



# THE ACHIEVER

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## Teachers of English Language Learners Honored at National Summit

Education Secretary Rod Paige presented awards to three education professionals credited for improving academic achievement among English language learners (ELLs) at the U.S. Department of Education's third annual conference on improving opportunities for ELL students, Oct. 7.

The "Excellence in Teaching English Language Learners" award was presented to Kathy Mellor, National Teacher of the Year, Davisville Middle School, North Kingstown, R.I., with awards for "Outstanding Commitment, Dedication and Contributions to Improving Education for English Language Learners" going to Carmen Pérez-Hogan, coordinator, Office of Bilingual Education, New York State Education Department, and Adela Weinstein, consultant, Illinois Resource Center.

"You shine every day, no matter how difficult your work may become," Secretary Paige said at the awards luncheon.

"You ignite a passion for learning that lights the way toward the future. In many cases, your students become vital links to the outside world for their families. So it is not just one future you secure, but many."

More than 1,500 educators, policy-makers and parents attended this year's conference, which included dozens of presentations on how ELL professionals can improve the quality of education for children who enter school unable to speak English proficiently. Currently, there are more than 4 million English language learners in the U.S. public school system, of which the largest percentage is Spanish-speaking at about 80 percent.

More than \$680 million in federal funding is available for ELL programs this year. For more information, visit the Department's Office of English Language Acquisition at [www.ed.gov/offices/OELA](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OELA).

## 9-Year-Old Found the Great Escape

By Russell Contreras  
*The Albuquerque Journal*  
(Published Sept. 17, 2004)

Ask Emerson Elementary third-grader Ashley Zavala about life in a homeless shelter, and Ashley repeats the word "scary," looks away and doesn't say much else about those days.

Home for Ashley and her family last fall was Joy Junction's [New Mexico's largest emergency family homeless shelter] cafeteria.

But ask Ashley about her summer at the San Pedro Library, and the 9-year-old brightens up.

There, in the quiet seclusion among stacks of books, Ashley dove into a world of princesses, castles, fairy tales and far-away places, reading at least 15 books every three days.

By the time school started, she had read 185 books.

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*Nine-year-old Ashley Zavala, pictured above with her mother and who last year resided in a homeless shelter with her family, this summer read 185 books, the second-highest number of books read among 1,500 Albuquerque students who took part in the No Child Left Behind summer reading program.*

Photo by Marla Brose, ©The Albuquerque Journal



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Today, the shy child will be honored by the U.S. Department of Education and Albuquerque Public Schools [(APS)] for reading the second-highest number of books among 1,500 Albuquerque students who took part in the *No Child Left Behind* summer reading program.

Hannah Duckett, a first-grader at Seven Bar Elementary, came in first after reading 279 books, says APS chief of staff Tom Garrity.

Ashley smiles when she recalls books

about ocean life, Clifford the Dog, nursery rhymes and, of course, Cinderella. And she giggles when she looks back at trying to convince her mom and brother to help her carry 50 books home.

Maybe she read to escape. Maybe she read to remind herself things would get better. Her mother and brother aren't exactly sure.

What they do know is that they are both proud of Ashley.

"Ashley was bitten by the reading bug," says Loretta Chavez, Emerson's parent liaison. "There's no stopping her now."

Ashley and her family have come a long way from their days in the homeless shelter, Chavez says.

For more than three months after arriving in Albuquerque from El Paso last year, Ashley and her family slept on floor mats at Joy Junction in the South Valley.

They had few options. Norberta Vasquez, Ashley's mom, had no job and little money to support Ashley and her 15-year-old brother, Jonathan.

Now Vasquez works for the New Mexico State Fair's cleanup crew and has moved the family into an apartment close to the school and the library.

This summer, Albuquerque students in kindergarten through eighth grade were invited to read at least 10 age-appropriate books, Garrity says.

Albuquerque was one of 11 cities chosen to take part in the federal program, designed to encourage students to read so they wouldn't lose skills during the summer break.

How Ashley was able to nearly top the reading list amazes school officials. Not only did the third-grader devour 185 books, she filled out the proper forms that proved she read each one of them.

"Ashley is a role model to all other students here at Emerson," says school principal Jacque Costales. "She has the drive to be anything she wants to be."

Vasquez says she once feared that her daughter would never be able to read.

Ashley was born four months premature, and doctors warned that she "wouldn't be a normal kid," Vasquez says.

Her fears increased when, at 4 years old, Ashley hadn't said a word and could only speak through sign language.

Then, after Ashley got closer to 5, she started saying words like "mom." In kindergarten, she opened her first book.

Now, Ashley reads aloud to her mom, sometimes until as late as 10 p.m.

Jonathan, a student at Creative Education Preparatory Institute Charter School, says his sister has always been a reader, unlike him. He prefers to watch television.

But, he admits, his sister's reading habits this summer affected him. "When we'd go to the library, I'd be bored," says Jonathan. "So, I'd just read, too."

Ashley smiles when asked if she's proud of her accomplishment. When asked how she feels about reading so many books, Ashley shrugs her shoulders. Then, Ashley reveals that she has another skill she wants people to know about.

She says in a soft voice: "I like to write, too."

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*Ashley, who did not start speaking until around the age of five, read at least 15 books every three days this summer.*

Photo by Marla Brose,  
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"We can be confident about the years to come. ... Each day we get closer to the best in American education, discarding our deficiencies and correcting long-standing problems. ... Each day we make this country stronger, nobler and wiser. Each day we better prepare the next generation for leadership and responsibility. Each day we take one step closer to this future of excellence and inclusion. And we are doing it together."

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, in his "Back-to-School" address at the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., Sept. 24, 2004.



### November 15-19

International Education Week. To download promotional materials and view planned activities, visit <http://exchanges.state.gov/iew/>.

### November 16 8:00-9:00 p.m. E.T.

*Education News Parents Can Use* monthly broadcast will focus on approaches for preventing dropouts. Visit [www.ed.gov/news/av/video/edtv](http://www.ed.gov/news/av/video/edtv) or call 1-800-USA-LEARN for details.

### December 6-8 Washington, D.C.

"Partnering to Prevent Truancy: A National Priority" conference, hosted by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education. Visit <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/2004TruancyConference> for online registration or call 202-307-5911 for more information.

Close-Up:



## No Child Left Behind Standard Technology for Students With Disabilities

Students with blindness, low vision and print disabilities are expected to gain improved access to textbooks thanks to a voluntary standardized format for electronic files now available, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige recently announced.

Textbooks and classroom materials produced according to this voluntary benchmark, called National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS), will be in an electronic format that can be adapted to create products ranging from Braille editions of textbooks to on-screen displays of text and graphics. In past years, the lack of a standardized format meant that publishers had to produce materials in multiple formats—often causing delays that meant students with disabilities did not receive their textbooks in time for the beginning of the school year.

To address these challenges, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs provided funding to the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum at the Center for Applied Special Technology, Inc. (CAST) to convene an expert panel to establish a voluntary, standardized format for materials. The 40-member panel included educators, publishers, technology specialists and advocacy group members.

In addition, the Education Department recently awarded CAST two grants to support further development of NIMAS and to provide technical assistance to states that are implementing the standard, in order to improve academic results for students with disabilities.

For more information on the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, visit [www.cast.org/NFF/NIMAS](http://www.cast.org/NFF/NIMAS).



### Loan Default Rate Drops

The student loan default rate is at an all-time low (5.2 percent), partly due to low interest rates and strong program management, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The fiscal year (FY) 2002 default rate represents the most current data available and includes data on borrowers who attended some 5,955 schools that participate in the Federal Family

Education Loan and William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan programs. The FY 2002 default rate is the percentage of borrowers who began repaying their loans between Oct. 1, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2002, and who defaulted before Sept. 30, 2003.

The Department credits the lower default rate, in part, to strong management by the Federal Student Aid

office, which has been working with student aid partners to better identify borrowers who may need repayment assistance, loan consolidation or other options to avoid defaulting.

Lower interest rates have also helped. This past summer, student loan interest rates dropped to 3.37 percent—the lowest in 35 years.

Borrowers needing assistance on repaying their student loans should contact the holders of the loans to learn about repayment options. For help locating loan holders, visit [www.nsls.ed.gov](http://www.nsls.ed.gov) or call 1-800-4FED-AID (433-3243).

Individual school default rates are available at [www.ifap.ed.gov/DefaultManagement/DefaultManagement.html](http://www.ifap.ed.gov/DefaultManagement/DefaultManagement.html).

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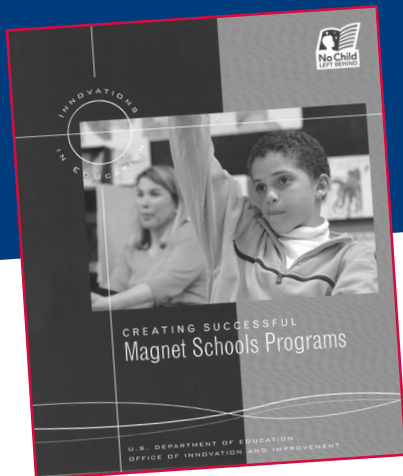
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**FIRST CLASS**



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

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH



## **NEW GUIDE!** **Creating Successful Magnet Schools Programs**

In the 1970s, magnet schools gained prominence in education as a tool for achieving voluntary desegregation in lieu of forced busing. Although they have been around for almost 40 years, magnet schools are taking on new and promising dimensions under *No Child Left Behind*, providing additional options to children whose current schools are in need of improvement and serving as laboratories of successful educational practice.

Creating schools that are distinctive and appealing—that are magnetic—is the focus of a new guide from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement.

*Creating Successful Magnet Schools Programs*, which examines six school districts with successful magnet programs, is organized around five action areas: getting started, promoting the program, making it easy for parents, fully implementing the program, and evaluating and continually improving. It concludes with an appendix summarizing each district's context and programs.

Like many districts serving urban areas, Tennessee's Hamilton County Schools, for instance, profited from the expertise of staff and resources at local museums. The district recently established in and near its downtown business center in Chattanooga two magnet museum schools that work closely with the area's seven museums. In addition, it established in the same area a magnet school that focuses on classical studies and another that bases its instruction on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Other districts profiled in the guide include Duval County Public Schools, Fla.; Hot Springs School District, Ark.; Houston Independent School District, Texas; Montclair Public Schools, N.J.; and Wake County Public School System, N.C.

For a free copy of *Creating Successful Magnet Schools Programs*, while supplies last, contact the Department's publication center at 1-877-4ED-PUBS with identification number EU0113P. Or visit [www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/magnet/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/magnet/index.html).