and click on the link to Academic Competitiveness and SMART grants.

Finally, check with your high school guidance counselor and college financial aid officer to learn more about additional sources of scholarships and grant aid, including those provided by private foundations, civic associations, churches, parent organizations, businesses and the colleges, themselves.

## **When applying for financial aid, you and your child should:**

- ④ Use the FAFSA4caster early in the high school years to get an estimate of the student's eligibility for federal financial aid and to reduce the time required to complete the FAFSA later on;



- ④ Consult with the high school guidance counselor and college financial aid advisors to learn about financial assistance opportunities available to your child, including his or her eligibility for ACG and National SMART grants;
- ④ File tax returns early in the year since information on these forms is required to complete the FAFSA form;
- ④ Complete the FAFSA as soon as possible, keeping in mind due dates established by your child's college as well as federal due dates posted on the FSA Web site. The FAFSA can be completed and submitted, in paper format or online, as early as January 1 each year;
- ④ Complete the FAFSA online if possible, as the online form provides you with instructions, information prompts and technical assistance; and
- ④ Apply for financial aid each year that your child is in school. An updated FAFSA must be submitted for each child you have in college and for each year that the child will attend college.

### **When working with the online FAFSA form, your child will need to:**

- ④ Get a personal identification number called a PIN at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov);
- ④ Keep an eye on the e-mail inbox for a response and further instructions; and
- ④ Make sure the financial aid office at each college your child may attend has all the information needed to determine eligibility for state and institutional aid.



## Tips for a Winning Scholarship Application

Here are some tips to give your child when he or she is preparing a scholarship application:

- ④ Read the requirements to see if you are eligible.
- ④ Complete all parts of the application.
- ④ Read and follow all directions.
- ④ Submit a clean and neat application.
- ④ Submit a well-composed essay (if it is required) that makes an impression.
- ④ Be aware of and meet all deadlines.
- ④ Give your application materials a final review.
- ④ Get help if you think you need it; have someone else look over the application.
- ④ Be sure that the work you submit is your own.
- ④ Make sure you are satisfied with your application before submitting.

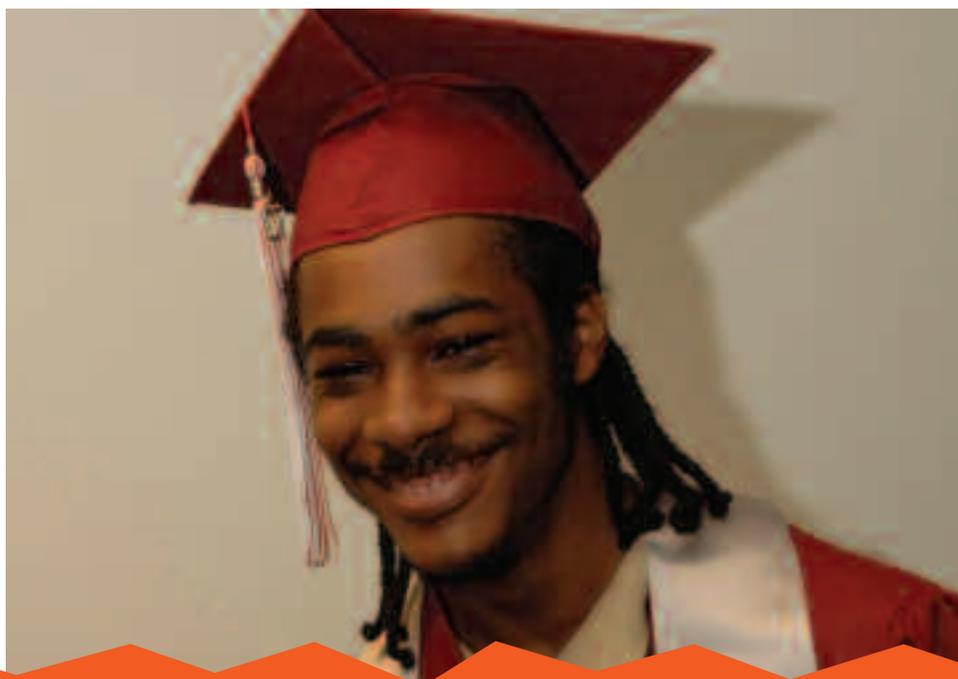


- ④ Mail the application to the proper address with the proper postage or submit the application online.
- ④ Be sure to mail the application early so that it will be received by the due date.
- ④ Follow-up with the sponsoring organization to make sure your information was received and to see if there are any questions about what you submitted.

**Source:** This section was adapted from “Financial Aid Tips” from Army School Liaison Services, 2006.

“For generations, a college education has meant the difference between a life lived on the edge of promise and one lived in the full embrace of the American Dream.”

—Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings







The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

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