



THE ACHIEVER

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Spellings Says Nation's Academic Progress Due to 'New Equation'

On Jan. 31, 2005, Margaret Spellings was sworn in as the eighth secretary of education. The following is adapted from her remarks at the ceremony.

Across the nation, test scores in reading and math are rising, with disadvantaged and minority students leading the way. Yes, after long decades, the pernicious 'achievement gap' is beginning to close.

We've learned a new equation: 'accountability plus high expectations plus resources equals results.' ...

At the same time, we must work to close another gap—the 'skills gap' faced by our high school graduates.

We must introduce the reforms of *No Child Left Behind* to our high schools, so that diplomas become tickets to success in the 21st century.

America enjoys many, many good schools and great teachers who share our passion and commitment to excellence.

As someone who has worked for school boards, a state legislature and a Texas governor, I know that many solutions can be found outside of

Washington, D.C. We will find and share them as we continue to build bridges to educators, public officials and parents. ...

I stand here today as a product of the public schools. I am also an education consumer—the first mother of school-age children to serve as secretary of education.

In carrying out my duties to the American people, I will be carrying out my duties as a mom. And there is none more important than to provide a quality education to our children.

For the full remarks and Secretary Spellings' biography, visit www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2005/01/01312005.html.

"We wanted to develop a school where students from the inner city could have the same opportunities to achieve as students from suburban areas," said June Brown, principal of The Laboratory School of Communication and Languages. Below, Brown speaks with kindergarten Daija Robertson about her computer assignment.

French, Spanish and ... Computers

Foreign Language and Technology Broaden
Horizons for Philadelphia Urban School

At The Laboratory Charter School of Communication and Languages, there's no telling what language will be heard in the classroom. That's because students at this 2004 *No Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon School in Philadelphia study both French and Spanish, from kindergarten through eighth grade.

The languages are integrated in all course work, as is the study of the cultures. "We incorporate the study of root words in our English classes and cultures in our history courses as much as possible," explained Principal June Brown. "We also invite native speakers to come to the school to talk to the students." *continued on page 2*



Photo by Jerry Jackson



The Achiever is published semi-monthly during the school year for parents and community leaders by the Office of Intergovernmental & Interagency Affairs, U.S. Department of Education (ED). Margaret Spellings, Secretary.

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As part of the mandatory after-school enrichment program, dancers and other artists from French-speaking countries in Africa recently came to the school to share folk tales, dances and art.

Culture also is explored virtually through WebQuest "trips," blending language study with another focus of the school—the integration of technology. Teachers incorporate standard computer applications in the classroom, such as PowerPoint presentations that flash words for young students, for both skill reinforcement and remediation.

"Our first-graders must type their papers and be able to use PowerPoint," said Brown, noting that all classrooms are equipped with several computers, in addition to the

fully operational computer labs.

These skills—language and technology—further the school's goals of providing learning opportunities that develop superior aptitude, knowledge of the world community and the ability to apply what is learned to real-life situations.

"We wanted to develop a school where students from the inner city could have the same opportunities to achieve as students from suburban areas," said Brown. "One of our main goals was to strengthen the basic skills of these students, which would give them the confidence to know that they had the ability to achieve."

Now in its seventh year, The Lab School, as it is popularly called, has met all 13 of Pennsylvania's adequate yearly progress goals. For the past three years, the scores of its predominantly black and economically disadvantaged population on the state's exam have placed The Lab School within the top 10 percent of schools in Pennsylvania, and many of its graduating eighth-graders have been recruited by top private schools.

On the 2002-03 and 2003-04 state tests, all of the school's fifth- and eighth-graders achieved proficient scores in math, with 97 percent and 85 percent, respectively, scoring at the advanced level on the 2003-04 test.

In reading, 97 percent of fifth-graders and 100 percent of eighth-graders scored at the proficient level on the 2002-03 exam. The following school year, both classes achieved 100 percent proficiency rates, with 92 percent

of fifth-graders and 95 percent of eighth-graders scoring at the advanced level.

Brown attributes much of the school's success to the dedication of teachers and parents, as well as a rigorous curriculum that follows a pacing chart, which lists, by subject, the skills to be taught each day.

"On Thursdays," she explained, "we send home a goal sheet for the coming week with a packet of materials. We outline the skills that will be taught on each day, along with a list of responsibilities for teachers and parents, and materials for students to reinforce those skills."

Gloria Gaskin, a parent of a Lab School graduate, grandmother of a kindergartener, and the chair of the Parent Advisory Committee said, "Parents are invited to join in the essential work of educating their children. We are invited to attend monthly Academic Partners meetings where teachers explain what our children will be studying during the next four weeks."

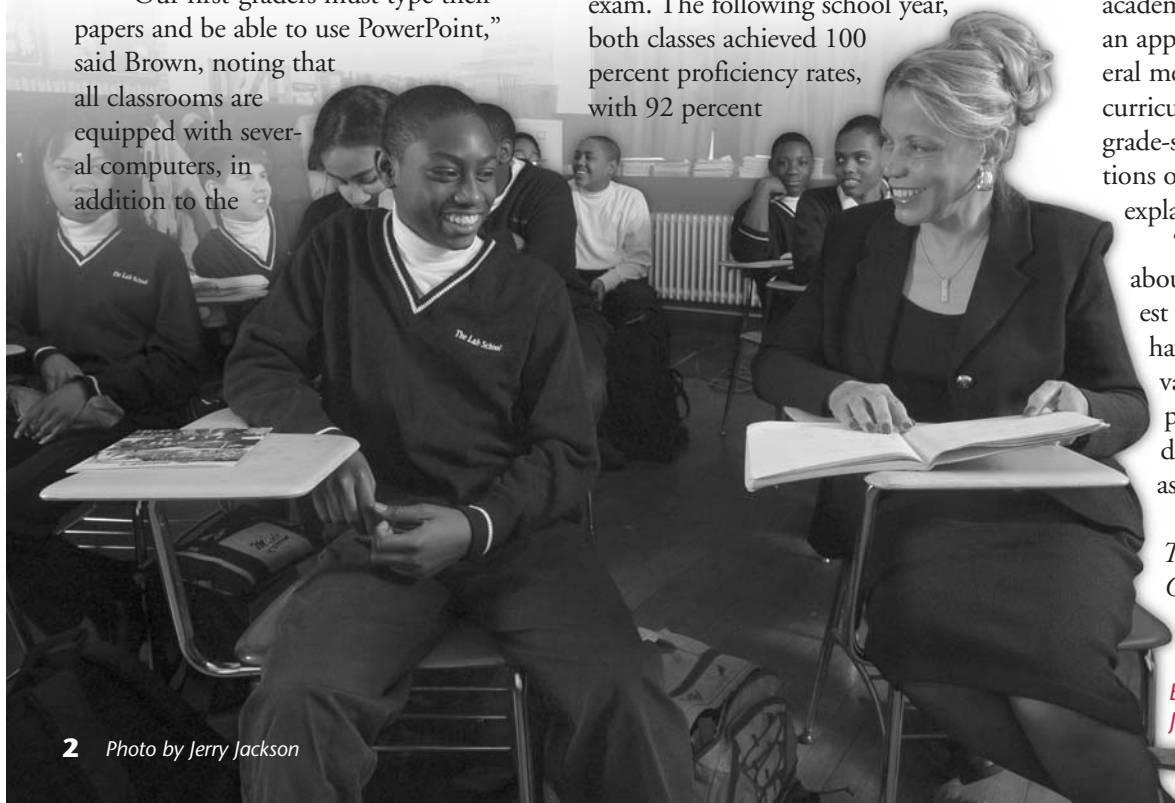
The school operates three facilities—a K-1 and a grades 2-8 site in south Philadelphia, and a K-8 site in the Northern Liberties section of the city. Enrollment is split almost equally among the locations. Because of the pacing chart used to develop the curriculum, students who move among the sites find the same daily lessons.

While the school is open to anyone who wants to study languages and communication, parents must agree to the academic requirements. Before submitting an application, parents must attend a general meeting where school policies and the curriculum are discussed, along with a grade-specific meeting where the expectations of the students, parents and staff are explained.

"Many parents," explains Brown about the community's increasing interest in the school, "even those who have withdrawn their children for various reasons, commend us for dispelling the myth that inner city children can't achieve at the same levels as their suburban peers."

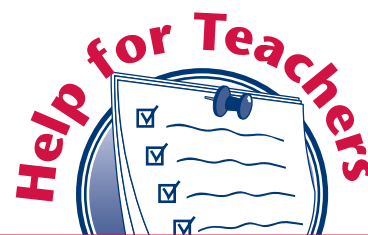
For more information about The Laboratory Charter School of Communication and Languages, visit www.labcharter.org.

Brown shares a laugh with student Jean-Gardy Pharaud during her visit to the eighth-grade French class.



"Testing at high school levels will help us to become more competitive as the years go by. Testing in high schools will make sure that our children are employable for the jobs of the 21st century. ... Testing will make sure that the diploma is not merely a sign of endurance, but the mark of a young person ready to succeed."

President Bush, in his remarks on *No Child Left Behind* and high school initiatives, Jan. 12, 2005, at J.E.B. Stuart High School in Falls Church, Va.



Math, science and special education teachers who have taught in Title I (economically disadvantaged) schools for up to five years may be eligible for higher loan forgiveness amounts under a new law.

The **Taxpayer-Teacher Protection Act** (P.L. 108-409), signed by President Bush in October 2004, authorizes up to \$17,500 in loan forgiveness to individuals who have been employed full-time for five consecutive years as highly qualified math, science and special education teachers. This dramatic increase of \$12,500 above the loan forgiveness amounts available to other teachers is meant to ease the shortage of teachers in key subject areas. The increased amount of teacher loan forgiveness is available to new Federal Stafford Loan borrowers (math, science and special education teachers with no outstanding loan balances prior to Oct. 1, 1998, who borrowed eligible loans prior to Oct. 1, 2005).

For more information, call the U.S. Department of Education's customer service call center at 1-800-433-7327, or visit www.ifap.ed.gov/dpcletters/GEN0414.html.

Close-Up: **No Child Left Behind** High School Initiatives



Last month, President George W. Bush introduced his education plan for reforming America's high schools, pledging \$1.5 billion in funding for a new High School Initiative that would help states better assess and address students' skills. He said "the problem is especially urgent" in mathematics and science, in which America's 15-year-olds ranked 27th out of 39 countries in mathematics literacy on the 2003 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The president's proposals would expand the assessment requirements of *No Child Left Behind*, which now calls for testing students in grades 3-8 and in one high school grade, to fully reach the secondary level. Overall, President Bush's fiscal year 2006 plan includes:

- **Implementing intervention strategies:** \$1.24 billion for a High School Intervention initiative that would focus on strengthening high school education and providing specific interventions, including assessment-based performance plans, for struggling students.
- **Increasing assessment measures:** \$250 million to help states develop and implement, by the 2009-10 school year, annual assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics at two additional high school grades. This effort, along with the one grade currently required by NCLB, would ensure that students are assessed at least three times during high school. The request also includes a \$22.5 million increase to administer in every state the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and mathematics at the 12th grade in 2007.
- **Increasing reading skills:** A \$175 million increase for the Striving Readers program, funded for the first time in fiscal year 2005, to expand the development and implementation of research-based interventions that improve the skills of teenage students who are reading below grade level.
- **Enhancing mathematics achievement:** \$120 million for a new Secondary Education Mathematics Initiative under the Mathematics and Science Partnership program that would provide competitive grants to accelerate the mathematics learning of secondary school students.
- **Increasing academically rigorous courses:** A \$22 million increase to expand the availability of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs in schools with large populations of low-income students and to train teachers for those programs.
- **Expanding the State Scholars program:** \$12 million to increase the number of states implementing the State Scholars program, which encourages high school students to complete a rigorous four-year course of study. This proposal would complement a \$33 million request that would increase Pell awards by up to \$1,000 for each student who completes a State Scholars program in high school.

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**PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS**



“When it comes to
the education of our
children ... failure is
not an option.”

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

NEW RESOURCE! Education Department Web Site Helps Combat Problem of Diploma Mills



To combat the growing industry of “diploma mills” that offer fraudulent degrees, the U.S. Department of Education recently unveiled a new Web site—www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation—where students and employers may access a master list of accredited colleges, universities, and career and trade schools. Diploma mills operate outside the domain of the accreditation process and the Department’s oversight of federal student aid programs and thus are not included in the list.

The site provides a database listing of approximately 6,900 postsecondary education institutions and programs, each of which is accredited by a national or state agency recognized by the secretary of education. The database does not include, however, a number of institutions that elect not to seek accreditation but nevertheless may provide a quality postsecondary education. The database does not include, however, a number of institutions that elect not to seek accreditation but nevertheless may provide a quality postsecondary education.

The Department therefore recommends the listing as only one source of information, and that additional sources of qualitative information be consulted.

In addition to the new Web site, the Federal Trade Commission announced a new publication for hiring managers and human resources professionals, titled *Avoid Fake-Degree Burns by Researching Academic Credentials*, which includes information on the Department’s database along with other tools to help assess academic credentials. The publication, available at www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/pubs/buspubs/diplomamills.htm, also identifies “red flags” that indicate when a job applicant’s claimed academic credentials could be bogus.