

## Top U.S. education official touts English requirements

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The nation's top education official said schools with high concentrations of Spanish speakers should not be exempted from federal English requirements.

"Most of our English-language-learner students are born here," Spellings said Monday after visiting a Mesa charter school. "I don't think it's unreasonable that by the end of the third grade they would be able to read on grade level in English."

Spellings toured the Mesa Arts Academy to promote the reauthorization of President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act. The 2001 education reform law has forced schools around the country to focus more on high stakes, standardized tests.  
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"We passed the very best law we could five years ago, and now we can improve it based upon what we've learned," Spellings said.

Spellings did not meet with state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne during her visit.

Horne has called No Child Left Behind "erratic" and has charged that it sets schools with high Spanish-speaking populations up to fail because it requires immigrant children to be proficient in English after spending just one year in the country.

Susan Carlson, executive director of the Arizona Business and Education Coalition, said she supports the law but shares some of Horne's concerns.

"Arizona is unique among the states in that we have a continual influx of English language learners," Carlson said. "Other states can take three years to test their students in Spanish or the native language, but our

state law requires they are tested in English. That puts Arizona in kind of a losing position."

During her tour, Spellings praised the charter school for posting high test scores even though many of its students come from low-income backgrounds, and more than half the students come to the school speaking no English.

Spellings said the school is an example of the benefits of No Child Left Behind. The law was touted as a way to ensure that minority children and those with low-income backgrounds achieved at the same level as their wealthier counterparts.

<http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0403Spellings03-ON.html#>