

The Achiever

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President Signs College Cost Reduction Act

Law Provides Largest Student Aid Increase Since *GI Bill*

Implementing a proposal from his 2008 budget plan, President George W. Bush on Sept. 27 signed into law the largest increase in federal



student aid since the *GI Bill of 1944*. The *College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007* increases funding for the Federal Pell Grant Program by \$11.4 billion over the next five years, raising the maximum annual award to \$5,400 by 2012. Unlike loans, Pell grants do not have to be repaid. More than 5 million low-income students receive this federal financial aid annually.

"Pell grants send an important message to students in need: If you work hard, and you

stay in school, and you make the right choices, the federal government is going to stand with you," said President Bush.

The legislation also makes it easier to repay loans, by—

> **Capping loan payments** so that borrowers would not have to devote more than 15 percent of their discretionary income to repaying Stafford student loans. Starting July 1, 2009, this applies to both subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford loans, regardless of when the loans were taken out. After 25 years, any remaining balances will be cancelled.

> **Forgiving loans** for borrowers working in public-sector jobs—such as

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Galvanizing the Community

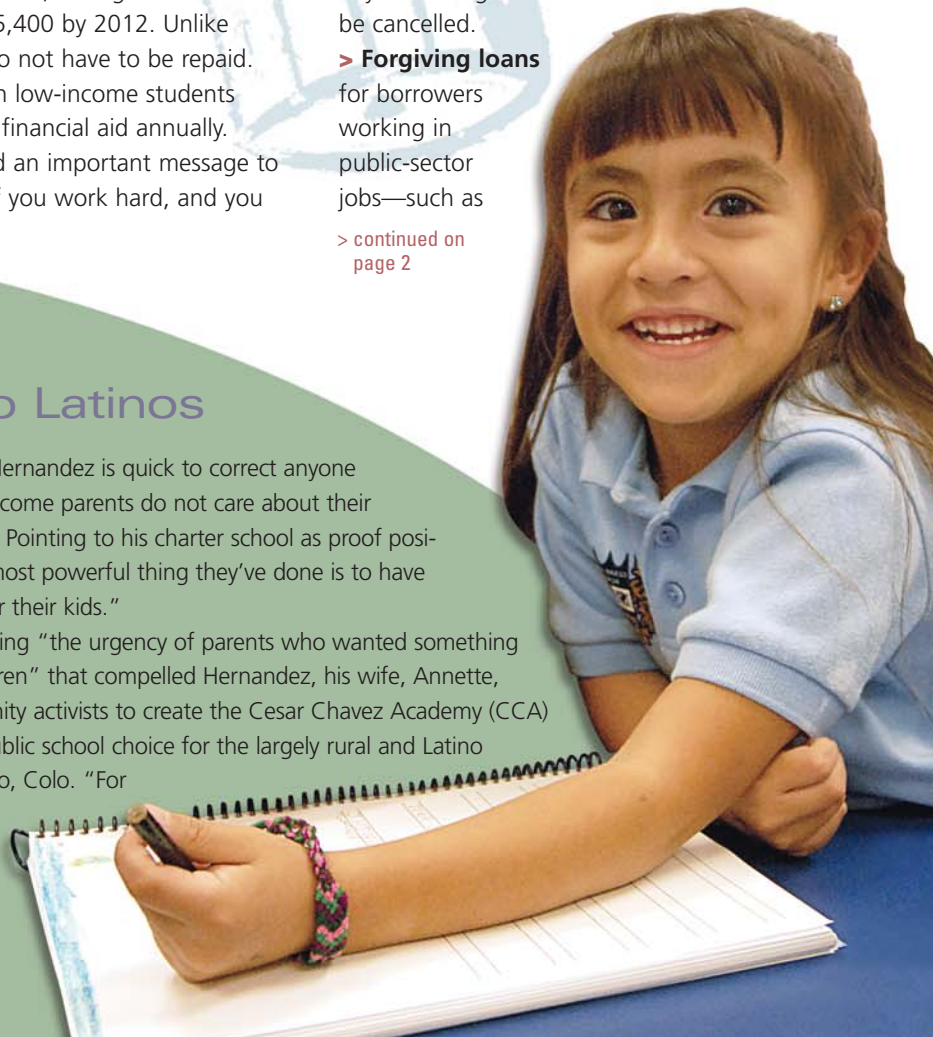
Charter School Provides Greater Choice to Colorado Latinos

"The most powerful thing they've done is to have chosen an option for their kids."

Principal Lawrence Hernandez is quick to correct anyone who tells him low-income parents do not care about their children's education. Pointing to his charter school as proof positive, he says, "The most powerful thing they've done is to have chosen an option for their kids."

In fact, it was seeing "the urgency of parents who wanted something better for their children" that compelled Hernandez, his wife, Annette, and several community activists to create the Cesar Chavez Academy (CCA) six years ago as a public school choice for the largely rural and Latino community of Pueblo, Colo. "For the longest time," he explains, "the parents who had

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those held by members of the military, law enforcement agents, firefighters, nurses, librarians and early childhood teachers—after 10 years of service and loan repay-

ment. Furthermore, students serving in the National Reserve who are called to address a national crisis will be able to defer loan payments for up to 13 months at the end of their service.

In addition, the bill may provide tuition

assistance of up to \$4,000 per year—for a total of \$16,000—to undergraduate and graduate students who commit to teaching certain subjects, such as science and math, in low-income public schools for at least four years.

Secretary's Corner~

Photo by Paul Wood



U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings (pictured above with members of the STAR-BASE program at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio during her back-to-school bus tour) addressed the Business Coalition for Student Achievement on Sept. 5, in Washington, D.C., about how the *No Child Left Behind Act* is working to raise student achievement and accountability in the nation's public schools. She also spoke about the need for Congress to strengthen and reauthorize the law this year. An excerpt of her remarks follows.

"... I've yet to meet a parent who didn't want their child learning on grade level. And thanks to *No Child Left Behind*, for the first time, families have a right to expect that their child will be performing at or above grade level—by 2014.

"That's seven years from now—plenty of time, especially since we set this goal in

January 2002. We're talking about grade-level work. Not nuclear physics—just fundamental, grade-level work. ...

"The latest results show more than 70 percent of schools met annual progress goals last year. In other words, they're doing it!

"Do we still have room for improvement? Absolutely. ... And we can and will do more. My department is already partnering with more than half of the states to make the law more flexible and workable—including finding better ways to measure student progress and help more kids get tutoring. ...

"At the same time, we must not make the law so 'flexible' that it loses its power or its urgency. ...

"Everybody knows that the more complicated the system, the easier it is to manipulate or obfuscate or confuse the bottom line. The law already includes reasonable accommodations for children with disabilities, those learning English, and those who start a new school in the middle of the year. But to move from reasonable accommodations to gigantic loopholes is a step in the wrong direction. ...

"... Instead, I look forward to working with you to fulfill the promise we made five years ago so that not only do we leave no child behind—we make sure every child is moving forward."

Congratulations!

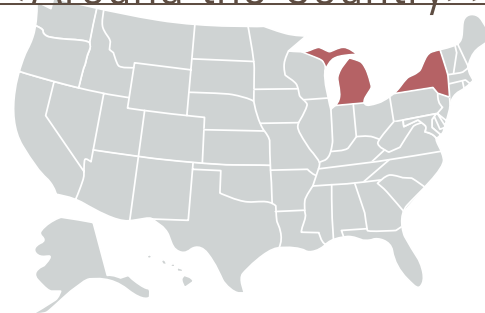
On Nov. 12–13, the winners of the 2007 *No Child Left Behind*–Blue Ribbon Schools Program will be honored at an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., represented by the principal and a teacher from 287 schools in each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The program honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools that are either academically superior or that demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement. Schools are selected based on having either: 1) at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds dramatically improving their performance to high levels on state tests; or 2) students, regardless of background, achieving in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests or on nationally normed tests for private schools. For a list of 2007 winners, visit <http://www.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/2007/2007-schools.html>. ■



The Results Are In

The latest Nation's Report Card reveals the continued progress and record gains made by America's schoolchildren, particularly by younger and minority students. Released in late September by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed fourth- and eighth-graders' scores to be not only improved in reading and math since the last assessment in 2005, but also the highest in the report card's history (with the exception of eighth-grade reading scores, which increased slightly). Moreover, while African-American and Hispanic students posted all-time high scores, the achievement gap between white and African-American fourth-graders in reading narrowed to its lowest point ever since 1992, when a new reading test was first given. Overall, 48 states and the District of Columbia either improved academically or held steady in all categories. More than 700,000 students nationwide participated in the 2007 assessment in reading and math. For detailed results, visit <http://www.nationsreportcard.gov>. ■

<<Around the Country>>



influence always got what was best for their kids, and sort of everybody else—which was the other 90 percent of people in the community—would hope that their children got a good education. But when we came along, what we really did was galvanize the entire community.”

By drawing on charter privileges that allow greater autonomy than traditional public schools in exchange for promised results, CCA offers students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade a longer school day, smaller classes and a more rigorous curriculum requiring any assignment receiving a grade below 80 percent to be redone. According to the results from last year’s state exam, its students in grades 3–8 outperformed others at both the district and state levels in reading, writing and math by an average of 25 percentage points. For the past three years, CCA—which was recently featured in a publication from the U.S. Department of Education spotlighting K–8 charter schools that have closed the achievement gap—has ranked in the top 8 percent of schools statewide based on overall academic performance.

Attracted to the school’s special features, Lynn Rodriguez was one of the first parents to enroll her children at CCA. She transferred all three of her sons, hoping the school’s tutoring programs, in particular, would help shore up her oldest son’s skills.

Her expectations were exceeded.

“[Compared to] what they were learning in their [traditional] public schools,” she said, “at Cesar Chavez Academy ... it seemed to me they were getting their education two years ahead. All my boys have always said, ‘They teach us to think at a higher level.’”

Since the 2001 opening, enrollment at CCA has more than quadrupled, from 240 to 1,100 students, while 3,000 are on the waiting list. (Spaces are awarded by lottery.) A number of parents drive their children from as far as 30 miles away for one of the school’s coveted seats. The principal’s two youngest children attend the school as well as most of the staff’s.

To meet the rising demand, in 2004, Hernandez, along with a committee of parents and business and community leaders, also founded locally a college prep high school, which now has 500 students, and next fall will open another Cesar Chavez Academy in an area in Colorado Springs with similar demographics.

While CCA was intended to serve Pueblo’s low-income population—of which nearly one in three Latinos lives in poverty—now it is more common to see “in the same classroom a child of a doctor or lawyer



sitting next to a child of a migrant farm worker,” said Hernandez. “That’s a powerful statement for the kind of choices parents are making for their kids.”

Based on the founders’ philosophy that “schooling is most effective when it respects and reflects the history and culture of the children and families that it is intended to benefit,” Latino traditions are celebrated throughout the school. Students take

Spanish every day. After-school activities include playing in the “Mariachi Aguila” band, which recently placed second in an international competition. Adorning the walls is various artwork of an aguila, or eagle, the symbol of the Mexican-American civil rights movement led by the school’s namesake, César Chávez.

Raised in Pueblo in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood, Hernandez understands firsthand the challenges faced by many of the families his school serves. He was the first in his family to go to college (afterward earning his master’s and doctorate degrees at Stanford University, and later teaching at Harvard’s School of



MICHIGAN—To comply with federal regulations that require states to evaluate the effectiveness of their teacher preparation programs, the Michigan Department of Education recently published the performance scores for the state’s 31 programs. Almost all of the programs passed, and the two that did not will have two years to improve before facing state sanctions. Criteria for determining the rating—the maximum being 70 points—include the Michigan Test for

Teacher Certification scores, new teacher surveys and program completion rates. Oakland University in Auburn Hills and Hope College in Holland each earned the top score among all the institutions, which was 68. Under Title II of the *Higher Education Act*, every October states must submit to the U.S. Department of Education information on certification and license requirements, pass rates on state assessments and teacher standards.

Education). While it was his mother who taught him to read and his father who secured a small scholarship to help pay tuition, he said he received little to no guidance from the school system. The experience gave him the impetus for developing a supportive school that helps make college possible for under-resourced children.

In preparation for the academic rigors of higher education, CCA students do research



papers as early as the fourth grade and are required to assemble a portfolio of their best work, complete a thesis project in history or science, and give a series of oral presentations as part of their graduation requirements. Keeping them on their toes, they also must deliver impromptu speeches and papers for what is respectively called “Stand and Deliver” and “Writing on Demand.” Hernandez has been known to walk into a room without notice and announce a topic that students must immediately address.

For those who want to take on greater challenges, CCA offers an honors curriculum for fifth- through eighth-graders that allows them to complete their high school freshman coursework, so by the time they graduate they can go directly into the 10th grade.

Nancy Gordon, one of the school’s founding teachers, said the high standards have been a lifesaver for many of the struggling students who arrive. “When the children come in so low, we don’t just want to make a year’s growth—we want to pull them up

even further.”

CCA’s academic program is designed to help ensure that no one fails. To help students exceed the 80-percent benchmark required for every assignment, teachers provide one-on-one tutoring after school as well as on Saturdays. Assessments are constantly administered to gauge student performance, providing data for teachers to customize instruction, develop individual student achievement plans, and, if necessary, enlist the assistance of the school’s prevention specialist who will make home visits to build parent support.

Furthermore, because the typical school day is from 7:20 a.m. to 6 p.m.—eight hours of classroom instruction followed by after-school enrichment activities in which all students must participate—more time is devoted to learning.

With a longer school day, coupled with a small-class ratio of one teacher to 13 students, the staff is able to cover more material and give more individualized attention. Last year, to help maintain student-teacher connections, CCA was organized into three separate academies: pre-kindergarten through second grades; third through fifth grades; and middle school (sixth through eighth grades).

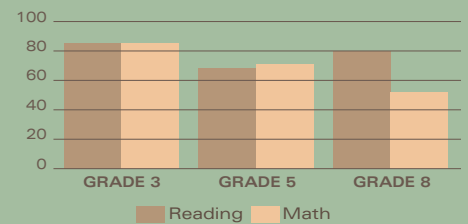
The reorganization has provided a greater network of support, especially for new educators, says Candice Leland, who joined CCA last year. As part of teacher collaborative efforts, Leland meets with her fifth-grade writing team, her academy colleagues, and her teacher mentor. She also likes the idea that students see only two teachers a day through grade 3 and from thereon a teacher for every subject. “I really think that benefits the students because it allows the teacher to get really strong in one subject, and then the students get the best of everything.”

—By Nicole Ashby

Cesar Chavez Academy



- > **Grade Span:** Pre-K–8
- > **Locale:** Rural
- > **Total Students:** 1,100
- > **Race/Ethnicity Enrollment:** 75% Hispanic, 23% white, 1% African American, 1% Native American
- > **Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible:** 62%
- > **English Language Learners:** 46%
- > **Special Education Students:** 13%
- > **Percentage Proficient*:**



*According to 2007 results on state exam.

- > **Interesting Fact:** Since the 2001 opening, enrollment at Cesar Chavez Academy has more than quadrupled, from 240 to 1,100 students, while 3,000 are on the waiting list.

Photos, clockwise from top: Principal Lawrence Hernandez with his wife, Annette, and their two daughters, who both attend CCA; students practicing for the school’s “Mariachi Aguila” band; and teacher Candice Leland with her fifth-grade writing class. On the cover, kindergartner Marianna. Photos by Debora Falco.

NEW YORK—The New York City Department of Education won this year’s Broad Prize for Urban Education. Funded by the Broad Foundation, the annual award honors large urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among disadvantaged and minority students. Among its merits, New York City—which received \$500,000 for college scholarships

for graduating high school seniors—narrowed the high school achievement gap between the state average for white students and New York City Hispanic and African-American students by 14 and 13 percentage points, respectively. The other four finalists—Bridgeport Public Schools (Conn.), Long Beach Unified School District (Calif.), Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and the Northside Independent School District (Texas)—each received \$125,000 for college scholarships.

Nov. 11-17

Geography Awareness Week, sponsored by the National Geographic Society as part of a multi-year campaign to highlight the diversity of peoples, places and natural wonders around the globe, with this year's focus on Asia. For events and K-12 resources, visit <http://www.mywonderfulworld.org>.

Nov. 12-16

International Education Week, founded in 2000 by the departments of Education and State to provide an opportunity for foreign students living in the United States to share their cultures with American classmates. For ideas and materials, as well as an online quiz about cities of the world, visit <http://iew.state.gov>.

Nov. 27-28

White House Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Conference, Los Angeles, sponsored by a consortium of federal agencies for grassroots leaders interested in federal grant opportunities. To register online, visit <http://www.fbc.gov> or call 202-456-6708.

Nov. 28-Dec. 6

Supplemental Educational Services Regional Workshops, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education to provide free technical assistance for organizations interested in becoming approved providers of supplemental educational services for disadvantaged students: Nov. 28, Portland, Ore.; Nov. 29, Tacoma, Wash.; Dec. 4, Nashville, Tenn.; and Dec. 6, Jackson, Miss. Visit <http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/list/fbc/suppserv-workshops.html> or call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

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What are Parent Information Resource Centers?

The Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) program is a nationwide effort designed to build successful family involvement in education as parents move beyond traditional activities, like helping children with homework, toward a shared responsibility for school improvement. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement, the program generally focuses on projects serving parents of low-income, minority and limited English proficient children in elementary and secondary schools. There are 62 PIRCs, with one in every state, the District of Columbia and most U.S. territories. To locate a center in your area, visit the National PIRC Coordination Center's Web site at <http://www.nationalpirc.org> for the directory.

Specific activities sponsored by PIRCs and their partnering organizations often include

helping parents to understand the data tied to school accountability systems and the significance of what that data means for opportunities afforded to their children under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, such as supplemental educational services and public school choice. Additionally, PIRC projects provide resource materials and coordinate conferences covering high-quality family involvement programs.

For example, the PIRC serving Texas uses a student group called the Youth Education Tekies to provide computer training for parents and other adults in the community so they can learn how to access online information about their children's schooling, particularly the state's education Web site, where school, district and state accountability data are posted. These and other efforts fostered by PIRCs are profiled in the latest publication in the Department's *Innovations in Education* series, entitled *Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons From Five Parental Information and Resource Centers*. The 65-page guide also includes tips for connecting with hard-to-reach parents, building community partnerships and setting up a parent center. For a copy, visit <http://www.edpubs.org> or call 1-877-4ED-PUBS, with identification number ED003668P, while supplies last.

News Show Looks at Higher Education

The November edition of *Education News Parents Can Use* will focus on how the U.S. Department of Education, higher education institutions and other key stakeholders are working together to better prepare students for college and the jobs of the 21st-century marketplace.

Today, over 90 percent of the fastest-growing jobs require postsecondary education or training, yet a staggering 60 percent of Americans have no postsecondary credentials at all. This crisis is even more evident among low-income and minority students, whose low participation in higher education is due partly to lack of access to information about opportunities, limited funds and language barriers. Guests on the November show will discuss the importance of taking Advanced

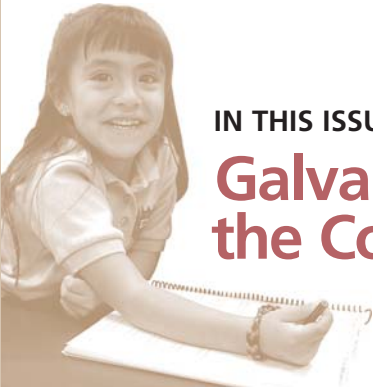
Placement (AP) classes and other rigorous courses in preparation for college; provide tips and services for helping all students succeed once enrolled in a postsecondary institution; and explore the latest financial planning tools and federal

aid programs designed to help students pay for college or other kinds of postsecondary education.

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 1-800-USA-LEARN.





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Doing What Works Web Site

The U.S. Department of Education recently unveiled a new Web site to support educators across the nation working towards *No Child Left Behind's* goal of having every student proficient in reading and math by 2014.

"Doing What Works"—available at <http://dww.ed.gov>—provides an online library of resources for teaching practices that have proven to be effective. It draws primarily from the evaluations of research findings compiled for the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), which was established in 2002 by the Department's Institute of Education Sciences.

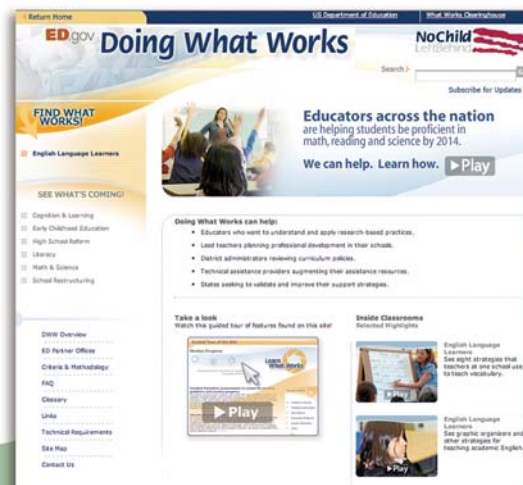
For practical applications based on the findings of WWC, the Web site includes:

- > Videos of leading researchers discussing the research base behind high-quality instructional practices;
- > Slideshows illustrating strategies that have been successful in teach-

ing English language learners (ELLs) at schools around the country; and

- > Downloadable tools to help teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses for improving ELL instruction.

The site is also ideal for building professional development activities for groups of teachers. Other topics will cover: cognition and learning; early childhood education; high school reform; literacy; math and science; and school restructuring.



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