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SPECIAL EDITION
Legislative Conference

Urban Schools Rank High On National List

Eleven of the top 20 public high schools in the nation are located in urban school districts, according to the *Washington Post's* 2014 ranking of "America's Most Challenging High Schools."

An Oakland Unified School District school in California, American Indian Public Charter, ranked No. 1 of the more than 1,900 public high schools nationwide that made the national newspaper's "Challenge" list.

Two Dallas Independent School District schools in Texas, Talented and Gifted and Science/Engineering Magnet, ranked No. 4 and No. 5, respectively.

One of the key lessons from the 2014 rankings, according to the *Post* in its April 7 edition, is that it's "not true that schools full of low-income kids are always at a disadvantage in school rankings." The paper noted that No. 1 American Indian Public Charter's enrollment includes 77 percent economically disadvantaged students.

The *Washington Post* rankings, launched in 1998, are based on a formula called the Challenge Index, which ranks schools on the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Advanced International Certificate of Education tests given at a school each year and divided by the number of graduating seniors.

Other high schools in districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools ranked in the top 20 are:

- Stanton College Prep in Jacksonville, Fla., No. 7;

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Civil Rights Report Stuns Education Leader

Arne Duncan has been the U.S. Secretary of Education since 2009, and in those five years serving as the nation's top education official he claims to have learned something new every day. But even he was taken aback at the results of a report the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights recently released documenting racial disparities in school discipline policies across the country.

"I was stunned to find how many pre-K kids are suspended each year," Duncan told big-city school leaders who assembled in Washington, D.C., for the Council of the Great City Schools' recent Legislative/Policy Conference. "Tragically, the school to prison pipeline actually starts with some of our 4-year-olds."

The report, which found young men and boys of color are disproportionately affected by suspensions and expulsions, also documented the lack of access to high level advanced courses found in high schools that predominantly serve students of color.

"All of us are focused on closing the achievement gap, but we can't close the achievement gap until we close the opportunity gap," said Duncan. "And the opportunity gap is expanding."

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Education Secretary Meets Superintendents



U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, center, poses with urban-school superintendents after meeting with them at the Council of the Great City Schools' recent Annual Legislative/Policy Conference in Washington. They discussed issues, challenges and achievements in big-city school districts.

Council Honors Longtime Congressman George Miller

George Miller was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1975, where he served on the then-House Education and Labor Committee, and since that time he has been a leading voice for equity and excellence in the nation's schools and a tireless supporter of the nation's children, particularly its poor children, children of color, children with disabilities and those who are learning English.

The California congressman, who is stepping down this year, was greeted with a standing ovation when the Council of the Great City Schools presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award at its recent Legislative/Policy Conference.

"A few people in Congress have had his longevity, but no one has had his impact on public education and the environment," said Council Executive Michael Casserly upon presenting Miller with the award.

Casserly praised the congressman for being not only the moral conscious of the now-Education and Workforce Committee, but as a great politician who always knew how to get things done and how to make progress on behalf of urban schools and urban schoolchildren.

"You have made the world a better place



Congressman George Miller, right, receives the Lifetime Achievement Award from Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

and you have ensured the future of so many others will be brighter," Casserly told Miller. "And please note that the standards you set will continue to be the beacon that so many of us will continue to follow well into the future."

Speaking directly to urban educators, Miller noted that after four decades in the "rough and tumble" halls of Congress, he was always committed to serving edu-

cation for the long haul and reflected over the myriad of changes he has seen in his 39-year career.

"We have come across a lot of fads in education," Miller said. "A lot of big fixes, a lot of short cuts and a lot of other things, most which haven't panned out terribly well."

However, Miller commended the

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Seven Urban School Leaders Profiled in Annual *Education Week* Report

Two superintendents and five other administrators from big-city school districts around the nation were recently spotlighted in *Education Week's* second annual report called "Leaders to Learn from."

The report profiles 16 school leaders who the newspaper recognizes as "bold and innovative leaders," published on page one of *Education Week's* March 5 edition.



Robert Runcie

In a profile of Superintendent Robert Runcie of the Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., he is described as ushering in "a new era of collaboration and cooperation between the Florida district and what some say is one of the biggest threats to its financial viability: the charter school community."



Kelvin Adams

St. Louis Public Schools Superintendent Kelvin Adams and St. Louis Teachers Union President Mary Armstrong received recognition for collaborating to increase the number of pre-

school seats to reverse years of declining student enrollment.

The "Leaders to Learn from" report also profiled Deputy Superintendent Maria Santos of California's Oakland Unified School District. She is described as using "instructional rounds," somewhat like those in teaching hospitals, to coach educators on how to better involve English language learners in the academic program.

Assistant Superintendent Dennis Creedon of the School District of Philadelphia was recognized for his support of arts education. "People see it as a frill, but it's not a frill. It's actually the center of the core," he told *Education Week*. "If you cut these out of schools, you are really cutting the heart out of our children and their future."

Other urban school leaders profiled in the newspaper's [2014 report](#):

- New York City's Steven Hodas, executive director of Innovative NYC Schools, a district initiative to advance educational technologies in classrooms, for innovation in procurement;
- Cleveland's Tracy Hill, executive director, Office of Family and Community Engagement, for parent engagement; and
- Minneapolis' Bertrand Weber, director of culinary and nutrition services, for creating healthier lunches for students.

Austin Superintendent Named to Lead Schools in Atlanta

Superintendent Meria Carstarphen of the Austin Independent School District in the Texas capital city has been chosen to lead the Atlanta Public Schools in Georgia's capital city.

She takes the reins of the 49,000-student school district from Superintendent Erroll Davis Jr., who has led the Atlanta school system since 2011.



Meria Carstarphen

"Meria's record as a superintendent speaks for itself – student achievement that outperformed many urban school systems across the country and graduation rates that set new highs for Austin," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in a statement in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

"I admire Meria's deep belief in serving all students and holding herself accountable for their success," he added.

She became the first African American and female superintendent of the 87,000-student Austin school system in 2009. Earlier, she served as superintendent of Minnesota's Saint Paul Public Schools and chief accountability officer for the District of Columbia Public Schools in the nation's capital.

Pre-Kindergarten Access to Be Expanded in Cleveland

The Cleveland Metropolitan School District has partnered with the city's mayor, county executive and others to expand access to high-quality pre-kindergarten to children of the Ohio city.

In March, an initiative called PRE-4CLE was unveiled aimed at increasing pre-school seats for 4-year-olds this coming 2014-15 school year, and will eventually include 3-year-olds.

"Every child deserves an excellent education, and a high-quality pre-school program is the place to start," said Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson in a press statement, noting that the initiative contributes to the school system's efforts to transform schools.

Under the plan, 2,000 additional 4-year-olds are expected to be enrolled in high-quality pre-K by 2016. And the estimated cost is \$15 million in the first year

to implement the initiative, with public and private funds being secured.

"A fundamental part of improving the quality of our schools is offering high-quality pre-K," said Cleveland school district CEO Eric Gordon in a news release, "because prepared kindergarteners eventually become well-prepared high school graduates."

Education Secretary *continued from page 1*

In his address, the secretary praised urban educators for challenging the status quo and not making excuses, while boosting academic achievement in their respective school districts despite the lack of resources. “Urban school districts are helping lead the country where it needs to go,” said Duncan. “Thank you collectively for the difference you are making.”

The nation’s ninth secretary of education said that in the three years his administration has left in office, he is not only thinking how to impact education every day, or a couple of years, but how his administration can impact education in the next couple of decades. And at the top of the list continues to be providing high quality, early childhood education.

“We are thrilled to see this becoming a national bipartisan issue in the real world,” said Duncan, who noted that even with tough economic times, approximately 30 governors have increased their investment in early childhood education. But he believes the big challenge is the huge waiting lists people encounter when trying to enroll their children in early childhood programs because there are not enough available slots.

“We know the average kid from a poor community starts kindergarten at the age of 5, a year to 14 months behind,” said Duncan. “None of us do a great job of catching them up to scale and we have to get out of the catch-up business.”

Duncan, the former chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools, praised urban school systems for moving toward teacher and principal evaluations that reward excellence and shine a spotlight on success but challenge the status quo when things aren’t working.

“For the first time in our country’s history, many of you, if not all of you, are starting to incorporate student learning into teacher evaluations,” Duncan told conferees.

He said that his department is working to provide school districts with money for new technology, and is trying to make sure schools and students get access to high



Education Secretary Arne Duncan

speed broadband and has asked for \$100 million to help train teachers how to use it better.

The secretary also explained how his department has requested money to fund “My Brother’s Keeper,” a new White House initiative to improve education outcomes for boys and young men of color.

“I don’t think one of us can be honest and say our districts are doing enough to break cycles of poverty and incarceration,” said Duncan. “We have to invest very differently and create a different opportunity structure.”

The education secretary strongly believes that it is important for educators to spend time listening to people because too many times they get the policy right but forget about the politics.

He said that in regard to new education policies being implemented there is increasing pushback from the far left and far right. “But I’m convinced there is a common sense middle in every community but we have to talk to them,” said Duncan, urging school leaders to go back to their respective communities and listen to parents, students and teachers.

Duncan also believes that educators must do a better job of painting a picture of what education in this country looks like five years from now.

“Parents want to know that we are going to have higher standards and people can compete with children in India and China and South Korea,” said Duncan. “So

paint a picture of what success looks like. That narrative is so important.”

Despite the difficulties, the nation’s top education official is optimistic about what the next couple of years will look like. “If we can change the course the next couple of years, we can change education in this country.”

Duncan took several questions from urban educators, including a question from Abby Pasion, a senior at Roosevelt High School in Portland, Oregon, who attended the conference because she aspires to be a student board member.

“What kind of role do students play in decisions around education?” asked Pasion.

Duncan said he tries to visit schools on a weekly basis as well as meet monthly with students in his office.

“If we are not listening to students, then we are not going to be where we need to go,” Duncan told Pasion. “If you put 20 students in a room, they are not always going to agree. But hearing from students is extraordinarily beneficial to me and my team.”



Portland student Abby Pasion

Congresswoman Speaks

Also addressing the conference was Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), who serves on the U.S. House of Representatives Education Appropriations Subcommittee and gave a passionate speech on the importance of education.

“We live in a country where one’s birth does not dictate one’s destiny,” said DeLauro, “and where education can inspire dreams and where everyone has the access to the tools to build his or her own future.”

The congresswoman noted that the federal government plays a crucial role in helping all children navigate the many obstacles to a good education, and it is the nation’s moral responsibility to see that the country’s budget reflects the goal of preserving access to opportunity and to education.

She decried that over the last decade federal education funding has not kept

Education Secretary *continued on page 5*

Education Secretary *continued from page 4*

pace with population growth and inflation.

“For many of our poor, the erosion and recent cuts in education programs have been devastating,” said DeLauro. She pointed out that Title I grants supporting instructional services for disadvantaged children, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act funding for special education, and after-school programs not only lost funding last year due to the sequester, but all three remain funded at levels below their appropriations in 2010.

“The list goes on and on,” said DeLauro. “...and the impact to our schools you see every day in overcrowded schools, overworked teachers and cuts to the arts and key subjects like civics.”

DeLauro strongly believes the nation is not meeting its responsibilities, and instead is mortgaging its future.

“Access to education is the great equalizer and in America it should not depend what your race, gender, religion, sexual or political orientation or economic circumstance is,” said the Connecticut congresswoman. “What matters is your God-given talent, hard work and the opportunity to succeed.”

DeLauro did cite one area where she was proud that the nation was able to make real investments, pointing to the Head Start program, which received \$8.6 million more in funding. “Early childhood education is one of the wisest investments that we can make in our national economy,” she said.

The congresswoman said that she continues to take issue with the Obama Administration’s emphasis on competitive funding. “Far too often competitive funding seeks to reward a state grant-writing ability rather than its actual school system,” stated DeLauro. “What is needed is steady secure funding for all our schools to move toward improvement.”

She said that if the nation wants to create jobs and grow the economy, the country’s educational system must provide opportunity for all, chiding members of both parties for not stepping up to the plate and doing right by education as a national priority.



Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro

“We have to support our children by giving them the tools they need to understand their world and to help them to realize their dreams,” said DeLauro. “All kids, no matter what neighborhood they come from, need to have an opportunity for success, that’s what this nation is all about.”

DeLauro, who has been a congresswoman for 24 years, believes that Congress can make a profound positive difference when it has the will and the courage to act and urged educators to not take no for an answer.

“You need to push for those kids you serve, push the edge of the envelope, and restore this nation’s commitment to education in the way that our Founding Fathers envisioned this institution’s capabilities of providing opportunity,” urged DeLauro.

Opportunity Gap

Urban educators also heard from Deborah Delisle, the assistant secretary of education for elementary and secondary education for the U.S. Department of Education.

She said that the Education Department is focused on closing the opportunity gap and said that too many times people turn to kids as if it is their fault, when in fact those achievement gaps often exist because of adult issues.

“We expect that different kids from dif-

ferent zip codes, for example, cannot do as well as certain other kids,” said Delisle. “So for me, it’s really about opening up opportunities as well as lifting up our expectations for all kids.”

She recalled a conversation she will never forget she had a year ago with high school students from a large city who told her their high school was divided in half by a brick wall, with the other half housing a charter school. The charter high school had 17 Advanced Placement courses, while their high school had none. In addition, there was no cafeteria at the high school, while the charter school had a beautiful cafeteria with a salad bar.

“Expectations and opportunities for kids were very much divided again as students said by one brick wall,” said Delisle. “We could never get to the achievement gap issue unless we confront the very notion of what we expect of kids and what we provide to kids.”

She told conferees that the Education Department under President Obama is the



Education official Deborah Delisle

first administration that has developed an office of early learning as well as established a productive partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which has been critical in helping fund home visiting programs.

She has seen firsthand the benefit these programs have provided. “And my heart is just absolutely lifted when those home visitation programs really work,” said Delisle. “I have seen lives transformed.”

Delisle noted that the department through its Office of Safe and Healthy Students is working to ensure school districts receive funds to help students with mental health issues and improve school climate.

“We find that when we go into schools, school climate beats everything,” said Delisle. “So we actually have some grants going out to the district level to look at school climate--to review it, to think about it in terms of how do you make those changes because it’s absolutely essential to get that advocacy for kids.”

Des Moines District Honored for Energy Use

For the third year in a row, Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools has been selected to receive the ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year Award by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy.

The annual award was presented to 127 organizations for their commitment to protecting the environment through superior energy efficiency.

In addition, the Des Moines school district was selected as one of 10 Climate

Communications winners that have created communications and raised awareness in their students, teachers, families and the community about the impacts of climate change.

Within the last five years, Des Moines officials have reduced overall energy expenditures by \$2.8 million through better appliance choices as well as educating staff and students about energy conservation.

"We're protecting the environment, but at the end of the day it's also financial," said James Wilkerson, facilities services director for the school system. "Energy costs are general fund expenditures, so it comes out of the same money that buys textbooks and pays salaries. So we save money that can be used in other places in our budget."

Des Moines was also one of the 72 Sustained Excellence winners that continues to exhibit exceptional leadership year after year in the ENERGY STAR Program while remaining dedicated to environmental protection through superior energy efficiency.

"It feels good," said Wilkerson, upon learning the district was being honored with a Partner of the Year Award for the third straight year. "It represents years of hard work and dedication to the energy culture change within the district."

Urban schools continued from page 1

- Suncoast Community in Palm Beach County, No. 8;
- Young Women's Prep in Miami-Dade County, No. 9;
- Carnegie Vanguard in Houston, No. 11;
- Paxon School for Advanced Studies in Jacksonville, No. 14;
- Darnell-Cookman of the Medical Arts in Jacksonville, No. 15;
- Archimedean Upper Conservatory in Miami-Dade County, No. 19; and
- Rangel Young Women's Leadership School in Dallas, No. 20

Florida's Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville is the only big-city school system in the nation with three schools listed in the top 15. "Results like these demonstrate that the education Duval County Public Schools offers is of the highest quality, an investment of great benefit to students, families and taxpayers," said Superintendent Nikolai Vitti in a news release.

A number of other urban public schools also made the grade in the *Post* rankings. The Houston Independent School District, for example, had 32 schools on the *Post's* "America's Most Challenging High Schools" list.

L.A. District Tech Leader Spotlighthed



Ronald Chandler

Ronald Chandler, chief information officer for the Los Angeles Unified School District, was recently named among the top 100 communications technology professionals in the nation

by *ComputerWorld* magazine. He was the only person hailing from a school district to be named a Premier 100 Information Technology Leader.

Chandler was honored for his innovative approaches to business challenges and for his leadership in managing, mentoring and motivating others.

In his current position, he oversees the information technology division for the nation's second largest school district. Chandler is making history in this position as he spearheads an effort to provide a computing device for approximately 600,000 students and teachers, in what district officials believe to be the largest such effort in the nation's history.

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Council of the Great City Schools

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Council of the Great City Schools

Council Video Wins Telly Awards

The Council of the Great City Schools' short video explaining how the Common Core State Standards will help students succeed has won the prestigious Telly Award – and not one, but two.

The video won the highest honor in the 35th Annual Telly Awards in the use of animation and education categories in the international competition. The Telly Awards program receives more than 13,000 entries a year from advertising agencies, video production companies, TV stations, cable companies, interactive agencies and corporations worldwide.



In a three-minute production, the video explains how the Common Core State Standards, adopted in 45 states and the District of Columbia, will help students achieve at high levels and learn what they need to know to get to graduation and beyond.

The Council has now won its third and fourth Telly Awards – statuettes similar to the Oscars and Emmys, and made by the same company that produces those awards. In 2006, the Council won Telly Awards in two categories for its “Pop Quiz” public service announcement for outstanding television commercials.



District of Columbia student Avery Coffey holds his scholarship letter to George Washington University.

Black Males Defy Odds And Gain Acceptance Into the Ivy League

Avery Coffey, a 17-year-old senior at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School in Washington, D.C., recently made national news after his acceptance into not one, but five Ivy League colleges.

The self-described “determined” student grew up in a single-parent household in Washington D.C.’s Ward 8, the poorest neighborhood in the city. Coffey, who maintains a 4.3 grade-point-average (GPA), defied the odds with college acceptance letters from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown and the University of Pennsylvania.

In an interview with *Fox News*, Coffey was asked what advice he has for other students who want to follow in his footsteps.

“You can go anywhere you want to, pursue any career that you want to, and you shouldn’t let anybody hinder you from trying to reach your goals,” he said.

Coffey is still undecided on a college; however, he recently was awarded a four-year \$200,000 scholarship to George Washington University.

And Coffey is not the only big-city school student making headlines for his academic achievement during this college acceptance season.

Three Long Beach Students Win C-SPAN Documentary Competition

Michaela Capps, Sarah Highducheck and Emma Larson are not only three freshman students at Poly High School in Long Beach, Calif., but also budding filmmakers whose documentary will soon be aired nationwide on C-SPAN.

The students won a \$5,000 grand prize from C-SPAN for their documentary, “Earth First, Fracking Second.”

Since 2006, C-SPAN has invited middle and high school students to produce short documentaries on an issue of national importance. This year, students used video cameras to answer the question, “What’s the most important issue the U.S. Congress should consider in 2014?”

The three Poly High students competed against 4,800 students nationwide who submitted 2,355 documentaries for the grand prize win.

Fracking frees up pockets of oil and natural gas trapped in shale by using injections of water mixed with chemicals. The students’ documentary details the economic benefits of fracking but also calls upon

Congress to develop regulations to protect the environment from potential harm.

The students’ winning documentary will air on C-SPAN throughout the day on Monday, April 28.

“The level of critical thought, effort and initiative that students have demonstrated in creating their documentaries is inspiring, and we are thrilled to share this year’s winning videos with both Congress and the public,” said Craig McAndrew, C-SPAN manager of education relations.



Michaela Capps, Sarah Highducheck and Emma Larson from Long Beach, Calif., are winners of a national C-SPAN contest.

George Miller continued from page 2

Council for being an organization that keeps its eye on the prize and knows that educating students in urban communities is doable.

He told big-city school leaders to stay strong because there are communities, families and children with many difficult problems, but these problems are solvable if people make a solid commitment to fix them.

“Because you know in many instances what these children need are actual access to services, and resources and assets on their behalf,” said Miller. “...they don’t need to wait to have someone figure out how to do this in the future, they need it now if they are going to thrive.”

Miller told urban school educators that what they bring to the job daily has sustained value.

“You have demonstrated that the children the nation laments so often because they are poor, because they are minority, because they are in a difficult environment they can in fact thrive,” said Miller. “We see it demonstrated all the time, so why isn’t that the norm?” he wondered.

The effort to normalize demonstrated success for urban students has been the challenge Miller has taken up during his 39 years in Congress.

He praised education advocates who in his words “never run away from equity and accountability,” and views this struggle as a big fundamental fight within society.

“Because if you don’t stand for equity, if you don’t stand for accountability, then people just get lost in the shadows,” declared Miller.

The congressman concluded his speech by thanking big-city school leaders for being his ally during his time in Congress to help benefit the students who needed it most.

“We are not where we want to be, and we are not where we think we should go,” Miller acknowledged. “But we have done a lot more for kids than would have been possible without your advocacy, without your support or your experience in understanding the children and families in the communities you serve.”



Nation’s Top Senior Volunteer

At age 97, Thurman Haynes recently became the national winner of the Salute to Senior Service Contest, sponsored by Home Instead Senior Care, chosen from the 50 state-level winners of the thousands of contestants. As the oldest volunteer in North Carolina’s Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, he proves that “age is irrelevant when it comes to making a positive difference in the lives of others,” said Jeff Huber, president of Home Instead Inc., in honoring the national winner.

Urban Districts Honored For Top Music Education

At Texas’ Como Elementary School in Fort Worth, the district offers the distinctive B Sharp Music program, which promotes music instruction and academic achievement. Music is integrated throughout the core curriculum and students receive specialized music instruction during the school day.

To further enhance the sound of music, students at the school are provided with 10 hours of music each week and four hours of grade-level tutoring.

In recognition for its outstanding commitment to music education, Fort Worth Independent School District was designated as one of the Best Communities for Music Education by the National Association of Music Merchants. The district joins

376 districts across the country to receive this distinction in 2014.

Other big-city districts recognized include Texas’ Austin Independent School District, Las Vegas’ Clark County School District, Tampa’s Hillsborough County Public Schools, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, San Diego Unified School District, Memphis’ Shelby County Schools and Kansas’ Wichita Public Schools.

Celebrating its 15th annual Best Communities for Music Education designations, the annual survey recognizes and celebrates commitment to music education for all children. In all, 472 communities were recognized, including 376 school districts and 96 schools.

Baltimore District Opens School With Johns Hopkins U.

Many urban schools have developed partnerships with local universities, but Baltimore school officials have turned to two local universities to actually run the day-to-day operations of their new school.

The Elmer A. Henderson: A Johns Hopkins Partnership School opened in January and is operated by the Johns Hopkins University School of Education in collaboration with Morgan State University's School of Education.

Henderson-Hopkins is officially a contract school of the Baltimore City Public Schools, but is owned by the nonprofit East Baltimore Development Inc., in an effort to create a high-performing school as well as revitalize the surrounding neighborhood.

The \$53-million, 90,000-square-foot-facility serves 720 students from grades K-8 on a seven-acre campus. The campus is divided into five "houses" or clusters of learning pavilions, featuring traditional classrooms as well as commons areas bathed in sunlight designed to enable students to collaborate in small groups or work on large hands-on projects.

In addition, each cluster has access to its own outdoor terrace that can be used for play as well as outdoor learning.

The school was designed to spur economic renewal in East Baltimore and is the first public school built in the neighborhood in more than 20 years. The school will include a family resource center, gym, library, and auditorium available for community use.

According to the *New York Times*, the school is the centerpiece of a \$1.8 billion redevelopment project that includes new science and technology buildings, a park, retail development and mixed-income housing.

"We wanted Henderson-Hopkins to be an inspiration and magnet for the neighborhood," said Christopher Shea, president of the East Baltimore Development, Inc., in an interview with the *New York Times*.

School District in Orlando Finalist for Top Prize

Florida's Orange County Public Schools in Orlando has been named a finalist for the 2014 Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation's annual million-dollar prize for urban school districts that demonstrate overall progress in student achievement, particularly for economically disadvantaged students.

Only two school districts in the nation, including Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia, have been selected as finalists for this year's Broad (rhymes with "road") Prize for Urban Education.

"This is the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for public education," Orange County School Board Chairman Bill Sublette

stressed in a news release.

"This is an extreme honor for our school board, principals, teachers, and every OCPS team member who supports student achievement in our schools," said Orange County Public Schools Superintendent Barbara Jenkins.

The winner between the two school systems will be awarded the top prize of \$750,000 in college scholarships, while the runner-up will receive \$250,000 in scholarships.

The winner will be announced Sept. 22.

The Houston Independent School District won the 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education.

Honolulu Joins Council



The statewide Hawaii public school system recently joined the Council of the Great City Schools, increasing the urban-school coalition's membership to 67 big-city school districts.

The Hawaii Department of Education has a student enrollment of 185,334 students, with an estimated 68 percent, or about 126,180 students, residing in the highly urban city and county of Honolulu.

Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi sees an opportunity for the Hawaii school district to tap into the resources and supports that the Council offers to help its member school systems improve instruction and operations.

Philadelphia Bridges Research Divide

Many urban school districts conduct research, but their findings are never implemented at the school district level. In an effort to change this, the School District of Philadelphia and the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Mid-Atlantic recently co-hosted the district's first Research, Policy, and Practice Conference (R2P 2014).

The conference included sessions on key aspects of the Philadelphia school system's strategic plan, Action Plan 2.0, including a presentation on dropout prevention featuring Russell Rumberger, founder and director of the California Dropout Research Project; as well as a panel discussion on the use of research in school improvement and policy making.

The conference highlighted several of the more than 400 research and evaluation projects that have been conducted in the Philadelphia school system in recent years. In addition, participants from district offices and the community were able to review lessons learned from the research that may inform the instructional, intervention, and administrative practices in the district.

"REL Mid-Atlantic is proud to support the R2P 2014 Conference with the School

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Pictorial of 2014 Legislative Conference



Education Secretary Arne Duncan (left) talks with Birmingham Schools Superintendent Craig Witherspoon, left, and Fort Worth Schools Superintendent Walter Dansby at meeting with urban-school leaders.



St. Paul Schools Superintendent and Council Chair Valeria Silva addresses conferees.



Congressman George Miller inspires conferees with his dedication to education equity.



Rochester Schools Superintendent Bolgen Vargas (third from left) asks Education Secretary Arne Duncan a question while, left to right, Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks, San Diego Schools Superintendent Cindy Marten and Seattle Schools Superintendent José Banda look on at meeting.



Tampa's Hillsborough County school board member Doretha Edgecomb asks a question.

Photos by Alex Jones



Carolyn Edwards, a school board member with Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas, asks a question at the conference.



Superintendents of Dayton, Lori Ward; Milwaukee, Gregory Thornton; and Des Moines, Thomas Ahart at meeting with U.S. secretary of education.



Milwaukee school board president Michael Bonds welcomes conferees to the Taste of Milwaukee reception.



Urban school leaders listen intently at Legislative/Policy Conference session.



Ambassador Eduardo Medina Mora of Mexico addresses urban educators at the Mexican Cultural Institute, site of the Legislative Conference's welcome reception. (Photo by Patricia Good)



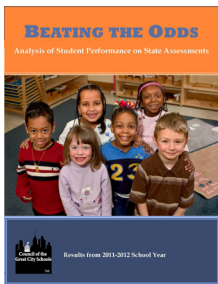
Philadelphia Schools Superintendent William Hite talks with Secretary Duncan following meeting with school chiefs.



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Council Releases Report



The Council of the Great City Schools recently released a new report on *Beating the Odds – Analysis of Student Performance on State Assessments*.

The report provides city-by-city profiles of large-city school districts on mathematics and reading state assessments – results from the 2011-12 school year.

The report can be accessed on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org

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“The Premier 100 awards program, now in its 15th year, shines a well-deserved spotlight on a group of talented, creative and hard-working men and women,” said Scot Finnie, *Computerworld* editor-in-chief.

This year the magazine received more than 1,000 nominees.

Black Males continued from page 7

In an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17-year-old Akintunde Ahmad described himself as an ordinary “street dude” living in Oakland, Calif. But his 5.0 GPA and 2100 score on the SAT (out of



Akintunde Ahmad 2400) show just how special the Oakland Technical High School senior really is.

With such high scores, it's no surprise Ahmad has been accepted into some of the top universities in the nation, including Yale, Brown, Columbia and UCLA.

But according to Ahmad, who is 6-foot-1 with shoulder length dreadlocks, it has been his appearance that has been judged and made others overlook him in academic settings. Few have believed him when he mentions his high GPA and SAT score.

“People looking at me funny is so common that it doesn't stick out for me anymore,” said Ahmad in the *Chronicle*. “It's

something that I've gotten used to.”

He has also gotten used to excelling in academics, appearing on the honor roll in every semester that he's been in high school.

Ahmad is also a student-athlete, playing basketball and baseball. Last year, he was the MVP of the baseball Oakland Athletic League.

Ahmad's strong work ethic comes from his father and mother, who is a principal at an Oakland elementary school. And he will take that strong work ethic with him to a college this fall, where he plans to major in either pre-med or pre-law.

Philadelphia Bridges continued from page 9

District of Philadelphia,” said Theresa Duncan, director of REL Mid-Atlantic. “This special collaboration will provide a forum to connect research to policy and practice during a day dedicated to putting the School District of Philadelphia Action Plan 2.0 into action.”

Access the conference program at: issuu.com/relma/docs/sdp_r2p_2014_conference_program_boo?e=11599934/7470795.