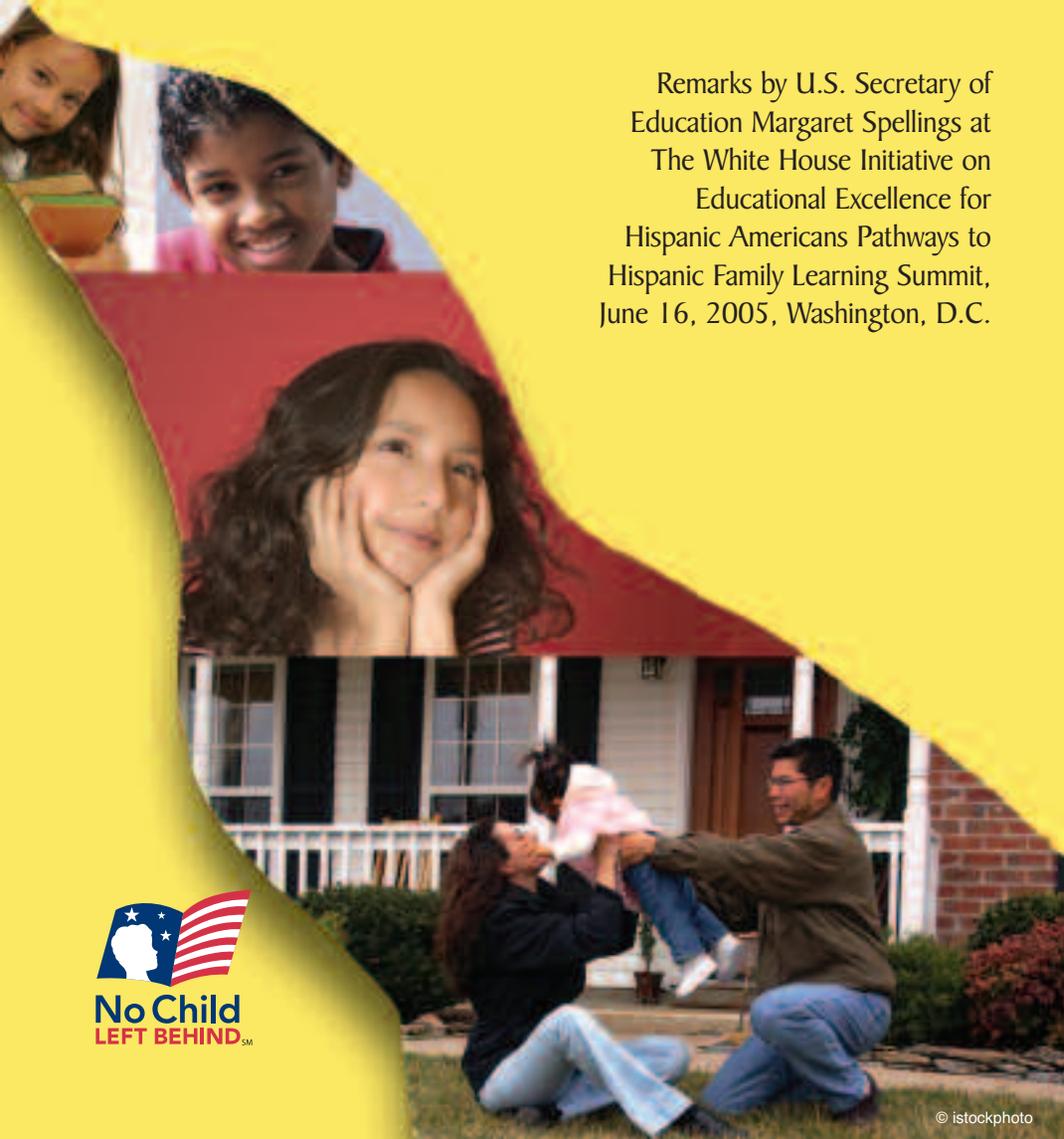


# Pathways To Hispanic Family Learning

Remarks by U.S. Secretary of  
Education Margaret Spellings at  
The White House Initiative on  
Educational Excellence for  
Hispanic Americans Pathways to  
Hispanic Family Learning Summit,  
June 16, 2005, Washington, D.C.



## U.S. Department of Education

Margaret Spellings  
Secretary

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It's a real honor to be with you all today. You have dedicated your lives to advancing the American ideals of equality and opportunity—principles that for centuries have drawn millions of people to risk everything to come to this land. And there is no faster path to equal opportunity than a good education. It is the key to the American dream. And thanks to your hard work, that dream is alive and well.

So it's a real pleasure to welcome you to the U.S. Department of Education. We just celebrated a birthday. The Department turned 25 years old. A lot has changed in those 25 years—for example, some of us look 10 years older.

The country looks a little different too. In 1980, there were fewer than 15 million Hispanic Americans in the United States. At that time, Hispanic Americans represented less than 7 percent of the total population.

Today, one in seven Americans is of Hispanic descent, with well over 40 million Hispanic Americans in the country. And, on average, the Hispanic population is far younger than the rest of the U.S. population. It's a baby boom.

So it's no surprise that educating our children is the top concern in the Hispanic community. Here at the Department of Education, it's our number one concern too. And thankfully, we have a law that guarantees every Hispanic child a quality education. We have made a commitment to do something that has never been done before: educate every single child.

That's why we called this summit. You touch thousands of Hispanic families each day. We need your help spreading the word about *No Child Left Behind*. We can't fully realize the promise of this law unless families first know all their rights. It's a big job, and I can't do it without your knowledge, commitment and years of experience. I need your help. We need your help. Our children need your help. When we passed *No Child Left Behind*, we made a great promise. And it's a promise we must keep.



*We have made a commitment to do something that has never been done before: educate every single child.*



*The law says that with a good education, all children can learn and achieve high standards. And just three years later, we are seeing the proof.*

*No Child Left Behind* is about a promise to these children, and of course it's a promise that we absolutely must keep if we're going to continue to thrive as the great nation that we are.

It all started when President Bush brought Democrats and Republicans together to pass the historic *No Child Left Behind Act*. The law says that with a good education, all children can learn and achieve high standards. And just three years later, we are seeing the proof.

And the law is elegant and simple and profound. It says that every single child can meet proficiency standards over a period of time and that every single child is going to get our focus; that the day of lumping folks together and allowing averages to mask underachievement is happily over.

In states across the country, scores are rising, and the achievement gap between minority and white students is finally starting to close. For example, last week in Maryland, we learned that the number of Hispanic third-graders meeting state standards in reading had increased by more than 20 percentage points over the last two years. And for the first time ever, New York state is reporting that a majority of Hispanic fourth-graders have met all state standards in English.

And in Gainesville, Ga., around 90 percent of all students at Gainesville Elementary passed Georgia's English-only state exams in reading and math. Around 70 percent of the school's students are Hispanic, and most are the sons and daughters of immigrants who speak little English. That's an incredible achievement. It shows what we can do when we raise the bar for our students. The school's principal, Shawn Arevalo McCollough, is here with us today. Let's give him a hand.

These stories give you just a glimpse of what's happening across the country. Here's the big picture. Nationally, the percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders proficient in math doubled between 2000 and 2003.

Unfortunately, I'm not fluent in Spanish. But living in Texas, I picked up a few words here and there. And I think it's safe to say the law *es exitoso!* In other words, this law works!

We have set our sights on making sure that by 2014 every single child in this country can read and do math at grade level. And we are well on our way to realizing that promise.

I know over the last half century, Hispanic families have heard their fair share of promises. I also know those promises haven't always been kept.

In 1954, the Supreme Court opened the schoolhouse doors to students of all races with *Brown v. Board of Education*. The decision guaranteed every child a seat in the classroom, but it wasn't enough.

Many Hispanic students still found themselves stuck in the back rows of classrooms with no one caring what they learned. Students new to the English language had it even worse. They often would be taken out of class and put in the hallway to learn. And in many cases, schools never attempted to teach these students anything more than the basic English needed to get by in life.

Like millions of other students, Hispanic students were subjected to what President Bush likes to call "the soft bigotry of low expectations." No one expected them to learn, and as a result, many did not.



For decades, politicians and school officials looked the other way. It wasn't for lack of interest on your part. I know Hispanic Americans believe in the importance of a quality education. Education is a shared value. And quite simply, Hispanic Americans have a strong sense of values. That's why survey after survey shows that education is the number one priority in the Hispanic community.

And now we have a law that makes education for all our number one priority too. *No Child Left Behind* places a special focus on how Hispanic and other minority children are doing in school. The law calls for annual assessments of all children in grades 3–8 in both reading and math. These assessments help us catch problems early by showing us which students need extra help and where.

And the law requires us to break down those assessment results by student groups, so we can be sure all students are getting ahead in school. This data finally gives us the tool to make sure our Hispanic students are meeting the same high standards as their peers. I like to say, "What gets measured gets done."

Now we expect all students—including students new to the English language—to achieve high standards in school. I want to thank Kathleen Leos for being here. She's my senior policy adviser on English language acquisition. She also does a lot of outreach, and she'll tell you that this law has really changed the way schools teach students who are learning English.

According to a report by the Department released this spring, for the first time ever, every state now has standards in place to measure the progress of students learning the English language. Best of all, we're making sure these students keep pace with their peers in reading and math.



**T**he days of learning in hallways are over. Under the law, every student must have a highly qualified teacher. All families, including those new to this country, deserve to know their children will receive a first-class education at any public school.

I bet the families at Gainesville Elementary School in Georgia are sleeping a bit easier now that 90 percent of their students are meeting state standards. As I said before, most of them don't speak English, but that didn't deter Principal McCollough and his staff. They pride themselves on overcoming language and cultural barriers to get families involved. This year, they made over 100 home visits to Hispanic families and held dozens of workshops to show parents how to become advocates for their children. Principal McCollough explains, "Because of *No Child Left Behind*, schools are having to respond to the unique needs of Hispanic families."

That's just the attitude we hoped principals would take when we passed *No Child Left Behind*. For the first time ever, this law holds schools accountable for reaching out to families and showing them what's happening inside the schoolhouse walls. Parents need this information. And they shouldn't have to bend over backwards to get it.

*No Child Left Behind* requires schools to provide every family with an easy-to-read school report card showing how well schools and districts are performing. These report cards also show whether schools are meeting the needs of their Hispanic students. And parents should be able to view this information in a language they can understand.

In the past, parents who couldn't find their own interpreters were out of luck. They often had to rely on their own children to explain what teachers were saying during parent-teacher conferences. As the mother of two school-age

daughters, I can see how that could lead to trouble. Let's just say children sometimes like to paint a rosier picture of life in the classroom. Now, Spanish-speaking parents can ask schools to provide free translation.

It makes a real difference. Take the story of Maria Leija of Dallas, Texas. She came to this country from Mexico in 1977 and still speaks only some English. In the days before *No Child Left Behind*, she once received a letter in English about a problem her daughter was having in school. And when she came to the school to ask what it meant, no one could translate the message into Spanish.

Thankfully, Maria no longer has to guess what letters mean these days. She says, "Thanks to this law, I'm very comfortable. When the letters come, the other side is in Spanish, and I'm not worried that I don't know what's happening with my children in school."

When we give families more information, we arm them with the power to become real advocates for their children. This is especially important when schools don't live up to their responsibilities to raise achievement for all students. *No Child Left Behind* gives children in these schools new options such as the ability to transfer to another school or to receive free after-school tutoring. These resources help level the playing field for families who otherwise would be unable to afford extra help for their children.

I want to encourage you to work with or even become providers of supplemental educational services like free tutoring. You have a special understanding of the needs of Hispanic students, and thousands of students in your communities could benefit.

Think of the story of Yanitza DeLeon in Camden, N. J. She and her two sons moved to Camden from Puerto Rico three years ago. When they arrived, they faced a serious language barrier. Yanitza soon received a letter that her oldest son was struggling in school, and at first, she wasn't sure what to do. She then learned that both her sons could qualify for free tutoring under *No Child Left Behind*. Now both her sons are doing better in school. And Yanitza can finally rest assured because, as she says, "I know my sons are in a good program." We want to make sure all families have the information to exercise their rights under this law. And we are working harder than ever to reach out to parents to make sure they do.



*When we give families more information, we arm them with the power to become real advocates for their children.*



*We also need your support to help our children reach their promise. You can be a powerful voice for them. We need you to take an active role in your local schools.*

And no one is working harder than Adam Chavarria and his team at the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. Last year, the White House Initiative brought together Hispanic organizations and businesses to help educate families about *No Child Left Behind*. Many of you participated. Thanks to your help, the partnership helped empower thousands of Hispanic parents with more information about education and schools.

Right now, the White House Initiative is working to form a new public-private partnership called the Partnership for Hispanic Family Learning. We want to form a national network that works with families to address the education needs of Hispanic Americans. I hope you all will join before you leave today.

Mrs. Bush has taken a leading role in the effort to bring families, educators and mentors together to help our children. Her Helping America's Youth Initiative is helping our children, and particularly our boys, beat the odds and realize their full potential in life.

We also need your support to help our children reach their promise. You can be a powerful voice for them. We need you to take an active role in your local schools. Talk to parents and hold meetings to discuss how schools are doing and what options families have. You have the community networks to help us spread the word about this law.

It helps to have easy-to-read information that you can share with families. Right now, we are putting the finishing touches on a new guide to help parents of students in Title I schools. I'm thankful for all the work you do in disadvantaged communities, and this guide will help you better explain *No Child Left Behind*.

Today, I also promise that we will make a new tool kit that focuses on the specific needs of Hispanic families. We hope this tool kit will be ready for back-to-school in the fall. We want to make sure Hispanic families have the information they need to take advantage of *No Child Left Behind* and to help their children get ahead in school and life.

We still have much work to do. A study last year by the Pew Hispanic Center showed that 95 percent of Hispanic parents think it's important for their children to go to college, but only around one in 10 Hispanic Americans has a bachelor's degree. In a world where 80 percent of the fastest-growing jobs require some postsecondary education, we need to close this gap between dreams and reality. We must change those numbers.

Families need better information about financial aid opportunities for their children. We've added about a million students in the last four years to the Pell Grant program, and that's money well spent. Over the next five years, the president has proposed raising the maximum student Pell Grant from its current level of \$4,050 to \$4,550 per year to help even more students. And we are investing almost \$100 million in institutions that focus on making the dream of college come true for Hispanic students.

Of course, we can't get more students to college unless we first get them through high school with a quality education. We face serious challenges. Nearly one-third of incoming ninth-graders do not graduate on time. According to the Manhattan Institute, even when students do graduate from high school, they usually do so unprepared for the challenges of college.



As many of you know, the dropout rate for Hispanic students is almost four times higher than the rate for white students. And it's over double the rate for African-Americans. We as a society simply must do a better job of encouraging Hispanics to stay in school. I need everyone's help in this room to get that message across.

President Bush understands the need to make high school relevant to the 21st century. That's why he has proposed a \$1.5 billion High School Initiative to help save students at risk of dropping out. We can't help students unless we first know where they are having problems, so the key is assessing students in math and reading at least three times during high school. Using this information, we can bring parents and teachers together to develop intervention strategies that respond to students' individual needs.

This personal attention will pay off later in life. The average college graduate makes about \$30,000 more per year than the average high school dropout. Over a worker's lifetime, the difference adds up to well over a million dollars.

I've never met a teenager who wouldn't want that money. We want to leave our children a world of expanded horizons—a world where every student leaves high school ready for college and the jobs of the 21st century. It's our job to make it happen.

We can already see a difference that accountability in our schools is making. When we expect high standards we get high standards and we must extend these principles to high schools. We must act on these reforms now. We cannot be satisfied with one in 10 Hispanic Americans graduating from college, and I know you agree with that.

We need you to be advocates for our children. Politicians and school officials need to hear your voice. We need you to take a stand. Please join our new partnership to help educate Hispanic families about their rights. We know there is no issue more important to Hispanic families. The days when schools could look past the achievement gap and hope no one noticed are over. Responsibility for closing the gap now lies on all of our shoulders. It's the moral imperative of the 21st century.

As I look around at all the bright and committed people gathered in this room, I am confident we can get the job done. I encourage you to have an honest and serious conversation today. And I welcome your ideas and suggestions for how we can best leave no child behind.

I know how high the stakes are. And I know you do too. There are now almost 10 million Hispanic children in elementary and secondary schools in this country. And I'm committed to keeping the promise of *No Child Left Behind* for every one of these children. We know every one of them can learn. And together, we will make sure they all do.



*We need you to take a stand. Please join our new partnership to help educate Hispanic families about their rights.*



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