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NPR education correspondent Claudio Sanchez, left, moderates the Council's town hall meeting on testing, featuring, left to right, Oakland school board member Jumoke Hinton Hodge, Milwaukee student Jaxs Goldsmith, St. Paul Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva, Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers Chris Minnich, Chancellor of D.C. Schools Kaya Henderson and President and CEO of the National Center on Education and the Economy Marc Tucker.

Issues of Student Testing Focus of National Town Hall Meeting

MILWAUKEE—Jaxs Goldsmith is senior class president at Milwaukee's Riverside University High School and plans to become a mechanical engineer. He believes that some of the state-administered tests he and his classmates were required to take were unnecessary.

"We didn't see the necessity to take these tests seriously because there were no high schools or colleges looking at these scores," said Goldsmith, who admits that he sometimes rushed through the tests. "I feel somewhat that they were a waste of time."

Goldsmith shared his opinion at a 90-minute town hall meeting addressing testing issues in the nation's urban schools. Moderated by Claudio Sanchez, the education correspondent for National Public Radio, the town meeting was held in conjunction with the Council of the Great City Schools' 58th Annual Fall Conference.

In addition to Goldsmith, the panel featured Valeria Silva, superintendent of Minnesota's St. Paul Public Schools; Kaya Henderson, chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools; Chris Minnich, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers; Jumoke Hinton Hodge, school board member of the Oak-

Astrophysicist Inspires Urban Educators

MILWAUKEE—When Neil deGrasse Tyson was in third grade, his teacher wrote on his report card that he needed to cultivate a more serious attitude toward his school work. And even though he knew at the age of 11 he wanted to be an astrophysicist, his 6th grade report card read "less social involvement and more academic diligence is in order."



Neil deGrasse Tyson

Houston Superintendent Named Urban Educator of the Year

MILWAUKEE- Terry Grier has been superintendent of the Houston Independent School District since 2009, and under his leadership the nation's seventh largest school district has experienced higher graduation rates, especially among African American and Hispanic students.

Grier has also focused on improving

student access to Advanced Placement (AP) coursework, resulting in a rising number of students participating in AP exams and earning high marks. And student participation in the SAT college-entrance exam has increased.

As a result, Grier was recently presented with the Green-Garner Award at the

Council of the Great City Schools' 58th Annual Fall Conference. The award is presented to the nation's top urban educator for 2014.

Sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools, Aramark K-12 Education and Voyager Sopris Learning, the top prize is named for Richard R. Green, the first African American chancellor of the New York City school system, and businessman Edward Garner, who had served on the Denver school board.

Upon receiving his award, Grier praised the progress that the school district has made. "We're that close to being a breakout urban district and we are not going to stop until we make that happen," said Grier. "Thank you on behalf of the children and the staff of Houston ISD."

As the recipient of this year's Green-Garner Award, Grier receives a \$10,000 college scholarship, which he can present to a 2014 graduate of his choice in the Houston school system or from his high school alma mater.



Houston Schools Superintendent Terry Grier, right, thanks his staff for their hard work as he accepts his Green-Garner Award as Aramark Education's Gwen High looks on.

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

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Tenure of Urban-School Superintendents Dips; Several Leaders Depart

The average tenure of current superintendents leading the nation's largest urban public school districts gradually increased from 2.8 years in 2003 to 3.6 years in 2010, but dipped to 3.2 years in 2014, according to a new survey by the Council of the Great City Schools, *Urban Indicator -- Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure and Salary*.

"Urban school superintendents were leading their districts for longer periods of time, but significant turnover this year brought the average tenure down," stressed Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "This continued churn makes it harder for urban school systems to main-

tain and accelerate the positive academic momentum that they have created over the last several years."

Nonetheless, several big-city school superintendents have been at the helm for nearly or longer than 10 years, including Christopher Steinhauser of California's Long Beach Unified School District (12 years), MaryEllen Elia of Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa (nine years), Michael Hanson of California's Fresno Unified School District (9 years) and Carole Smith of Oregon's Portland Public Schools (seven years).

At the same time, urban school districts have lost a number of leaders this year, in-

cluding superintendents in Albuquerque, Birmingham, Bridgeport, Conn., Charleston, Charlotte, and Los Angeles.

There are now interim superintendents in 10 big-city school districts, including Austin, Buffalo, Fort Worth and Seattle.

The new report is the Council's eighth survey in a series of *Urban Indicator* publications. Highlights of the 10-page report include the demographics of urban school superintendents, showing approximately 45 percent white, 42 percent black and 9 percent Hispanic, as well as 70 percent men and 28 percent women in 2014. Data are also given on previous work experience, accountability, salaries, benefits and bonuses.

Miami Schools Chief Addresses White House Conference, Introduces Obama

Superintendent Alberto Carvalho of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools recently explained how his school system has made a digital transformation – just before introducing President Obama at a White House conference on boosting digital learning in America.

Carvalho was among more than 100 superintendents and other educators who convened at the "ConnectED to the Future" Conference hosted by Obama on Nov. 19 to build on the president's ConnectED initiative, aimed at connecting 99 percent of the nation's students to high-

speed Internet in five years.

"In a country where we expect free Wi-Fi with our coffee, the least we can do is expect that our schools are properly wired," President Obama emphasized.

He launched a new effort to help school leaders transition to digital learning, asking them to sign his Future Ready Digital Pledge, "a vision for digital learning in classrooms across America."

Superintendent Carvalho outlined how his district has been successful in making the digital transition. "Two years ago, we began our digital convergence to fundamentally transform the structure and environment of education in our district. To address our infrastructure needs, we raised \$7 million in leveraged federal funds to outfit 350 schools with universal Wi-Fi access, which we completed this past August."

He continued, "That is 45 million square feet of space right now under a powerful umbrella of broadband access."

In addition to Carvalho, other big-city school superintendents who were invited to the White House's "ConnectED to the Future" Conference included Houston's Terry Grier, Philadelphia's William Hite and El Paso's Juan Cabrera.



President Obama shakes hands with Miami-Dade County Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho after Carvalho introduced the president at a digital conference. (Official White House photo by Chuck Kennedy)

Town Hall *continued from page 1*

land Unified School District; and Marc Tucker, president and CEO of the National Center on Education and the Economy.

Superintendent Silva noted that during the era of *No Child Left Behind* testing was used as a way to measure the academic progress of students, but testing data is now increasingly being used to direct instruction. She also pointed out that there are huge implications from testing in some states, with results being used for teacher evaluations as well as to determine if a school is bad.

“If someone gave me a magic wand and said, ‘what would you like to do instead of testing,’ I don’t know if I have an answer,” admitted Silva, “because I also want to know as an educator when students come into my classroom where they are and where they are moving. But we have to figure out how to make the test relevant to the students as well as to the educators.”

Minnich, from the Council of Chief State School Officers, believes states can get significantly better about the incentives put forward in the nation’s testing system because, “if kids aren’t engaged in what they are doing on the assessments, I don’t even want to use those results to see how we are doing.”

He said that while educators are not going to back away from measuring how schools are doing, there needs to be a conversation about the relevance of giving students more than 100 tests throughout their school career.

Chancellor Henderson believes it is vital that educators find the reasonable middle. “We’ve gone from no accountability and failed accountability to uber accountability and testing, and I think there’s a reasonable middle,” said Henderson.

Tucker, from the National Center on Education and Economy, said that the nation’s accountability system has resulted in low teacher morale, plummeting applications to schools of education and a narrowing of the curriculum for students to a handful of subjects.

“There is no evidence it is contributing anything to improved school performance,



Council of Chief State School Officers Executive Director Chris Minnich shares his views as St. Paul Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva, left, and D.C. Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson look on.

especially for low-income and minority students,” said Tucker. He advised educators to look at countries in which student performance is highest and where tests are given no more than three times in a student’s career, unlike in the United States.

“By insisting on a year-by-year testing requirement, we are assured that states only use cheap lousy tests that will test only a very small part of what the Common Core was designed to produce in our students,” said Tucker, referring to the new academic standards.

He also noted that the top performing countries have greatly raised their require-



Florida’s Hillsborough County school board member Candy Olson asks panelists a question.

ments for teachers and they have a system where they treat their teachers like professionals.

Sanchez asked the panelists if the nation often dismisses international comparisons.

Henderson said international comparisons may motivate educators to do something different, “but no parent I know cares what students in Finland or Singapore are

doing.”

She said it is good to look at how other countries are educating students, but she doesn’t think it should be the sole rationale for how educators in this country teach students. “I think we can learn from other places, but contextualize for our own situations,” said Henderson. The leader of the 46,000-student school system also said it is a human-capital problem because school districts are often not equipped to provide students with the high-quality teachers they need.

Silva said that there’s not a high desire for people to be teachers anymore and that there are less and less people applying to teaching positions.

Oakland’s Hinton Hodge said that when she talks to educators who visited China they don’t talk about seeing creativity, innovation or critical thinking skills. “Creativity and resilience is an important factor,” said Hinton Hodge.

Sanchez believes there is a link to testing and international comparisons. “I see them as dominoes; testing is a consequence of policies that have little or no connection to preparing kids for the workforce.”

Tucker believes that it comes down to Common Core and providing students with a high-quality education.

“But the Common Core will not mean anything unless you can have tests that test a fair amount of what is in the Common Core, and what we now have are tests that measure only the bottom part of those expansive skills,” said Tucker.

During a question- and-answer session, school board member Candy Olson asked, “How do we get rid of testing as a weapon and use it as a tool to reach every single child?”

According to student leader Goldsmith, “If we are going to test so much, we need to make it valuable and have it generalize so you know exactly what students are learning and how we are doing and help us along the way.”

Minnich believes that the nation should be pushing toward not giving assessments that don’t have any impact on students. “We have to ask ourselves how do we as states start minding what matters to kids?” said Minnich.

State and Big-City School Leaders Team Up To Improve Student Testing Across the Nation

Assessments must be of high quality, and must make good use of educators' and students' time. Yet in some places, tests – and the preparation for them – are dominating the calendar and culture of schools and causing undue stress for students and educators.

That's a statement from U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, welcoming a joint effort announced Oct. 15 by leaders of state and large-city school systems to evaluate and improve the quality and quantity of student assessments in public schools across the nation.

Working together, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Council of the Great City Schools jointly released *Commitments on High-Quality Assessments*, a series of established principles to guide state leaders and district leaders in making sure every assessment administered is high-quality, coherent, and meaningful to students, parents and teachers.

"As we transition to new assessments aligned with college- and career-ready standards in every state, this is a great opportunity for state leaders to take a look at all assessments and make sure they are of the highest quality and deliver meaningful results," said Council of Chief State School Officers Executive Director Chris Minnich.

"Tests are an important way for schools and parents to determine our students' academic needs, and gauge how well our

children are progressing toward being college or career ready by the time they graduate," said Council of the Great City Schools Executive Director Michael Casserly. "But we hope through this process to create some additional rationality, coherence and purpose to how the nation assesses the learning of its children."

President Obama also weighed in on the issue of student testing. He said in a press statement, "In the spirit of flexibility, I welcome today's announcement from the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Council of the Great City Schools that state education chiefs and district superintendents will work together to cut back on unnecessary testing and test preparation, while promoting the smarter use of tests that measure real student learning."

Joining Minnich and Casserly in announcing the joint commitments were New York State Commissioner John B. King, Jr., Louisiana State Superintendent John White, District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson and Oakland school board member Jumoke Hinton Hodge, chair of the Council of the Great City Schools.

More than 30 state and urban school leaders also supported the announcement of the *Commitments on High-Quality Assessments*.

School Chief in Tampa Named Florida's Top Superintendent



MaryEllen Elia

Hillsborough County Public Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia has been named Florida's 2015 Superintendent of the Year by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents.

She is one of the longest serving superintendents in the nation's big-city school districts, having served at the helm of the school system in Tampa since 2005.

"MaryEllen Elia is one of the nation's finest superintendents and is most deserving of this recognition," said Council of the Great City Schools Executive Director Michael Casserly.

Jackson District Gives Computers To 2,000 Students

Mississippi's Jackson Public Schools recently distributed Apple computers to more than 2,000 ninth-grade students in its Freshman Academy program as part of the school system's 1:1 Digital Learning Initiative.

Students and their parents were introduced to Apple MacBook Air computers in "Meet Your Mac" nights at all seven of Jackson's public high schools during October.

"We are preparing our students to learn and function in a digital world," said Superintendent Cedrick Gray. "We have to prepare them for the world in which they will grow. This technology will help our students to be creative and innovative, critical thinkers, communicators, problem solvers, collaborators and team players."

Each student participated in workshops with a parent or guardian and paid a \$40

Jackson District continued on page 12

Council Reaffirms Males of Color Pledge Following the Ferguson, Cleveland Tragedies

The Council of the Great City Schools issued a public statement Dec. 3 supporting President Obama and his call for action, fairness, and understanding in the wake of the recent Ferguson grand jury ruling and the Cleveland incident of a 12-year-old boy fatally shot by police.

"On the surface, the tragic events in Ferguson and Cleveland concerned the police and the local communities. But ultimately, these are cases about how America's institutions, including our schools, respect the rights, well-being and futures of all our young people," said

Ferguson Tragedy continued on page 12

Fall Conference *continued from page 1*

"If you go back to these teachers, because I did not fit the accepted model of the perfect student, none of them would have said 'he will go far,'" stressed Tyson, astrophysicist, author, television science commentator and the Frederick P. Rose Director of the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History.

Tyson addressed his remarks to more than 1,000 urban school superintendents, senior administrators, board members and deans of colleges of education assembled here for the Council of the Great City Schools' 58th Annual Fall Conference in a funny and insightful speech he called "Adventures in Science Education."

He recalled that he was not considered a good student because often the measure of good students is how obedient they are. But the astrophysicist doesn't know what that means in the big picture "because true discovery out there requires on some level not obeying anything that came before you," said Tyson, "and thinking in ways that none has done before."

Tyson, who went to Harvard, recalls that one of the most influential courses he took was an art class because it rewired his physics brain. "It allowed me to wire other kinds of thinking and thought into my life," said Tyson. "I think I'm a fuller person because of this."

He recalled, as a student majoring in physics at Harvard, that half of his classes were not in math or science, yet Harvard has twice as many Nobel Prize winners in the sciences among its graduates than the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a science engineering school. "To win a Nobel Prize, you have to see what everyone else has seen and think the way no one else has ever thought," said Tyson, who advocates that schools teach subjects such as art and music that expand a person's creativity.

Tyson, who is planning to write a book about education titled "how to raise a scientifically literate child," shared some of his views on education with conferees.

The bestselling author was highly critical of how schools raise teacher salaries based on a system that rewards seniority.



Neil deGrasse Tyson

He gave the example of a 25-year-old person starting in the profession realizing he or she would not get a big teaching salary until age 50.

"That's not how the real world works," said Tyson, noting that in Silicon Valley, people are paid based on what value they bring to the company, no matter how young they are. "If you are going to raise teacher salaries, you need some way for someone to want to become a teacher and make big money out of the box."

Science is Trending

Despite the naysayers, Tyson believes there is hope for science literacy in the country, pointing out that the No. 1 television show is the *Big Bang Theory*, a comedy featuring scientists.

Tyson also starred in a 13-part documentary on the universe that aired in prime time on network television and appeared in 181 countries and in 47 languages. "Science is trending and as educators you need to know this," he told the audience.

He took several questions from conferees, including a question about lawmakers who question proven science theories such as global warming and evolution.

"People are deciding that they can cherry pick from emergent truths of scien-

tific research in ways that serve a political desire that they want to be true," lamented Tyson. "I don't have an issue if we have political agreements about legislation and policies, but because you don't like the results and then deny it, I don't know what country this is. That's not the country I grew up in."

Empowering Girls

Also addressing urban educators was Anna Maria Chávez, the CEO of the Girl Scouts USA, which throughout its 102-year history has been focused on helping girls attain leadership skills. Chavez pointed

out that 70 percent of women serving in the U.S. Senate, 50 percent of women serving in the U.S. House of Representatives and all of the women who have served as secretaries of state were Girl Scouts. "There are 59 million living Girl Scout alumnae," said Chavez.

In recent years, the organization has focused on teaching girls financial literacy, such as finding ways to

pay for college. And the Girl Scouts continue to operate the largest entrepreneurial program in the country for girls with its cookie program, whose average participant is 8-years-old.

Chavez, who is the first woman of color to lead the organization, noted that there are Girl Scouts in every zip code in the nation and in 90 countries. "We have them in homeless shelters and even have Girl Scout troops in the prison system," said Chavez. "They aren't Girl Scouts going in, but they are coming out."

A graduate of Yale University, Chavez knows firsthand the importance of the organization, having been a Girl Scout in a rural farming community in Arizona. She recalls meeting two Girl Scout volunteers



Anna Maria Chávez

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Fall Conference *continued from page 6*

at the age of 12, who spurred her decision to become an attorney. She said that the Girl Scouts was a great way of integrating her family into the community. “It kept me in school and focused on school,” said Chavez.

She noted that there is a demographic shift in the country, with the number of girls of color increasing, and that the nation should be engaging these girls.

The Girl Scouts has its own research institute and recently did a study on African American and Latina girls and found that many of them have great resilience, having gone through so many barriers and obstacles in their lives. “So by the time we get to positions where opportunities open up for us, we are ready,” said Chavez, “because our resilience factor is high.”

A former official in President Clinton’s administration, Chavez sees girls as an opportunity, not a problem to be solved, and the need to invest in girls more important than ever. “If we invest in them, they will succeed.”

Chavez told urban educators that their leadership is critical to the mission of the Girl Scouts because the only way the organization serves girls is through local school districts. She praised Kaya Henderson, the chancellor of District of Columbia Public Schools, who agreed to help pay the \$15 membership for each girl who becomes a Girl Scout. “Because of her efforts and others, the D.C. Girl Scouts Council is now the largest Girl Scouts Council in the country,” said Chavez.

According to Chavez, the biggest challenge facing the two-million-member Girl Scouts is the shortage of volunteers and that there are 30,000 girls across the country waiting to be Girl Scouts.

She said that her dream is that the wait list for girls disappears because urban educators in the audience go back to their districts and educate administrators about the power of Girl Scouts.

As a graduate of public schools, she thanked conferees for their efforts to educate the nation’s urban schoolchildren.

“How thankful I am for your leadership

because what you do everyday matters,” Chavez told urban educators. “There were people who told me I didn’t matter and I stand before you because of your efforts.”

Providing Opportunity

Conferees also heard from David Coleman, president of the College Board, who noted that Council Executive Director Michel Casserly was a mentor to him when he began his career in education.

He told urban educators that in order for the College Board to help them in their respective cities, what is not needed is another program but actions that build coalitions.



David Coleman

As part of President Obama’s *My Brother’s Keeper* initiative, the College Board is partnering with the Council as well as the National Council of La Raza and the National Urban League to ensure that every minority male that is ready for Advanced Placement (AP) will take Advanced Placement courses.

“Last year, there were over 5,000 young men, African American and Latino in Council districts, with potential to succeed in AP who did not take the opportunity they earned,” acknowledged Coleman.

He cited statistics that in 15 states no African American males took the AP exam in computer science, while in eight states no Hispanic males took the exam.

“I could say it’s not the fault of the College Board who takes it,” said Coleman, “but if it’s not our fault, it is most certainly our problem.”

He said the College Board has created a campaign called “All In,” in which the organization is doing intensive personal outreach to not only students, but also to parents, counselors and school administrators.

Coleman said the College Board will not have assessments without better opportunity for teaching and learning and is redesigning the SAT college-entrance exam, enabling students to concentrate on fewer topics and in greater depth.

“Nothing should be on a test simply because it is on a test,” said Coleman. “It should be on at test because it is what you need to succeed in college and career.”

Coleman noted that as president of the College Board, he is supposed to say that test preparation doesn’t matter. But this past March he said that the College Board needs to admit that the practice of test preparation for wealthy students magnifies the injustice in this country.

As a result, the College Board has partnered with Khan Academy to provide free test-preparation programs and resources to all students, beginning in spring 2015.

Coleman also noted that many top students who are poor do not apply to a single selective school. So the College Board is sending every income-eligible senior who takes the SAT four college application fee waivers.

The former Rhodes Scholar recalled that his favorite day on the job was when a student sent a message on Twitter that the College Board had sent him fee waivers because he is awesome.

“He did not say because I’m poor,” noted Coleman.

The College Board also wants to provide students with opportunities for career success and has created free career-planning tools. According to Coleman, 500,000 students have examined those tools this year.

Coleman told conferees that he hopes to change the conversation and start telling the story about the productive work students are doing every day, not the exams they are taking.

“I see you as my colleagues in delivering opportunity and have never felt so strongly,” said Coleman. “And we hope you will come with us on that journey.”

Council Publishes New Instructional, Operational Reports to Aid Urban Schools

Reports to help urban school districts implement the Common Core assessments and raise expectations of English language learners were recently published by the Council of the Great City Schools.

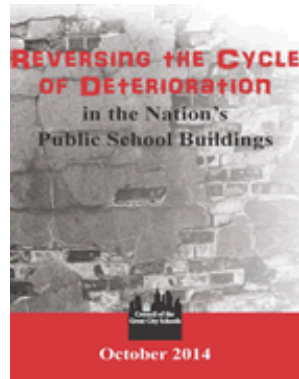
And to aid districts on the operational or business side of the house, it has also continued its series of key performance indicators in management and produced a report aimed at reducing deterioration in the nation's school buildings.

Implementing Common Core Assessments: Challenges and Recommendations is a booklet to help the nation's school districts, especially in major cities, get ready for new assessments. In particular, the publication focuses on the two major Common Core assessments -- the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia (SBAC). Proposals and recommendations are presented to help school districts in the planning process to measure student performance on the Common Core State Standards.

A Framework for Raising Expectations and Instructional Rigor for English Language Learners offers step-by-step guidance for selecting instructional materials that will "accelerate the acquisition of ac-

ademic language and grade-level content for English learners in urban school districts," the booklet points out.

Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools, 2014 continues to refine the key performance indicators created by a



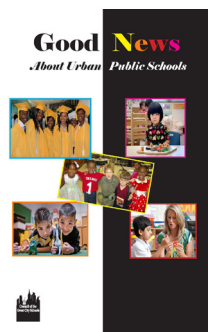
Reversing the Cycle of Deterioration in the Nation's Public School Buildings describes how school districts, financially squeezed over long periods of time, made economic decisions that reduced the most cost-effective preventive and predictive maintenance. The report provides information and references on strategies that have proven successful in reversing the cycle of deterioration.

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

Council of the Great City Schools initiative to improve non-academic operations of school district management.

Reversing the Cycle of Deterioration in the Na-

New Booklet Illustrates Good News in City Schools



Students in the nation's big-city public schools have made steady academic progress over the past 10 years in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math ... two high schools in Los Angeles have won the U.S. Academic Decathlon for the past five years ... 11 big-city schools ranked in the top 20 of the *Washington Post's* 2014 "America's Most

Challenging High Schools."

These achievements and more are illustrated in a new booklet called *Good News About Urban Public Schools*, designed to shed light on success stories that often go unheralded, or don't receive the attention they deserve.

"Urban schools are often seen only through a lens of multiple challenges, and not for what they accomplish in spite of these challenges," says Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which published the booklet.

Awards *continued from page 2*

Queen Smith Award

William Daniel, a financial literacy teacher at Boone High School in Orlando, Fla., was the recipient of the Queen Smith Award for Urban Education. The \$5,000 award is named in honor of the late vice president of urban programs for Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.



William Daniel, center, a high school teacher in Orlando, is presented with the Queen Smith Award from, left, Arthur Griffin of McGraw-Hill and Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

Urban Impact Award

The Council of the Great City Colleges of Education, an affiliate group of deans working with urban school leaders, presented the Dr. Shirley Schwartz Urban Impact Award to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Winthrop University for their Leaders for Tomorrow program.

The program is designed to prepare school principals and assistant principals for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system. With the award, the Council gives a \$2,000 scholarship to a Charlotte school graduate who will be attending Winthrop University to pursue a career in education.



Winners receive the Urban Impact Award from Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, left, and Brooklyn College CUNY Dean Deborah Shanley, right.

Urban Educators Discuss Strategies To Support Males of Color

MILWAUKEE- In July 2014, 60 of the Council of the Great City Schools' member districts pledged to improve educational outcomes for boys and young men of color by implementing evidence-based strategies that ranged from early childhood through graduation.

In an effort to turn that pledge into reality, the Council recently sponsored a two-day meeting titled United to Make a Difference: Improving the Achievement of Young Men of Color. The meeting was held the day before the Council's 58th Annual Fall Conference and more than 100 big-city superintendents, school board members and senior administrators attended to discuss strategies, share ideas and get advice on how to address the needs of black and Latino males.

Glenn Singleton, president and founder of Pacific Educational Group, served as the keynote speaker, and discussed the existence of racial disparities in school systems as well as the need for educators to embark on courageous conversations around the issue of race.

"This is not a conversation we just have when we notice that suspension is disproportionate or special education is disproportionate or we struggle to hire teachers of color," said Singleton. "This is a conversation we need to have every single day."

The conference also featured a presentation from Alfred Tatum, dean and professor of the College of Education at the University of Illinois-Chicago, who illustrated

how boys of color can comprehend and create complex text and how important literacy is for boys of color.



Glenn Singleton, president of Pacific Educational Group, called for courageous conversations about race.



Long Beach school board member Felton Williams, right, and Milwaukee Schools regional superintendent Reginald Lawrence listen to guest speakers.

"You cannot slow walk African American and Latino boys through school," Tatum said. "If you slow walk them through school, you slow walk them through life."

Conferees also heard from Lamont Flowers, professor of educational leadership at Clemson University, who said that challenging males of color will have to start with the belief that they are able. "Are we instilling confidence in areas we think are important such as academics and behavior for males of color?" he asked.

The meeting also provided urban school leaders the opportunity to discuss and share strategies they are using.

Some district highlights include:

- In Minneapolis Public Schools, students of color are suspended 10 times more than their peers, so Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson has placed a moratorium on nonviolent suspensions for students in Pre-K through first grade and committed to reviewing all suspensions to address a growing disparity in the number of students of color being suspended for nonviolent actions.

- Kentucky's Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville has implemented ACT college-entrance exam "boot camps" in targeted schools where the academic achievement of young men of color is below the national average for college and career readiness.

- Los Angeles Unified School District passed a resolution directing the district to develop a plan aimed at addressing the pressing needs of English Language Learners (ELLs).

Boston District Reveals Opportunity Gap for Males of Color

Boston Public Schools is leading the charge to address the academic crisis facing males of color in the nation.

The district recently released "Opportunity and Equity," a report it commissioned, with the support of the Barr Foundation, as part of a long-term strategy to eliminate achievement and opportunity gaps for black and Latino males in Boston Public Schools.

The report examines data between the 2009-2012 academic school years. Currently, 78 percent of male students in Boston schools is black and Latino.

The report found substantial opportunity gaps for males of color in relation to suspension rates, access to inclusive class settings and advanced work classes and admission to Boston's three exam schools.

Recommendations include converting all 4-6 grade classrooms into advanced work centers that offer accelerated curricula; expanding the eligibility requirement for exam schools; and prioritizing enrollment in early childhood education programs to low-income and black and Latino students.

"This sets the stage for a transformative, community effort that looks at systemic change," said Boston Schools Interim Superintendent John McDonough. "We are issuing this report as a call to action, with a recognition that we have urgent work ahead."

The report is Phase 1 of a larger study titled *Analyzing Enrollment, Outcomes, and Excellent Schools for Black and Latino Male Students in Boston Public Schools*. The second phase of the study, to be released this spring, will examine practices and policies in four Boston schools where males of color perform better academically in comparison to district schools overall.

The Opportunity and Equity report was conducted by the Center for Collaborative Education and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. It can be accessed at: bostonpublicschools.org/opportunity.

Pictorial of 58th Annual Fall Conference



John Deasy, the former superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, second from right, receives a special recognition award from the Executive Committee of the Council for his leadership and service to urban schoolchildren.



Council Chair Jumoke Hinton Hodge welcomes conferees to the 58th Annual Fall Conference.



Jackson (Mississippi) Schools Superintendent Cedrick Gray shares his views at a session.



Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, right, poses with Council Executive Director Michael Casserly and Milwaukee Schools Superintendent Darienne Driver at the opening reception of the Council's 58th Annual Fall Conference.



Newark Schools Superintendent Cami Anderson participates in a session.

Photos by Clarence Tabb Jr.

Chicago to Expand Pre-K Program Using Social-Impact Bonds

More than 2,600 students in the nation's third largest school district will have access to quality early-education learning programs as a result of the district's use of "pay for success" finance bonds.

Chicago Public Schools is using a \$17-million Social Impact Bond Program to fund a half-day Child-Parent Center preschool program over the next four years.

The Social Impact Bond Program is structured to ensure that its lenders are only paid back if the program realizes positive academic results. The program's goals include increasing kindergarten readiness, improving third-grade literacy, and reducing the need for special education services.

For the launch of the program, the district identified six schools serving low-income families. The first preschool cohort will include 374 students, then increase to 782 children over the next two years, and provide funding for at least 680 children in the fourth year of the project. The program launched in November.

"Early childhood education helps create a strong foundation that benefits students throughout their entire education," said Chicago Schools Superintendent Barbara Byrd-Bennett. "By investing in the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs, we will set more students on the right educational path and eliminate the need and cost for additional educational supports."

The primary lenders of the bond program are the Goldman Sachs Social Impact Fund and Northern Trust Corporation. The bonds will be issued with each incoming preschool class and set for the duration of their public school education. Lenders will share in the savings that the school district receive from the reduced need for intervention needed in later years.

According to district officials, Chicago's program is only the fifth social-bond program in the country.

Charleston District Receives Historic State Rating

South Carolina's Charleston County School District recently received, for the first time in its history, the state's highest absolute rating.

The 2014 South Carolina District and School Report Card rated the Charleston school system as "Excellent," following "Good" district absolute ratings for the past three years and "Average" ratings in the preceding four years.

"Our steady climb to the top rating has taken the collective effort of thousands of people, the unwavering drive to succeed, and the resolute commitment to provide the best for Charleston's children," said Acting Superintendent Michael Bobby in a press release.

An "Excellent" rating means a district's performance substantially exceeds the standards for progress toward the South Carolina Performance Vision, a goal that all students by 2020 "will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy...."

Voters Approve Funds for Urban Schools



Several big-city school districts received a vote of confidence from citizens at the ballot box in early November.

An \$800-million bond was approved for Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Funds from the bond will be used to make improvements to computers and technology infrastructure at all district schools.

And voters approved Florida's School District of Palm Beach County's referendum renewing an existing special property levy to pay for art, music, physical education teachers and magnet programs.

Measures Pass in Omaha, Cleveland and Other Cities

Voters in Omaha, Neb., approved a \$421-million bond issue that will provide funds to renovate and repair aging schools, including rebuilding four elementary schools. The bond was the biggest in state history and the district's first bond in 15 years.

The passage of a \$200-million bond issue for construction and a 2.5-mill annual levy for maintenance will enable the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to build 20 schools and refurbish approximately 23

schools.

Voters in Cincinnati approved a renewal levy that will provide Cincinnati Public Schools with \$65.2-million annually. And Toledo Public Schools will now be able to restore bus transportation that was eliminated in 2010, as a result of the passage of a five-year, \$13-million levy.

A renewal levy for Oregon's Portland Public Schools was approved by 70 percent of the voters, providing the school district with \$64.3-million to fund teaching positions and maintain or reduce class sizes.

A one-penny sales tax was also approved for South Carolina's Charleston County School District for another six years. Revenue from the referendum will fund \$500 million in capital improvement projects.

And while several urban school districts received good news on Election Day, Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C., did not. A 1/4-cent sales tax increase that would have generated \$14 million a year for the school district failed.



Students in Ohio's Toledo Public Schools celebrate the passage of a \$13-million levy.



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Jackson District *continued from page 5*

technology fee in order to receive his or her laptop. Jackson school officials administered the orientation sessions to share related policies and procedures, proper handling of the devices, information on technical support, and how to deal with a damaged, lost or stolen computer.

Also, all ninth-grade teachers in the Jackson Public Schools received Apple MacBook Pro computers, and participated in training on the devices prior to the sessions with students.

The district's Digital Learning Initiative aims to provide kindergarten through 12th-grade students a progressive, innovative digital approach to learning, described as "where students are the center of the classroom learning experience and teachers are empowered with the digital tools they need to connect students to a world of learning."

Jackson Public Schools launched Freshman Academies at all seven of its high schools this 2014-2015 academic year as part of its overall Academies of Jackson initiative. The academies focus on small learning communities centered on student advocacy and wraparound services designed to promote success in the ninth grade.

Council Honors Financial Officer

Michael Burke, chief financial and operating officer for Florida's School District of Palm Beach County, recently received the top award at the Council of the Great City Schools' recent Chief Financial Officers Conference in New Orleans. He was presented the Bill Wise Award for top professionalism, commitment, integrity and leadership demonstrated by the award's namesake, a former leader in Tennessee's Nashville school system.



Robert Carlson, the Council's director of management services, left, presents the Bill Wise Award to Michael Burke of Florida's School District of Palm Beach County.

Ferguson Tragedy *continued from page 5*

Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "This broader reading of Ferguson and Cleveland extends to how our schools define and mete out justice and ensure that all students have access to the highest standards and opportunities.

"Therefore, the Council and its member urban school systems recommit themselves to the pledge on males of color we took alongside the president earlier this summer to boost academic outcomes, reduce disproportionate suspensions and expulsions, and improve graduation rates for all our urban children," he stressed.

Des Moines, Houston Districts Recognized

Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools and the Houston Independent School District were recently recognized by *District Administration* magazine as a 2014 District of Distinction. They were among 49 school districts in the nation recognized.

Des Moines was honored for its energy efficiency, while Houston was honored for its improvement of operational efficiency and safety of its buses and drivers.