



Charter Schools To Receive Multimillion-Dollar Boost

By **ELIZABETH GREEN, STAFF REPORTER OF THE SUN** | April 7, 2008

Charter schools that have been struggling to find homes in New York will receive a boost today from the Bush administration, in the form of a multimillion-dollar grant.

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings is presenting the award to a local group that finances, constructs, and renovates charter school buildings, Civic Builders, Inc. The money will be used to aid building efforts in New York City and Newark, N.J., charter schools, according to sources familiar with the grant.

Both the New York City schools chancellor, Joel Klein, and the Newark mayor, Cory Booker, will be on hand at today's announcement.

The grant comes as charter schools in the city face what officials at Civic Builders have termed a space "crisis." Charter schools are publicly funded but privately managed, and state laws often do not guarantee them space in public school buildings. In New York City, Mayor Bloomberg and his Department of Education have worked to help secure space for charter schools, welcoming them into public school buildings with some extra space, where the charter schools usually get a hallway or floor and part-time access to the cafeteria and gymnasium.

They are becoming more and more common, but these sharing arrangements are politically perilous, with parents and teachers at existing schools crying foul and enlisting elected officials to back their protests.

One school's protest has migrated to the Internet, where a Red Hook mother started a Web log, Charter-Free PS15. Another protest planned for this Wednesday is also expected to draw attention to the issue.

Civic Builders helps charter schools construct and lease buildings that are separate from public facilities. With the help of private philanthropy, it has transformed a Bronx parking garage into a 43,000-square-foot school and a kosher salami factory in Hunts Point into a school with an arts specialty, and built a 90,000-square-foot school complete with a 10,000-volume library, a climbing wall, and a rooftop athletic area in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn.

The grant is part of a federal program aimed at making it more attractive — and less risky — for philanthropists to invest in charter school construction projects. The Bush administration has already awarded more than \$175 million in grants to similar projects across the country, according to Education Department grant lists.