

A Guide to the Tool Kit for Hispanic Families



U.S. Department of Education

White House Initiative on
Educational Excellence for
Hispanic Americans



U.S. Department of Education

Margaret Spellings

Secretary

2005

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Welcome, families!

Your child is engaged in one of life's most important pursuits—getting an education. As parents, you will be asked to make decisions to help steer him or her in the right direction. To make the right choices, you must have the best information. That's what the *Tool Kit for Hispanic Families* is all about.

This tool kit will show you what to expect from your schools, your teachers and your child, at all ages and grade levels. It will tell you how to help your child through school, what resources are available, and what you, your family and your community can do to help your child learn.

Today, school children enjoy new benefits and expectations under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the U.S. law for K–12 education. These include a quality education, regardless of one's country of origin or language spoken at home. Under this law, standards are higher, and all schools are held accountable for meeting them. Just as important, parents are given information about their children's progress and their school's performance.

We want to help parents become involved in education—it's good for the children, good for their schools and good for America. Use this tool kit often to make sure your child gets the best education possible—the key to getting the very best out of life.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Margaret Spellings".

Margaret Spellings
U.S. Secretary of Education



Dear parents and families,

You now have in your hands information that will help you attain the academic success you wish for your child. This information is provided to you in the form of a tool kit that will help you become familiar with the educational options and opportunities available to you and your family.

Regardless of your own education level, you as parents play an important role in shaping your child's education. Other members of the family—brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and grandparents—can also play a supportive role by creating an environment in which academic learning is expected and enabled.

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans is working closely with the U.S. Department of Education to get information about the *No Child Left Behind Act* to Hispanic parents, families and communities across the country so that they are fully aware of the benefits and expectations under the law.

No one cares more about your child's education than you, the family. This is why this tool kit was created. Once you have finished reading this information, please share it with other members of your family and your friends and neighbors. Help us spread the word about how we can improve education for *all* our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam Chavarria".

Adam Chavarria
Executive Director
White House Initiative on Educational
Excellence for Hispanic Americans



Using the Tool Kit—A Guide

STAGE ONE: PRESCHOOL

As any mom can tell you, a surprising amount of progress is made in the first three years of life.

—Secretary Margaret Spellings

What You Should Know

Kids are born with a great potential to learn. Scientists who study how the brain works have found that children learn much earlier, and far more, than once thought possible. And a child's first teacher is his or her family.

Reading is the most important skill a child can learn. At an early age, families should introduce their preschool children to activities that will provide a strong foundation for reading in and out of school. These include:

- Learning the letters of the alphabet;
- Hearing the individual sounds in words;
- Learning new words and their meanings; and
- Looking at books and hearing stories read aloud.

In addition to reading skills, you can help your child develop early math skills by counting and sorting with them and pointing out different shapes and patterns.

There are many benefits to placing your child in a good **preschool program**, especially one that teaches these early learning skills. You can enroll your child in some preschool programs as early as age three. Research shows that such children, on average, perform better in reading and math, have better attendance in school and are less likely to be asked to repeat a grade. Information to help children learn is available from local schools, libraries, community organizations and government agencies. (See the "Using the Tool Kit" section.)

What You Can Do

Families can create a safe, friendly and fun learning environment at home.

For example, you can:

- Read aloud to your children every day. Involve them in activities that allow them to talk, listen, explore and wonder. This tells them that learning is both enjoyable and important.



FACT:

In 2004, around 250,000 students took advantage of free tutoring or school choice options under the No Child Left Behind Act.

- Make sure there are always books and reading materials around the house.
- Take your child to the local library, and help him or her get a library card.
- Ask older brothers and sisters to pitch in.

If you opt for preschool, try to visit more than one in your area beforehand. Discuss the choice with family, friends, other parents and school officials to make sure you select a quality program that is right for your child.

How *No Child Left Behind* Can Help You

The ***No Child Left Behind Act*** is the nation's landmark education reform law. It seeks to ensure a quality education for every child in America, regardless of race or cultural heritage or family income. The goal is for all schoolchildren to learn to read and do math at grade level or better, based on high academic standards set by states.

Some programs under *No Child Left Behind* that may be of interest to you and of benefit to your preschool child are:

Early Reading First

Early Reading First supports projects that teach preschool children letters, sounds and words, helping them get ready for kindergarten. There are nearly 100 Early Reading First projects throughout the country, based in Head Start centers, preschool sites and elsewhere. There may be one in your area.

Good Start, Grow Smart

In 2002, President Bush launched the Good Start, Grow Smart initiative to help preschool programs match instruction with their state's academic standards. The initiative also provides information on preschool care to teachers, parents and child care providers. As part of Good Start, Grow Smart, in 2002 the Department of Education published a guide for caregivers called *Teaching Our Youngest*. If you have Internet access, it's available at <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/teachingouryoungest/index.html>. Your local public library also may have computers available for public use.

Title I Preschool Services

No Child Left Behind provides preschool services to about 400,000 children from low-income families through the federal Title I program. Title I serves disadvantaged children who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches at school. In addition, nearly one

million children with disabilities receive preschool care through the ***Individuals with Disabilities Education Act***, with early intervention for infants and toddlers from birth through age 2. Check to see if your child is eligible for these services at preschools near you.

Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs)

These centers provide free classes and information on early childhood care and learning. The U.S. Department of Education awards grants to PIRCs in communities across the country. Visit <http://www.pirc-info.net/pircs.asp> to find the one nearest you.

Maya and Miguel

Maya and Miguel is an educational television program for preschool and elementary school-children in English and Spanish. It is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Its Web site at <http://pbskids.org/mayaandmiguel/flash.html> has information for parents.

Using the Tool Kit

For more activities to help prepare your child to read, check out *A Guide for Reading* in your tool kit. Two other booklets, *Helping Your Preschool Child* and *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*, are available free of charge in English or Spanish from the U.S. Department of Education. To order these, call **1-877-4ED-PUBS (1-877-433-7827)** or visit <http://www.edpubs.org>.

To learn more about *No Child Left Behind* and for other questions, call the U.S. Department of Education's toll-free number, **1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327)**.

HELP! QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What do I need to know to enroll my child in school?

Contact the school's main office directly or the school district office to find out what to bring to registration. Most states have health requirements and request proof of immunizations. Also, school districts have specific geographic boundaries they serve and may ask you to present information, such as a utility bill, that indicates you live within the district.

I do not feel comfortable speaking in English. What should I do?

You have the right to receive the same information about school matters as parents who speak English. Let school officials know that you do not speak English and that you would prefer to receive school-related information in the language that you speak and understand. You may also request an interpreter for parent-teacher conferences; school districts will make a reasonable effort to provide one. Contact your school district for more information about their translation and interpretation services.

Are there programs available for my child with disabilities?

Yes. The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* provides federal assistance to states and local school districts for special education programs, including Individualized Education Programs (IEP) tailored to your child's learning disability. To learn more about IEPs visit the Department's Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html>. For more information about programs in your state, contact your state office of special education through the information provided at <http://www.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html?src=ln>.



STAGE TWO: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

We made a commitment to close the achievement gap and provide every child with a quality education by 2014. That means all children, no matter their race, ethnicity or income level. And you know what? That commitment is paying off.

—Secretary Margaret Spellings

What You Should Know

The first day of school is a joyous and exciting time for families. Teachers and principals are now your partners, helping your child learn and grow. But for children to be successful in school, parents must be actively involved in their education from day one.

Schools have many resources available to help your child learn. It is important to tell teachers and principals about your child's needs. It's equally important to listen to their expectations for your child's academic growth. Here are three things to look for as your child begins elementary school:

- Does your school understand your child's learning needs and abilities?
- Is he or she prepared to learn English at grade level?
- Will the academic curriculum put your child on the right track to succeed in middle school and high school?

A good start is critical. Young students who fall behind academically are sometimes placed on a different academic track with lowered expectations, affecting future learning opportunities. Research tells us that, if a child is not reading well early in elementary school, it will be much harder to catch up later. Do not accept excuses from your school if your child isn't learning to read.

What You Can Do

Before the school year begins, find out as much as you can about your child's school. Ask the principal for a copy of the most recent school "report card." It will tell you if students, including students of Hispanic origin, are making solid academic progress. Ask for any handbooks or guidebooks the school puts out. Talk to your child's teachers; they want to hear from you. Talk to other parents as well. Find out the date of the next parent-teacher conference and make plans to attend it. Spanish-speaking parents can ask schools to provide free translations of written material and interpretation for meetings.



FACT:

The percentage of Hispanic fourth-graders proficient in math doubled between 2000 and 2003.

Make sure homework is done on time by setting a regular time and place at home, free of distractions, for your child to get it done. Ask your child if he or she is having difficulty with assignments or tests. If so, make it a priority to meet with your child's teacher to discuss ways to help your child succeed.

How *No Child Left Behind* Can Help You

The ***No Child Left Behind Act*** is bringing high standards and accountability to our public schools. It's based on the belief that all children can achieve to high standards and that we should measure student progress each year to make sure they do.

No Child Left Behind is working. Studies show that students at risk of falling behind are now receiving more classroom attention to stay on track. In states across the country, test scores are rising and the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students is beginning to close. According to the latest results from the Nation's Report Card, reading and math scores for Hispanic nine-year-olds have reached an all-time high, and their math achievement gap with white students is at an all-time low. Math scores for Hispanic 13-year-olds are at record highs as well.

The law provides several key benefits to students and their families. Among them:

- A highly qualified teacher in every classroom;
- The opportunity for children to learn English and other subjects at the same academic level as other students; and
- The opportunity to be placed in English language acquisition classes, if needed.

Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, all students in grades 3-8 will be assessed each year in reading and math. Parents are given information about their child's progress, and their school's performance is tracked through easy-to-understand school report cards. School districts must make a reasonable effort to provide them in a family's native language.

The law also gives children in Title I schools marked "in need of improvement" two or more times—meaning they missed their annual achievement goals—a second chance to succeed. For example,

- Children in Title I schools marked "in need of improvement" for two straight years have the chance to transfer to another public school in the district, including a public charter school.
 - Children from low-income families may qualify for free after-school tutoring (known as "Supplemental Educational Services," or SES) if their school is marked "in need of improvement" for three straight years.
-

This provides a real incentive for *all* schools to reform. The results can be seen in places such as Gainesville Elementary in Georgia. Nearly 90 percent of its student body, which is majority Hispanic, passed the state's English-only exams in reading and math. "Because of *No Child Left Behind*, schools are having to respond to the unique needs of Hispanic families," said principal Shawn Arevalo McCollough.

Additional federal support is available to families, including the school-based English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program and the 21st Century Learning Communities after-school program.

Using the Tool Kit

For more ways to help your child in elementary school, read *Questions Parents Ask About Schools* and *Helping Your Child Succeed in School*, enclosed in this tool kit. For information about choosing another school, refer to *Choosing a School for Your Child*.

If your child qualifies for supplemental educational services, the brochure *Extra Help for Student Success* will tell you about the options available to you. Under *No Child Left Behind*, a wide array of providers, including school districts, non-profit and for-profit companies, and faith-based and community organizations, may offer these services. Speaking with them may prove helpful. You can learn more about supplemental educational services by talking to the teachers and principal at your child's school or to officials at your state education department.

For other questions, call the U.S. Department of Education's toll-free number at **1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327)**.

HELP! QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What does it mean for my child's teacher to be "highly qualified"?

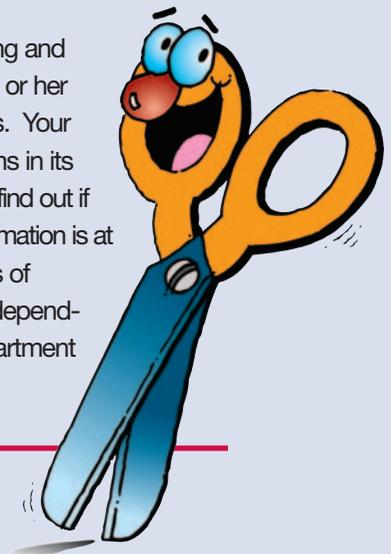
The key to a quality education is a good teacher. The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires a highly qualified teacher for core courses (reading, math, history, etc.) in every classroom by the end of the 2005-06 school year. "Highly qualified" means that a teacher has a college degree, is certified by the state and shows knowledge about the subject that he or she teaches.

Does my child qualify for school choice?

Your child may qualify for transfer to another public school in the district, including a public charter school, if his or her Title I school has missed its annual academic progress goals for two consecutive years. Under *No Child Left Behind*, school districts are required to notify parents each year if their child is eligible for transfer, and to provide busing or other transportation to the new school. Contact your school district or your state department of education to find out if your school is a Title I school and if you're eligible for school choice. Contact information is at <http://www.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html?src=ln>.

Where can I find a tutoring program for my child?

Depending on your income level, your child may qualify for free tutoring and after-school homework help (supplemental educational services) if his or her school has missed its annual academic progress goals for three years. Your school district is required to tell eligible families about tutoring programs in its area. Contact your school district or state department of education to find out if your school is a Title I school and if you're eligible for SES. Contact information is at <http://www.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html?src=ln>. Names of approved providers in English or Spanish can also be found at the independent www.tutorsforkids.org, established with help from the U.S. Department of Education.



STAGE THREE: MIDDLE SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND

We must measure student progress in at least three grades during high school so we can ensure no one falls behind just as they're nearing the finish line.

—Secretary Margaret Spellings

What You Should Know

The middle and high school years are important crossroads. Some students find themselves on track for a meaningful diploma and a bright future. But far too many simply mark time or drop out. The dropout rate for Hispanic students is nearly four times higher than the rate for white students. Students who drop out face a lifetime of lowered earnings and diminished employment as adults.

Even for students on track to graduate, unfortunately, not all high school diplomas are created equal. One recent independent study found that two-thirds of students leave high school unprepared to apply to a four-year university.

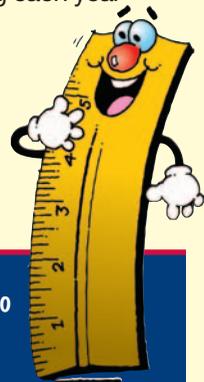
President Bush wants every high school diploma to become a ticket to success in the workforce or higher education. The key is challenging coursework, strong accountability, and safe, disciplined classrooms. The U.S. Department of Education is working to make this happen. But we cannot do it alone; parents and educators must play a vital role.

What You Can Do

About 80 percent of the fastest-growing jobs of the future will require some college or technical education after high school. So parents who want to prepare their children for this future should encourage them to take the right classes in middle and high school.

It is important that schools offer challenging pre-college coursework and Advanced Placement (AP) classes to their students. Ask your school's principal if it does. The following is a list of courses that your child may wish to consider taking each year to become prepared for college:

- English
- Math (Algebra I, Algebra II, trigonometry, pre-calculus)
- Foreign languages
- Natural sciences
- History / social studies



FACT:

All 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico now have English language proficiency standards in place.

As soon as your child enrolls in high school, talk with a school guidance counselor about what he or she needs to do to get ready for and be admitted to college. When your child is a junior, talk with a guidance counselor again about the steps you and your child need to take to apply for admission to a college or university. Get information about how much it costs to attend college and what financial aid is available. With grants and loans, college can become much more affordable.

To learn more about how to be prepared both academically and financially for college, please go to <http://studentaid.ed.gov/>. At the top right-hand side you can select information in English or Spanish. Or call **1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)**.

How No Child Left Behind Can Help You

No Child Left Behind asks that states measure high school students at least once before graduation. Testing is important because it allows teachers to identify which students are falling behind academically so they can be helped before it's too late.

The U.S. Department of Education's proposed 2006 budget would institute **testing in two additional high school grades**. It's part of a proposed \$1.5 billion **High School Initiative** that would also provide academic intervention for incoming ninth-graders struggling with reading or math.

We know a great deal about what instruction works best for high school students. President Bush's **Striving Readers** program and proposed new **Secondary Education Mathematics Initiative** are strongly focused on their development.

Under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, some federal aid is provided for middle school **Advanced Placement** preparation classes and to cover the cost of AP tests at the high school level. The Department has proposed increased federal funding for AP courses so that more disadvantaged students will have access to the rigorous coursework that colleges and universities value.

Finally, to help more families afford college, the Department has proposed raising the maximum **Pell Grant** from \$4,050 to \$4,550 per year. Millions of students could benefit.

HELP! QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

My child is losing interest in schoolwork. How do I get him or her focused again?

Tell your child how important going to school will be to his or her future. Be sure to set aside regular homework time every day. And make time to talk to your child's teachers and principal. Your positive attitude will be contagious! Refer to the U.S. Department of Education publication Homework Tips for Parents at www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/homework/homeworktips.pdf for more useful ideas to help your child succeed.

How do I find out about scholarships and financial aid for college?

Families should start saving and planning for college as early as possible, even before the high school years. Grants do not have to be repaid; loans do. Ask your child's school counselor for information about applying to college. To apply for federal grants, loans or work-study programs, complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). To download a copy of the FAFSA, log on to http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/completing_fafsa/index or call the Federal Student Aid Information Center for a hard copy at 1-800-433-3243, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. For a handy student aid calculator and timeline, log on to http://studentaid2.ed.gov/getmoney/fin_aid_wizard/ and <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/timeline.jsp?tab=applying>. Finally, to learn how a college education can improve your child's future earning ability, log on to <http://teen.educationpays.org/calc.asp>.



OTHER KEY RESOURCES

White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans

The White House Initiative is working to educate Hispanic Americans about benefits under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The initiative is currently forming the public-private Partnership for Hispanic Family Learning. To follow its progress or to sign up for more information, log on to www.yesican.gov or www.yosipuedo.gov.

Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs)

In addition to preschool services, Parental Information and Resource Centers help parents of older students become more involved in their education, particularly if they attend schools marked “in need of improvement.” Many provide information and outreach in Spanish as well as English. For more information over the Internet, log onto <http://www.pirc-info.net/>.

Resources in Spanish

For U.S. Department of Education resources in Spanish, please visit www.ed.gov/espanol/bienvenidos/es/.

To Request Copies of Publications

To order publications not provided in this tool kit, please contact the Department’s publications center at **1-877-4ED-PUBS (1-877-433-7827)** or visit www.edpubs.org.

FACT:

Before the *No Child Left Behind Act*, only about 15 percent of all Limited English Proficient [LEP] students received federal assistance to help meet their unique educational needs. Today, 80 percent receive such aid.

