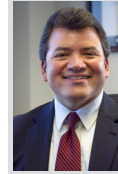


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Education Secretary to Address Council

With a new Congress in Washington, there's much on the agenda for debate over education legislation and policy.

How will the issues affect urban education in America?

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan will address urban school leaders from around the nation at the Council of the Great City Schools' Annual Legislative/Policy Conference, March 14-17, at the historic Renaissance Mayflower Hotel in the nation's capital.

The conference will focus on a range of Obama Administration and 114th Congress topics, including how the nation will be governed under a divided federal government. Urban educators will also discuss the status of the Elementary and Second-



Arne Duncan

ary Education Act (ESEA) and other education reauthorizations.

Waiver renewals for *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and other Administration initiatives will be addressed as well.

Still other topics will include the final federal appropriations for 2015, new budget and debt-ceiling battles in Congress, and the E-Rate funding increase and new rules.

Conference highlights are on page 9, and registration information can be accessed at www.cgcs.org.

Progress Shown In Turning Around Struggling Schools

About 70 percent of low-achieving urban schools that have received federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) to spur improvement have shown progress over the past three years, according to a detailed new study by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The study – *School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools* – found that SIG-award schools increased the numbers of students at or above Proficient levels of attainment on state assessments in reading and math. SIG-award schools in urban districts also demonstrated significant reductions in the numbers of students in the below-Basic level of performance in both subjects.

School Improvement Grants:
Progress Report from America's Great City Schools



February 2015

Charleston Only School System Named to CyberSecurity Consortium

Vice President Joseph Biden recently announced \$25 million in funding to launch a cybersecurity education consortium that will include 13 historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), two national labs, and only one school district – South Carolina's Charleston County School District.

"This is a tremendous honor...that the CCSD would be named the ONLY district in the nation to take part in a grant program that will prepare our students to be on the cutting edge of cybersecurity," said Acting Charleston Schools Superintendent Michael Bobby.

The White House emphasized the need for cybersecurity professionals. "By some estimates, the demand for cybersecurity workers is growing 12 times faster than the U.S. job market, and is creating well-paying jobs," said the Office of the Vice President in a press release.

The U.S. Department of Energy will provide a \$25-million grant over the next five years to support the Cybersecurity Workforce Pipeline Consortium, aimed at creating "a sustainable pipeline of students focused on cybersecurity issues," the White House noted.

Progress Shown continued on page 4

Council Offers Scholarships Inspired by a Former Astronaut

In 2010, former astronaut Dr. Bernard Harris Jr., the first African American to walk in space, and ExxonMobil wanted to help underrepresented students pursue science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies, and to increase diversity in the STEM workplace.

They created the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships for graduating high-school seniors in urban school districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.

For the sixth consecutive year, the Council is offering the scholarships to 2015 graduating seniors in the 67 Council member school districts. Four \$5,000 scholarships for two males and two females each will be awarded to two African American and two Hispanic students this spring.

After selecting last year's ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Scholars, Dr. Harris, who is also a physician and businessman, pointed out, "Our country is driven by our ability to create and develop the most advanced technologies and solutions. Engineers and scientists are the catalysts, and by providing these scholarships, we are planting seeds in the minds of these bright



Former NASA astronaut Bernard Harris shows students how to reach the stars.

young students, especially those from diverse backgrounds, to support their interest in the exciting and rewarding careers in STEM."

Last summer, the scholarships were awarded to students graduating from Florida's Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, the District

of Columbia Public Schools, Miami-Dade County Public Schools and North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro.

They enrolled as freshmen in STEM-related degree programs at the University of Florida, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Awards continued on page 3



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A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 67 of the nation's largest urban public school districts.

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Find the Council on:



Austin and New Orleans School Districts Name New Superintendents; Tampa, Palm Beach and Minneapolis School Chiefs Departing



Paul Cruz

At the start of 2015, several urban school districts are experiencing changes at the helm.

Texas' Austin Independent School District recently appointed Paul Cruz as the district's superintendent. Cruz has served

as interim leader of the 85,000-student school system since last April, when former superintendent Meria Carstarphen left to head Atlanta Public Schools.

Cruz joined the Austin school district in 2006 as an assistant superintendent for education services. For the past five years, he has been the district's chief schools officer, where he has helped plan and implement the development of programs such as early-college high schools and the Any Given Child initiative with the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, which involves integrating fine arts into everyday lessons.

Cruz is a veteran educator, having worked as a teacher and central office administrator in several Texas school districts, including serving as superintendent of schools for the Laredo Independent School District. He also served as the deputy commissioner for dropout prevention

Awards continued from page 2

na-Champaign, Yale University and North Carolina State University, respectively.

"With the generous support of Exxon-Mobil and Dr. Harris, these young men and women have an opportunity to reach the stars and become innovators and leaders of tomorrow," said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

High school seniors in the Class of 2015 can apply for the scholarships online by accessing www.cgcs.org. Deadline is April 8 for submissions.

at the Texas Education Agency.

Also selecting a new superintendent recently was the Orleans Parish School Board, which operates six schools and oversees 14 independent charter schools in New Orleans. Henderson Lewis Jr., a native of New Orleans and superintendent of Louisiana's East Feliciana school district, was unanimously named superintendent of the school system, which has not had a permanent leader at the helm since 2013.

Several Leaders Departing

The Hillsborough County School Board in Tampa, Fla., recently voted to terminate the contract of Superintendent MaryEllen Elia, who has served as leader of the school district since 2005 and is one of the nation's longest-serving urban school superintendents.

Elia was recently named Florida Superintendent of the Year and is a finalist for National Superintendent of the Year.

According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, she will lead the district until March 5.

Elia joined the district in 1986 as a high school reading resource specialist and has served a variety of roles in the district, including as the school system's first magnet schools supervisor, general director of secondary education and chief facilities officer.

Under Elia's leadership, district schools have successively earned more A and B grades each year of her tenure.

Another big-city school district in Florida is also losing a superintendent: the School District of Palm Beach County.

Wayne Gent, who has led the district since 2012, recently announced he was leaving the school system at the end of the school year. He has worked in the school district for 15 years.

The district recently passed a referendum renewing an existing special property levy, and graduation rates have increased each year and continue to outperform the

state's average.

Bernadeia Johnson, the superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools, recently resigned from the 35,000-student school system she has led since 2010.

During her tenure, she established a new office dedicated to the achievement of black male students. She also launched the *Shift* campaign to accelerate academic achievement, including implementing academies during school breaks to increase instructional times.

The district has named chief executive officer Michael Goar as interim superintendent.

Michigan Governor Appoints Manager For Detroit Schools

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder recently appointed Darnell Earley, emergency manager for the city of Flint, Mich., as the new emergency manager of Detroit Public Schools.

Earley reportedly becomes the district's fourth emergency manager in six years as Detroit Public Schools remains under financial emergency provisions. He replaces Jack Martin.

"A thriving public school system is an essential part of Detroit's comeback," Snyder said. "Financial challenges unquestionably hinder efforts to improve academics."

The governor pointed out that community leaders have begun discussions about creating a long-term financial system for the Detroit school district.

Detroit Schools continued on page 9

Chicago District Partners With Colleges to Improve Its Graduation Rate

In an effort to increase the number of students who obtain college degrees, Chicago Public Schools is partnering with 19 local and Illinois colleges and universities in a collaboration called the Chicago Higher Education Compact. The collaboration is dedicated to developing ways to increase college enrollment and completion rates, with the goal of boosting the college graduation rate for Chicago students to 60 percent by 2025.

As part of the collaboration, members

will meet quarterly to share goals and best practices and ensure students receive supports to keep them on track to complete college once they enroll.

Chicago Public Schools CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett noted that while the district's students are making progress with college enrollment and completion rates up, there is still work to do to prepare students to enter the 21st century workforce.

"Under this new partnership, leaders in higher education are joining together to

increase the number of students who graduate and enter the workforce prepared and educated," said Byrd-Bennett.

Colleges and universities in the compact include DePaul University, Northwestern University, Loyola University and the University of Chicago.

The nation's third largest school district is also teaming with a local non-profit to pilot a professional development program for college advisors to better help them prepare students to succeed in college.

Progress Shown *continued from page 1*

In addition, the new study shows that urban high schools receiving SIG funds were able to improve their ability to move students from grade to grade.

However, performance in SIG elementary schools continued to be low even after three years of intervention and support, and not all schools receiving SIG funding improved.

"Turning around chronically low-performing schools is some of the hardest and most important work in education, with direct and enormous impact on the life outcomes of young people," says U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

"I want to praise the Council of the Great City Schools for their thoughtfulness in this report, which offers vitally important insights on what works. There is much to learn from here," he emphasizes.

Analyzing data across states for grades three through eight in both math and reading, the study also found that gaps in the percentages of students scoring at or above Proficient between SIG-award schools and peer schools that did not receive grants narrowed steadily over the first two years of the grants, but then leveled off in the third year.

"The results of this study indicate that urban schools have made significant improvements with the federal funds they received through the School Improvement

Grants, although they have much further to go," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "The gains suggest that the federal government should retain its targeted and dedicated efforts to improve the nation's lowest performing schools."

'Opportunity for Districts'

The report follows another study the Council released in 2012 that showed urban school districts were mounting an unprecedented number of school turnaround efforts with funds from the revamped federal School Improvement Grant program that complemented their ongoing system-wide reform efforts.

In the past three years, the SIG program and the funding behind it "have provided an important opportunity for districts to redesign their support structures for struggling schools; recruit effective teachers and principals; change the climate and expectations for students in these buildings; and engage parents and the community," says the new report.

School Improvement Grants: Progress Report from America's Great City Schools identifies several features that appeared to propel successful SIG implementation efforts, including:

- A coherent and coordinated district plan for supporting and turning around the lowest-performing schools;
- Interventions focused on instructional improvements with high-quality programming and materials;
- Coordination and integration of instructional interventions and strategies;
- Professional development that built staff instructional capacity;
- Principals who were invested in a vision for improvement and conveyed these priorities to teachers, students, and the community;
- Principals who were given the flexibility to make staff changes or remove ineffective teachers and staff; and
- The ability to leverage data to identify the specific academic needs of struggling students, determine needs for professional development, and decide on intervention strategies.

The unprecedented study also examines reasons behind why some SIG schools did not improve.

Students Discuss Civil Rights History and Present-Day Reality

In commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, schools often have their students discuss with one another the meaning of his historic "I Have a Dream Speech." But eight schools across the country went one step further and used technology to digitally connect their classrooms in a student town hall webcast that explored the themes of King's most famous speech.

The webinar was sponsored by New York's Rochester City School District in partnership with the Council of the Great City Schools and the Council of Urban Boards of Education and was streamed live by CBS News.

A nationwide audience tuned in as students in grades 8-12 from eight schools in Rochester; New York City; Camden, N.J.; Los Angeles; Tampa, Fla.; Tulsa, Okla.; Pontiac, Mich.; and Ferguson, Mo., explored four themes from King's speech: segregation and discrimination; unearned suffering; unrest, discontent, and demonstration; and his dream. Each participating school was given a specific theme and had to teach listeners about the historical context of the theme, or the current-day reality.

Several students opened up their virtual classrooms through video detailing their research and reaction to the questions set before them. Other participants gave impassioned interviews about progress and even added creative touches such as poetry to express their sentiments about race relations in America.

At Rochester's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School, a classroom full of young men of color engaged in a lively discussion about how African Americans had been "crippled by chains of discrimination," a metaphor King used during his famed speech.

To spark classroom engagement, Van Henri White, the organizer and moderator of the student town hall webinar, passed around an actual pair of slave pods that once were used to shackle African Americans. White also serves as the president of the Rochester school board.

The students used video to depict discrimination and segregation as it relates to



Rochester school board president Van Henri White discusses slave pods that were once used to shackle African Americans during the student town hall webcast.

issues such as disparities in housing and schools and unlawful arrests of minorities that led to the birth of the civil rights movement. The young men correlated abuses inflicted upon African Americans as clear violations of their human and legal rights.

"I kind of found it disturbing," Abner Vargas, 14, said. "In the video, I tried to point out all the (Constitutional) amendments that were broken."

As audiences jetted from classroom to classroom across the nation, White remarked how webcast participants could just take a digital walk and travel from coast to coast. The high-tech town hall conversation allowed students to be the teachers within a far-reaching digital classroom.

"I think Dr. King would be very pleased," White stated to *Rochester.TWCNews.com*, "as to how we have taken technology and

integrated it into the classroom to achieve what nobody else has been able to achieve on Martin Luther King's birthday in his school."

In Los Angeles' Samuel Gompers Middle School, a mock trial of "The Dream vs. The United States of America" was staged by students to explain exactly what King's dream meant. In addition, the students presented evidence before a jury to determine whether the United States had made King's dream a reality.

To make their case, students created a montage of images of King, famous snippets of his speech, protest pictures and songs to demonstrate who King's dream represented and why the nation must make good on its promise of equality among the races.

Students at McCluer South-Berkeley High School in Missouri's Ferguson-Florissant School District aired a video addressing modern-day race relations and how they stack up against King's dream.

Included in the video was film footage from the 2014 protests in the wake of the shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old black male. During the video, students took the audience along as they staged a massive school walk out after the non-guilty verdict of Darren Wilson, the Ferguson police officer who shot Brown.



Rochester students get an up close look at slave pods.

Back inside the school walls, Ferguson students ended their video segment with interviews of students and administrators reflecting on the progress of race relations locally and on the national stage. The answer was a resounding yes to the question of whether race relations have improved, but students noted that as a nation there is still more that the country can do to achieve Dr. King's dream of racial equality.

Hawaii Teacher Named Finalist For Teacher of the Year

Catherine Caine has taught at Waikiki Elementary School in Honolulu for 23 years, and her love for teaching has expanded to include serving as a mentor teacher as well as school coordinator for both the University of Hawaii and Hawaii Pacific University's teacher development program. And although the National Board certified teacher has served teachers in many capacities, it's her dedication to classroom practice that she believes is her greatest accomplishment.

This dedication is one of the reasons Caine has been selected as one of four finalists for the 2015 National Teacher of the Year award. Sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, the program selects outstanding teachers in the nation who have been selected as their respective State Teachers of the Year.

One of the four finalists will be named the 2015 Teacher of the Year in April, spending a year traveling the nation to represent educators and advocate on behalf of teachers.

Caine, Hawaii's 2015 State Teacher, teaches a multiple-subject curriculum for second-grade students at Waikiki and



Catherine Caine, a finalist for National Teacher of the Year, with her second-grade students at Waikiki Elementary School in Honolulu.

is Hawaii's first national finalist for the Teacher of the Year program since 2001.

"We are thrilled and couldn't be more proud of having Catherine represent Hawaii," said Hawaii Schools Superintendent Kathryn Matayoshi. "...Her passion for teaching is evident in her classroom and school campus, as well as in her dedication to share her expertise with peers and advance the profession."

In addition to Caine, several other big-city teachers were named State Teachers of the Year, including Los Angeles teacher Lovelyn Marquez-Prueher and Anchorage teacher John Bruce.

All San Francisco High Schools To Offer Ethnic Studies

When Richard Carranza, the superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District, was a teacher in Arizona, he witnessed how Mexican-American studies were stripped from the curriculum even though 95 percent of his students were Mexican American.

So he is extremely proud that all high schools in his district will soon offer students the opportunity to enroll in an ethnic studies class.

The San Francisco school board recently voted unanimously to provide an ethnic studies course at all high schools beginning in the fall of 2015. Students may take a class in Asian American, African American, Latino/Chicano or Native American studies.

Currently, several high schools in the district offer an ethnic studies course in which students who complete the course in their junior or senior year can receive college credit from San Francisco State University. The new course has also been approved by the University of California as eligible for entrance into the UC system.

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the courses will cost the school district \$500,000 to implement. Those costs will include hiring an ethnic studies coordinator to oversee the expansion to all 19 high schools as well as to ensure support for curriculum development and teacher training.

And in addition to offering ethnic studies classes at all high schools, the board also wants to explore ways to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement in the future.

"By affording every high school student the opportunity to take the course, we are doing our share in creating a more cohesive, peaceful world while allowing students to develop a deeper understanding of the world around them," said San Francisco Board of Education president Sandra Lee Fewer.



Albuquerque Holds First School Choice Fair

Stan Pena, right, the principal of School on Wheels in Albuquerque, N.M., showcases his school to parents during Albuquerque Public Schools' first-ever School Choice Fair. The fair was held to help families become aware of programs in the district's 142 schools and 19 locally authorized charter schools.

Nevada's Clark County District, Business Leaders Launch 'Ensuring Every Dollar Counts' Initiative

Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas is just one of many big-city school systems across the nation undergoing financial challenges. So in an effort to ensure that the district is spending taxpayers' money efficiently, the school district has joined forces with local community and business leaders to track the value of its programs and departments to ensure that they maximize the most gains in terms of student success.

"Ensuring Every Dollar Counts" is a unique public/private partnership created to examine if one of the nation's fastest growing school districts is utilizing its \$2.3-billion budget in a way that provides the best possible return, commonly called "return on investment."

District officials believe the initiative is a first-of-its-kind partnership between a school district and community leaders to implement financial best practices. They also believe the initiative is groundbreaking because while work on return on investment has been undertaken in public K-12 education, it has occurred mostly at the district-to-district level – not at the school level, such as Clark County is attempting to do.

The partnership includes community leaders and representatives from organizations such as the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce; the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance; the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; and Wells Fargo Bank; as well as school district leaders.

In May 2014, Clark County Schools Superintendent Pat Skorkowsky convened a team of citizens to serve as an Executive Advisory Group to start examining the re-

turn on investment in the school district.

Subcommittees were then created to examine academic programs and district departments as well as a committee that compared school performance with the amount of money spent on each school.

The School Comparison Study compared a school's expenditures and its academic performance. By linking school funding with school performance, the study, which also took into account the make-up of the school population, enabled the district to pinpoint schools that provided better-than-expected value given the resources available to the school.

The preliminary reports have been posted on the district's web site and the frameworks developed by each of the three subcommittees are being peer reviewed by national experts.

The school district hopes the data from these reports will highlight best practices that can be replicated.

The ultimate goal of the "Ensuring Every Dollar Counts" initiative is to not only reassure the public that its tax dollars are used in ways that directly impact students and classrooms, but to demonstrate that school funds make a difference in terms of student achievement and to advocate for an increased focus on education in the state of Nevada. According to the *Las Vegas Sun*, recent studies have shown that the state lacks a sufficiently educated workforce.

"We also know that we live in an age of accountability," said Schools Superintendent Skorkowsky. "We are ready to meet that challenge with this groundbreaking work examining return on investment of the dollars we spend in our school district. We want to show our community that every dollar makes a difference in the lives of students."



Providence Student Wins \$50,000 Siemens Scholarship

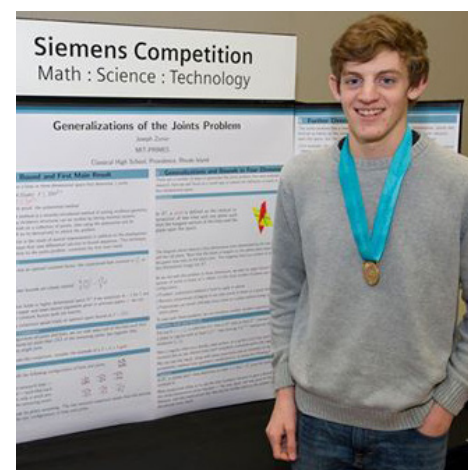
Joseph Zurier, a senior at Classical High School in Providence, R.I., placed second in the 2014 Siemens Competition in Math, Science and Technology, the nation's premier research competition for high school students.

Zurier's second-place prize came with the added bonus of a \$50,000 college scholarship.

Zurier was one of six finalists participating in the Siemens competition that was recently held in Washington, D.C. His project "Generalizations of the Joint Problem," solved an open math problem in counting the number of intersections of lines and planes in space, improving on previous results.

According to an article published on *BusinessWire.com*, Zurier's project will have implications for digital image processing both in general computer science and medical imaging.

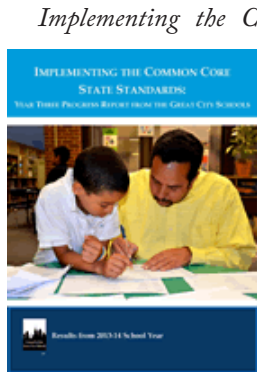
Zurier, who was recently accepted to Harvard University and is also applying to MIT and Stanford University, plans to use his scholarship funds to major either in mathematics, applied mathematics or computer science.



Providence student Joseph Zurier stands in front of the poster summarizing his math research at the Siemens competition in Washington D.C.

Council Releases Two Reports

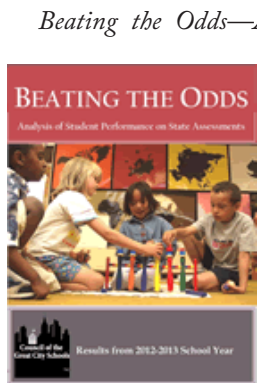
The Council of the Great City Schools recently published two new reports that examine urban school achievement in mathematics and reading and survey the progress big-city school districts are making in implementing the Common Core State Standards.



Implementing the Common Core State Standards: Year Three Progress Report reveals that approximately 87 percent of urban school districts plan to have fully implemented the Common Core State Standards

in reading and mathematics by the 2014-2015 school year.

The survey also covers a wide range of implementation activities in the nation's urban school districts, including professional development and communication methods to inform key community and education stakeholders of district Common Core initiatives and progress.



Beating the Odds—Analysis of Student Performance on State Assessments gives an in-depth look at how urban school districts are performing on the academic goals and standards set by the states.

The report examines student achievement in mathematics and reading from spring 2010 through spring 2013.

This is the 13th edition of *Beating the Odds* the Council has published.

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

Nashville School District Launches Drive To Recruit 100 Turnaround Teachers

Tennessee's Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools recently launched a recruiting drive to find a few good teachers, 100 to be exact. The district embarked on an aggressive campaign to attract 100 of the best teachers into its Turnaround Corps.

Turnaround Corps members will be hired to join the district's mission for rapid improvement at priority and other low-performing schools. New members will be elementary and secondary teachers in core subjects of reading/language arts, math and science.

The application process was extensive and prospective corps members must have at least three years of successful teaching experience in a turnaround setting with evidence to support prior work.

Selected teachers will begin in the summer of 2015. Employment incentives include the opportunity to sign short-term contracts, which can boost base pay and include performance bonuses as well as leadership roles and more.

National recruiting efforts sought to reflect the diversity of the district and the campaign recruited in cities such as New York and Houston. These recruitment cities are recognized for innovation in education and have won the Broad Prize for Urban Education, a prestigious honor.

"If you are passionate about education, Nashville is the place to be."

—Susan Thompson, Metro Nashville's chief human capital officer

The campaign also focused on recruiting events, digital and traditional advertising as well as positioning the city as a national attraction.

"This is not only one of America's hottest cities," said Susan Thompson, Metro Nashville's chief human capital officer, "but there is so much happening in Nashville education right now...If you are passionate about education, Nashville is the place to be."

Miami School Alum Becomes U.S. Surgeon General



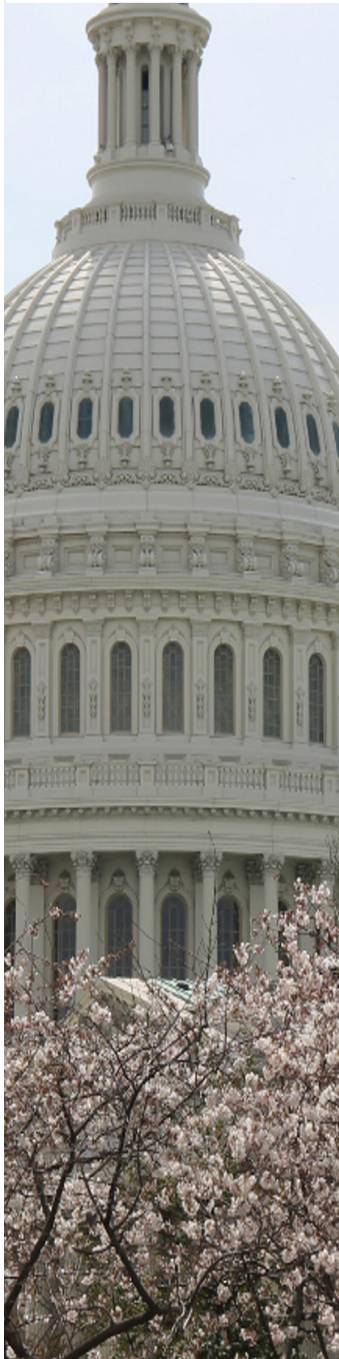
Vivek Murthy, a graduate of Miami Palmetto Senior High School, was recently confirmed as the 19th United States Surgeon General. As America's doctor, Murthy is responsible for communicating the best available scientific information to the public regarding ways to improve personal health and the health of the nation. The son of immigrants from India, he graduated as the valedictorian of the Miami Palmetto Class of 1994, and has a bachelor's degree from Harvard University and an M.D. and M.B.A. degrees from Yale University. He completed his residency training at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, where he later joined the faculty as an internal medicine physician and instructor.

Council of the Great City Schools

ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE/POLICY CONFERENCE

March 14-17, 2015

Renaissance Mayflower Hotel • Washington, DC



Saturday, March 14

- Conference Registration
- Fall Conference Planning Meeting
- Blue Ribbon Corporate Advisory Group Meeting
- Meeting of Legislative & Federal Program Liaisons
- Executive Committee Meeting
- Task Force Meetings
- New Members & New Attendees Orientation
- Welcome Reception

Sunday, March 15

- Conference Registration
- Breakfast Buffet
- Board of Directors Meeting
- Great City Colleges of Education Meeting
- Luncheon with Speaker: **U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan**
- Legislative Briefings

Monday, March 16

- Breakfast with Speaker
- Legislative Briefings
- Luncheon with Speaker
- Capitol Hill Visits
- Reception at National Geographic Museum

Tuesday, March 17

- Breakfast and Briefing
- Adjourn

Student Congress In Houston Gives High Schoolers a Voice

High school students in the Houston Independent School District wanted to play a more active role in their education. So a group of juniors and seniors started a student-led, student-run political movement by establishing a Student Congress.

Providing a voice to more than 2,000 students across the district, Student Congress aims to influence district policies by generating a steady stream of real-time feedback to district administrators.

The Student Congress is open to all students in district high schools and now boast more than 300 active members.

The idea for a Student Congress was a direct result of research conducted by Zaakir Tameez, a senior at Carnegie Vanguard High School. After gathering about 20 students to discuss issues that affect teens, such as gang violence, one student participant questioned the lack of student perspective in education issues that affect them daily. This led to more than 125 students from two dozen high schools attending a November school board meeting and trustees approved the Student Congress as an official student group.

“We need your input as to how we can make things better,” Juliet Stieche, Houston’s board president told students at a board meeting.

The Student Congress is working on plans to create their own radio show as well as meet monthly with senior-level district staff.

Detroit Schools *continued from page 3*

Earley acknowledged the community’s efforts, and said, “Important community discussions are underway about creating a brighter future for education in Detroit. It’s vital for the district to be on firmer financial footing so this work can move forward.

“Education must be a cornerstone of a strong, revitalized Detroit,” he stressed.

The ESEA Reauthorization and a Request For More Education Funding

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

The 114th Congress has hit the ground running with its effort to reauthorize the long-delayed Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Senate HELP Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) issued an ESEA discussion draft in mid-January for committee review and public comment. And House Education and Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN) introduced an ESEA reauthorization bill (H.R. 5) in early February. The House has scheduled quick committee and floor action during February. The Senate committee is also expected to move its bill this month with floor consideration to be determined later.



The Senate discussion draft presents an ESEA reauthorization that improves a number of provisions over current law, including language that rolls back several current requirements that complicate local program implementation. The Council of the Great City Schools' comments to the Senate committee, however, also outline multiple financial, instructional, and operational problems that need revision. The financial problems include the repeal of maintenance-of-effort, an overhaul of supplement-not-supplant, and a new follow-the-child allocation system that raises serious concerns.

The House ESEA bill is similar to its 2013 version, which passed on a party line vote, but never moved further because no companion bill ever passed the Senate. The House package also pares back a number of federal requirements and provides substantial program flexibility, but it also includes major fiscal and program areas of concern: the repeal of maintenance of effort requirements, a Title I portability allocation proposal, the consolidation of a number of ESEA programs, as well as a new state-controlled flexible block grant.

While Congress focuses on new education legislation, the Obama Administration is proposing a \$3.6 billion or 5.4 percent increase in the Education Department's FY 2016 discretionary budget. The largest increase is requested for the Title I LEA grant program with a \$1 billion proposed increase—wiping out the last vestiges of the 2013 sequestration. The budget request, however, proposes to increase the Title I State administration

set-aside from 1 percent to 3 percent, thereby lowering the proposed Title I funding increase to local school districts by nearly \$300 million.

Dozens of other Education Department programs would also benefit from the FY 2016 budget proposal, including: An \$175 million increase for IDEA Part B formula grants; a \$50 million boost for School Improvement Grants; an increase of \$36 million for the Title III program for English Learners; and an \$180 million increase for the Investing in Innovation program. An additional \$200 million would also be directed to the unfunded Title II-D

Technology Program and \$200 million more would support a new American Technical Training Fund under a new Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. The current Preschool Development Grants would be tripled to \$750 million in conjunction with a \$1 billion increase in Head Start along with increases in the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Home Visiting Program.

Finally, the Administration requested a number of new mandatory-funded programs, including a 10-year Preschool-for-All program at \$75 billion, a 5-year Teaching for Tomorrow program at \$5 billion; a 10-year American College Promise program for free community college education at \$60 billion; and a 10-year College Opportunity and Graduation Bonus program at \$7 billion.

After a two-year respite from Federal budget battles and threats of government shutdowns, the new budget fights are expected to arise quickly and linger well into next fall. The specter of another round of across-the-board sequestrations in FY 2016 could also complicate budget negotiations. The Administration is proposing to avoid sequestration by increasing federal budget ceilings and raising revenue through new tax proposals. Despite this early flurry of activity, the path forward on authorization and budget issues will be difficult, and ultimately they will require cooperation between the legislative and executive branches of government – a commodity that continues to be in short supply.

Council's Males of Color Initiative Advancing in Big-City School Districts

The Fort Worth school system in Texas recently formed a *My Brother's Keeper* Task Force to address challenges facing its students of color.

Florida's Broward County school district has partnered with a local college to create a mentoring program for minority males.

California's Long Beach school system plans a Students of Color Town Hall Meeting to provide information on helping to prepare all students for success.

These three school districts and many other big-city school systems around the nation have embraced the Council of the Great City Schools' call to action following a White House event last summer, when President Obama announced that 60 urban school districts pledged unprecedented support to help boys and young men of color succeed.

The Council led the 60 urban school districts to Washington to support the president's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative, which was launched a year ago to help young males of color reach their full potential.

"We need to include pastors, juvenile services, other elected officials, students, teachers and parents to address this issue," says Ashley Paz, a board member of the Fort Worth Independent School District, in a news release recently announcing the district's *My Brother's Keeper* Task Force.

A *My Brother's Keeper* Summit is scheduled for Feb. 21 in Fort Worth, which will involve community and school district leaders to discuss racial equity, culture and disparity in the school system.

The Fort Worth district reports significant challenges facing its students of color:

- 76 percent of African American students and 80 percent of Hispanic students are economically disadvantaged as compared to 31 percent of white students;
- 41 percent of African American students



Mentors and mentees from a high school in Florida's Broward County participate in a tour and orientation at Broward College.

The program combines peer and group mentoring to high school students and provides Broward College students, under the guidance of a faculty member, the opportunity to help high school students through the transition to college or the workforce.

"This program is a direct link to President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative aimed at helping young men and boys of color facing tough odds reach their full potential," says Laurel Thompson, the Broward school system's director of student services.

and 55 percent of Hispanic students were successful in state assessments compared to 75 percent of white students; and

- Suspensions for African American and Hispanic males exceeded 11,000 in 2013-14 compared to 1,600 white male suspensions.

Empowerment Initiative

The District of Columbia Public Schools recently launched a new initiative called Empowering Males of Color, aimed at increasing the success of black and Latino male students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

Over the next three years, the school system plans to dedicate \$20 million to help improve the outcomes of its males of color by working with the community, identifying strategies to elevate the student experience, and boosting achievement to prepare males of color for college, careers and life.

Local College Partnership

The Broward County School Board in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., recently partnered with Broward College to support and advance its Mentoring Tomorrow's Leaders initiative by creating a mentoring program for minority males attending two high schools.

Implementing Programs

A few months after President Obama in July announced that 60 school districts pledged to improve educational outcomes for boys and young men of color, the Council of the Great City Schools held a two-day conference to turn the pledge into reality. Urban school leaders from around the nation converged in Milwaukee to discuss implementing action plans at the conference titled "United to Make a Difference: Improving the Achievement of Young Men of Color."

Since that October meeting, some 25 big-city school districts have submitted implementation plans to advance the Council's Males of Color Initiative.

The Council has also partnered with the College Board to publish a brief "how to" guide describing how some of urban school districts have expanded participation in Advanced Placement courses among students of color. The booklet also features data on the aggregate number of students of color who are not taking AP even though they qualify for the courses.

Males of Color Events

More than 200 students in Albuquerque recently discussed student discipline

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and engagement in an event called *My Brother's Keeper* Community Challenge Student Summit, hosted by the Albuquerque Public Schools.

The forum engaged youth, community leaders, policymakers and community members in a community conversation aimed at assessing needs, setting priorities, and developing concrete goals to improve social and academic outcomes for young men of color.

In Long Beach, Calif., the school system plans what it calls a Students of Color Town Hall Meeting on Feb. 28. Parents will have an opportunity to attend workshops that will enhance effective parenting skills, and community agencies will be available to provide resources and information,

“The Town Hall meeting is one more way our school district is building upon its nationally recognized efforts to help all students succeed, regardless of color, disability and socioeconomic status,” says Chris Eftychiou, public information director at the Long Beach Unified School District.

Council of the Great City Schools 2015 Calendar of Events		
Chief Human Resources Officers Meeting	February 4-6, 2015	Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Legislative/Policy Conference	March 14-17, 2015	Washington, DC
Chief Operating Officers Conference	April 21-24, 2015	Las Vegas, NV
Bilingual Directors Meeting	May 13-16, 2015	Charlotte, NC
Chief Information Officers Meeting	June 2015	TBD
Public Relations Executives Meeting	July 10-12, 2015	Nashville, TN
Curriculum & Research Directors' Meeting	July 15-18, 2015	Chicago, IL
Annual Fall Conference	October 7- 11, 2015	Long Beach, CA
Chief Financial Officers Conference	November 2015	TBD