



## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



# Great Expectations: Holding Ourselves and Our Schools Accountable For Results

January 2009

*"We can be proud of this record of bipartisan accomplishment. Expectations were raised for what our students can achieve and what our government can get done."*

**--U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**

Today, Secretary Spellings released *Great Expectations*, an overview of the movement to hold schools accountable for the achievement of every child. Named for the common denominator of all successful schools, *Great Expectations* begins with a look back at the history of public education in America. It tells the story of a remarkable comeback by our nation's students, many of whom are achieving record-high test scores in reading and math. Above all, it proves that reforms are yielding results.

As Americans prepare for a change in government, one thing that must not change is the remarkable progress being made by our nation's schools. Schools are expecting more from students. And our students are meeting the challenge.

#### Test Scores Are Higher:

- Math scores for 4th- and 8th-graders rose to record highs in 2007, according to the Nation's Report Card (NAEP);
- Reading scores for 4th-graders rose to record highs in 2007;
- Writing scores increased for 8th and 12th-graders in 2007;
- History scores increased in all three grade levels tested—4th, 8th, and 12th—in 2006.

#### The Achievement Gap Is Narrowing:

- African-American 4th-graders (in reading and math) and 8th-graders (in math) achieved their highest scores in the history of the Nation's Report Card in 2007;
- Hispanic 4th-graders (in reading and math) and 8<sup>th</sup>-graders (in math) achieved their highest scores in history;
- The achievement gap in math between white and Hispanic 8th-graders, and white and African-American 8th graders, narrowed by three points between 2003 and 2007.

#### Children Once "Left Behind" Have Made Great Strides Forward:

- Average reading scores for 4th-grade students with disabilities improved by 23 points between 2000 and 2007;
- Average reading scores for limited-English proficient 4th-graders improved by 21 points between 2000 and 2007;
- Children in large urban school districts have generally made faster academic gains than the nation as a whole.

#### Progress Is Being Made Compared To Other Nations:

- U.S. students in grades four and eight showed steady improvements in mathematics since 1995, according to the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS);
- U.S. 4th-graders (11 points higher) and 8th-graders (four points higher) improved in math from 2003 to 2007;
- U.S. 8th-graders improved by 16 points in math since 1995.

For more information, visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) or call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

## EDUCATION AS A CIVIL RIGHT: THE *NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT*

President Bush set the tone for this progress. Upon taking office, he challenged schools to hold all students, regardless of race, income level, background, or zip code, to the same high standards. He vowed to end the “soft bigotry of low expectations” that plagued many schools.

Promises became action with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB]*. President Bush reached across the aisle, working with Democrats and Republicans as Congress passed the bill by an overwhelmingly bipartisan margin.

Signed into law in 2002, *No Child Left Behind* set a goal of all children learning to read and do math at grade level or better by 2014, with our schools held accountable for meeting it. While much work remains, we are on the right track.

Under *NCLB*:

- Schools test all students annually in grades 3-8 and once in high school;
- Data are disaggregated so the progress of all students can be measured and improved;
- States and districts have considerable freedom to use federal education funds on top priorities; and
- Parents of children in poorly performing schools have new options, including free tutoring or the choice to enroll in another public or public charter school.

## DOING WHAT WORKS: WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE

*No Child Left Behind* has spurred a nationwide accountability movement. It has focused our national conversation on education on results. Before *NCLB*, few states had complete assessment and accountability systems in place, and some did not even participate in the Nation's Report Card. We had little objective data to prove whether students were acquiring at least grade-level skills. Today:

- All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have accountability plans in place;
- All 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico test public school students annually to measure progress toward grade-level proficiency;
- All 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico offer parents “report cards” on their public schools; and
- All 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico participate in the Nation's Report Card.

To enhance states' ability to use test score data to drive student improvement, the **Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grant Program** was authorized in 2002. The program is already helping 27 states develop and implement improved data systems, through 3-year grants ranging from \$1.5 to \$6 million per state.

In addition, **federal funding for K-12 education has risen 39 percent since 2001**. This includes:

- A 59 percent increase (to **\$13.9 billion**) for disadvantaged students in Title I schools;
- More than **\$3 billion** to help states strengthen their assessments; and
- A **\$500 million** School Improvement Fund to reform and restructure chronically underperforming schools.

Federal education funds are now focused on what works. The **Reading First** program is a prime example. More than **\$6 billion** has been invested in proven, research-based strategies to help students learn to read by grade three. Over 1.8 million children, many from low-income families, have been served. In addition:

- The **Striving Readers** program provides intensive instruction to help older students catch up;
- The President created the **National Mathematics Advisory Panel** in 2006 to review the best available scientific research on the teaching and learning of math;
- The **What Works Clearinghouse** and **Doing What Works Web site** are providing information on effective instructional strategies and examples of how to apply them to the classroom;
- In January 2008, the Department launched its national “dashboard” Web site, **Mapping Educational Progress**, enabling parents to quickly learn how their states compare on key educational indicators; and
- A **growth model** pilot and a “**differentiated accountability**” pilot are promoting innovation and flexibility while meeting the “bright line” requirements of *NCLB*.

## RECOGNIZING AND REWARDING TEACHERS

Progress is made possible by great teachers. *NCLB* calls for a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. The Department has invested nearly **\$3 billion** each year to help states meet the requirements, which include state certification and subject-matter knowledge. The percentage of highly qualified teachers **rose from 87 percent to 94 percent** between the 2003-2004 and 2006-2007 school years.

Continued academic improvement depends on teachers who are highly effective as well as highly qualified. The best teachers must be encouraged to work in the most challenging educational environments. This is key to closing the achievement gap and preparing all students for the demands of the 21st century.

President Bush's groundbreaking **Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF)** is the first federally funded program geared toward rewarding great teachers and principals for outstanding performance. The program also aligns teacher hiring with *NCLB's* academic achievement goals. Since 2006, nearly \$200 million has been awarded to 34 grantees. In addition:

Other Support For Teachers:

- **Loan forgiveness** has been expanded from \$5,000 to \$17,500 per teacher, for highly qualified math, science, and special education teachers who choose to work in high-poverty communities;
- More than 300,000 teachers have been trained through the Department's **Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative** and **e-Learning** professional development Web site;
- Congress enacted (but did not fund) the President's **Adjunct Teacher Corps** to encourage thousands of qualified professionals in mathematical, scientific, and other fields to become adjunct high school teachers; and
- The Department's **Troops-to-Teachers** program is enabling our veterans to make a difference in the classroom.

## HIGHER EDUCATION THAT AIMS HIGHER

America's system of higher education has long been recognized as the finest in the world. But our colleges and universities face twin challenges: freshmen unprepared for postsecondary coursework and students unable to afford or gain access to college.

In 2005, Secretary Spellings formed the **Commission on the Future of Higher Education**. Its report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, called for improved access, particularly for low-income and minority students; affordability, by putting a check on rising tuition costs and making the financial aid system more user-friendly; and accountability, by providing consumers with clear and reliable information about cost and quality.

In September 2006, Secretary Spellings launched the **Action Plan for Higher Education**. She proposed a number of reforms, including aligning high school standards with college expectations, using the Internet to help families compare schools and receive financial aid, and modernizing state information systems without compromising student privacy.

Progress has been made towards each of these goals:

- About 1.5 million more students are receiving **Pell Grants** than in 2001, while the maximum Pell Grant award has risen from about \$3,700 per person in 2001 to \$4,731 in 2008-09, a significant increase;
- The President's **Academic Competitiveness Grants** and **SMART (Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent) Grants** encourage schools to offer and students to take more challenging course work; and
- The Department supports redesigning and simplifying the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**, and launched **College.gov** and the **College Navigator Web site** to help educate consumers.

President Bush has acted to protect student aid from the financial crisis. In 2008, the President signed the **Ensuring Continued Access to Student Loans Act** into law, followed by a one-year extension. Using this and existing authority, the Department of Education has taken steps to secure the lending market:

- Purchased \$11 billion in participation interests to date from Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program lenders to support new 2008-09 Stafford and PLUS loans, with another \$23 billion expected in the near future;
- Agreed to purchase any qualifying 2008-09 Stafford and PLUS loans from FFEL lenders;
- Agreed to purchase up to \$6.5 billion in 2007-08 loans to provide funding for FFEL lenders to make new loans;
- Committed to support new market financing arrangements for older FFEL loans (2003-2008) to help generate new FFEL loans over the next three years;
- Established a robust Lender-of-Last-Resort program for State and non-profit loan guarantors to make FFEL loans where needed, using Federal advances if necessary; and
- Expanded the capacity of the Direct Loan program to accommodate additional volume.

## **NEW CHOICES FOR A NEW CENTURY**

In many ways, our public education system is trapped in the industrial age. The old, agrarian six-hours-a-day, 180-days-a-year model must be updated for the 21st century. We must use time more efficiently, and use data to customize instruction for individual students. And we must give parents more choices and control over their children's education.

Charter Schools:

- More than \$1.8 billion in start-up funding has been invested since 2001 through the **Charter Schools Program**.
- The Department has leveraged nearly \$740 million in financing for construction and renovation of charter schools.

Choice:

- Approximately 120,000 students took advantage of *NCLB's* choice provision in 2006-07, transferring from an underperforming public school to another public school in the district.
- In October 2008, the Department announced final **Title I regulations** to require schools to notify parents in a timely manner about their choice options.

Supplemental Educational Services (SES):

- More than 530,000 students received free tutoring or after school help under *NCLB's* SES provision in 2006-07.
- The Department has launched SES pilot programs aimed at increasing the number of students receiving services.

D.C. Opportunity Scholarships:

- In 2004, President Bush signed the **D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program** into law, the nation's first federally funded voucher program. It offers low-income parents scholarships worth up to \$7,500 toward tuition and fees at the private school of their choice.
- Independent studies of the scholarship program have shown academic gains and parental satisfaction.

## **WHAT'S NEXT: A FUTURE OF REFORM AND RESULTS**

President-elect Barack Obama has said that the goal of grade-level proficiency for all students is "the right one." But he and Congress will hear calls to dismantle or radically alter these reforms. They should instead make the choice to listen to the voices of the educators, civil rights leaders, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and parents who have united behind high standards, raised expectations, and accountability for results.

This choice will determine the future of our country's children, and the future of America. It will ensure that students are held to high standards and meet them. It will guarantee that more students are prepared to succeed in college and in careers. Most importantly, it will build upon the foundations of *No Child Left Behind* by preserving the solemn pledge that a quality education is not a privilege for some, but a heritage for all.