

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Spellings Sworn in as Secretary; Vows to Extend NCLB to High Schools

With President Bush at her side, Margaret Spellings was sworn in as secretary of education January 31, the first mother of school-age children to serve in that position.

"In carrying out my duties to the American people, I will be carrying out my duties as a mom, and there's none more important than to provide a quality education to our children," she said in her first speech as secretary. Spellings is the mother of two school-age daughters, one in a public school and one in a Catholic school.

In comments during the swearing-in ceremony, both President Bush and Secretary Spellings touted the success of the No Child Left Behind Act and pledged to lengthen its reach to high schools.

"In the past four years, we have made great strides," said the president, citing as evidence higher scores on standardized

tests and a narrowing of the achievement gap. But he said more work must be

done, including extending "high standards and accountability to America's public high schools." He called "unacceptable" the fact that only about 60 percent of entering freshmen make it to high school graduation four years

later, and he pledged to ensure that every high school student graduates "with the

skills he or she needs to succeed in college or the workplace."



With President George W. Bush looking on and her husband, Robert, holding the Bible, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings takes the oath of office at the Department of Education January 31, 2005. (White House Photo)

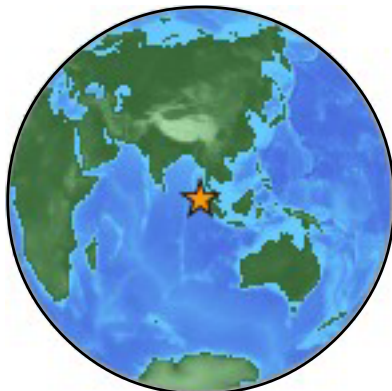
Secretary Spellings echoed the president's remarks, promising to introduce NCLB reforms to high schools "so that diplomas become tickets to success in the 21st century." She offered an equation for school reform: "Accountabil-

ity plus high expectations plus resources

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Schools Respond to Tsunami Tragedy

For a wide swath of students across the country, the return to school in January was far from business as usual. With people in Southern Asia experiencing unspeakable suffering in the wake of the wall of water that devastated villages and families, the response of many American school communities was not to resume the routine, but to extend a helping hand. Teachers revamped lesson plans to inspire students to assist those in need. Administrators prepared prayer services to implore God's comfort. Students took up a series of fundraising activities ranging from swim-a-thons and math-a-thons to dress-down



days and bake sales. Whether creative or tried and true, all the projects were aimed at a simple and kindhearted purpose: to ease the pain of those who survived the tsunami. The hope was for a wave of healing as swift and powerful as the wave of ruin that preceded and prompted it.

One school's relief project took place close to the tsunami site itself. Students, teachers, and other volunteers from Cincinnati

Hills Christian Academy in Cincinnati, Ohio, traveled all the way to Charity City, India, where they helped an orphanage prepare for children affected by the tsunami. Although the trip had been

planned well before the tragedy, the timing placed CHCA students in the front lines helping the orphanage get ready to receive hundreds of children who had lost their homes and families in the floods.

"Seeing all this really wakes you up," said Ashley Reno, a senior at the school. Her comments were reported in *The Enquirer* by a staff writer who accompanied the group on the trip. "When you see the children on the street, on the way here, my heart just goes out to them," she said. "No one should have to live like that." The writer noted Reno's eyes were glistening when she said, "I already want to bring all of them home with me."

While not as close to the destruction as the Cincinnati Hills project, other school-based efforts were just as commendable. The Blue Ridge School, a college preparatory school for boys in St. George, Vir-

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CAPE member organizations:

- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- National Association of Episcopal Schools
- National Association of Independent Schools
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- Solomon Schechter Day School Association
- Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- 28 Affiliated State Organizations

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ginia, sponsored several projects to help tsunami victims. Events included a special chapel service and offering, a bake sale, and a fundraising dress-down day on which students and faculty donated funds in exchange for the right to shed the traditional coat and tie for more casual attire. The school sent the American Red Cross a check for \$7,000.

Sioux Falls Christian School worked with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) to provide assistance to children affected by the tsunami. The school showed students a short video clip from CRWRC and asked them to “give their age” to help another boy or girl who had lost a family or home.

In Milford, New Jersey, students at the Solomon Schechter Day School raised over \$3,000, according to the North Jersey Media Group. Students sold a newspaper they produced about the tsunami, and raised additional funds through bake sales and collections taken after morning prayer services.

Links of Love and Hope

Our Lady of Mercy School in Potomac, Maryland, has a project called “Links of Love and Hope.” The Catholic Standard reports that student council members in the school sell slips of paper for \$2, which students decorate with a prayer for victims of the tsunami. The prayer papers are then linked together to drape the school as a remembrance of the tragedy. Funds from the project will be forwarded to Catholic Relief Services.

Lower school students at The Moses Brown School, a Friends school in Providence, Rhode Island, made and sold bracelets to raise money. Upper school students will be hosting a performing arts festival, with the price of admission being a donation towards the relief effort. The tsunami will also be the focus of a school-wide meeting for worship this month.

The Rudolf Steiner School, a Waldorf school in New York City, raised over \$11,000 for tsunami relief, the bulk coming from donations offered during a concert on January 13. Students and teachers displayed their creative and artistic talents through poetry, music, drama, chorus, and dance. Students in The Park School in Snyder, New York, were planning to follow suit with a fundraising talent show slated for February 15.

Pennies from Heaven

Not all disaster-relief activities involved extensive planning. A number of schools raised significant sums of money simply by having students and teachers deposit coins and bills in five-gallon jars or other containers placed in en-

trances, hallways, or classrooms. One school called the project “Change the World,” another, “Pennies from Heaven.”

When Kevin Dunning, executive director of Faith Lutheran School in Las Vegas, Nevada, challenged staff and students to donate \$1 a day for seven days for tsunami relief, he never dreamed that the initial goal of \$10,000 would be surpassed nearly four times over. As of early February, the school received more than \$37,000 from students, teachers, parents, and friends. The money will go to the American Red Cross, the World Relief Fund of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and Bethania Kids, an organization that assists orphaned children in India.

Perhaps the most unusual collection effort is the one being undertaken by Southwestern Christian School in Yuma, AZ. The Yuma Sun reports that children are saving their pennies to collect toothbrushes for children in an orphanage in Myanmar. A parent, John Jackson, is planning to deliver the toothbrushes during a mission trip to Myanmar. “The children in the orphanage do not own a thing,” he said. “They have nothing that belongs to them, so we hope this will help them.”

UNICEF has developed a school-in-a-box, which provides basic supplies and materials for a class of 40 students, allowing children to receive instruction in emergency situations. The agency says the kit—which includes such items as workbooks, pencils, a wooden teaching clock, counting cubes, laminated arithmetic posters, and even a blackboard—allows teachers to “establish makeshift classrooms almost anywhere.” The Hockessin Montessori School in Delaware raised about \$4,200 for the school-in-a box program.

Frog Kiss and Penny War

Working off the premise that frog-kissing is an effective motivator, Cape Christian School in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, had classes compete in a penny war, with the losing class having to designate a volunteer student to kiss a frog. The rules were quite elaborate, with each penny counting as one positive point and all other currency counting as negative points according to their penny value (e.g., one dollar equals 100 negative points). The object was to put as many pennies as possible in your own class’s jar and as many bills as possible in the jars of other classes in order to pull down their scores. There were so many coins involved that a bank was recruited to count them. The school of only 138 students donated a grand total of \$2,842.10 in tsunami aid to Samaritan’s Purse, a nondenominational evangelical Christian relief agency.

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equals results.”

The administration's plan for high school reform includes the following initiatives:

- an increase in funds for the Striving Readers program and the Mathematics and Science Partnerships program;
- a new program of intervention for high school students performing below grade level;
- the consolidation of several existing programs that serve high school students;
- monetary awards for teachers who bring about dramatic increases in student performance in low-income schools;
- creation of an Adjunct Teacher Corps to enable professionals to teach high school courses;
- additional funds to help more students take Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses;
- a State Scholars program to help promote rigorous courses of high school study.

CAPE believes that federal programs benefiting public school students and teachers should offer equitable benefits to comparably situated private school students and teachers while protecting the autonomy and independence of private schools. In programs such as the Mathematics and Science Partnership, such equity already exists. But other current programs identified for expansion under the president's plan (e.g., Striving Readers and Advanced Placement) are not under a statutory obligation for equity. These, as well as any new initiatives, would require clear language to secure the equitable participation of comparably situated students and teachers in private schools.

In her remarks at the swearing-in ceremony, Secretary Spellings called the No Child Left Behind law more than just a piece of legislation.

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Latching on to the current bracelet craze, students in Oregon Episcopal School created a three-bead bracelet, with each bead carrying a particular message: black for mourning those who died, gold for the help provided survivors, and a clear bead to symbolize hope and cooperation. The project raised several thousand dollars in its first two days, and the hope is for an even higher yield. Enterprising students are providing parishes throughout the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon with materials to make their own bracelets.

One of CAPE's member organizations, the Association of Christian Schools International, reports that a number of its schools in Indonesia endured extensive damage during earthquakes prior to the tsunami. Petra Vocational High School in Nabire, for example, sustained

“It was an attitude,” she said. “An attitude that says it's right to measure our children's progress from year to year so we can help them before it's too late; an attitude that says expecting students to read and do math at grade level or better is not too much to ask.” She described the law's effect this way: “Across the nation, test scores in reading and math are rising, with disadvantaged and minority students leading the way. Yes, after long decades, the pernicious achievement gap is beginning to close.”

In his State of the Union address February 2, the president repeated the twin themes of the NCLB's success and its extension to high school: “Under the No Child Left Behind Act, standards are higher, test scores are on the rise, and we're closing the achievement gap for minority students. Now we must demand better results from our high schools, so every high school diploma is a ticket to success.”

Close to the President

Secretary Spellings is a close associate of President Bush, having served as his domestic policy advisor for the past four years and as his senior advisor for education when he was governor of Texas. Her connection with the White House inner circle was reflected in the audience at her swearing-in ceremony. Attendees included Karl Rove, senior advisor to the president; Andrew Card, White House chief of staff; Jim Towey, director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and Alberto Gonzales, counsel to the president. Other guests included Senators Mike Enzi (R-WY) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA), chairman and ranking member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, and Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

major damage to nine classrooms and several other rooms. The reconstruction cost for each classroom is an estimated \$6,500. ACSI is accepting donations to help the damaged schools. More information is available at www.acsi.org.

Various reasons prompted people to participate in what is now one of the largest humanitarian relief missions in history. Rachel Burton, a senior at the Academy of the Holy Cross in Kensington, Maryland, was motivated by a sense that humanity is united. She told *The Catholic Standard* that in religion class she was reminded that when one part of the body hurts, the entire body hurts. “[W]hen someone in another country is hurting, you feel their pain too—and that's why we all want to keep on helping.”

Given the extent of the tsunami's devastation, it looks like we will all need to keep on helping for a long time to come.

Three Governors Propose Choice

“Every child is entitled to a public education, but public education is not entitled to every child.” That is what Texas Governor Rick Perry said in his State of the State address last month when announcing a school choice program for parents in poor-performing schools.

Perry was one of several governors who used their state of the state addresses or annual budgets to unveil school choice initiatives. South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford devoted a significant portion of his address on January 26 to making the case for putting parents in charge of their children's education. He noted his state's standing as 49th in the nation for high school dropouts and asked how anyone could accept a system where one-half of all students never make it to graduation. Perry cited the success of the school choice program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where, he said, public schools got better, education dollars went further, dropout rates fell, and parents were empowered. He called his school choice proposal a “gut-check vote” that could “transform people's lives.”

A bit further north, Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty proposed in his budget a “pilot project for measuring the effects of school choice scholarships for poor and academically challenged students.” Capped at \$4 million, the initiative would provide “tax credits for contributions to scholarship organizations that will administer the program.”

Reacting to the three initiatives, Clint Bolick, president and general counsel of the Alliance for School Choice, said, “These efforts demonstrate a growing recognition that we need to consider all alternatives, including private schools, to make good on the promise of equal educational opportunities.”

Return service requested

CAPE notes

★ **Fast Fact About Private Schools:** Private school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more than three times more likely than comparable public school students to attain a bachelor's degree by their mid-20s. (Source: National Center for Education Statistics, [Private Schools: A Brief Portrait](#) (NCES 2002-013), table 13.) The above-average college-going rate for low-income students shows how private schools contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty for their students.

★ Private school students, home school students, and public school students in Georgia would be able to take up to six state-funded online courses per year if a bill passed by the state Senate on January 27 makes it through the House. The bill would establish the Georgia Virtual School, a distance-learning program delivering instruction via the Internet or "any other manner not involving on-site interaction with a teacher." The state would cover the cost of tuition, materials, and fees related to the courses. One catch, however, for students not attending public schools is the bill's provision that when it comes to enrolling for the online courses, "public school students shall be given priority."

★ Shauna Fleming, a sophomore at Lutheran High School in Orange, California, came to Washington last month to at-

tend the presidential inauguration. It was not her first visit to D.C. Last November she met with President Bush to present him the millionth message collected by a program she founded called A Million Thanks.

Started in the spring of 2004, when Shauna was a freshman, A Million Thanks is a national campaign to collect and distribute letters of appreciation to members of the U.S. military. The original goal of one million letters, cards, and e-mail messages was met in October, an event celebrated when Shauna gave the framed goal-reaching letter to the president in the Oval Office. "Meeting the president, it really was like a dream come true," she said.

With the original goal realized, the project now wants to collect 1.4 million thank you's, representing the number of men and women currently in the armed forces.

Lutheran High students participate in the project by opening, sorting, and packaging the letters for distribution to mili-

tary bases, USOs, and VA hospitals. Gregg Pinick, principal of the school, welcomes

the program. "I can't think of a better way for students to express themselves for the sacrifices made by the men and women in our military, than to try to collect and distribute letters of love and appreciation. The students are not asking people to support any military cause, but to take time and write a special thank you letter to our service members for the work they do and for their sacrifices to maintain the freedom we enjoy in this country," said Pinick.

The school is well on its way to collecting and distributing the additional 400,000

thank you's. With enough support, the goal could be reached by May 2005, National Military Appreciation Month, for which Shauna is now the spokesperson.

For more information about A Million Thanks, including information on how your school or organization can participate in the program, visit www.amillionthanks.org.



In this March 2004 photo, Shauna Fleming displays the first of a million letters of appreciation she received. (Nate Wisely/Lutheran High School via U.S. Newswire)

