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# THE ACHIEVER

March 15, 2004 • Vol. 3, No. 5

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
Permit NO. G-17

**FIRST CLASS**



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

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH



## **NEW WEB SITE!** **Upholding the Value of Character Development**

**E**mphasizing the importance of developing strong character among youths, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige recalled a maxim of ancient Greece: “[T]he character of the person is the primary product of education. Good character is the product of good judgments made every day.”

To advance the field of character education, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools last month unveiled its new Web site for the Character Education and Civic Engagement Technical Assistance Center (CETAC). The center’s objective is to provide technical assistance for implementing effective character education and civic engagement to

- grantees of the Department’s Partnerships in Character Education Program and to serve as a resource for educators, parents and the community at large. The Web site [www.cetac.org](http://www.cetac.org) includes links to—
- *News and events* that report some of the latest developments in the fields of character education and civic engagement, along with a list of upcoming conferences and workshops;
  - *A resource center* that features key publications, such as the booklet *Helping Your Child Become a Responsible Citizen* from the Department’s popular series for families and caregivers, and the guidebook *Students in Service to America* from the Corporation for National and Community Service; and
  - *A message board* called the *Work Zone* for Partnerships in Character Education Program grantees.

In the last two years alone, the Department has awarded 47 grants to states and local school districts to implement character education, a significant increase from the 46 grants awarded during the first six years of the program.



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## ED to Fund Research Training in the Education Sciences

**T**he U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences last month announced funding for graduate training programs in the education sciences to develop a new generation of researchers capable of producing scientific evidence that will guide education policy and classroom practice. Such evidence is crucial to implementing the education reforms in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, and to furthering the transformation of education into an evidence-based field.

Each of the new training grants will be funded for up to \$1 million per year for up to five years. Ten or more training grants could be awarded in the first year of the program. This marks the first time that the Department will provide significant support to colleges and universities to develop programs for students interested in pursuing careers in education research. Currently, schools of education are not producing sufficient numbers of researchers to meet the burgeoning demand for rigorous, quantitative research on the effectiveness of education programs and practices.

The new training programs will be staffed by faculty with expertise in fields ranging from cognition to epidemiology.

For more information, visit [www.ed.gov/programs/edresearch/applicant.html#predoc04](http://www.ed.gov/programs/edresearch/applicant.html#predoc04) or contact James Griffin at 202-219-2280 or [James.Griffin@ed.gov](mailto:James.Griffin@ed.gov).

### Old Neighborhood, New Standards Albuquerque's Oldest School Makes the Grade with New State Rating System

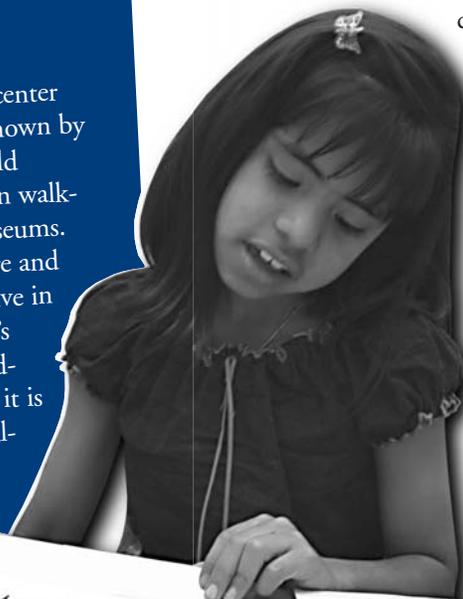
By Maggie Riechers



Principal Saavedra

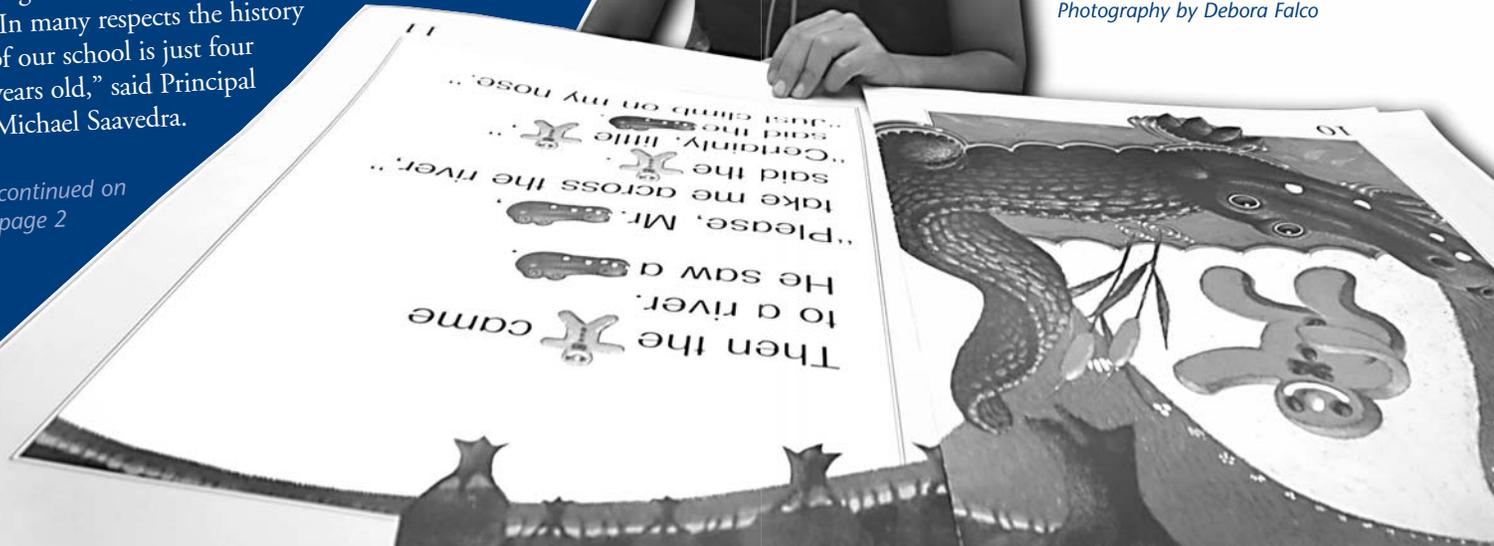
**L**ocated in the historic Spanish center of Albuquerque, N.M., best known by residents as Old Town, Reginald Chavez Elementary School is within walking distance of the city's major museums. The neighborhood is rich in culture and heritage, but many of its families live in poverty. Ninety percent of Chavez's students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. The school is Albuquerque's oldest; yet, it is only in its recent past that Chavez has risen to the challenge of being accountable for educating its students. "In many respects the history of our school is just four years old," said Principal Michael Saavedra.

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*Although Chavez Elementary is Albuquerque Public School's oldest school, Principal Michael Saavedra contends, "In many respects the history of our school is just four years old," referring to the school's recent efforts to improve student achievement. At left, Sarai, among the 30 percent of Chavez's students qualified as English language learners, reads her book.*

Photography by Debora Falco





**The Achiever** is published semi-monthly during the school year for parents and community leaders by the Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs, U.S.

Department of Education (ED). Rod Paige, Secretary.

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**For information on ED programs, resources and events,** contact: Information Resource Center, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20202, 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327), usa\_learn@ed.gov.

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That is because in 1999 the state began setting accountability standards that rated schools. In the first year of the new system Chavez received the lowest rating, a "probationary warning"; in the second year, it was rated "meets standards"; and in the third year, "exceeds standards." Last year, when more stringent federal standards were used, the school was rated "meets standards." Only three schools in the state exceeded standards.

The lower rating, nonetheless, only compelled Chavez to work harder. Said Saavedra, "We have been identified as the most improved school in Albuquerque based on the state rating system." It is also the only school in New Mexico to have received a 2003 *No*

*Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon Award because of its dramatic improvement in academic performance among a highly economically disadvantaged population.

As the state began instituting major changes by developing criteria for every grade level, so too did Chavez. The Title I school has used a combination of cutting-edge technology and the old-fashioned education principles of small-group learning and highly qualified teachers (over half of whom have master's degrees) to achieve its impressive results. Change was catalyzed with the formation of an Instructional Council, made up of staff and parents, which looked at ways to improve the school's rating. The council addressed basic issues of safety and school organization.

To improve learning, the school moved to a system based on gearing the curriculum to a student's specific needs. Chavez also hired two more teachers, which helped reduce each class to fewer than 20 students. And it purchased a state-of-the-art computer system that provides exact data on each student based on testing and makes recommendations for lesson planning.

With nearly 30 percent of its population coming from homes where Spanish is the first language, Chavez focuses primarily on reading and language. Last year, third-graders scored impressively in the 63rd percentile in reading on the standardized tests.

The school's strong emphasis on literacy begins at enrollment. The full-day kindergarten program at Chavez gives

teachers the time needed to help catch up entering students already below grade level. Every grade has at least a two-hour block of uninterrupted reading and language arts time that focuses daily on building language skills and vocabulary. The teachers, many of whom are bilingual, work with students on vocabulary, and writing is a strong component of the program. Special lessons for Spanish-speaking students include hands-on activities and translations.

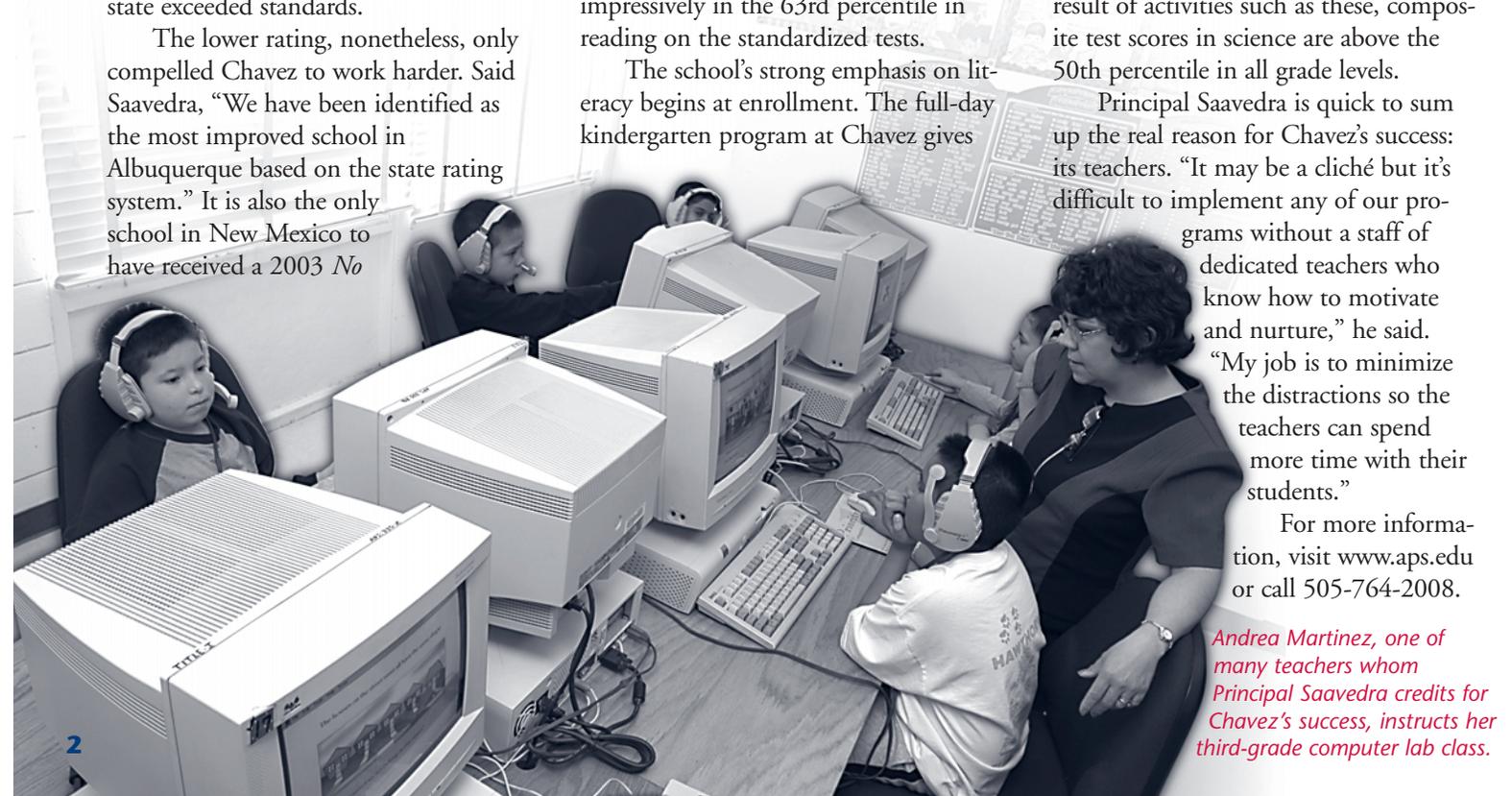
In addition, paraprofessionals, who aid the teachers, are used to provide one-on-one tutoring. In fact, tutoring is a major part of Chavez's program. Every grade level has at least one teacher who tutors students before and after school. Of the school's 375 students, 75 participate in the tutoring program.

Through an outreach program with the area's science museums, students also receive hands-on experience as they expand their vocabulary. The school's annual science fair has become a community event with nearly 100 percent student participation. Employees from the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science judge the competition. Another partner, Lodestar, run by the U.S. Air Force, sponsors an Art and Dessert Night when parents and students can look through the museum's telescopes and view the stars. Partly as a result of activities such as these, composite test scores in science are above the 50th percentile in all grade levels.

Principal Saavedra is quick to sum up the real reason for Chavez's success: its teachers. "It may be a cliché but it's difficult to implement any of our programs without a staff of dedicated teachers who know how to motivate and nurture," he said. "My job is to minimize the distractions so the teachers can spend more time with their students."

For more information, visit [www.aps.edu](http://www.aps.edu) or call 505-764-2008.

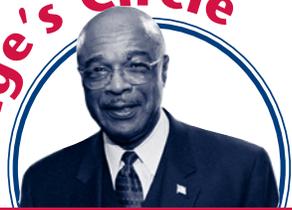
*Andrea Martinez, one of many teachers whom Principal Saavedra credits for Chavez's success, instructs her third-grade computer lab class.*



"... [F]irst and foremost, be a partner [in your child's education]. Know that you have as much information and as much power as anyone in that [school] building—and probably more. ... Be at school. ... [I]f there's a program after school ... be there. That way your kids know that it's important to you. These little guys really want to make the grownups in their lives happy. And if they know that's a priority for you, I think it will be a priority for them also."

Regena Izzo, parent and teacher, Indian River School District, Del., in her remarks during the Jan. 2004 monthly broadcast of *Education News Parents Can Use*.

## Paige's Circle



The following is excerpted from an op-ed article by U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, which appeared in the Feb. 27, 2004 edition of *The Washington Post*:

*"Education should be about children, not partisan politics. Yet, sadly, there has been a lot of political posturing on this issue lately. It may be inevitable during an election year.*

*"I admit that this week I, too, ratcheted up the debate with a very poor word choice to describe the leadership of the nation's largest teachers union. I chose my words carelessly, and I am truly sorry for the hurt and confusion they caused. ...*

*"My comment was born out of frustration at the depth of the problem in our schools. Let's look at the facts: the Nation's Report Card (the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP) shows that only one in six African Americans and one in five Hispanics are proficient in reading by the time they are high school seniors. NAEP math scores are even worse: Only 3 percent of blacks and 4 percent of Hispanics are testing at the 'proficient' level. No wonder a recent study claimed a high school diploma has become nothing more than a 'certificate of attendance.' ...*

*"The old system—the status quo—is one that we must fight to change. President Bush and both parties in Congress understood the urgency of the situation and set in motion a process to fix the problem: the No Child Left Behind Act. The law requires schools to give all students a quality education, provides accountability and choice for parents, and insists that teachers be highly qualified to teach ...*

*"It's time to make the law successful. We need to create an American public educational system that matches the vision of this law, where we strive for excellence without exclusion, where our children achieve greatness rather than greatly underachieving, and where 10 or 20 years from now a new generation of adults realizes that we gave them a better life because we had courage and conviction."*

Close-Up:



## No Child Left Behind Highly Qualified Teachers

**N**o Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires every teacher who teaches a core academic subject to be highly qualified—that is, to have a bachelor's degree, subject-matter competency in each subject taught and full state certification. New teachers in Title I programs must be highly qualified when they are hired; other new teachers and all current teachers must be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year.

States have the flexibility to set their own standards on how well new elementary school teachers must perform on a required state test to demonstrate subject-matter competency. New middle or secondary school teachers have two avenues for establishing competency: (1) completing an academic major, graduate degree or coursework equivalent to an academic major; or (2) passing a rigorous state academic subject test.

In determining subject-matter competency for current teachers, states also may develop a "high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation" (HOUSSE). Objective factors such as college course work, advanced credentials, professional development, involvement in content and curriculum-related activities, student achievement and years of experience may be included as components of the HOUSSE model.

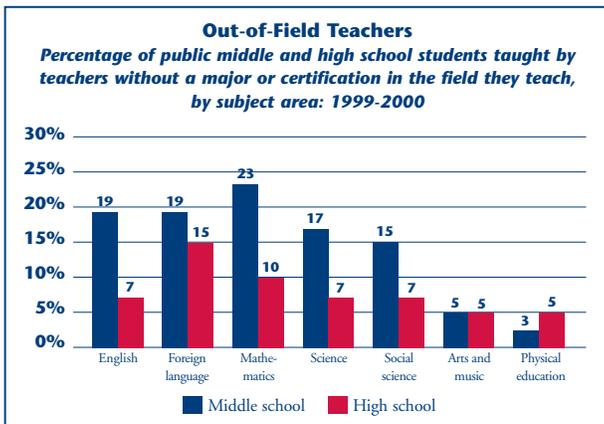
In licensing teachers, states have full authority over certification requirements, which they may redesign at any time according to state law. States may offer alternate certification programs—such as the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, which fully certifies teachers who pass the board's rigorous series of assessments—and other non-traditional routes towards achieving state certification, such as NCLB's Transition to Teaching program.

Similar to its requirements for teachers, NCLB requires that paraprofessionals who

work in Title I programs and who provide instructional support meet certain standards. They must have a high school diploma or its equivalent

and have completed two years of study at an institution of higher education; obtained an associate degree; or be able to demonstrate, by passing a state or local assessment, their knowledge of and ability to assist in instructing reading, writing and mathematics. New paraprofessionals in Title I programs must meet these requirements prior to being hired, whereas current paraprofessionals in Title I programs have until January 2006 to meet these requirements.

This past January, the U.S. Department of Education released a revised and expanded version of the *Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Non-Regulatory Guidance*, which is available online at [www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/guidance.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/guidance.pdf).



Source: *Qualifications of the Public School Teacher Workforce: Prevalence of Out-of-Field Teaching 1987-88 to 1999-2000*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002.