

**From: U.S. Department of Education**

**Sent:** Monday, September 24, 2007 5:02 PM

**To:** U.S. Department of Education

**Subject:** SECRETARY SPELLINGS DELIVERS REMARKS AT WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES CONFERENCE

U.S. Department of Education

Office of Communications and Outreach, Press Office

400 Maryland Ave., S.W.

Washington, D.C. 20202

FOR RELEASE

September 24, 2007

Contact: Trey Ditto or Samara Yudof

(202) 401-1576

**SECRETARY SPELLINGS DELIVERS REMARKS AT WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES CONFERENCE**

*Conference on Youth and Education in The Hispanic Community*

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings today delivered remarks to the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives *Conference on Youth and Education in the Hispanic Community*. The following are her prepared remarks. Please note the speaker may deviate from the text.

It's a pleasure to be here, especially during Hispanic American Heritage Month. Americans of Hispanic backgrounds have made profound contributions to every aspect of our national life, and especially to education. This audience is a great example.

From Ms. Arce to folks like Irasema Salcido, founder of Cesar Chavez Public Charter School here in DC, and Carlos Villagrana, Principal of Amigos Por Vida Charter School in Houston. You're all working hard everyday to equip children with the skills and knowledge to succeed.

Education is the fundamental issue in determining whether rising generations of Hispanics - and all students - will live in the full embrace of the American dream.

This is an issue of the greatest concern for me, not only as Secretary of Education and a parent, but also as a Texan from a place where there are so many strong Hispanic communities. In my hometown of Austin, 55% of students in the district are Hispanic. As you all know, this demographic reality is becoming more and more common in other parts of the nation as well.

For too long, the academic performance of Hispanic and other students was hidden among averages. They could too easily be shuffled along without acquiring basic skills and knowledge. With No Child Left Behind, we made an historic commitment that schools must be responsible for getting every child - regardless of ethnicity, zip code, or family income - on grade level.

This is a moral commitment to prepare every student for a productive, fulfilling life. And it's an economic imperative to prepare our citizens for success in the globally competitive workforce.

NCLB set a goal, clear and simple: have all children reading and doing math on grade level by 2014. Not doing nuclear physics or advanced calculus, but performing on grade level. To take an example from Indiana's standards, that means a third grader should be able to understand the basic features of words and apply this knowledge to fluent reading.

In other words, they should be able to read Curious George or Paddington Bear. I don't think this is too much to expect, and I find that most parents agree. In fact, if someone told me I had to wait until 2014 for my daughter to read on grade level - which is what NCLB asks parents to do - I'd ask why not now?

"Why not now" is a great question parents are beginning to ask, now that they have access to the data that NCLB requires. Here are some other questions we're asking:

- Why do less than half of Hispanic and African American fourth graders have basic reading skills, as defined by the Nation's Report Card? That's 700,000 students who can barely read!
- And why do only half of minority students graduate from high school on time?

As my friend Bill Gates has said, if the speedometer says you're going too slow, you don't need a new speedometer. You need to speed up. That's just what NCLB is telling us.

So, instead of making excuses about why the speedometer is flawed, we should be talking about improving the law and getting all students on grade level. And we should be firm in

our refusal to accept any watering down of grade-level standards in reading and math. After all, these are the gateway subjects for all other learning.

We know this law isn't perfect - it was the best law we could pass in 2001. Back then, few states had annual assessments, only a handful had disaggregated data, and very few had high-quality tests for students learning English.

Since, nearly a half million more students have learned to do basic math. More than 500,000 students have received free tutoring. These supplemental services are critical to improving student achievement and the faith-based community has played an important role - over 12% of provider organizations were from the faith-based community last year.

The fact is, over 70 percent of schools made annual progress goals last year - that's more than 60,000 schools achieving results. But can we do better? Can we do a better job of challenging students with advanced math and science? Can we do a better job of getting and schools extra help to improve? And can we make the accountability system more precise and more sophisticated? Absolutely.

We can and must do more. The President's plan to improve NCLB includes strategies to make these improvements, and many more. We appreciate that Congress has chosen to work on many of the same issues.

But we also must guard against attempts to make the law so flexible that we dilute its power and urgency. The easiest way to ignore reality - to push some students to the margins - is to cover up what's really going on. And the more complicated the system, the easier it is to manipulate the bottom line. And by dialing back accountability, we reduce our ability to make necessary improvements to assessments - improvements that are critical to helping students.

So we must stand together against policies that say some kids can't learn, or some kids count more than others, or it's ok for some to fall behind! My position is this: If a proposal helps more kids perform on grade level, I'm for it. If a proposal reduces or negates our responsibility to any child, I'm against it.

For example, when I see proposals that would mean 250,000 fewer students receiving tutoring, is that because those students suddenly don't need help? I don't think so, and I bet you agree.

Luis Santana, Executive Director of Fresno Covenant Foundation, can tell you a story about a young student named Lizzie, who worked with a tutor on reading. She improved from a second-grade level to a fifth-grade reading level in six months. Lizzie's mom wrote a note of thanks describing the amazing progress her daughter had made, not only in ability but in attitude and enthusiasm for reading. The letter concluded, "Thanks again for being the inspiration in our lives."

That inspiration is part of what tutoring can provide for students. We can't afford to take it away from those who need it most. As it stands, only 14% of eligible students are taking advantage of free tutoring services - that means there are more than 3 million eligible students who could be benefiting from this help. Cutting back these services is the wrong thing to do.

I've also seen some proposals that would enable them to go from third to ninth grade without ever being tested in English.

Last month, I traveled to Chile and Brazil with a delegation of U.S. college and university presidents, including Dr. Eduardo Padrón, of Miami-Dade Community College.

He came to the U.S. at age fifteen speaking little English. But he dedicated himself to learning, went on to earn a PhD in economics, and now runs a college that boasts the largest overall enrollment in the country and the largest enrollment of Hispanic students. Dr. Padron didn't succeed in the classroom because he was treated as a child who wasn't capable of learning... And neither should Hispanic children be treated like that today. They are smart, motivated students, and the data supports this.

Among students learning English, a majority of whom are Hispanic, 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores jumped an unprecedented 20 points between 2000 and 2005. 43,000 more kids with basic reading skills, thanks to the hard work of teachers who challenged them.

Of course, we're working hard to make assessments of language and math as accessible as possible for students learning English. That's what our Limited English Proficient - or LEP - Partnership is all about. We've partnered with 20 states on this initiative, and we'll meet again in October.

As we move ahead, we need to maintain the law's core principles. One of these is that families, not bureaucrats in Washington, make the best decisions for their children. Thanks to NCLB, the parents of 50 million students have more information, more control, better teachers, and more choices.

Choice is something parents can appreciate. A recent poll by Hispanic CREO showed that education is among the top three voting issues for 82% of Latino voters, with the highest percentage of respondents rating school choice as their top educational priority.

President Bush has been an historic advocate for choice in education. He's supported a robust expansion of school choice options for students and parents, including charter schools. Since he came to office in 2001...

- The first-ever federally funded opportunity scholarship program began in DC. Thanks to this program, 1,800 DC students from economically disadvantaged families are realizing their potential at 58 private schools.

- We've also seen an expansion of State school choice programs. As of August, there were 24 programs in 13 States providing financial assistance in the form of vouchers, tax credits, and tax deductions. There were just seven such programs a decade ago.
- We have invested over \$1.6 billion in the Charter Schools Program to facilitate start-ups, spread clear information about successful schools, and improve facilities.
- It's no coincidence that there were 2,000 charters in America when the President took office, and today there are over 4,000 in 40 states, plus the District of Columbia.

Charters are also tackling the achievement gap, and realizing great results for kids. For example, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools reported last fall on how customized learning through charter schools is translating into improved academic growth among Hispanic students.

Charters and choice are effective tools in our arsenal to expand access to a quality education for every child. Faith-based and community organizations can continue to play a leading role.

Just last week, I helped dedicate my Department's headquarters in honor of Lyndon Baines Johnson. At the ceremony, there was much reflection on President Johnson's first job after college - teaching at a school in Cotulla, Texas for poor Mexican children. He said of that experience, "I shall never forget the faces of the boys and girls in that...school... I remember even yet the pain of realizing and knowing then that college was closed to the poor."

We've come a long way in the four decades since LBJ began to transform public education in this country. But our work is not done, and it begins with reauthorizing No Child Left Behind. I appreciate your support, and your hard work for the cause of education.

Together, we can build on the progress we've made, and create a brighter future for all children.