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Urban Schools Make the Grade In *U.S. News* Rankings

For the third consecutive year, a big-city school has topped the *U.S. News & World Report's* "Best High Schools" rankings.

The School for the Talented and Gifted in Dallas ranked No. 1 of the more than 19,400 public high schools in 50 states and the District of Columbia that were awarded gold, silver or bronze medals of some 31,200 schools analyzed.

"Minority students are in the majority at TAG – nearly 60 percent are black, Hispanic or Asian," *U.S. News* pointed out in an April 22 announcement of its 2014 rankings.

Seven big-city schools located in districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools ranked in the top 25 of the "Best High Schools" list.

U.S. News teamed up with the American Institutes for Research to evaluate student performance on state-mandated assessments, and measured how effectively schools educate minority students, as well as how they educate college-bound students based on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams.

In addition to the Dallas Independent School District's School for the Talented and Gifted, the other schools in Council districts ranked in the top 25 and awarded gold medals are:

Urban Schools continued on page 4

L.A. School Wins Academic Decathlon

A team of students from the Los Angeles Unified School District recently finished at the top of the annual U.S. Academic Decathlon®. The championship team represents El Camino Real Charter High School.

And the second-place winner — Granada Hills Charter High School — also hails from the nation's second largest school district.

The title has gone to either one of the two high schools for the past five competitions. The team from El Camino Real reclaimed the title from Granada Hills, which won the title three years in a row. And it was El Camino Real that was the champion the year before Granada Hills' three-peat.

This year's national Academic Decathlon® was held in Honolulu, with nearly 470 students from 52 high schools competing. Each nine-member team can earn a possible 60,000 points, and the El Camino Real team earned 52,601.1 points for the win. The competition's topic was World War I.

"Congratulations to El Camino Real for the incredible honor of capturing the national title," said Los Angeles Schools Superintendent John Deasy in a statement. "We are so proud at LAUSD of the team members and coaches of El Camino and the second-place finisher Granada for their amazing performances in the 2014 Academic Decathlon."

L.A. School continued on page 4



Astrophysicist To Address Urban Educators

Astrophysicist and broadcast science commentator Neil deGrasse Tyson will be one of the keynote speakers at the Council of the Great City Schools' 58th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 22-26, in Milwaukee. For more on the conference, see page 5.



Urban Teachers Honored with Milken Awards for Teaching

As a middle-school science teacher in Honolulu, Michelle Kay strives to excite her students about STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) through hands-on projects. Kay built the school's VEX Bot program that allows students to design their own robots while learning the basics of engineering, robotics and design.

She has managed to turn her students' scientific curiosity into serious competition at the middle school VEX Bot competitions. The Kalakaua Middle School team was not only selected to attend the VEX Robotics World Championship, but finished 11th out of 160 students from around the globe.

As a result of her dedication to teaching, Kay was one of 35 educators to receive the \$25,000 Milken Educator Award.

The award recognizes early to mid-career education professionals for their outstanding achievements and for the promise of what they will accomplish in the future. Recipients are usually caught by surprise at an all-school assembly where they are honored in front of cheering students, colleagues and school officials and media.

In addition to Kay, six big-city educators received the "surprise of a lifetime," including Sarah Berndt of Milwaukee Public

Schools, Andrew Cook of Albuquerque Public Schools, Luis Espinosa of Florida's Broward County Public Schools, Mark Miazga of Baltimore City Public Schools, Teresa Chan Seidel of Oregon's Portland Public Schools and Tracee

Thompson of Jackson Public Schools in Mississippi.

Established in 1985, the Milken Educator Award program awards and inspires excellence in the world of education by

Urban Teachers continued on page 3



Teacher Michelle Kay in Honolulu is congratulated by her students for winning the \$25,000 Milken Educator Award.



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Richard Carranza
Superintendent, San Francisco

Executive Director
Michael Casserly

Editor
Henry Duvall
hduvall@cgcs.org

Associate Editor
Tonya Harris
tharris@cgcs.org

Staff Writer
Danyell Taylor
dtaylor@cgcs.org

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Oakland, Oklahoma City Name New Leaders; Austin Appoints Interim Chief



Antwan Wilson

After a year-long search, California's Oakland Unified School District has selected Antwan Wilson as superintendent to lead the 37,000-student school district.

Wilson, currently Denver Public Schools' assistant superintendent for post-secondary readiness, will succeed Acting Superintendent Gary Yee.

Wilson leads Denver's middle, high and alternative schools with additional responsibility for the district's school turnaround efforts, college and career office, the student engagement office and the athletics office. The district has had improvement in graduation rates and the number of students entering college, doubled enrollment in AP courses, tripled concurrent enrollment in college-level courses and expanded options for students seeking degrees through the district's alternative school programs.

Before his current position, Wilson served in a variety of roles within Denver Public Schools, including high school instructional superintendent, principal and teacher at middle and high schools. A notable contribution includes his work with Denver's formerly low-performing Montbello High, where under Wilson's leadership as principal, the percentage of students accepted into two- and four-year colleges rose from 35 percent in 2005 to 95 percent in 2008.

"He has built an outstanding team of middle school and high school leaders," said Tom Boasberg, Denver Public Schools superintendent in a press release, "who have driven strong gains in the number of families choosing to send their kids to our city's middle and high schools and in the number of kids graduating each year from

Denver Public Schools and going on to college..."

New Leader in Oklahoma

Oklahoma City Public Schools has also selected a new leader to take the reins of the 45,000-student school district. Robert Neu will succeed Interim Superintendent David Lopez.

Currently superintendent of Federal Way Public Schools in suburban Seattle, Neu is familiar with challenges facing urban school districts, having experienced them on a smaller scale during his recent four-year tenure as superintendent where 60 percent of students live in poverty.

To create conditions that encourage academic achievement, Neu intends to implement programs and policies credited with success in Federal Way. In four years, Neu increased SAT test participation from 25 percent to 94 percent and implemented an academic program that identified high-performing students to place them in Advanced Placement courses.

"He is focused on educating the whole child," said Oklahoma City's school board chair, Lynne Hardin, "and creating innovative ways that make school and education relevant for students. We look forward to him joining our district and focusing on the need for increased rigor and improve education for all our students."

In Texas, Chief Schools Officer Paul Cruz steps up to serve as interim superintendent of Austin Independent School District after current Superintendent Meria Carstarphen departs to lead Atlanta Public Schools this summer.

"Dr. Cruz is a really good example of who can step into her shoes," said Monica Sanchez, president of the Austin Council of the PTAs, in the *Austin American-Statesman*. "He has the heart for serving students and for listening to the community..."

U.S. Schools and Districts Recognized For Going 'Green'

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced its 2014 Green Ribbon Schools and District Sustainability awardees for exemplary efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, as well as promote environmental education and "green" career pathways.

Nine school districts were recognized, which included two urban school systems – Broward County Public Schools in



Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Omaha Public Schools in Nebraska.

"We are proud to be honored as a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School District," said Broward County Schools Superintendent Robert Runcie. "Our district is committed to environmental stewardship, from green initiatives aimed at helping the environment while also increasing our operational efficiency to educational programs for our students."

Green Ribbon honors went to 48 schools – 39 public and nine private – in 27 states, including the nation's oldest public school, Boston Latin, founded in 1635 and the largest school in the Boston Public Schools.

The other urban school districts that have 2014 Green Ribbon Schools include Bridgeport, Conn.; Long Beach, Calif.; and Omaha.

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honoring top educators with an unrestricted cash prize. Additionally, Milken educators are given access to networking and development tools to aid their careers.

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- School of Science and Engineering Magnet in Dallas, No. 8;
- Stanton College Preparatory School in Jacksonville, Fla.; No. 12;
- Academic Magnet High School in North Charleston, S.C., No. 16;
- Design & Architecture Senior High in Miami-Dade County, No. 19
- Carnegie Vanguard High School in Houston, No. 23; and
- International Studies Charter High School in Miami-Dade County, No. 24.

A number of urban schools won medals in the 2014 *U.S. News* national rankings.

L.A. School continued from page 1



The El Camino Real Charter High School Academic Decathlon team from Los Angeles holds the winning trophy after being named the 2014 U.S. Academic Decathlon® champion.

The U.S. Academic Decathlon®, which is in its 33rd year, is a rigorous ten-event scholastic competition for teams of high school students.

Each high school enters a team of nine students: three “A” or honor students, three

Toledo District Awarded \$3.8-Million Federal Grant

Ohio’s Toledo Public Schools was the state’s sole recipient of a nearly \$4 million federal grant focused on making students career-ready. Youth Career Connect, the competitive national grant, aims to create programs integrating rigorous academic and career-focused curriculum.

Toledo will use grant funds to launch “Pathway to Prosperity” during the 2014–2015 school year at five of the district’s high schools. Business partnerships have been developed with Toledo companies to help provide training, job-shadowing and mentoring so students learn in-demand skills for today’s job market.

Award funds will be used to purchase technologically advanced equipment for student use.

Urban Students Named Presidential Scholars

Fourteen big-city students were named to the 50th class of U.S. Presidential Scholars by the Department of Education.

This annual recognition is the nation’s highest honor for high school students. Urban students in Anchorage, Dallas, Palm Beach (Fla.), Miami, Hillsborough (Fla.), Las Vegas, New York, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Memphis and Portland (Ore.) were named to the commemorative class. The honored scholars represent excellence in education and the promise of greatness in young people.

The White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, appointed by the president, honors 141 high school seniors from around the nation who have demonstrated leadership, scholarship, and contribution to school and community.

Students are selected based on essays, school evaluations, transcripts, SAT and ACT scores, as well as evidence of their leadership and community service.

More than 3,900 high school seniors qualified for the awards this year across the country.

Created in 1964, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program every year recognizes students across the nation who are considered distinguished graduating seniors academically and artistically.

Portland School Wins Constitution Contest For Record Five Times

Lincoln High School in Portland, Ore., has done it again: it is the winner of this year’s “*We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*” competition. It was the high school’s fifth win, making it the only school in the nation to win the national title five times.

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College Board President, Astrophysicist and Girl Scouts CEO to Speak

College Board President David Coleman, astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson and Girl Scouts CEO Anna Maria Chavez will address the nation's urban-school leaders at the Council of the Great City Schools' 58th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 22-26, in Milwaukee.

Coleman took the reins of the College Board, particularly known for the SAT college-entrance exam and the Advanced Placement Program, in the fall of 2012 after serving as CEO of Student Achievement Partners, which he cofounded. The nonprofit played a leading role in the development of the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and literacy.

The Rhodes Scholar was recognized as one of *Time* magazine's "100 Most Influential People" of 2013.

TV Astrophysicist

Hosted by the Milwaukee Public Schools, the conference will also feature astrophysicist, author, and radio and television science commentator Neil deGrasse Tyson, who also serves as the Frederick P. Rose Director of the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History.



Neil deGrasse Tyson

From 2006 to 2011, he hosted the edu-

cational science television show *NOVA ScienceNOW* on PBS. He is now updating astronomer Carl Sagan's landmark television series *Cosmos*, hosting *Cosmos: A Space Odyssey* on the FOX television network.

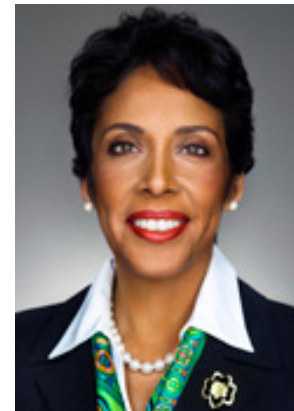
Tyson is a product of urban public schools, graduating from the Bronx High School of Science in New York City. He went on to earn a baccalaureate degree in physics from Harvard and a Ph.D in astrophysics from Columbia University.

Under the banner "Fresh Water, Fresh Thinking in Urban Education," the Council's Fall Conference focuses on issues, challenges, reforms and achievements in America's big-city school districts. Some 1,000 urban school leaders, including superintendents, board members and senior administrators, converge to discuss what's working to improve instruction and operations in the nation's large city school districts.

Girl Scouts Chief

Another keynote speaker at the five-day conference will be Anna Maria Chávez, chief executive officer of the Girl Scouts of the USA.

Of Mexican-American heritage, Chávez is the first Hispanic to head the national



Anna Maria Chávez

Girl Scouts, taking the reins in 2011. She is a lifetime member of the Girl Scouts, joining the group as a child in the small town of Eloy, Ariz. She later attended Yale

University and earned a law degree from the University of Arizona.

She worked in numerous posts in President Clinton's administration, including as a senior policy adviser to former U.S. secretary of transportation Rodney Slater. She later returned to her home state of Arizona and served as deputy chief of staff for urban relations and community development under then-Governor Janet Napolitano.

In 2009, Chávez became chief executive officer of Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas. Two years later, she was named CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA.

CLOSE-UP

Big-City School Districts Strive to Break the School-to-Prison Pipeline

By Tonya Harris

Darlene Sampson, the director of culturally responsive education at Denver Public Schools, remembers visiting a local elementary school a few years ago and seeing a 3-year-old African American boy brought to the principal's office. The teacher, who was white, said the boy had assaulted her.

"In what world would we use the word assault for a 3-year-old," Sampson said in an interview with the *Urban Educator*. "But black boys from the time they enter school are thought to be older, bigger, tougher and badder."

Unfortunately, schools disciplining black children at an early age is not uncommon. A report released in March by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights found that while black children represent 18 percent of preschool enrollment, they are 42 percent of the preschool children suspended.

The findings were even a surprise to Education Secretary Arne Duncan who told conferees at the Council of the Great City Schools' recent Legislative/Policy Conference how stunned he was at the numbers and that "tragically, the school to prison pipeline actually starts with some of our 4-year-olds."

But with studies showing that zero tolerance policies that suspend and expel students for minor infractions do more harm than good, leading to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates, urban school districts across the nation are creating alternative methods to keep students in the classroom and out of the criminal justice system.

A Leader Listens

In the 2011-2012 school year, more than 1,000 students in Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., were ar-



Students in Broward County Public Schools' PROMISE program in Florida take a pledge to better themselves.

rested, with the district ranking number one for school-based arrests in Florida. These numbers were not a surprise to Marsha Ellison, president of the NAACP Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Chapter, who for years had been trying to get the district to decrease the number of students of color being arrested for non-violent offenses to no avail.

But that changed when Robert Runcie became the district's superintendent in 2011. "He's a numbers guy, so we were able to get him to sit down with us and listen and examine the data," said Ellison. The school district eventually entered into a Collaborative Agreement on School Discipline with the NAACP, local law enforcement, and government agencies such as the state's attorney office, to overhaul its disciplinary policies, including changing the Code of Student Conduct.

Suspensions for non-violent misdemeanors ended and interventions were put into place to keep students in school, such as the PROMISE (Preventing Recidivism through Opportunities, Mentoring Interventions, Support and Education) program.

When a student commits a non-violent offense, they are assigned to a PROMISE site for two to nine days. Students receive

counseling from graduate students at Nova Southeastern University as well as social skills/conflict resolution instruction from social workers and guidance counselors, with a curriculum tailored to their needs.

And when a student finishes his or her time in the PROMISE program, a six-week transition plan is developed for the student upon return to his or her home school.

PROMISE went into effect the beginning of the 2013-14 school year and 1,613 students have participated, with less than 4 percent of students repeating the program. And since the overhaul of its disciplinary policies, the district has seen a 41 percent decrease in school-based arrests and a decrease in suspensions by 66.2 percent in a year.

Ellison credits Runcie, as well as school board members' willingness to admit there was a school-to-jailhouse pipeline in the district, and offers advice for educators and community stakeholders looking to combat the problem in their respective school systems.

"Until you change the policy in schools, you are really spinning your wheels," said Ellison. "Progress won't be as systemic unless you work on the policy in school districts that allow these things to happen."

Suspension Plan

Chicago Public Schools has among the highest and most racially disproportionate suspension rates in the nation, with more

Prison Pipeline continued on page 7

Prison Pipeline *continued from page 6*

than three-quarters of all suspensions issued to African American students who comprise about 40 percent of the student population. And in 2012, the Office of Civil Rights named the school system the worst district in the nation for disproportionate use of suspensions by race.



As a result, the district is moving away from its zero tolerance policies, and in 2012, it revised its Students Code of Conduct to focus more on corrective and instructive practices. The revisions have led to a 36 percent decrease in out-of-school suspensions for the 2013-2014 school year.

And recently the school system released its Suspensions and Expulsions Reduction Plan, which aims to encourage schools to build a positive school climate, build students' social and emotional skills, and develop alternative strategies such as peer councils for dealing with disciplinary issues.

"The overarching principle of the plan is how do we keep kids in class; because every minute they are out of class, they are falling behind," said Aarti Dhupelia, the district's chief officer for college and career success.

The district is also making a concerted effort to be more transparent about its data and increase accountability by releasing suspension and expulsion data on its website and implementing an outreach plan with focus groups and community meetings.

Afraid of Black Boys

Denver Public Schools is focusing heavily on providing professional development to its administrators and teachers who are on the front lines of the disproportionate disparity in suspensions and expulsions.

As the director of culturally responsive education in the district, Sampson trained more than 500 principals, teachers and departments last year in workshops on perceptions and biases that educators may bring into the classroom with them.

"I may address questions such as 'What do I do if I'm afraid of black boys,'" said

Sampson, who acknowledges that educators may feel anxiety or fear that they may be called racists. "But I have to talk about these issues because we know that black boys are often removed from classrooms for subjective reasons, such as they looked at a teacher in a perceived menacing manner or used a loud voice; where another student is quiet but exhibiting the same behavior and is not punished."

Sampson often gets calls from schools saying they need tools in classroom management but she tells them they have to start with student engagement first.

"We know that teachers who have authentic relationships with students have a third fewer disciplinary problems," said Sampson. "What really resonates with students of color is that they need to know you care about them; that comes first."

Ending Willful Defiance

In 2011-2012, 48 percent of school suspensions in the state of California were for willful defiance, a category that includes such minor offenses as dress code violations. The Los Angeles Unified School District relied on willful defiance for 31 percent of its suspensions and while that number was relatively low compared to other school districts, officials felt the number was still too high. So on May 14, 2013, the school system became the first in California to ban suspensions of defiant students.

The Los Angeles School Board approved the policy that not only bans willful defiance as grounds for suspension, but put a plan in place that will require the district to use alternative disciplinary practices such as restorative justice, which requires misbehaving students to make amends to the people they have harmed.

This is just the latest effort by the school district to overhaul school discipline; in 2007, the school system established a positive behavior supports program in schools.

Social-Emotional Learning

In 2007, a student in Cleveland who had been suspended returned to his high school and shot and wounded two teachers

and two other students before killing himself. This incident spurred officials in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to realize they needed to address students' social and emotional needs.

As a result, the district created planning centers in each school as an alternative to in-school suspensions. The centers are staffed by a professional trained in de-escalation and problem-solving techniques, who can provide students with emotional and mental health assistance.

Students may be sent to the planning center by a teacher, principal or can send themselves, and can stay for up to five days at one time.

In its fourth year, district officials credit the planning centers with decreases in discipline referrals and decreases in suspensions.

A Second Chance

By the time students have reached 9th grade, 42 percent of black male students have been suspended or expelled during their school years, compared to 14 percent of white male students.

The dismal numbers have caught the attention of organizations such as The Atlantic Philanthropies, which recently awarded a \$1-million grant to fund the PASSAGE (Positive and Safe Schools Advancing Greater Equity) program. The initiative is aimed at reducing racial and discipline disparities in four school districts: New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles and Nashville.

In Broward, officials have seen first hand the difference revising the district's student discipline policies have made.

Lakeshia Flint, the PROMISE Program administrative designee, still receives emails of gratitude from a student who participated in the program. The student, a senior, was sent to the program for a non-violent offense that previously might have led to his arrest.

"He understood and appreciated that by coming through the PROMISE program he was given a second opportunity," said Flint. "PROMISE is a promise to students that we will continue to educate them, that we are not going to turn our backs on them, and we will give them every opportunity to succeed."

Charlotte Educator Named Teacher Of the Year in North Carolina



James Ford

James Ford didn't begin his career as a teacher, but the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 9th grade world history teacher is confident he was born to teach. Recently, his standout contributions to the teaching field have earned him

statewide recognition.

Named the 2014 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year, Ford is the first Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools educator in four decades to win the prestigious award. In this role, Ford will spend the upcoming school year traveling the state as an ambassador for more than 95,000 teachers in the state.

"My personal journey has been both long and unorthodox," said Ford, a teacher at Garinger High School. "But in the end, I realize that it was my passion that ultimately led me to my purpose—education."

Ford has been a teacher in Charlotte since 2010. However, he began his career serving youth employed as a high school

truancy intervention specialist. Next, he worked as director of a teen center providing educational and after-school activities for youth at-risk of dropping out of school. He then transitioned into teaching.

While he is currently teaching world history, Ford is also co-leader of the peer mentoring program and the Garinger High School Cultural Festival. He previously served as the chair of the school's teacher advisory council as well as the world history curriculum writing team and he has conducted workshops for world history teachers in the district.

"We are very proud of James Ford and his achievements, which illustrate why great teaching matters so much," said Heath Morrison, Charlotte Schools superintendent.

Ford was named the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Teacher of the Year in May 2013. And in December 2013, he received the Southwest Regional Teacher of the Year.

As North Carolina's Teacher of the Year, he will receive a \$7,500 cash award in addition to other prizes. Ford will also serve as an adviser to the State Board of Education for two years.

Top Magnet Schools In U.S. Named

Miami-Dade County Schools opened its first magnet program in 1973, and now the district offers students more than 340 programs in more than 100 schools, with an enrollment of more than 43,000 students.

Magnet programs are available to students under different themes of study such as Careers & Professions; International Programs; Mathematics, Science, & Technology; and Visual & Performing Arts.

The district's magnet program recently received recognition when 12 of its magnet schools were recognized as among the best magnet programs in the nation by the Magnet Schools of America organization.

The schools received the 2014 Magnet Schools of Excellence, the highest honor given to magnet schools.

Among urban districts, Miami-Dade County Public Schools had the most schools being designated as Magnet Schools of Excellence, with 12.

The Magnet Schools of Excellence Award is presented to magnet schools that demonstrate a commitment to high academic standards, curriculum innovation, school diversity and integration, specialized teaching staffs and parent and community involvement.

Schools in Miami-Dade were not the only big-city schools to receive an Excellence Award. In addition, eight schools in Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas; seven in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools; five in Tampa's Hillsborough County Public Schools; three in Indianapolis Public Schools and two in Louisiana's East Baton Rouge Parish School system received awards.

"Schools that win our...awards represent the best in education, innovation, equity and opportunity for all students in our nation," said Magnet Schools of America Executive Director Scott Thomas.

The winning schools were selected from a field of approximately 300 schools and had to submit an application that was scored by a panel of educators.

A Former Baltimore Superintendent Dies



Walter Amprey

Dr. Walter Amprey, superintendent of the Baltimore City Schools from 1991 to 1997, died April 22 at the age of 69 at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

"Walt Amprey was one of our finest urban school leaders and a person who was widely admired and respected by his colleagues across the nation,"

said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.

"He also served at a critical moment in the history of the Baltimore City Public Schools," Casserly added. "His leadership and infectious laugh will be missed by his many friends."

After stepping down from the helm of the Baltimore City school system, Dr. Amprey created his own business and consulted on urban education issues and reforms.

Superintendent Surprises Teacher with Award

Surprise!

That's what a middle-school teacher in Florida received on a Friday earlier this month when she was lured into the school cafeteria to supposedly help a student and found that she had won the Superintendent's *We Deliver Award* for 2014.

Greeted with cheers from school district staff and officials, Greco Middle School reading teacher Angela Keller-Markle received the \$10,000 award from Superintendent MaryEllen Elia of the Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa and Hillsborough Education Foundation Vice President Debra Friedberg.

Keller-Markle, who has been with the school district for nine years, was honored for going above and beyond for her students, while dealing with challenges in her own life.

She inspires students to be well-rounded, encouraging them to make cards for veterans that she then delivers to the VA nursing home. And in honor of her husband, Henry, who died of cancer a few years ago, she founded Henry's Angels, an organization that provides care packages for cancer-stricken patients. And she has collected clothing for students in need.

Students cheered and Keller-Markle shed a tear when she was presented the Superintendent's *We Deliver Award*. She was one of nearly 400 nominees for the award, receiving a \$10,000 check to use as she chooses.

This is the eighth year the superintendent and foundation have presented the award.



Hillsborough County school teacher Angela Keller-Markle expresses her gratitude for winning the Superintendent's *We Deliver Award* as, left to right, school board Chair Carol Kurdell, school board member Candy Olson, Hillsborough Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia and Hillsborough Education Foundation Vice President Debra Friedberg look on.

Providence School Offers Pre-Engineering Course

In an effort to prepare high school students for college-level work, the Providence Public School District in Rhode Island is offering the state's first high school pre-engineering course.

The course is being taught at the district's Providence Career and Technical Academy. According to the *Providence*

Journal, the course was developed by a professor of engineering at the University of Rhode Island, who retooled his online course in practical engineering so it was suitable for high school students.

"We're giving kids a four-year head start," said Luke Driver, the school system's director of career and technical education

Providence School continued on page 12

Las Vegas School Wins Grammy Award

The Las Vegas Academy of the Arts in Nevada's Clark County School District is a magnet school serving approximately 1,700 students. The school offers majors in dance, visual arts, photography, theater and music, which includes programs in orchestra, band, choir, piano, guitar, world jazz studies, and even mariachi.

Its close proximity to the Las Vegas Strip offers students the opportunity to in-



teract with working musical performers on a regular basis.

Not only does the school excel in the arts, but also in academics. The school boasts a graduation rate of 96 percent and approximately 84 percent of its graduates go on to pursue postsecondary education.

The Las Vegas Academy of the Arts was the only big-city school selected as a 2014 GRAMMY Signature School for its outstanding commitment to music education. Awarded a cash prize of \$5,000 to improve its music department, Las Vegas Academy was one of 12 schools across the nation selected as a 2014 GRAMMY Signature School.

The high school received the "Grammy Signature Schools Gold Award," which designated the school as one of the top three schools to receive this honor.

This year's win marks the 11th time the school has received a Grammy Signature School award. The Las Vegas Academy has also been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a Blue Ribbon School.

Established in 1998 by the GRAMMY Foundation, the award program honors exceptional public high school music programs across the nation. Schools are selected for the award by an independent blue ribbon committee of top music educators and professionals.

Legislating in an Election Year

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

Passing federal education legislation has become an increasingly rare occurrence in recent years. All the major federal K-12 education laws are long overdue for reauthorization. The last reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act were enacted 12, 10, and eight years ago, respectively. And, passing major education legislation in an election year is generally more difficult than in non-election cycles.



tion passed in one house or the other--and even moving some bills to enactment.

In the education arena, the House has passed a bipartisan charter schools bill (H.R. 4366) and a bipartisan education research reauthorization bill (H.R. 10). The Senate has passed a bipartisan child-care development reauthorization bill (S. 1086). Each house is now encouraging the other to take up these pieces of legislation, although the futures of all of them are uncertain.

Bills introduced in an election year often reflect specific political priorities of the proponent, and may be purposefully designed to juxtapose priorities of the opposing party. Congressional “message” bills proliferate in election years to promote favored policy positions of favored constituency groups, while having little prospect of being enacted. Nonetheless, message bills are frequently voted out of committee and may be considered on the floor of either house of Congress despite having little chance of passage. And, advocacy organizations will gin up grassroots support for these legislative theatrics, raising unrealistic hopes of a legislative victory.

Though there are always exceptions to this legislative conventional wisdom, the bills with the best chance of passage are generally less significant, noncontroversial, and make minimal changes. Still, the 113th Congress is smarting over being tagged as a “do-nothing” Congress, so there is some interest in getting a few pieces of legisla-

Nonetheless, there is some interest in taking up the Higher Education Act reauthorization, and both education committees of Congress have passed a Workforce Investment Act reauthorization (H.R. 803, S. 1356), which has been languishing in Congress since 2003.

Most major legislation, however, will receive short-term extensions due to the lack of bipartisan consensus. And though it may be impolitic to suggest, local school districts may be better off without education reauthorizations, rather than having to face poorly crafted or badly negotiated federal education laws that may do more damage than good. In ESEA, for example, both congressional committees passed seriously flawed bills. Final passage, therefore, would likely require each house of Congress having to accept many of the flaws of the other’s bill. A political consensus on Capitol Hill does not ensure a workable or even desirable law for school districts. In an election year, inaction may be the best we can hope for.

Portland School *continued from page 4*

The three-day competition was held in congressional hearing rooms on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

The team from Lincoln competed for the national title in the Rayburn House Office Building Judicial Committee Hearing Room, the same room in which the Watergate Impeachment hearings were held.

Students participated in mock congressional hearings where they were tested on their knowledge and understanding of the

U.S. Constitution by a panel of federal judges and constitutional scholars.

The competition, in its 27th year, is sponsored by the Center for Civic Education. The 36-member team from Lincoln High School defeated more than 1,000 students from 55 schools across the nation to take home the national title.

Lincoln High School last won the competition two years ago, while last year, a team from Portland’s Grant High School was the winner. This year’s win by Lincoln

High School marks the third consecutive year a school from Portland Public Schools has won the competition.

Lincoln was joined by another big-city school on the podium: Highland High School in Albuquerque, N.M., placed tenth.

The *We the People* competition is open to upper elementary, middle and high school students and is designed to increase knowledge of American democracy.



The Houston district's general manager of transportation, Nathan Graf, center, holds the plaque the Council of the Great City Schools presented to the Houston Schools transportation department for exemplary service. Graf is flanked by the department's employees and Houston district Chief Operating Officer Leo Bobadilla, right.

Transportation Systems Recognized In Two Urban School Districts

The Houston Independent School District and Florida's Orange County Public Schools in Orlando are the only two big-city school systems named in "The 100 Best Fleets" in North America rankings.

The rankings were recently announced at a conference of the NAFA Fleet Management Association, representing professionals who manage fleets of sedans, public safety vehicles, trucks and buses.

The 100 Best Fleets program rewards peak-performing fleet operations, ranking the best of some 38,000 fleets across the nation.

The City of Columbus, Ohio, tops the 2014 winners of "The 100 Best Fleets" rankings. The Houston school system ranks No. 39 and Orange County Public Schools Transportation Services ranks No. 76.

Recognition and rankings are based on various levels of performance, including accountability, use of technology and information, and competitive pricing.

On the heels of the rankings, the Council of the Great City Schools recently gave special recognition to both the Houston and Orange County school systems, calling them "a model for exemplary performance" in the use of technology, staff development and training, quick and efficient service and resource stewardship.

"The recognition speaks to the service excellence of the transportation staff," said the Houston school district's chief operating officer, Leo Bobadilla. "It takes an incredibly strong team to safely transport more than 30,000 students to school every day."

Florida's Orange County school system, based in Orlando, has a fleet of 900 buses, transporting nearly 70,000 students daily over more than 92,000 miles on an average school day, according to the district.

Sacramento Student Among Few Accepted To West Point Academy

This year approximately 15,000 students applied to the United States Military Academy at West Point in New York, but only 1,200 students were accepted. And one of those students was Austin Updegraff, a student at West Campus Senior High School in Sacramento, Calif., who will attend the prestigious academy in the fall.

Founded in 1802, the United States Military Academy is the oldest of the five United States service academies. Upon graduation, all candidates receive a Bachelor of Science degree and are commissioned as second lieutenants in the United States Army.

Updegraff has a grade-point average of 4.0 and has not only excelled at academics, but is also a member of the football, wrestling and rugby teams as well as a piano player in the school's blues band.

Updegraff's father, Dennis, credits his son's education at West Campus with helping his son acquire the skills needed to get into West Point.

Sacramento Student continued on page 12



Sacramento student Austin Updegraff displays his acceptance certificate to the United States Military Academy at West Point.



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Houston COO Wins Council Award

Leo Bobadilla, the chief operations officer for the Houston Independent School District, recently received the Distinguished Service Award at the Council of the Great City Schools' Chief Operating Officers Meeting in New Orleans.

Sponsored by Chartwells School Dining Services/Thompson Hospitality, the award recognizes business officials who exemplify leadership, innovation, commitment and professionalism in urban education.

Bobadilla was honored for his strong effort to strengthen service functions in his district.

Providence School *continued from page 9*

in the *Providence Journal*. "This is exactly what German apprenticeship programs do."

The course is part of a plan by district officials to implement a career pathways initiative this fall, including the opportunity for middle school students to earn credit for out-of-school work.

Sacramento Student *continued from page 11*

"I can't say enough great things about West Campus," said Dennis Updegraff in a story that appeared on the district's web site. "It's awesome."

In order to be admitted to the United States Military Academy at West Point, students must be nominated for consideration by a U.S. senator, a congressional representative or other officeholders.

Congresswoman Doris Matsui, D-Calif., named Updegraff as her primary nominee for West Point, which allowed him to go through a rigorous process that included an application, essays and an interview.

As a West Point cadet, all of Updegraff's tuition, room, board and all expenses will be paid by the Army for all four years.

In addition to West Point, Updegraff was also accepted to UC Berkeley, Santa Clara University and Embry Riddle Aeronautical University.

Notable graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point include U.S. presidents Ulysses Grant and Dwight Eisenhower, former United States Army general H. Norman Schwarzkopf and astronaut Buzz Aldrin.

Great City Grads



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake

Mayor of Baltimore

1988 Graduate

Western High School

Baltimore City Public Schools