

The Education Innovator
October 12, 2006 - U.S. Fed News

The U.S. Department of Education issued the following newsletter:

BURRVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: THREE YEARS LATER THE BLUE RIBBON CONTINUES TO WAVE

The federal Blue Ribbon Schools Program was initially created in 1982 to honor secondary schools across the country that were performing at high levels. Today, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) - Blue Ribbon Schools Program reflects the high standards and accountability of its namesake education law. The program also has expanded to honor both public and private schools that serve students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Schools that are recognized are those that have at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds who dramatically improve performance to high levels on state tests; and schools in which students, regardless of background, achieve in the top 10 percent of their state on state or nationally-normed tests.

During the 2002-2003 academic year, Burrville Elementary School in Northeast Washington, DC received recognition from this program for dramatically improving student performance on standardized assessments of reading and mathematics. Three years later, Burrville continues to hold all students to high expectations for academic achievement through a focus on literacy, parental involvement, and mentoring and support for students.

The history of Burrville Elementary School dates back to the turn of the 20th century and can be traced to The Freedman's Bureau, which was established after the Civil War ended in 1865, and supervised all relief and educational activities relating to refugees and freed male slaves in the United States. After the war, a group of parents in Washington, DC began looking for a high-quality education for their children. This group of parents called upon The Freedman's Bureau to help them create their own school. In 1906, Burrville opened in the basement of Contee AME Zion Church. At that time, the school only had two rooms. In 1980, the school moved to its current open-space facility, on the same street where it began nearly 80 years previous.

Since its inception, it has been Burrville's mission to provide students with a positive environment and enriching educational experiences and foster in them a lifelong love of learning. The school serves 332 students in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade, 100 percent of whom are African-American. Over 70 percent of the student population qualifies for the federal free or reduced-price meal program.

PUTTING LITERACY AT THE CENTER OF THE CURRICULUM

Burrville implements a standards-based, interdisciplinary curriculum with a strong emphasis on improving students' literacy skills. For example, in every classroom there are "Word Walls" where important vocabulary terms that students encounter in various

core academic subjects are posted. Book fairs are held throughout the school year and parents are invited to participate in after-school "Community Read-Ins" that promote family literacy.

During the school day, Burrville implements a block system aimed at improving students' reading, writing, and listening skills. Each day, students participate in a 120-minute literacy block in which they receive four different types of instruction that reinforce phonics and phonemic awareness. These types of instruction include: Working with Words, Guided Reading, Writing, and Self-Selected Reading. In the Working with Words block, students are introduced to words that appear frequently in writing. Students then practice reading and spelling these "high frequency" words. During the Guided Reading block, students work on reading comprehension and vocabulary development with their teachers. Teachers implement creative instructional strategies in the Writing block, having students keep journals and write short fictional stories or book reports. During Self-Selected Reading, the final block, students engage in independent reading with books of their choosing, or the teacher may read aloud to the students.

Literacy also finds a way into the mathematics and science curricula at the school. Instruction in mathematics integrates mathematical concepts with language arts skills through a focus on reasoning and problem solving. Students also are required to master essential mathematical vocabulary terms. This approach to instruction helps students solve increasingly complex problems and learn mathematics in a way where they understand its connection to other disciplines.

The science curriculum at Burrville is based on the Full Option Science System (FOSS), developed by the Lawrence Hall of Science at the University of California , Berkeley. FOSS is a science curriculum for students in kindergarten through eighth grade, and an ongoing research project dedicated to improving the learning and teaching of science. The FOSS kindergarten through sixth grade program at Burrville emphasizes scientific literacy by introducing students to a broad range of topics such as life science, physical science, earth science, and scientific reasoning and technology. The program consists of 26 modules for classroom instruction including Balance and Motion, Animals Two By Two, The Human Body, and Variables.

As a supplement to the mathematics and science curricula, Burrville has offered students the opportunity to participate in the SUNBEAMS program (Students United with NASA Becoming Enthusiastic About Math and Science). As part of this program, students travel to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Goddard Space Flight Center and engage in hands-on activities in which the mathematics and science concepts they learn in the classroom come to life.

GETTING A HELPING HAND FROM THE COMMUNITY AND FAMILIES

In addition to the curricular focus on literacy, Burrville is involved with a number of other initiatives that stress the importance of reading and writing. One of these is the Washington, DC-based In2Books program, which is designed to motivate students in

second through fifth grade to read, think, and write by matching them with adult pen pals. These pen pals are coached to discuss books with students through personalized letters. Through the Readers are Leaders program, 56 participating students read over 1,300 books last year. Burrville also participates in Everybody Wins! USA, a national literacy and mentoring nonprofit program, in which adults in the local community are matched with students. These adult mentors volunteer their time to read with Burrville students during the school day. An in-school mentoring program also was established by Burrville teachers for male students in second through sixth grade who were identified as needing additional support in reading. The program is aimed at improving students' reading comprehension and test taking skills and is managed by Burrville teachers. Students are empowered to become reading mentors for each other as well. For example, students are paired across grade levels to foster collaborative learning. Intermediate-level readers often share books with primary-level readers and serve as "study buddies" in other core subjects.

At Burrville, faculty members believe that communication with families is just as important as a solid curriculum. Teachers regularly communicate information about student performance to parents through report cards, progress reports, newsletters, conferences, and community meetings. At parent-teacher conferences, parents sit down with teachers to review standardized test scores as well as portfolios that contain examples of student work.

USING DATA TO RAISE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The challenging, literacy-infused curriculum and parent communication at Burrville are two elements of the school's success in raising achievement. Another element is the support that the school provides for its students. For example, in 2002-2003, the academic year that the school was selected as an NCLB - Blue Ribbon award winner, teachers used disaggregated data from the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT-9) to determine which students needed extra academic help. Teachers discovered that many male students could benefit, and consequently established a program to support these students and improve their reading and mathematics scores. Students began to receive assistance from resource teachers, volunteers, and tutors both during the school day and in an After School Academy. Teachers used skill sheets, based on assessment data, to create a learning profile for each student receiving services. These profiles were shared with parents, and were used to determine if further interventions were necessary. Burrville also began looping, or keeping students with the same teacher for two consecutive years. This program was instituted for students in second, third, and sixth grade to give them added consistency in instruction.

PROGRESS BRINGS NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Before Burrville implemented these reforms, 63.9 percent of all fifth grade students reached proficiency targets in the reading portion of the SAT-9 and 64.9 percent reached those targets in mathematics. By 2003, 79 percent of students reached reading targets and 80 percent reached mathematics targets. This upward trend continues now, when in 2005,

96 percent of students scored in the proficient range in reading and 92 percent scored in that range in mathematics.

This year, when U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced the first 250 new No Child Left Behind - Blue Ribbon Schools, she noted, "These schools show what wonderful accomplishments can be made when we focus on the bottom line in education - student achievement." Burrville Elementary School demonstrates that when teachers, parents, and students work together, this bottom line can rise to the top.

Resources:

No Child Left Behind - Blue Ribbon Schools Program

Top: www.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/index.html

WHAT'S NEW

From the U.S. Department of Education

To help keep the country competitive and provide students and families with more information and more affordable access to higher education, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings issued her plans to improve the U.S. higher education system, based on the recommendations in the final report PDF, (28KB) of her Commission on the Future of Higher Education. (Sept. 26)

Secretary Spellings announced a partnership with the National Urban League to increase student enrollment in free tutoring and after-school programs. In Columbus (OH) during a joint town hall meeting, Secretary Spellings encouraged more eligible families to take advantage of supplemental educational services (SES). Two other town hall meetings were held in Gary (IN) and Broward County (FL). The National Urban League partnership will help to ensure that options are better communicated to parents of children who qualify for extra help. (Sept. 22)

The first 250 schools to be selected as 2006 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Blue Ribbon Schools were announced by Secretary Spellings. Each year, schools are selected based on one of two criteria: 1.) schools with at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student performance to high levels on state tests; and 2.) schools in which students, regardless of background, achieve in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests, or in the case of private schools, in the top 10 percent of the nation on nationally-normed tests. (See Feature) (Sept. 22)

Secretary Spellings joined First Lady Laura Bush at the first-ever White House Conference on Global Literacy in New York City (NY). Secretary Spellings hosted a panel on Mother-Child Literacy and Intergenerational Learning and delivered remarks. (Sept. 18)

Secretary Spellings issued a statement recognizing the celebration of Constitution Day and Citizenship Day (September 17) and Constitution Week (September 17 - September 23). She noted that the Teaching American History program from the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education is proud to help bring the Constitution to life for millions of students across the country. (Sept. 17)

Secretary Spellings visited Pennsylvania to tour a local school, address the 60th annual National Conference of Editorial Writers convention, and read to children participating in the Reach Out and Read program at the Lawrenceville Family Health Center at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Joined by Representative Tim Murphy, Secretary Spellings toured Wilson Elementary School and visited mathematics and language arts classrooms. (Sept. 14)

Final regulations for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students were announced by Secretary Spellings. The new Title I Regulation is intended to help LEP students who have recently arrived in the United States to learn English and other subjects. The regulations also give states and local school districts greater flexibility on assessments while continuing to hold them accountable under NCLB. The U.S. Department of Education also is preparing a series of reports by leading education researcher, David Francis, focused on supporting the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs). (Sept. 13)

At the 2006 National Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Week Conference in Washington, DC, Secretary Spellings delivered remarks. The President's Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities host the annual HBCU Week Conference. (Sept. 12)

Secretary Spellings rang in the new academic year at the New York Stock Exchange when she sounded The Opening Bell™. While at the Exchange, Secretary Spellings spoke with business leaders about the President's investments to improve education and prepare students for the needs of the global marketplace. (Sept. 8)

An Issue Brief from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) describes school-to-home communication practices and opportunities for parental involvement at school. Data was gathered as reported by parents of U.S. school-age students from primarily English- and primarily Spanish-speaking households during the 2002-2003 academic year. (Sept. 27)

A new NCES annual report provides basic information from the Common Core of Data (CCD) about the nation's largest public school districts during the 2003-2004 academic year. The data include characteristics such as the numbers of students and teachers, number of high school completers, as well as the averaged freshman graduation rate and revenues and expenditures. (Sept. 26)

Projections of Education Statistics to 2015 is the 34 th in a series of publications that were initiated in 1964. The current NCES publication provides projections for enrollment, graduates, teachers, and expenditures in elementary and secondary schools, as well as enrollment and degrees for colleges and universities. (Sept. 14)

A report from NCES uses data from the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) to report teachers' transitions between public and private schools. Teachers both with and without certifications in the subjects they teach were included in the report. (Sept. 8)

FROM THE OFFICE OF INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Sixty new grants have been awarded under the Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC) grant program. PIRC grants help implement successful and effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities that lead to improvements in student academic achievement and that strengthen partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and other school personnel in meeting the education needs of children. (Oct. 1)

ARTS EDUCATION

Could you be more creative? That is the question the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers is asking teenagers as it launches the 84th year of The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. The program was officially launched in September at the U.S. Department of Education showcasing nationally recognized work from The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards of 2006, and P.S. Art 2006, which featured the most accomplished works by young artists from the New York City Public Schools. (Oct. 12)

CHARTER SCHOOLS

A new report PDF, (1.36MB)[\[www.fightforchildren.org/docs/State_of_DC_Charters_Oct0106_Final.pdf\]](http://www.fightforchildren.org/docs/State_of_DC_Charters_Oct0106_Final.pdf), from Fight for Children, a Washington, DC-based organization, finds the nation's capital currently has the third highest public charter school student "market share" in the nation, with one out of four public school students enrolled in a charter school. The report also cites successes and challenges of charter schools in Washington, DC. (Oct. 3)

CHOICE

A new study by the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington reveals how two different school districts, Milwaukee (WI) and Dayton (OH), are confronting the challenges posed by competition in public education. No Longer the Only Game in Town: Helping Traditional Public Schools Compete explores how the districts are affected by and respond to public school choice. (Sept. 2006)

EDUCATION REFORM

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has released a new 502-page report entitled, Education at a Glance 2006. The report allows the 30 OECD member countries, including the United States, to examine how their education performance compares to that of other OECD countries. (Sept. 12)

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform has assembled a group of four school reform models to develop PDF, (86KB)[<http://www.mgforum.org/News/WhatsNew/Grant%20Announcement%20FINAL.pdf>], a "Mathematics Improvement Toolkit." The Toolkit will include curriculum, professional development materials, and guidelines designed to improve the teaching and learning of mathematics at the middle school level. (Sept. 11)

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement has released a report PDF, (3.23MB)[www.centerforsri.org/files/RestructuringGuide.pdf#search=%22School%20Restructuring%20Under], for administrators tasked with restructuring schools that have failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under NCLB for five consecutive years. (Sept. 2006)

LEADERSHIP

Leaders in teacher development, high school reform, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), recently were honored with the 2006 Harold W. McGraw, Jr. Prize in Education. Wendy Kopp, founder of Teach For America, Vincent D. Murray, Principal of Henry W. Grady High School (GA), and Norman R. Augustine, retired Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Lockheed Martin, were awarded the McGraw Prize in honor of their commitment to the improvement of education. (Sept. 26)

Leading for Learning, PDF, (814KB) [www.edweek.org/media/03wallace.pdf], the third annual Education Week report examining leadership in education, has been released. The Wallace Foundation funded the report, which includes a mix of articles and research findings analyzed by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. (Sept. 13)

RAISING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

GSN, the interactive television game network, and The Princeton Review are partnering to produce the first-ever National Vocabulary Championship (NVC). High school students across the country are invited to enter the first round of the competition, which is aimed at emphasizing the importance of language arts skills, by taking either a national qualifying exam online or in their schools. Top scorers will compete in the National Vocabulary Championship finale in February 2007. Eligibility requirements and more information are available online. (Oct. 12)

More than 7,500 communities and one million Americans will celebrate the seventh annual "Lights On Afterschool," a nationwide event organized by the Afterschool Alliance to rally support for after-school programs. The event brings attention to after-

school programs that keep children safe, help working families, and inspire learning. (Oct. 12)

The latest volume of *The Future of Children*, a semi-annual journal from the Brookings Institution and Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, focuses on the extent to which children's chances of success depend on the circumstances into which they are born. [The journal may be purchased online](#). (Fall 2006)

TEACHER QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) will highlight and celebrate the accomplishments of young educators who achieve excellence and equity in teaching and learning. The ASCD Outstanding Young Educator Award will recognize education professionals, 40 years of age or younger who demonstrate exemplary commitment and exceptional contribution to the profession. Nominations may be made online. Fall nominations close on October 15, 2006 and spring nominations close April 15, 2007. (Sept. 2006)

TECHNOLOGY

A new tool on the Alliance for Excellent Education's website allows users to compare the performance of high schools in their area with other high schools from around their state. Based on "promoting power," an indicator developed by Johns Hopkins University (MD), the database provides data for high schools for 2003 and 2004, which are searchable by state, congressional district, or zip code. (Sept. 2006)

UPDATES

The National Association of Street Schools (NASS) (see Innovator, March 2006) announced a new two-year, \$1.1 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Using the new funding, NASS, in partnership with the Alternative High School Initiative (AHSI), will increase the number of schools utilizing the Street School Model, strengthen instruction and curriculum at its 42 member schools, and provide additional professional development and instructional coaching to support teachers and administrators. (Sept. 29)

Quantum Simulations, Inc., a developer of artificial intelligence tutoring and assessment software (see Innovator, August 29, 2005: www.ed.gov/news/newsletters/innovator/2006/0914.html#1) was awarded the national Tibbetts Award, the highest recognition given by the federal government to small businesses for research. The award recognizes exceptional small businesses' achievement in the areas of leading-edge research, technological innovation, and economic impact. (Sept. 26)

Innovations in the News

CHARTER SCHOOLS/EDUCATION REFORM

Five Boston-area universities pledged that they will allocate \$10 million in funds and services to 10 of the city's underperforming public schools to improve test scores and increase the number of students going to college. The plan is called "Step Up" and will provide teacher training, lend teaching assistance, and may advise schools on their curriculum design. The plan also includes provisions to help with student issues, including dental and general-health screenings. The five universities include Boston College, Boston University, Harvard University, Northeastern University, and Tufts University. The public schools that will receive services are yet to be selected. [More-The Boston Globe:

www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2006/09/29/colleges_pledge_10m_bost_to_10_boston_schools/. (Sept. 29)

A new report by the congressionally chartered National Research Council posits that students in elementary and middle school should be encouraged to master a relatively small number of crucial science concepts and gradually expand their knowledge of those topics in order to develop a strong understanding of science. According to the report, students too often are presented with long lists of disconnected facts and ideas in their science classes. The 348-page report does not list the core science topics that students should master, but it does offer a few examples of possible "building blocks," such as the theory of evolution and the study of atoms and molecules. [More-Education Week: [paid subscription required](#)] (Sept. 27)

Arkansas education officials kicked off a new media campaign to emphasize the importance of students participating in rigorous coursework. State Education Commissioner Ken James stated that high school students need rigorous courses like those offered through the state's "Smart Core" curriculum to succeed after graduation. Under Smart Core, students take four courses each in mathematics and English, in addition to three courses each in natural science and social studies. The state will take steps to educate the public about the courses, including an insert in NEXT magazine for high school students, television advertising, and radio advertisements. [More-Arkansas News Bureau: www.arkansasnews.com/archive/2006/09/21/News/337794.html]. (Sept. 21)

The Boston Public Schools has reason to celebrate with its recent honor from The Broad Foundation. The "Broad Prize," a \$500,000 award to the urban school district making the greatest gains in student achievement, was awarded to Boston this year. The school district had been a runner-up during each of the last four years since the prize was created in 2002. Other finalists for this year's award included New York City (NY), Jersey City (NJ), Miami-Dade County (FL), and Bridgeport (CT). [More-The New York Times: [subscription required](#)]. (Sept. 20)

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation recently awarded \$1.8 million to Green Dot Public Schools, a Los Angeles (CA) charter school organization. The Green Dot philosophy (see Innovator, June 28, 2004) emphasizes small, safe schools of no more than 500 students each, a college preparatory curriculum, and parent and community involvement. This philosophy has proven relatively successful with Green Dot schools scoring higher than

some comparable Los Angeles Unified School District schools on the 2006 Academic Performance Index (API). The Gates grant will support five Green Dot charter schools that opened this year. [More-The Los Angeles Times] (Sept. 20)

Since the University of California-San Diego opened the college-preparatory Preuss charter school on its campus in 1999, many California universities have forged collaborative relationships with charter schools to help guide curriculum, offer students opportunities to earn early college credit, inform research, and help ensure the next generation of college students is prepared to succeed. Last year, universities were involved with 12 charter schools across the state, according to the California Charter Schools Association. As many as 10 more charter schools are expected to open this fall in partnership with colleges. [More-Inside Bay Area: www.insidebayarea.com/portal/search/ci_4352469?loopback=1]. (Sept. 17)

The College Board, the New York City-based nonprofit best known for the SAT college-admission test, will partner with Chicago (IL), Washington, DC, and Duval County (FL) to launch a new model for improving high schools through a \$16 million commitment from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The EXCEerator model is designed to improve achievement at existing schools, in part through the use of a curriculum based on the College Board's SpringBoard and Advanced Placement (AP) curricula. The model also includes greater personalized attention for students; ongoing professional development for teachers, counselors, principals, and superintendents; extensive use of data; and stronger school-based college and career planning. [More-Education Week: [paid subscription required.](#)] (Sept. 9)

LEADERSHIP/TEACHER QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

For the first time this year, nearly 100 Chicago (IL) principals will receive intensive training in teacher recruiting and interviewing techniques from a program run by The New Teacher Project (TNTP). TNTP, a New York-based organization that works in high-need districts to improve teaching pools, will manage half-day training sessions for principals that will start in late fall and run through early spring. Principals will learn how to ask detailed questions that expose the values and experiences that may make a teacher candidate successful in an urban school. Principals also will practice the techniques they learn from veteran principals who have solid track records of finding and keeping high-quality teachers. [More-Chicago Tribune: [subscription required](#)]. (Sept. 25)

While opportunities for online learning are rapidly expanding, two reports from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) present a set of standards for online teaching and offer guidelines on the costs of establishing state virtual schools. The online-teaching report PDF, (244KB)

www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/PDF/06T02_Standards_Online_Teaching.pdf,

outlines 11 standards that teachers should meet, in areas ranging from academic preparation to leadership and management. The second report provides a "fiscal blueprint" PDF, (155KB)

www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/pubs/PDF/06T03_Virtual_School_Costs.pdf for states

that want to establish virtual schools. [More-Education Week: [\[paid subscription required\]](#). (Sept. 20)

A leadership gift of \$5 million from George Sherman, retired president and CEO of Danaher Corporation, and his wife Betsy, a former teacher, will fund the Sherman STEM Teacher Training Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). The program intends to increase the number of UMBC graduates who move directly into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teaching positions in challenging schools in Baltimore City and throughout Maryland. The program will provide scholarships for undergraduate and transfer students and fellowships for recent college graduates or mid-career professionals pursuing UMBC's Master of Arts in Teaching. Through this new program, UMBC seeks to become one of the nation's leading institutions for training STEM teachers to work in schools with at-risk students. [More-UMBC News:

[\[www.umbc.edu/NewsEvents/releases/archives/2006/09/umbc_launches_s_1.html\]](http://www.umbc.edu/NewsEvents/releases/archives/2006/09/umbc_launches_s_1.html). (Sept. 8)

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB) BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS (SEE FEATURE)

At Butler Junior High School in Oak Brook (IL), the bar has always been set high for student achievement. These high expectations and student performance on state standardized tests has earned the school recognition as one of the 2006 NCLB Blue Ribbon Schools. Butler's eighth grade reading scores improved from the 2002-2003 academic year when 84 percent of students met or exceeded standards to 95 percent reaching those marks in the 2004-2005 academic year. Principal Ed Condon attributes the rise in scores to longer class periods for reading and writing, lower student-teacher ratios, and a requirement that every student take two language arts classes each day. [More-The Chicago Daily Herald: [\[paid subscription required\]](#). (Sept. 26)

Eight Kentucky schools have been awarded the U.S. Department of Education's top educational honor. Four of these schools, which have never been honored as NCLB Blue Ribbon Schools previously, are located in Northern Kentucky. At Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Burlington, Principal Ed Colina will be giving his students the day off on October 13 to honor their hard work. At St. Joseph School in Crescent Springs, Principal Becky Brown and her students are celebrating with an out-of-uniform day, among other events. [More-Cincinnati Enquirer: [\[http://news.enquirer.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060926/NEWS0102/609260341/1058/NEWS01\]](http://news.enquirer.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060926/NEWS0102/609260341/1058/NEWS01). (Sept. 26)

When student government president and fifth-grader Sara Thomas heard that her school, Main Elementary School (AK), was being honored as a 2006 NCLB Blue Ribbon School, she noted, "[I was] really excited?I've always liked Main. I'm glad we got the ribbon. It means we worked hard." The school was nominated for the honor last September by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development based on assessment data collected by the department. Main Elementary is one of 59 schools nationwide designated as a "school with dramatically improving student performance with at least 40 percent of

students from disadvantaged backgrounds." (A full listing of the first 250 NCLB Blue Ribbon Schools for 2006 may be found on the U.S. Department of Education's website.) [More-The Kodiak Daily Mirror: www.kodiakdailymirror.com/?pid=19&id=3711]. (Sept. 25)

RAISING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT/PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Akira Yokomi Elementary School students don white lab coats, examine liquids with a flashlight to determine whether the liquids are transparent or opaque, and make presentations to classmates using digital whiteboards. This magnet school in Fresno (CA) opened just last year, and it is already providing students with challenging and engaging learning opportunities using high-tech equipment and innovative instructional strategies. Morgan Brown, Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education visited the school during a visit to California and stated, "It's just an amazing school to walk into." [More-The Fresno Bee: [subscription required](#)]. (Sept. 30)

Josette Jackson arrived at Indianapolis Public School 14 (IN) eight years ago as an angry mother who wanted little to do with her son's teachers. Today, she serves as the school's chief recruiter of parent volunteers. School 14 is an unlikely success story of parental involvement. Usually urban schools struggle to connect with parents who work inflexible jobs or shifts that compete with school hours. At School 14, teachers communicate with parents every week through newsletters and phone calls. Principal R. Elizabeth Odle actively seeks out parents and welcomes them into the school. Parents at School 14 have responded by taking over hall duty in the morning, supervising classrooms while teachers work with students in small groups, and organizing school events. Fathers also patrol the halls and adopt whole classrooms, where they act as mentors and role models. [More-The Indianapolis Star: www.indystar.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060925/LOCAL/609250364]. (Sept. 25)

TECHNOLOGY

The Technology Access Foundation hopes to create five public schools with a focus on technology, engineering, mathematics, and science to provide low-income, minority students with a rigorous, high-quality education and access to jobs at technology firms. The charity's co-founder, former Microsoft employee Trish Mill ines Dziko, states that the Foundation would provide the schools with computers and donate \$1.5 to \$2 million annually to each campus, while district partners would provide the buildings and teachers. Superintendent Raj Manhas said that the Seattle Public Schools (WA) will study the proposal. He expects the district to make a decision in the next two to three months. [More-The Seattle Times: http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/education/2003277302_techacademies27m.html]. (Sept. 27)

Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell announced \$5 million in funding for fiber optic wiring for 66 school districts and educational institutions across the state at an assembly at Hazardville Memorial School in Enfield. Rell told students: "I like to call this 'knowledge at the speed of light.'" The Connecticut Education Network, which aims to link all of the state's public school districts, libraries, and institutions of higher education, will disseminate the funds for the computer networking project. The project is run by the state Department of Information Technology with staffing and design support provided by the University of Connecticut. [More-Hartford Courant: [\[paid subscription required\]](#). (Sept. 22)]