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Special NYC Program Helps Males Of Color Advance to College



Thirty-nine black and Latino male students from some of New York City's toughest neighborhoods will graduate high school this year, with many of them accepted to selective colleges, including Ivy League schools.

These young men are completing a special program in the New York City Department of Education called NYC Urban Ambassadors, which handpicks promising students from high schools that don't typically send students to selective four-year colleges.

One of the NYC Urban Ambassadors to graduate this spring has received a full scholarship to attend Harvard University,

NYC Program *continued on page 4*

L.A. School Wins Academic Decathlon

Granada Hills Charter High School in Los Angeles is no stranger to the winner circle at the U.S. Academic Decathlon®, having won the title in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2015. And the school continues its winning streak, taking home the top prize at the 2016 Academic Decathlon®, held recently in Anchorage, Alaska.

Not only is this the school's fifth **L.A. School** *continued on page 5*

'Game Changer' Partnership Multiplies College Opportunities for Dallas Students

The Dallas Independent School District is multiplying opportunities for high school students to pursue a college degree at no personal cost to their families in a new partnership with the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD).

Under the partnership, the school district will open eight new collegiate academies in August, one of which is a Pathways to Technology Early College High School, believed to be the first of its kind in the state of Texas.

Hailed as a "game changer" by Dallas Schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa and officials of DCCCD, the eight new collegiate academies will offer thousands of first-generation college students an opportunity to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and a community college degree in four years.

As the first public school district to create eight early college programs at once in Texas and maybe the nation, the project takes the Dallas school system where no other school district has gone before. The eight new schools will join five existing early college high schools where students who take full advantage of dual credit programs can earn up to 60 hours of college

credit or an Associate of Applied Science degree, tuition-free.

Students, parents and the business community are eagerly embracing the concept. Victor Black, a junior at Dallas' W.W. Samuell High School who also takes classes at Eastfield College in the DCCCD, said an early college program is too good to pass up for any student who wants a college degree.

Ahead of the Game

"If you're at the stage where you're ready to go to high school, you have to go to an

Dallas Students *continued on page 4*



Dallas students Karla Rangel and Jose Lopez discuss the advantages of attending an early college high school with school district and community college leaders.

Cleveland Students Win World Robotic Competition

A group of 25 high school students from Cleveland can now call themselves world champions after recently winning the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics World Championship in St. Louis.

The two-day event featured 640 high school teams from around the world going head-to-head in a competition with robots they designed, built and programmed.

The Cleveland students won the championship as part of an alliance with students from three other smaller cities.

In this year's competition, students were required to have their robots knock down defenses, cross moats, open draw-bridges, throw boulders and scale the walls of a plywood and acrylic castle that was approximately 15 feet tall. Robots scored points by breaching opponents' defenses and tossing boulders through goals in the opposing tower.

According to its leaders, the Cleveland team is the first from Ohio to win the world championship since it was started 25 years ago as a way to increase students' interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).



Cleveland students hold their winning robot. The students placed first at the FIRST Robotics World Championship.

The Cleveland group was comprised of students from eight district high schools and is based at Cuyahoga Community College's Youth Technology Academy.

George Bilokonsky, the academy's founder and executive director, has coached district robotics students for 14 years and until now had come close

Cleveland Students continued on page 3



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Baltimore Names New CEO; Oklahoma City And Dayton Leaders to Depart



Sonja Santelises

Veteran educator Sonja Santelises is no stranger to Baltimore City Public Schools, having been the chief academic officer for the school system from 2010 to 2013 before leaving to work at a non-profit education organization.

Now she is once again back in the Baltimore school system, but this time as the new chief executive officer of the 77,000-student school district. She will succeed Gregory Thornton, who recently departed the school district after serving as CEO since 2014.

According to the *Baltimore Sun*, during her tenure as chief academic officer Santelises helped the district implement the Common Core State Standards, and ele-

mentary students improved their academic performance on standardized tests.

Before coming to Baltimore, Santelises was an assistant superintendent in Boston Public Schools, overseeing 25 pilot schools created to improve academic performance. She also served as the district's deputy superintendent for teaching and learning as well as assistant superintendent for professional development.

Marnell Cooper, chairman of the Baltimore school board, said the board recognized that the work Santelises performed as chief academic officer helped set the school system in a direction where students were improving.

"We believe Santelises is the person to lead Baltimore City Schools for the next 10 years," said Cooper in a press release.

An interim leader will lead Baltimore City Schools until June 30, when Santelises takes the reins.

Two Leaders Depart

Rob Neu, who served at the helm of Oklahoma City Public Schools since April 2014, recently departed from the 46,000-student school district. During his tenure, Neu developed a five-year strategic plan to boost academic achievement.

Aurora Lora, the district's associate superintendent of student achievement and accountability, is serving as the district's interim leader.

Also leaving is Lori Ward, the superintendent for Ohio's Dayton Public Schools. Ward has led the school system since 2010 and is credited with strengthening parent engagement and increasing community partnerships, increasing the graduation rate, developing the district's credit recovery program for high school students and creating the Office for Males of Color.

Ward has served in the school district for 21 years, the last six as superintendent.

Dallas High School Ranked the Nation's Best for 5th Year

U.S. News & World Report has ranked the School for the Talented and Gifted (TAG) in Dallas as the best public high school in the nation – for the fifth consecutive year.

It is one of 10 urban schools listed nationally in the newsmagazine's top 25 public high schools of more than 21,000 ranked in 50 states and the District of Columbia.

"Being named the best of the best for five straight years is an impressive accomplishment by any measure," said Superintendent Michael Hinojosa of the Dallas Independent School District, noting that the entire school district is proud of TAG's "track record of excellence."

Releasing its annual "Best High Schools" rankings in April, *U.S. News* awarded gold, silver or bronze medals to the best public high schools, based on "their performance on state assessments, their graduation rates and how well they prepare students for college."

Of the top 25 gold medalists, the other nine schools in urban school districts represented in the Council of the Great City Schools are:

- School of Science and Engineering in Dallas, ranked No. 4;
- Academic Magnet High in Charleston County, S.C., No. 8;
- Carnegie Vanguard High in Houston, No. 10;
- High School of American Studies at Lehman College in Bronx, N.Y., No. 15;
- KIPP Academy Charter School in Bronx, N.Y., No. 17;

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Cleveland Students continued from page 2

to a world championship only once, with a team that reached the semifinals in 2007.

"It's unbelievable," he said in a story featured on Cleveland's school system website. "I haven't really had a chance to take it all in."

The Cuyahoga Community College's Youth Technology Academy was created 14 years ago to provide students in the Cleveland school system with access to modern technology. Staff, many of whom are district teachers serving as adjunct college faculty, work in more than a dozen high schools in the district.

This academic year, teachers assisted more than 1,000 high school students who built robots and engaged in competition, while also getting a chance to earn college credit and develop skills in the field of STEM.



All that Jazz!

Jazz saxophonist and composer Dayna Stephens participates in a workshop with students from two high schools in South Carolina's Charleston County School District and seven students from Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts who were touring with the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. The Charleston school district was one of five nationwide selected to the institute's national peer-to-peer jazz education and "informance" program.

Dallas Students *continued from page 1*

early college," Black said, "because it puts you so far ahead of the game."

The new collegiate academies will be housed in designated areas of eight existing high school campuses. Students will enter the program as part of a freshman cohort and complete their high school requirements as freshmen and sophomores.

In their junior year, they will enroll at one of six DCCCD colleges, and attend class on campus with free books, tuition and transportation. By the end of their senior year, the students will don their caps and gowns and graduate with both a high school diploma and up to 60 hours of transferable college credit.

NYC Program *continued from page 1*

graduating salutatorian from Brooklyn's Medgar Evers College Preparatory School.

"What motivates me is all the statistics saying I can't," graduating senior Ethan Ambrose emphasized at the Council of the Great City Schools' all-student town meeting last fall in Long Beach, Calif. "Being a young man of color and living in New York City, they say I can't go to Harvard, but that's exactly where I'm going to go."

Ambrose is one of four in the Urban Ambassadors program to be accepted to Ivy League colleges, with one graduating ambassador, Shyon Smalls, accepted to four Ivies – Cornell, Penn, Columbia and Brown, according to Ainsley Rudolfo, the program's director. Others of the 39 have also been accepted to select public and private colleges and universities, including Morehouse College, Notre Dame University, University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University to name a few.

Founded in 2012, the NYC Ambassadors program is an outgrowth of a concern that New York City school district officials had about the low percentage of young men of color applying to and matriculating into senior colleges and universities, par-

ticularly select public and private colleges, says Rudolfo.

"Then-Chancellor Dennis Walcott and my supervisor Deputy Chancellor Dr. Dorita Gibson challenged me to develop a program to address this issue – hence the birth of the NYC Urban Ambassadors," he maintains.

Promising Students

At least 30 promising students a year from various high schools across New York City's five boroughs are selected for the program, which begins at 10th grade. The program provides rigorous academic enrichment, leadership development, mentorship, mandated parental involvement, networking and public-speaking opportunities, and one-on-one college advisory assistance in phases through 12th grade and after graduation.

As a result, the NYC Urban Ambassadors program -- with the motto "Purpose. Distinction. Leadership" – has a graduation and college acceptance rate of 90 percent.

The program's first graduating class in 2014 began with 27 young males of color,

with 22 graduating and matriculating into colleges with a host of scholarships.

The 2015 NYC Urban Ambassadors cohort had 32 students, with 26 young men graduating – all of whom enrolled in college and several receiving scholarships, including the highly selective Gates Millennium Scholarship.

This year marks the program's third graduating class, which expected to graduate 42 students. Thirty-nine black and Latino male students will receive high school diplomas and head to college with one receiving the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship.

They will be honored June 15 at the annual NYC Urban Ambassadors graduation and scholarship dinner at Columbia University, featuring American opera star Jessye Norman as keynote speaker.

The NYC Urban Ambassadors program is expected to expand under current Chancellor Carmen Farina, says director Rudolfo, noting that the program is part of the New York City school system's pledge with the Council of the Great City Schools to improve the academic outcomes of males of color.

L.A. School *continued from page 1*

tional school championship in six years, but it marks the 17th time a school from the Los Angeles Unified School District has been crowned the champion of the U.S. Academic Decathlon®.

The Academic Decathlon® is known as the most prestigious high school academic team competition in the nation. This year's event featured more than 450 high school students from 48 national and international teams. The team from Granada Hills won with a score of 54,195 points out of 60,000.

Team member Melissa Santos, who was the top scoring student overall, said in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* that it was a huge relief for the team to take the winning trophy. "We were sitting there clasping each others hands because this is the legacy for Granada Hills and for California to keep, and we didn't want the hard work and trust everyone placed in the team to go to waste," said Santos.

Each high school enters a team of nine students: three "A" or honor students, three "B" or scholastic students and three "C" or

below.

Granada Hills officials credit the success of the team to finding those students who may not be the best academically, but who want to work really hard studying and training for the competition 12 hours a day, six days a week.

"You just can't stack the deck with the top kids at school," said one of the team coaches, Jon Sturtevant, in the *Los Angeles Times*. "You have to find kids who have the motivational skills, and that's where I think we do really well."

Students in the competition compete in 10 categories: art, economics, essay, interview, language and literature, mathematics, music, science, social science and speech. The theme for this year's competition was India.

"The entire L.A. Unified family is extremely proud of your unwavering determination, pride and selflessness," said Los Angeles Schools Superintendent Michelle King in a press statement. "You are all champions."



The Granada Hills High Academic Decathlon team from Los Angeles holds its first-place trophy after being named the 2016 U.S. Academic Decathlon® champion.

Nation's Best *continued from page 3*

- Design & Architecture Senior High in Miami-Dade County, No. 20;
- International Studies Charter High School in Miami-Dade County, No. 21;
- Early College at Guilford in Greensboro, N.C., No. 23; and
- Brooklyn Latin School in Brooklyn, N.Y., No. 25.

A number of urban school districts also won medals in the *U.S. News* rankings.

Washington Post Rankings

The Washington Post also released its national rankings of high schools in April called "America's Most Challenging High Schools."

Another Dallas school, Science and Engineering Magnet, topped the list of six big-city high schools in districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools ranked in the top 20. It placed third.

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

Other urban high schools in Council districts that ranked in the top 20 are:

- Talented and Gifted in Dallas, No. 6;
- Stanton College Prep in Jacksonville, Fla., No. 7;
- Carnegie Vanguard in Houston, No. 10;
- Suncoast Community in Palm Beach County, No. 14; and
- MAST Academy in Miami-Dade County, No. 18.

Nearly 2,300 high schools nationwide received Challenge Index scores.

Three Big-City School Districts Recognized For Being 'Green'

The Los Angeles Unified School District has converted the district's bus and fleet vehicles to clean and alternative energy, resulting in the largest alternative-fuel bus fleet in the state of California.

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., has created a successful recycling program that has kept more than 55 million pounds of materials out of local landfills and has saved more than \$600,000 within the last three years.

And the San Francisco Unified School District rewards schools for reducing their utility usage by returning 50 percent of the generated savings to each school. In addition, the district has created a Department of Sustainability that provides an environmental liaison at all school sites.

These efforts are why these three big-city school districts were among only 15 school districts in the nation selected as a 2016 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools District Sustainability Awardee.



School districts, along with 47 schools and 11 colleges and universities, were honored for their innovative efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, improve health and wellness and ensure effective sustainability education.

U.S. Secretary of Education John King congratulated the awardees for their commitment to sustainable facilities, health and classroom practices. "The healthiest, most inspiring school facilities can and should be another tool to level the playing field, particularly for underserved students," said King in a news statement.

The 15 school district honorees were named from a pool of candidates nominated by 25 states, Washington, D.C., and the Department of Defense.

Baltimore Graduate Wins Global Environmental Prize

In 2010, the state of Maryland approved plans for the nation's largest trash incinerator to be built in a heavily industrialized community in Baltimore called Curtis Bay. The incinerator was less than a mile away from two schools.



Destiny Watford

Watford transformed from a shy teenager to a determined activist who was able to inspire residents of the Curtis Bay community to defeat plans to build the incinerator.

For her efforts, she was recently selected as one of six recipients of the 2016 Goldman Environmental Prize, which honors grassroots environmental leaders from around the world.

Watford, who is now 20, was not only the youngest of this year's six recipients, but also the third-youngest honoree to win the prize since it was created in 1990. The prize, which recognizes individuals for significant efforts to protect and enhance the environment, awards recipients \$175,000 to pursue their vision of a renewed and protected environment.

Environmental Fighter

When she was a senior in high school, Watford cofounded Free Your Voice (FYV), a student organization dedicated to community rights and social justice. The group took action against the proposed incinerator and began canvassing neighborhoods, organizing protests and circulating petitions with the rallying cry "Clear air is a human right."

The group soon discovered that city government agencies, such as Baltimore

City Public Schools, had signed an agreement to purchase energy from the incinerator. In May 2014, Watford and her fellow students attended a school board meeting to urge school officials to divest from the project. Watford gave a presentation, students showcased art and music performances and parents gave testimonies in support. The group also took the board on a tour of the Curtis Bay community and the proposed incinerator site.

In February 2015, in response to concerns from students and their families, the Baltimore school board voted to terminate its contract with the incinerator's developer. By the fall of that year, all 22 customers canceled their contracts, leaving the incinerator with no market for its product.

Watford and FYV then turned their efforts to the Maryland Department of Environment and even brought 200 protestors to confront the Maryland environment secretary to pull the project's permits. In March 2016, the Maryland Department of the Environment declared the incinerator's permit invalid.

Currently a student at Towson University, Watford is now working with Curtis Bay community residents to turn the site into a community solar farm and a recycling center.

In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Greg Saltwell, an organizer for a non-profit group, who acted as a mentor and helped nominate Watford for the Goldman award, praised her determination and efforts to encourage the community to take action. "Older people said they got involved from their doors being knocked on by Destiny," said Saltwell. "She inspired a multigenerational struggle. She showed a lot of wisdom and patience."

The Goldman Environmental Prize recipients are selected by an international jury from nominations submitted by a worldwide group of environmental organizations and individuals.

Charleston Parents Challenged To Spend Time with Children

The Charleston County School District in South Carolina has challenged parents to put down their electronic devices such as cell phones and computers to spend more time talking with their children.

In a campaign called “Drop the Line, Embrace Their Minds,” the school system launched a “30 million word gap challenge” in January based on research that indicates that students that come from under-resourced and working class families hear an average of 30 million fewer words than their counterparts in wealthier homes.

“This disparity leads to a lack of proficiency in language development and reading,” says Ruth Taylor, executive director of early childhood programs in the Charleston County School District. “This can impact the educational trajectory of children for years to come.”

So, the school system developed a campaign that aims to make parents aware of the 30-million-word gap and offers solutions that families can use to give their children the best opportunity to be successful in school.

The campaign encourages parents to take time out of their schedules to have uninterrupted conversations with their children. The initial focus is on families in the federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs for students from low-income households.

Feedback from parents who have taken the pledge to “Drop the Line, Embrace Their Minds” has been positive, Taylor points out.

“They have seen their relationship with their children grow stronger through more frequent and engaging conversations.

“They have shared their experiences through written testimonials that help us know that the campaign is on target and making a difference,” she says.

A North Charleston parent is one of several hundred committed to the challenge, and she has seen a big difference in communicating with her 5-year-old daughter, according to a local Charleston

CBS-TV news report.

Jovanna Stevens says she now takes extra time to talk with and read to her daughter. “She comes home everyday telling me about the new things that she learns....I’m there 100 percent. It’s very important to me. I feel that education is number one, no matter what,” she emphasizes.

The school district’s early childhood executive director Taylor hopes the campaign will expand, and “to be an example of a local solution to a national problem.”



Parents and their children are spending more time together as a result of the Charleston school district’s challenge.

NYC Students Win \$120,000 Technology Award for School

People use smartwatch apps to browse the Web, check the weather, read email, and even order a meal, but three students from Brooklyn Technical High School in New York City have created an app they hope will do something more important--save lives.

The students have developed a smartwatch app that warns pedestrians of oncoming vehicles and is among the winning projects of this year’s Solve for Tomorrow contest. Sponsored by Samsung, the contest challenges students in grades 6 - 12 to use their STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) skills to come up with a solution to a problem in their community.

This year, the grand prize winners were selected from a pool of more than 4,100 school groups that submitted ideas last October for how they would apply STEM to making a difference where they live.

The idea for a smartwatch app to warn pedestrians was the brainchild of Alison Collard de Beaufort, after three of her friends were hit by cars and killed within a span of 15 months. “Everyone was terrified and devastated,” she said in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*. “We thought of an app that would make pedestrians safe.”

The app works by detecting an oncoming car based on the sound waves emitted by its engine. The watch’s alarm then warns its wearer to get out of the way.

Collard de Beaufort worked on the app with three friends and the app was entered into the Samsung contest by a teacher. As a result of being selected as one of the winners of the contest, Brooklyn Tech will receive a \$120,000 technology grant.

Each of the winning teams were required to create a video showcasing their project. The video of the Brooklyn Tech’s team can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiwjcTyQeE8>.

Buffalo Superintendent Unveils Reform Plan With Vision Of the City's Economic Growth

After taking the reins of the Buffalo Public Schools last fall, Superintendent Kriner Cash went right to work in assessing the district's needs. Then in February, he unveiled what is called *The New Education Bargain with Students and Parents* (NEB), a reform agenda for turning around the school system and contributing to economic growth in Western New York.

"I listened to the community," he pointed out in the development of the plan. "We live in a city that is in the midst of a surging economic renaissance -- the growth of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, STEM {science, technology, engineering and mathematics} careers, software engineering, and new advanced manufacturing opportunities in solar technology."

"*The New Education Bargain* is simple: the district will guarantee pathways to opportunity that will lead to achievement and success in exchange for hard work, commitment, and collaboration of our students and parents," he stresses.

The reform plan is based on six planks:

- Rigorous early elementary education;
- Strong community schools;
- New innovative high schools;
- Extended learning excellence for all Buffalo public school students;

- Services for the district's neediest children and families; and
- A new relationship with district school teachers.

In addition to reduced class sizes and intense literacy focus in the early grades, the district will launch five new competitive high schools and programs in the coming school year, and provide for expanded opportunities for career development aligned to emerging industries in Western New York.

One of the programs would include Buffalo's Bennett High School partnering with the State University of New York at Buffalo and Buffalo State College to teach software engineering, network building, gaming, coding, animation and digital design.

Another program would include the State University of New York at Buffalo and Empire Genomics teaming up with Buffalo's Math, Science and Technology Preparatory School to offer a research laboratory in bioinformatics and life sciences.

Still another program would have East Community High School partnering with Buffalo Fire and Police departments and

Buffalo continued on page 12



Buffalo Schools Superintendent Kriner Cash spends time with children in his district's early grades.

St. Louis District Wins First Property Tax Levy in 25 Years

On election night last month, St. Louis City Public Schools received very good news -- voters approved the first operating tax levy increase to support the school district in 25 years.

More than 69 percent of voters approved the tax levy, known as Proposition 1, which will generate an estimated \$28 million a year for schools.



According to district officials, funds from the levy will be used to support the school system's early childhood education program, improve safety and security equipment

and personnel, expand character education and alternative education options and raise salaries for teachers and support staff.

School board member Richard Gaines, who was also chairman of the Proposition 1 campaign, said the passage of the tax levy to benefit district schools was a proud day for the St. Louis school system.

"The citizens of St. Louis have said to us again, they trust us to handle their money, and more importantly, they trust us to handle their children," said Gaines. "And for that we are all thankful."

St. Louis City Public Schools is on a roll -- last year the school system qualified for full accreditation from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the first time since 2000.

While St. Louis students received good news on election night, students in Alaska's Anchorage School District did not. A \$49 million bond to make repairs and improvements at 37 district schools failed. Projects funded by the bond would have included nine roof replacements, 18 security camera upgrades and the replacement of 27 schools buses.



Cincinnati school board approves district equity policy with a quote on the screen from Michael Casserly of the Council of the Great City Schools.

Cincinnati School Board Approves Equity Policy

In an effort to ensure that Ohio's Cincinnati Public Schools is eliminating policies and practices that lead to disparities among students and schools but at the same time fully embracing the value of diversity, the school district has approved an historic equity policy.

The policy, which was unanimously approved by the school board, commits the board to ensuring that the principles of fairness, equity and inclusion are fully integrated into all of the district's policies, programs, operations and practices.

Under the equity policy, the school system will eliminate any policies, structures and practices that cause inequities and contribute to disproportionate educational outcomes as well as unequal access. The policy also calls for equitable distribution of financial, capital and human resources through the school system's annual budget allocation process.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, believes the policy puts the Cincinnati school system at the forefront of urban school systems across the country that are both improving the quality of their instructional programming and ensuring greater equity and access to all the resources that the school district offers.

"The work should pay long-term dividends for the school system, the city of Cincinnati and most importantly our urban children," said Casserly in a news statement.

Under the policy, the superintendent and treasurer are required to create a plan that lists clear and measurable accountability standards and procedures to be shared with the public and submitted to the school board annually for approval. The plan will be reviewed by the board to make sure it is being implemented at all district departments and school sites.

Cleveland COO Wins Top Council Award

Patrick Zohn, chief operating officer for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, received the Distinguished Service Award from the Council of the Great City Schools at its recent Chief Operating Officers Conference in Charlotte, N.C. The award honors business officials who exemplify leadership, innovation, commitment and professionalism in urban education.

Zohn often reminds operations employees that many of them are likely to be the first person a student encounters each day and during his acceptance speech thanked his entire division, saying, "This award is for the cleaners who late at night make sure our buildings are ready for the next day. To all of you this is your honor, our collective recognition that we are doing good and noble work in service to the highest of callings -- taking care of children."

Zohn was appointed chief operating officer six years ago.

Clark County District Is Music Ed. Leader For 17th Year

This is the 17th year the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) has released a list recognizing school districts across the nation for their support of music education programs for students. And the Clark County School District in Las Vegas has been on that list for 17 consecutive years.

The "Best Communities for Music Education in America" (BCME) list recognizes school districts for demonstrating outstanding achievement by teachers, administrators, parents, students and community leaders who work together to provide music access and education to all students as part of the school curriculum.

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ESSA Regulations Off to a Troubling Start

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

After issuing timely guidance to school districts that clarified the transition year for the new “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA), the Education Department’s initial foray into rule-making governing ESSA quickly went awry. The negotiated rulemaking process, which is authorized by Congress and has been used in previous reauthorizations to reach agreement on regulations that will govern the new law, was -- this time -- poorly conceived and executed by the Education Department. The process began with a demand from session facilitators for committee members to switch seats—akin to “musical chairs”—prior to commenting, amending, or responding to each other. And it ended with a stalemate over an Education Department proposal to alter the Title I comparability rule that the agency folded into the legislation’s supplement-not-supplant requirements. Maybe more troubling during the eight days of negotiations was a pronounced disregard for the opinions of practitioners who were being asked to implement the proposed rules and patent indifference to the operational effects or costs of the draft regulations.

In general, the federal rulemaking process is meant to facilitate implementation of and compliance with the statute and to clarify otherwise ambiguous provisions. The regulatory process can also be used to restrict or even expand legislative action taken by Congress to accommodate particular priorities of a federal agency – a process that at times occurs in the final year of a presidential administration. In this case, the Education Department is using its rulemaking authority to imbed its priorities into the ESSA regulations—not unlike how the Bush administration amended the Title I rules on October 29, 2008. What is unusual, however, is that the current Education Department is

adding language that Congress clearly considered during the law-writing process but then explicitly rejected.

The most glaring expansion proposed by the Department of Education during the negotiated rulemaking process was the addition of a new “supplement not supplant” requirement designed to ensure that per pupil expenditures of state and local funds in Title I schools equaled or exceeded the average of such expenditures in non-Title I schools. The proposal was identical to various proposals made by the Education Department and other Washington-based groups over the years to modify current Title I “comparability” requirements—not supplement-not-supplant. In this case, Congress did not change the comparability provisions after considerable debate and actually barred the agency from specifying the methodology under the supplement not supplant provisions.

On top of the questionable interpretation of Congressional action, the costs of complying with the department’s proposals are substantial. In 2012, the Center for American Progress estimated the cost to local school districts of complying with the proposal was \$6.8 billion in additional state and local funds—a number the center updated to \$8.5 billion in a March 2015 report. Similarly, the Education Department issued a policy brief in 2011 estimating the additional cost in state and local funds of complying at between 3 and 4 percent of all state and local elementary and secondary education expenditures nationwide. The Council of the Great City Schools projected the cost of compliance just for its own members at upwards of \$3.9 billion. In short, the proposed regulation would amount to the single largest administratively-created

requirement in the 50-year history of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The comparability proposal – absent its lack of statutory authority -- appears deceptively simple on its face, i.e., make expenditures of all Title I schools equal to or greater than those in non-Title I schools. But school districts typically staff their schools with full-time equivalent teachers or other staff based on student enrollment without regard to salary. Schools generally have the same number of teachers in similarly-sized schools, but the salaries of those teachers will vary widely based on teacher experience and other factors. Older, more highly-paid teachers in one school cost more than younger, lower-paid teachers in another. At the heart of the proposal is the assumption—not backed by research—that older teachers are more effective teachers.

Massive noncompliance nationwide would likely be the result of the proposed Education Department regulations -- if finalized – because of these salary differentials. Correspondingly, massive disruptions to school-level budgets and teacher staffing would also be expected in any district attempting to comply with the rule. Yet, at the end of the day when teacher salaries were equalized across Title I and non-Title schools, there would be little or no effect on student outcomes since the research does not demonstrate any consistent relationship between teacher salaries and student achievement.

This proposal has drawn the ire of the chairmen of both House and Senate education committees, and been described by the non-partisan Congressional Research Service as beyond the scope of the law. It exceeds the plain language of the Act, and ignores at least three prohibitions in ESSA restricting the Education Department’s authority to direct the allocation of state and local funds.

ESSA Regulations *continued on page 11*



ESSA Regulations *continued from page 10*

This proposed expenditure regulation was one of several regulatory changes proposed during the negotiated rule-making process with which participating practitioners expressed serious concerns. Others included a requirement for middle schools to offer advance math coursework to any student statewide who requests it—if the state exercises the law’s option for 8th graders to take the advanced-math assessment in lieu of the regular 8th grade assessment. Another involves a series of conditions states must meet before they could qualify for an alternate-assessment waiver—despite the law’s prohibition on setting conditions on waivers. Also proposed were restrictions on local use of nationally-recognized high school assessments.

While the Education Department now cites a “Neg-Reg consensus” on its proposed ESSA regulations governing assessments, in reality it was really a lack of dissent. Under the department’s rulemaking protocols, the Department’s proposed language became the basis for any revisions or modifications during the process—and could only be over-turned if there was consensus. On the comparability proposals, specifically, school practitioners clearly voiced their dissent, but the department is now free—barring Congressional intervention or a lawsuit—to finalize its own fictitious version of the law, but real damage has been done by the way that the agency steamrolled the process and voiced its disregard for state and school district concerns.

Urban Schools Named Grammy Award Winners

Boston Arts Academy, Pearl-Cohen Entertainment Magnet High School in Nashville and Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville, Fla., were among 13 schools recently selected as a

Grammy Award *continued on page 12*

‘Tis the Season for Proms

The spring season every year for the nation’s graduating high school students means commencement exercises – and proms.

Students in New York City, Miami, Los Angeles and Dallas recently had the opportunity to have the prom of their dreams as part of the TLC cable TV channel’s fifth annual *Say Yes to the Prom* initiative.

More than 300 students were pampered with head-to-toe makeovers and outfitted with dazzling attire for their proms in the initiative’s tour of the four big cities and a school district in Maryland. They had an opportunity to select from an array of more than 2,000 donated dresses and tuxedo rentals, as well as a wide range of accessories and shoes.

But the *Say Yes to the Prom* initiative is not just about treating deserving students to prom shopping and removing the finan-

cial burden on families for the expensive night on the town. It also offers a day of mentorship, building self-confidence and a sense of empowerment among the academically strong participants selected for the program.

“My family and me, we were all stressed out about it,” said Dallas student Tiandria McClure in a *Dallas Morning News* blog. She indicated that she might not have attended the prom if it wasn’t for *Say Yes to the Prom* program. She plans to begin studies at the University of Texas at Arlington this fall.

At each daylong event on the tour, the initiative culminated with a red-carpet runway show, giving participants the chance to show off their new prom-ready looks.

A one-hour *Say Yes to the Prom* special is scheduled to air on TLC on May 20.



Dallas Independent School District Superintendent Michael Hinojosa poses with his students in the *Say Yes to the Prom* initiative with an official of Discovery, parent company of TLC.



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Music Education *continued from page 9*

This year, 476 urban, suburban and rural school districts were recognized.

In addition to Clark County, Albuquerque Public Schools, Atlanta Public Schools, Tampa's Hillsborough County, Memphis' Shelby County Schools, Kansas' Wichita Public Schools and Texas' Austin Independent School District and Fort Worth Independent School District were honored.

The BCME survey requires districts to answer detailed questions about funding, graduation requirements, music class participation, instruction time, facilities, support for the music program and community music-making programs. The responses were reviewed by researchers at the Music Research Institute at the University of Kansas.

In addition, the NAMM Foundation also recognized 118 public and private schools across the nation with the SupportMusic Merit Award (SMMA), honoring individual schools that have demonstrated strong support for and commitment to music education. Big-city schools in Las Vegas, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Diego and Washington, D.C., made the list.

Great City Grads



Prince Rogers Nelson

Singer-Songwriter

1976 Graduate

Central High School

Minneapolis Public Schools

Buffalo *continued from page 8*

city and county government agencies to focus on concentrations in law, public safety, government and public administration.

"The Department of Labor has projected 165,000 new jobs in Buffalo over the next 10 years, and I want our students to be prepared to fill them," Superintendent Cash emphasizes. "Every plank of *The New Education Bargain* anticipates and aggressively addresses the long-term economic and educational growth of the City of Buffalo.

"We cannot become an international City of Choice without having a world-class public education system to complement it," he contends.

Grammy Award *continued from page 11*

2016 GRAMMY Signature School by the Grammy Foundation.

The award program recognizes the nation's top public high schools that make an outstanding commitment to music education during an academic school year.