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Former Houston Emerge student and Stanford freshman Felipe Guillén comments during Houston's recent State of the Schools event. Photo credit: Dave Einsel/Houston ISD

## Houston's Emerge Program Gets Boost To Help Students Attend Top Colleges

For four years, Edgar Avina rode his bike six miles from his family's mobile home to Houston's DeBakey High School. His journey ended last June, when he graduated and received a full scholarship to attend Yale University.

Avina was one of 64 Houston Independent School District graduates who matriculated at a top tier university last fall as part of the district's Emerge program, which identifies and helps high-potential students from low-income households receive scholarships and admittance into the nation's elite and Ivy League colleges and universities.

Houston's Emerge program has been so successful that school district Superintendent Terry Grier recently announced \$8.5 million in grants received from the Houston Endowment to expand the program and to boost college attendance of the city's public-school students.

The district plans to use a \$5.5-million grant to expand the Emerge program, which

**Emerge** continued on page 4

## Council Partners With NBA to Help Males of Color Succeed in Life

A partnership has been established between the Council of the Great City Schools and the National Basketball Association to improve educational and social outcomes of males of color, and includes NBA affiliates – the National Basketball Players Association and the National Basketball Retired Players Association.

Part of President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative, the partnership is designed "as a collaborative effort to help put boys and young men of color on a path to lifelong success," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly and NBA Senior Vice President Todd Jacobson in a joint letter.

After the president last summer announced that 60 big-city school districts pledge to support *My Brother's Keeper*, the Council in October held a two-day conference to turn the pledge into reality.

Urban school leaders from across the nation converged in Milwaukee to discuss implementing action plans under the conference banner "United to Make a Difference: Improving the Achievement of Young Men of Color."



**NBA** continued on page 5

# 'Engineering Zone' Launched to Support K.C. STEM Students

Students in Missouri's Kansas City Public Schools who are interested in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) now have a place to call their own.

The Kansas City Engineering Zone is a pilot program located on the campus of the University of Missouri-Kansas City that has opened its doors to students on the robotics teams at Paseo Academy and Lincoln College Preparatory Academy.

The KC Engineering Zone was created as a facility where urban students interested in science, technology, engineering and math can access the space, technology and expertise they need. It was also constructed to be an equalizer to provide resources on par with more affluent areas.

The zone is the result of a partnership between the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Computing and Engineering and the KC STEM Alliance, a collaborative network of educators, business affiliates and organizations that inspires interest in STEM careers to generate a robust cadre of professionals for the Kansas City community.

According to Laura Loyacono, KC STEM Alliance executive director, many



**Kansas City Schools Superintendent R. Stephen Green joins students from Paseo Academy and Lincoln College Preparatory Academy to mark the launch of the new Kansas City Engineering Zone. Photo credit: KC Stem Alliance**

schools have STEM or robotics programs, but many of their facilities have limitations.

"What is uneven is the physical space and the tools and the machinery as well as access to mentors in the urban core," said Loyacono in an interview on *WDAF-TV*.

The site is set to be a magnet for students in the region who want to learn more about STEM and spur interest in STEM fields as possible careers. The location plans to open up to more schools' robotics teams and engineering contests, as well as be a regional resource through hosting STEM summer camps.



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**Secretary-Treasurer**

Felton Williams  
Board Member, Long Beach

Executive Director  
Michael Casserly  
mcasserly@cgcs.org

Editor  
Henry Duvall  
hduvall@cgcs.org

Associate Editor  
Tonya Harris  
tharris@cgcs.org

Staff Writer  
Danyell Taylor  
dtaylor@cgcs.org

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# Boston and Seattle Name New Superintendents; Tenure Extended For San Francisco, Guilford County and Milwaukee School District Leaders



Tommy Chang

Tommy Chang, a schools administrator in Los Angeles, has been named the new superintendent of the Boston Public Schools.

He is the local instructional superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District's Intensive Support & Innovation Center, where he oversees 135 schools and some 95,000 students in the nation's second largest school district.

Chang was named Boston's next superintendent March 3, and will succeed interim superintendent John McDonough, who has been at the helm since the spring of 2013.

"Dr. Chang will provide the leadership that our school system needs and I am confident that his innovative views on education will move our students forward," said Boston Mayor Martin Walsh in a news statement.

Seattle Public Schools also named a new superintendent recently, appointing interim superintendent Larry Nyland as its permanent leader to head the 52,000-student school district. He has served as the school system's interim leader since August 2014, succeeding Jose Banda, who left the district to lead California's Sacramento Unified School District.

Nyland is a native of Seattle and graduated from the district's Roosevelt High School.

Prior to serving as Seattle's interim leader, Nyland led Washington's Marysville School District for nine years. In 2007, he was named Superintendent of the Year by

the Washington School Administrators Association, and was also a finalist for National Superintendent of the Year.

After retiring from the Marysville school system in June 2013, he served as a leadership coach working with more than 40 school districts, including the Seattle school system.

## A Vote of Confidence

Superintendent Maurice Green has led North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro since 2008, and under his leadership the 72,000-student school district has the highest four-year graduation rate in its history and has been nationally recognized for its innovative character education programs.

As a result, the school board has extended Green's contract through June 30, 2018.

In its review of the superintendent, the school board praised Green for his strong character and integrity. Green was also praised for turning down a 3 percent annual raise, the sixth year in a row he has turned down the annual compensation.

Also receiving a three-year contract extension recently was Richard Carranza, the superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District.

He has led the 57,000-student district since 2012 after serving as the deputy superintendent for instruction, innovation and social justice.

"Richard is driving our district forward with a clear vision of the transformation that our schools need, a deep understanding of what we are capable of, and an unyielding commitment not to leave any student behind," said school board vice president Matt Haney in a press release.

During Carranza's tenure, the district has turned around low-performing schools and made strides in reducing student suspension rates, particularly for African American students.

And in Milwaukee Public Schools, Su-

perintendent Darienne Driver will be able to lead the school system for at least another two years. She has been superintendent of the 77,391-student school system since 2014.

The school board recently voted to extend Driver's contract through June 20, 2017, and commended her for efforts to improve student achievement and engage families and the community.

## Former Atlanta Superintendent Remembered

A former superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools, Dr. Beverly Hall, died on March 2 after battling breast cancer. She was 68.

She is remembered among many urban school leaders in the Council of the Great City Schools as a long-standing member of the organization's Executive Committee and the winner of the 2006 Richard R. Green Award, the highest honor in urban-school leadership.

"Today, Atlanta lost one of its giants," said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly in a press statement. "Urban public education has lost one of its great stalwarts. All of us lost one of the best friends anyone could ever have. And America's children lost one of their truest champions."



Atlanta Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall accepts the Richard Green Award.



**Emerge** continued from page 1

now serves 25 high schools, to all 45 high schools. The expansion is expected to increase the number of Houston school district graduates in the program who go on to attend top colleges from 100 this year to 250 annually over the next two years.

And a \$3-million matching grant from the Houston Endowment will be used to deploy 28 new college counselors to campuses across the district in efforts to boost college attendance rates by 20 percent over the next three years.

“HISD [Houston Independent School District] has been awarded a pair of truly generous grants from the Houston Endowment that will transform the lives of scores of children who may not have attended college otherwise,” said Superintendent Grier in a press release after delivering his annual State of the Schools address.

Students in the program participate in college admissions workshops, SAT boot camps and college tours to prepare them for campus life.

“They’re real trailblazers, setting a tangible example for others in our under-served communities to follow,” Grier stressed, touting *Emerge* students in his Feb. 11 address before a sold-out crowd at a local hotel. “They remind all of us that our children’s ability to succeed is driven by expectations. And those expectations are shaped by the adults who matter in their lives.”

Felipe Guillén, another Houston high school graduate who participated in the *Emerge* program, is now a freshman at Stanford University. He told the hundreds of educators, administrators and community members at the recent State of the Schools event that he would have never dreamed of attending a prestigious school like Stanford.

“I didn’t get to this place all on my own. It wasn’t just through hard work, or focusing on academics,” he said, acknowledging the support system provided by the *Emerge* program. “This dream became my reality because of those who believed in me – people in my family, fellow classmates, and a lot of you in this room...”

## Toledo Schools Take NASA Challenge

Most high school students simply learn about Mars from a textbook, but in Ohio’s Toledo Public Schools students are going one step further by designing hardware to actually rove the planet.

Engineering students at Start High School are getting a hands-on education through a NASA challenge to design new wheels for a lunar module on the surface of Mars. The designed hardware that is being crafted by juniors and seniors could possibly be installed on the Mars Rover. Currently, the machine has to be moved along the planet’s surface with a mechanical arm.

Two NASA personnel at the Glenn Research Center Simulated Lunar Operations facility will help oversee the classroom’s progress. During a news conference, NASA outlined how its personnel will help students, including giving assistance to students in order to build a replica of a moon surface at Start as well as conduct student tours of the NASA facilities.

A computer and design class from Toledo’s Bowsler High School will also be working on part of the project. The two classes are helping to modify a manual

about the design challenge, now used on the junior high level, for high school classes.

The partnership between Toledo schools and NASA was made possible by a \$3.8-million Youth Career Connect grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The grant is part of a national program that focuses on making students career-ready through academic and career-focused curriculum.

In addition to Start and Bowsler, the grant focuses on three other high schools in the district in order to create partnerships that provide training, job-shadowing and mentoring to ensure students learn skills relevant to the job market. The Toledo school district was the only recipient of the federal funding in the state of Ohio.

Romules Durant, Toledo schools superintendent, remarked during the news conference that the collaboration is a prime example of how the district is providing new classroom experiences to broaden students’ knowledge base. He also added he’s ready to take the district’s catchphrase ‘TPS Proud’ to Mars.

## Dallas Bilingual Teacher Wins National Award



**Irma De La Guardia**

Irma De La Guardia, a third-grade dual language teacher at Harry C. Winters Elementary School in Dallas, was recently named the 2015 Teacher of the Year by the National Association of Bilingual Education, which represents English language learners and bilingual education professionals.

Originally an auditor in Mexico City, De La Guardia moved to Dallas nearly 15 years ago. A career change through alternative certification led her to the Dallas

school district a few years later, where she taught kindergarten. “I wanted to make an impact on society; make a difference in my community,” she said.

In 2007, she was recruited to Withers to help start its dual-language program. She teaches Spanish Language Arts, science and social studies as part of the Two Way Dual Language Program at Withers.

De La Guardia is no stranger to winning awards for her achievements in the classroom. She was elected 2012-2013 Teacher of the Year at Withers. And she was selected as 2014 Bilingual Education Teacher of the Year by the Texas Association for Bilingual Education.

## Three Big-City Superintendents Represent Urban Schools At White House Forum on *My Brother's Keeper* Community Challenge

Three big-city school superintendents converged at the White House recently with other education, church, business and community leaders to advance President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative, launched in February last year to help young males of color reach their full potential.

The White House hosted a daylong "national convening" of a variety of community sectors that joined the president's *My Brother's Keeper* Community Challenge to ensure opportunities and overcome barriers for all youth, especially boys and young men of color.

Last summer, the Council of the Great City Schools led 60 urban school districts to the White House to support President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative.

Attorney General Eric Holder and senior presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett delivered remarks to open the Feb. 12 na-

tional convening. Later in the day, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly moderated a panel discussion on "Strong Schools, Strong Kids: Partnering with Superintendents to Increase Opportunity and Achievement."

Missouri's Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent R. Stephen Green, District of Columbia Chancellor Kaya Henderson and Minnesota's St. Paul Public Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva discussed how school district leaders can help meet the *My Brother's Keeper* Community Challenge.

"In KCPS [Kansas City Public Schools], we're committed to making sure that all students receive the education and guidance they need to become successful contributors to their communities, and the president's challenge aligns perfectly with our goals," said Superintendent Green.

His district is among some 25 urban public school systems, including the District of Columbia, that have developed action plans to move the Council's Males of Color Initiative forward in improving the achievement of young men of color.

The D.C. school system and Washington's new mayor recently launched an initiative called Empowering Males of Color, aimed at increasing the success of black and Latino male students from pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The district in the nation's capital plans to dedicate \$20 million to help improve the outcomes of its males of color, which includes working with the community.

"We serve more black and Latino boys than any other group of students, and we need to give them the tools to succeed," said D.C. Schools Chancellor Henderson during the rollout of the initiative Jan. 21.



Left to right, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, District of Columbia Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson, St. Paul Public Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva and Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent R. Stephen Green participate in a panel at the White House to support President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative.

**NBA** continued from page 1

Thus far, some 25 districts have come forward with plans of action to help young males of color achieve in life. And several big-city school districts have hosted community events to support racial and cultural equity.

The NBA and its affiliates have made a commitment to provide resources aimed at encouraging male students of color to stay in school, attend classes every day, concentrate on their studies, complete homework, and serve as school and community leaders.

"Over the next several months, we recommend representatives from the NBA teams and school system leaders in their respective cities reach out to each other to determine how we can better coordinate our efforts, our talents, and our skills to improve the lives of boys and young men beginning during the 2015-2016 school year," stressed the joint letter of partnership.

## Atlanta District Tops in Financial Management

The Council of the Great City Schools recently recognized the Atlanta Public Schools for attaining the highest standards in financial management, accountability and fiscal control.

The Council presented the Award for Excellence in Financial Management to the Atlanta school system for enhancing, safeguarding, and protecting the financial integrity of the district.

This is only the fourth time since the Council initiated the award in 2008 that it has honored a school district with its highest national award for sound financial management. The last award was given to the Miami-Dade County Schools in 2012, with the Houston Independent School District and Florida's Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale receiving the top financial honor earlier.

"This is a significant milestone for the Atlanta Public Schools," Council Executive Director Michael Casserly said, honoring the school board, superintendent, chief financial officer and staff for providing exemplary financial management and stewardship of taxpayer dollars. "Citizens and taxpayers in Atlanta should take pride



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, second from right, presents the Award for Excellence in Financial Management to Atlanta school district officials at a board meeting. Left to right, Atlanta Schools Board Chair Courtney English, Superintendent Meria Carstarphen and CFO Chuck Burbridge.

Atlanta Award continued on page 12

## Dallas 'ACE Plan' Provides Teachers To Low-Performing Schools

In an effort to place effective teachers in every classroom, the Dallas Independent School District recently announced a plan to recruit the highest-performing teachers and principals into the lowest-performing schools.

The Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) Plan is a pilot program aimed at relocating top teachers and principals to work at five to eight of the district's struggling schools. The Teacher Excellence Initiative, the district's evaluation system that defines and rewards effective teaching, will identify which teachers are considered the most effective to be eligible to teach in new ACE schools.

The ACE Plan will offer a bonus stipend of \$10,000 to eligible teachers and \$15,000 to participating principals. Distinguished ACE teachers and principals

will also receive extended contracts and have their evaluation ratings stay the same for two years.

In early spring, district officials will identify the five to eight low-performing campuses that will be transformed into ACE schools. In addition to recruiting new teachers and principals, teachers already located at campuses designated as ACE schools will be incentivized to remain at their campuses. Bonus stipends of \$5,000 for returning distinguished teachers and \$3,000 for returning proficient teachers will be added to their normal salaries.

"Our lowest-performing schools need the most effective teachers," said Dallas Schools Superintendent Mike Miles.

The ACE program is scheduled to begin in the 2015-2016 school year.

## Denver Teacher Leadership Program Expands

In Denver Public Schools, an innovative teacher leadership program that started in 14 schools two years ago has been so successful that the program is expanding to more than 70 schools in the 2015-2016 school year.

Differentiated Roles, a teacher leadership program, has been praised by participating schools for helping to align existing school-wide initiatives and distribute leadership, while retaining great teachers.

The program's success lies with teacher leaders, known as team leads, who serve in a hybrid role that includes both teaching and non-teaching time. Team leads spend half their day as teachers in their own classrooms, and the other half of the day as team leads who work closely with a team of teachers in their schools, co-planning, observing instruction and providing feedback. Selected team leads participate in extensive professional development to improve skills they need for their new leadership roles.

This shift in the traditional teaching model is having an effect where it counts most, with the students.

"I've noticed that teachers in this program are willing to engage in dialog with students that is very different than what it was before," said Carmelina Palmer, a senior at Denver Center for International Studies. "It's no longer 'Are you understanding the material?' It's more, 'What can I do to make sure you are getting what you need...'"

Schools interested in joining the teacher leadership program are required to create design teams, comprised of teachers and school leaders, and spend months creating a strong plan regarding what teacher leadership should look like at their school. Schools with a strong plan are awarded funding to implement these roles.

Teacher teams are developed around specific goals for the school and its stu-

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## Serving the Students of San Francisco in Dual Roles

Hydra Mendoza-McDonnell advocates for the San Francisco Unified School District by serving as a board member, a position she has held since 2006. But she also advocates for the 57,000-student school district by serving in another role: senior adviser on Education and Family Services to San Francisco Mayor Edwin Lee.

She has served in this position since 2005, when then-Mayor Gavin Newsom, appointed her to the newly created senior staff level position because he wanted to develop a better relationship between the school district and the city.

“He felt strongly that the city and school district go hand-in-hand and in order to have a great city you have to have great public schools,” said Mendoza-McDonnell in a recent interview with the *Urban Educator*.

Her decision to run for the school board a year later was spurred by Newsom, who believed it would be beneficial to have someone in city government who understood the inner workings of the school system so the city could align its services and resources with what the school district needed.

Although Mendoza-McDonnell had never run for political office and was running against 16 other candidates, she finished second in the city-wide election for the three available seats on the board. Her election made her the first, and only, Filipina elected to public office in San Francisco.

And what about the potential conflict of interest that may arise in serving as a member of the school board as well as the mayor’s education adviser? She admits that the issue came up when she was first elected, but over the years she believes people have come to appreciate the dual roles.

“I think people appreciate this kind of ‘twofer,’” said Mendoza-McDonnell. “Because when I’m at a meeting, people know that they not only have me there as a school board member, but they know the things that came out of the meeting which were meaningful, I will share with the mayor.”

As a result, she believes the mayor is more knowledgeable than most about edu-



Hydra Mendoza-McDonnell with her daughter and son.

cation because he has someone like her on the inside who can serve as his eyes and ears as well as the interest of students and families she serves as a school board member.

She said balancing the two roles can be a little tricky because oftentimes she may find herself at an event featuring the mayor, superintendent and her fellow board members, but she will be staffing the mayor. However, she feels strongly that serving as the mayor’s education adviser has helped her tremendously as a board member.

“Being at the table when the city is planning things, I get to be the one who says ‘have we talked to the school district about this or how will this impact families,’” said Mendoza-McDonnell. “The school district can be a part of these conversations.”

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, since Mendoza-McDonnell was elected to the board in 2006, she has recused herself only once from voting on an issue because it involved the school district suing the city over rules regarding civil servants.

### Bringing in More Dollars

As a board member, she has worked to increase partnerships among the school

district, the city and private entities and bring more private dollars into the school system.

Last year, she helped shepherd a \$2.7-million donation from the Salesforce.com Foundation to fund the mayor’s Middle Grades Leadership Initiative to provide San Francisco middle schools with increased technology resources, including purchasing iPads for middle school students in math and science classes and creating Wi-Fi digital classrooms. This year, Salesforce.com Foundation is donating an additional \$5 million.

A former pre-school teacher, Mendoza-McDonnell also has a strong interest in strengthening the district’s early childhood education programs, which she believes can help close the district’s achievement gap.

She is a 1983 graduate of the San Francisco school system, as well as her daughter, while her son is a sophomore at one of the district’s high schools.

The public servant describes her service on the school board as “an honor and privilege to create and implement policy for our young people.” But she urges those who want to follow in her footsteps to come into education for the right reasons. “This is about changing the history of how public schools have served our schoolchildren historically,” said Mendoza-McDonnell. “Open your mind to multiple solutions of the challenges of public school systems.”

Mendoza-McDonnell, who recently turned 50, likes to travel, spend time with friends and family and take advantage of all the things living in a city as ‘dynamic’ as San Francisco offers.

And in her nine years on the school board, she has attended hundreds of board meetings, but there is one meeting she will likely never forget. It was the one where her boyfriend approached the microphone, told the board he was in love and after singing a few songs, including Stevie Wonder’s “*You are the Sunshine of My Life*,” bent on one knee and asked a surprised Mendoza-McDonnell to marry him.

They will celebrate their two-year anniversary in August.

## Boston Extends School Day

Boston's school board recently voted to extend the school day by 40 minutes in 60 elementary, middle and K-8 public schools in the city, giving nearly 23,000 students the equivalent of an additional month of instruction.

The vote follows an agreement forged by Boston Mayor Martin Walsh, Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union.

Calling the agreement "a historic moment in public education for Boston," Mayor Walsh noted in a press statement that "Boston's students deserve more learning opportunities. The extra 40 minutes will mean more time for academic learn-

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**"Boston's students deserve more learning opportunities."**

—Boston Mayor Martin Walsh

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ing, more time for enrichment opportunities, and more time for added supports for struggling students."

The additional 40 minutes will be phased in over three years, and will begin this fall in 20 schools, according to the school district.

Currently, students in traditional Boston public elementary schools are in class for six hours a day, and six hours and 10 minutes for middle-school students.

"This is an exciting time in the Boston Public Schools," says Boston School Committee Chair Michael O'Neil. "Innovations such as longer school days, an improved teacher hiring and evaluation system, and more opportunities for school staff, parents and partners to collaborate are leading to greater outcomes for students...."

## New San Francisco Disciplinary Efforts Help African American Students

Four years ago, officials in the San Francisco Unified School District analyzed suspension data and found that although African Americans constituted only 10.5 percent of the overall student population, they made up nearly half of all suspensions.

So the district embarked on a series of efforts to fix the problem and their work is paying off, with new data revealing that the number of suspended African American students is down 17 percent since last school year.

One of the ways the school system began to reduce the disproportionate number of suspensions for African American students was when the Board of Education in 2013 passed the Safe and Supportive Schools resolution. The resolution committed the school system to addressing the disparities in principal-office referrals, suspensions, expulsion referrals and expulsion.

As part of the resolution, middle school principals began implementing Behavioral Response to Intervention (Rtl), a research-proven program that offers a multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. As part of the program, students' progress is closely monitored to determine the need for instruction or intervention.

As a result of the program, district middle schools have made the most strides in reducing suspensions for African American students, accounting for 40 percent of the reductions taking place in the school district.

At a recent school board meeting, three schools demonstrated the programs they have developed within the Rtl framework.

Visitacion Elementary School conducts daily check-ins with students and organizes classroom circles where students talk about their feelings. James Lick Middle School has an Rtl facilitator, who helps provide lessons for all homeroom teachers, while students at Civic Center Secondary School get raffle tickets for being on time and for positive behavior in class.

### ***New Discipline Code in NYC***

While the efforts made by San Francisco schools to reduce the number of suspensions for African American students is showing results, the nation's largest school district recently announced a plan to implement a series of school climate and discipline reforms.

District officials in New York City have partnered with the New York Police Department and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice in an initiative to reduce ineffective suspensions, increase oversight and accountability and eliminate disparities that negatively affect African American and special-education students, who are more likely to be suspended than their peers.

Under the new discipline code, principals will be required to seek authorization from the Office of Safety and Youth Development before suspending students for insubordination/defying unlawful authority.

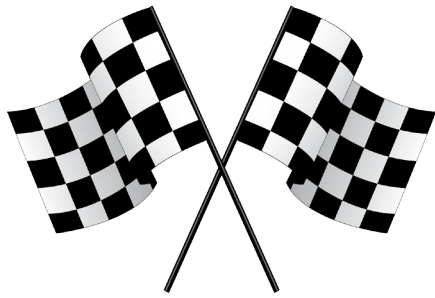
In addition, a School Climate Leadership Team has been created to coordinate and evaluate the effectiveness of reforms and make recommendations for improvement.

Initiatives will also be put in place to reduce the need for suspensions, including allotting \$1.2 million to 100 schools to implement restorative practices and \$2.36 million to provide counselors to students who are in detention and help them ease their transition back to traditional schools.

The NYPD will also establish a pilot program at five schools that will replace summons for student misconduct with warning cards, with the program expanding to eventually 25 schools. The police department will also begin tracking the use of restraints in schools and will provide a monthly report on any use to the Mayor's Office.

According to district officials, the school climate reforms will go into effect in Spring 2015.





## Council PSAs Air At Daytona 500

More than a million race-car fans viewed the Council of the Great City Schools' latest public service announcements on the Common Core State Standards at the recent Daytona 500, NASCAR's most prestigious motor race.

Two 30-second spots aired multiple times on a jumbo-tron during the Feb. 20-22 event at the Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla.

The Council in January launched its second PSA campaign to increase public awareness and engagement of the Common Core State Standards, especially around new assessments to help students prepare for college and career success.

Two Common Core PSAs – one on English language arts and the other on mathematics -- have been developed for television and radio, and in English and Spanish, with a companion three-minute video.

The Council's first Common Core PSA, rolled out in December 2012, won two prestigious Telly Awards and ranked high in the Nielsen Media Research rankings among national public service announcements.

The PSAs and three-minute videos are available on the Council's web site at [www.cgcs.org](http://www.cgcs.org).

## School District in Orlando Riding Wave of Success

By all measures of success, 2014 was a good year for Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla. The district became the first co-winner of the prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education, along with Georgia's Gwinnett County Public Schools. As a co-winner of the 2014 award, the district received \$500,000 in college scholarships for its high school seniors.

The 191,942-student school district also won the confidence of voters, who in August, passed a renewal of a half-cent sales tax worth approximately \$2.1 billion. The funds will help the school system continue its building program with 59 schools scheduled for renovation or replacement in the next decade.

And three months later, in November, citizens overwhelmingly approved the renewal of a one-mill property tax estimated to raise approximately \$429 million, which will help the school system retain highly qualified teachers and preserve arts, athletics and academic programs.

### Continuing the Success

So what's next for the district in 2015? In an effort to close the achievement gap, two years ago Orange County Schools Superintendent Barbara Jenkins created the district's Minority Achievement Office. One of the office's newest initiatives is its

Minority Leadership Scholars program, where young students of color meet after school and receive academic and social support from adult male mentors in the business world. The district is also embarking on plans to send older students into elementary schools to provide the same kind of support for third-grade boys of color. This concept models the Males of Color initiative established by the Council of the Great City Schools, meeting the criteria of President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" Initiative.

The school system's state-of-the-art digital tech centers recently received a boost when Florida Gov. Rick Scott announced plans to fund \$20 million for student scholarships at the state's technical centers. He made this announcement while touring the district's Orlando Tech.

The district is also continuing its efforts to make Advanced Placement (AP) courses open to academically prepared students. Last year, the district was named to the College Board's 5<sup>th</sup> Annual AP District Honor Roll in 2014 by posting significant gains in AP class enrollment.

"We want to continue leading our students to success with our excellent, dedicated teachers and principals, and an outstanding central office leadership team," said Orange Schools Superintendent Jenkins.



Florida Gov. Rick Scott, left, listens as Orange County Schools Superintendent Barbara Jenkins discuss the importance of the district's technical centers.

## ESEA Off and Running

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

The U.S. House of Representatives has under consideration a new Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bill -- H.R. 5, The Student Success Act. After three days of debate on the House floor without bipartisan support, further action has been postponed as of the beginning of March. In the meantime, the Senate continues its bipartisan negotiations at the committee level. And even though other reauthorization efforts have failed in the 110<sup>th</sup>, 112<sup>th</sup> and 113<sup>th</sup> Congresses, the outlook for a reauthorization in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress appears better -- though clearly far from certain.

Nonetheless, the Council of the Great City Schools has opposed the new House ESEA bill. While the organization acknowledges efforts to fix many of the flaws in *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and roll back unproductive federal requirements, the House bill swings the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. H.R. 5 undercuts the purposes, benefits, funding, and integrity of the main ESEA programs for disadvantaged students, their schools, and their communities. In fact, the fundamental financial infrastructure of this landmark law is so diminished that attention to key ESEA policy issues that need fixing has been sidetracked.

The House bill also erodes the essential targeting of funds under the so-called "portability" provision. Under this option, districts with high-concentrations of poverty could have their "weighted" Title I allocations redistributed by their State to school districts with lesser or minimal poverty. Thereafter, school districts would be required to direct Title I funds to any school with even one low-income student.

The result would be a two-step dilution of Title I funding for high-poverty communities -- first from the State to the school district level and second from the school district to any school with one or more poor students. In effect, there no longer would be Title I schools as we know them, and former Title I schools would have significantly less Title I funding than before. Moreover, the 40 percent poverty threshold for using Title I funds for schoolwide activities



would be repealed in H.R. 5, allowing funds generated by poor students to be used to benefit others.

Additionally, H.R. 5 freezes ESEA program funding for the remainder of the decade and beyond. And, the formula grant funding that remains would be diverted, in part, to States to support a 150 percent increase in the State Title I set-aside.

Finally, the House bill eliminates the long-standing ESEA maintenance of effort requirement for districts and states. Without this essential fiscal protection, states could cut their own state education expenditures and not suffer a reduction in federal funds as in current law. Under this provision, ESEA dollars could become an offset against reductions in state aid without providing the additional benefits intended in the original Act.

While the Senate Education Committee continues bipartisan negotiations on its ESEA reauthorization bill, the panel's ESEA Discussion Draft starts with all the unacceptable fiscal provisions that are under consideration in the House. This includes Title I portability, the repeal of the schoolwide poverty threshold, a six-year freeze on ESEA funding, an increased Title I State set-aside, and the elimination of the ESEA maintenance of effort requirement. Hopefully, the bipartisan process can make substantial revisions to these extremely troubling provisions.

In fairness, it is easy to criticize a partisan bill that was fast-tracked in the House, but it should be noted that an overwhelming bipartisan process with strong White House support created the now widely disparaged NCLB Act. Bipartisan bills may readily address the interests of Congress and the Administration, while being divorced from the needs and operational realities of the nation's diverse schools, communities, and children.

The nation needs a better and more workable ESEA bill, but at this point, neither the House nor Senate has produced an acceptable product.





## Council Testifies on Capitol Hill

Executive Director Michael Casserly of the Council of the Great City Schools testifies Feb. 5 at a forum on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), hosted by Congressman Bobby Scott (D-Va.), ranking minority member of the House Education and Workforce Committee. “The challenge ... facing the Committee is to design an ESEA reauthorization that is an improvement for schools and students over current law with their accompanying flexibility waivers,” Casserly concluded in his remarks. “Merely delegating authority to the states and hoping for the best is not a supportable approach.” (Photo credit: Michael Campbell)

## First-Ever Student to Serve on Minneapolis School Board



Noah Branch

to address injustices.

Selected as the first-ever student representative to join Minneapolis Board of Education, Branch is ready to take his student

Noah Branch, Patrick Henry High School sophomore, has impressed his peers and Minneapolis Public Schools leaders with his self-professed critical and conscious view of the world and passion

government leadership to the next level.

Branch will serve as a non-voting member of the school board during monthly meetings. The goal of his new position is to be the voice of student issues and work with the school board to improve the quality of the district through the development of education policies and programs.

Currently, Branch is actively involved in Minneapolis schools City Wide Student Government and The Movement, Patrick Henry’s student council.

## L.A. School Board Approves Aid To Students at Risk Of Deportation

In Los Angeles, almost 3,000 unaccompanied youth who fled from dangers they faced in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala last year are unrepresented in court cases on the Los Angeles Immigration Court docket.

In a potentially precedent-setting measure for urban school districts nationwide, the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education recently approved a plan to allow attorneys employed by the district to accept a limited number of deportation cases, without charge, involving unaccompanied children who live within the school system’s boundaries.

The pro-bono work will be handled by 10 district lawyers working in concert with nonprofit organizations that specialize in immigration law.

The move furthers the nation’s second largest school district’s mission to keep students in school.

“LAUSD continues to lead by example,” said Los Angeles board member Mónica García. “Our students faced with circumstances beyond their control can now focus in the classroom instead of the courtroom.”

The initiative is slated to begin this spring.

The Los Angeles school district is not the only school system in California offering assistance to unaccompanied minors.

The San Francisco Unified School District and the Oakland Unified School District offer newcomer programs that specialize in helping recent immigrant students make the transition to school in the United States.

The San Francisco School Board approved a resolution committing that it will dedicate resources toward both the short- and long-term needs of unaccompanied

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Council of the Great City Schools  
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Washington DC 20004

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**Atlanta Award** *continued from page 6*

in how well the city's public schools are managing their resources. Few city school systems can match Atlanta on this front."

To receive the Award for Excellence in Financial Management, an urban school district must demonstrate it complies with a series of management practices that represent the highest standards in financial accountability and control in nine categories: general financial management, internal controls, budget, strategic planning and management, internal and external financial auditing, capital asset management, debt management, risk management and purchasing.

**Denver Teacher** *continued from page 6*

dents. This program is not a one-size-fits-all and is unique to each selected school.

"I greatly appreciate the innovative work of our teachers and school leaders," said Denver Schools Superintendent Tom Boasberg, "which is positively changing our schools and is providing tremendous leadership opportunities within the teaching profession."

The Council convenes a panel composed of respected senior financial executives from major school systems across the nation to conduct the review process, which includes an assessment of the district's management practices, an extensive review of documents, and a lengthy site visit.

**L.A. School Board** *continued from page 11*

immigrant children enrolling in the district's schools.

The district has hired new teachers and established professional development for newcomer teachers and support staff.

In addition, the school system has hired a social worker to coordinate legal and social services for unaccompanied immigrant children.

The Oakland school system has hired an unaccompanied minor support services consultant and created a newcomer task force to make recommendations for a long-term strategic plan for newcomer support. The district is also using grant money to pay for new support positions and services for unaccompanied minors.

## Great City Grads



### A. Philip Randolph

**Labor Leader and Social Activist**

**1907 Graduate**

**Cookman Institute**

**Duval County Public Schools  
(Jacksonville, FL)**