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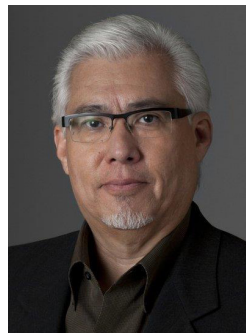
Graduation Rate Sets New Record

North Carolina's third largest school system, Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, set a record with its Class of 2014: 88.5 percent graduation rate.

The four-year graduation rate exceeds the 2014 state average of 83.8 percent, the district reported. And it also surpasses the national high-school graduation rate, which U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced this past May as 80 percent in 2012--the highest in America's

Graduation Rate continued on page 4

Town Hall Meeting to Tackle Issues of Testing



Claudio Sanchez

Schools' National Town Hall Meeting on

Issues such as the purpose, use and practice of testing in schools, and the hot topic of possible over-testing, will be the center of discussion at the Council of the Great City

Oct. 24 in Milwaukee.

The pinnacle event of the Council's 58th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 22-26, hosted by Milwaukee Public Schools, will be moderated by National Public Radio education correspondent Claudio Sanchez.

A former elementary and middle school teacher, the veteran journalist has been covering education on the national desk of NPR for many years, joining the radio network in 1989. Sanchez's reports air regularly on National Public Radio's award-

Town Hall continued on page 3

Florida's Orange County Schools in Orlando Co-Winner of Top Prize

Florida's Orange County Public Schools in Orlando last month became the first co-winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education in the 13-year history of the million-dollar award, sharing the prize with Georgia's Gwinnett County Public Schools.

As co-winners of the 2014 award, the two districts will split the \$1-million prize, with each receiving \$500,000 in college scholarships for their high school seniors, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation announced.

The Broad (rhymes with "road") Prize recognizes urban school districts that are making the greatest progress in raising student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among economically disadvantaged students and students of color.

"There is no single solution to the challenge of ensuring a world-class education for every child," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, referring to different

paths the two winning school districts took to succeed. "Yet, the real winners in both places are the same: children."

In a decision to award both school districts, a jury of prominent leaders from education and public service determined that

honoring two districts with two different strategies might inspire more school leaders nationwide to consider varying ways to raise student achievement.

Top Prize continued on page 4



Employees of Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., celebrate at district headquarters upon the announcement that the district is selected as a co-winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education. They viewed a live webcast of the victory.

2014 National Blue Ribbon Schools Named

The Houston Academy for International Studies is one of Houston's early college high schools, offering students the chance to complete an associate's degree through Houston Community College while earning their high school diploma.

Students are required to take four years of a foreign language (Spanish or Mandarin Chinese), take a course in Model

United Nations, and create a portfolio of projects with a global perspective.

Lincoln College Preparatory Academy in Kansas City, Missouri, is an International World School where students have the opportunity to graduate with a prestigious IB Diploma. Eighty-nine percent of the school's enrollment is comprised of minority students and 72 percent are stu-

dents from economically disadvantaged families.

In addition to offering students rigorous academic instruction, these two schools also have something else in common. They are among the 337 schools the U.S. Department of Education recently recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2014 for their academic excellence or for making exemplary progress in closing the achievement gap.

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools in one of two performance categories:

- Exemplary High Performing Schools are among their state's highest performing schools as measured by state assessments on nationally normed tests.
- Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools are among their state's highest performing schools in closing achievement gaps between a school's subgroups and all students over the past five years.

Blue Ribbon continued on page 4



Fifth-grade students from Cielo Vista Elementary School in El Paso, Texas, celebrate after learning their school was selected as a 2014 Blue Ribbon School. Photo credit: El Paso Independent School District



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Milwaukee Selects Superintendent; El Paso Leader's Tenure Extended



Darienne Driver

Darienne Driver joined Milwaukee Public Schools in July 2012 as the district's first chief innovation officer, where she led efforts to improve outcomes in the schools in greatest need of improvement.

Two years later, Driver is now the leader of the 78,502-student school district, the largest in the state of Wisconsin.

Driver was recently selected by the Milwaukee Board of School Directors to lead the school system after serving as acting superintendent since July 2014. She will be the district's first permanent female superintendent, succeeding Gregory Thornton, who left the district in July to head Baltimore City Public Schools.

After Thornton departed, the district selected Driver as acting leader, while they conducted a search for a permanent superintendent.

But the board eventually realized that Driver was the best candidate for the position and subsequently canceled the superintendent search.

"Dr. Driver is a visionary, highly qualified and energetic educator," said Michael Bonds, the board president. "...The board has every confidence that Dr. Driver will continue to lead the district in a positive direction and continue our efforts and commitment to improve outcomes for the children of Milwaukee Public Schools."

In addition to helping high-need schools improve as chief innovation officer, Driver also oversaw the district's implementation of the Wisconsin Common Core State Standards in literacy and mathematics and recruited several educational organizations to serve as partners in efforts to boost student academic achievement.

Contract Extension

Juan Cabrera took the reins of Texas' El Paso Independent School District in



Juan Cabrera

September 2013 after working as a school law attorney and general counsel to more than 20 Texas school districts.

Under his leadership, full governance accreditation has been restored to the school district, dual language programs have been expanded to pre-K and kindergarten classes, and the central office has been streamlined and reorganized. In addition, beginning this fall, students and teachers in the district will receive digital textbooks as part of the school system's e-text device initiative.

As a result, the district's board of managers recently voted to extend Cabrera's contract for an additional year to 2019.

Board President Dee Margo said Cabrera has shown great leadership and made significant progress during his first year as superintendent.

Town Hall *continued from page 1*

winning newsmagazines *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered* and *Weekend Edition*.



Kaya Henderson

The town hall meeting panel will feature:

- Chancellor Kaya Henderson of the District of Columbia Public Schools;



Valeria Silva

- Superintendent Valeria Silva of Minnesota's St. Paul Public Schools;



Chris Minnich

- Chris Minnich, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers;

- School board member Jumoke Hinton Hodge of the Oakland Unified School District and chair of the Council of the Great City Schools;



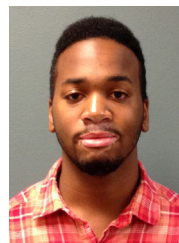
Jumoke Hinton Hodge

- Marc Tucker, president and CEO of the National Center on Education and the Economy; and



Marc Tucker

- Jaxs Goldsmith, a senior at Milwaukee's Riverside University High School and senior class president.



Jaxs Goldsmith

Related to the 90-minute town hall meeting will be a Council study on testing -- a survey of current assessment practices in the nation's big-city school districts aimed at improving testing.

The town hall meeting is scheduled on Oct. 24 from 2:30 to 4 pm at the Hilton Milwaukee City Center.

Top Prize *continued from page 1*

For Orange County Public Schools, it was the first time the district has been a finalist for the prize. It is credited for raising achievement among low-income middle school students and narrowing income and ethnic achievement gaps.

“The Council of the Great City Schools salutes the achievements of the Orange County Public Schools in Florida as a winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “The school district’s board of education, superintendent, staff and teachers deserve every kudo. Great job, Orlando!”

The Orange County school district is a member of the Council.

Blue Ribbon *continued from page 2*

For this year’s award, the Department of Education strengthened the focus of both categories’ performance criteria around subgroups within a school and improving graduation rates for all students.

In addition to schools in Houston and Kansas City, Blue Ribbon honors were also presented to big-city schools in San Francisco, Miami, Honolulu, Chicago, Indianapolis, Baton Rouge, Louisville, New York City, Philadelphia, Nashville, Fort Worth, El Paso, Dallas as well as schools in the Los Angeles district, Clark County (Las Vegas), and Florida’s Palm Beach County and Hillsborough County (Tampa) districts. Clark County and El Paso had two schools recognized, while Hawaii and Palm Beach had three, Dallas had four and New York City had five.

To celebrate their achievement, each school will be honored Nov. 10-11 in Washington, D.C., at an awards ceremony.



Posing at the 2014 Broad Prize event in New York City are, left to right, past superintendent of Orange County Schools Ronald Blocker, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Edythe and Eli Broad, Orange County Schools Superintendent Barbara Jenkins, Orange County Public Schools Board Chairman William Sublette and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

Graduation Rate *continued from page 1*

history, he indicated.

Guilford County Schools (GCS) has seen its graduation rate rise for the sixth consecutive year. The 2013 rate was 86.2 percent. And its black students district-wide had an 86.9 percent graduation rate in 2014, according to district Chief of Staff Nora Carr.

“We are incredibly proud of our students, teachers and staff, who prove that hard work and determination pays off,” said GCS Superintendent Maurice “Mo” Green in a press statement.

Seven schools achieved 100-percent graduation rates, including three schools that serve predominantly students of color and those who are disadvantaged. Fourteen other schools achieved graduation rates of more than 90 percent, including 10 traditional schools with large student populations.

“We are graduating more students who are ready to be leaders in college or in a career, as well as in their communities,” stressed Superintendent Green. “Our students worked hard during their time with GCS, and I’m confident they will continue the tradition of excellence that started here.”

NYC Schools Chancellor Launches Innovative Framework for School Improvement



Carmen Fariña

Chancellor Carmen Fariña of the New York City Department of Education recently launched a bold, innovative, research-based capacity framework and new accountability measures aimed at improving the nation’s largest school district, which enrolls 1.1 million schoolchildren.

The framework emphasizes six critical components to assure high-achieving schools:

- Rigorous instruction;
- Supportive environment;
- Collaborative teachers;
- Effective school leadership;
- Strong family-community ties; and
- Trust

The new accountability measures, called the *School Quality Snapshot* and the *School Quality Guide*, will be aligned to the capacity framework, which will help the New York City school system gauge school quality.

The *School Quality Snapshot* will replace the one size fits all letter grade system, and is designed to give families a concise and accessible picture of the quality of each school.

The *School Quality Guide* will give more comprehensive information about each school, including multiple years of data so that schools’ progress over time can be more easily tracked.

“Our new system affirms our commitment to recognizing that there are many

NYC Schools *continued on page 5*

New GEAR UP Grants Awarded

The Minneapolis Public Schools recently received one of 41 grants totaling \$82 million awarded by the U.S. Department of Education to help 116,000 at-risk students prepare for college.

New GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grants were primarily awarded to universities and colleges and school districts in 25 states.

“It is inspiring and encouraging to win a grant like this,” said Minneapolis Public Schools Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson. “These funds will help boost our efforts to close the achievement gap and ensure that all of our students are college and career ready.”

The only school district in Minnesota awarded the grant is expected to receive funds over seven years, reaching nearly \$14-million. The Minneapolis GEAR UP project will serve more than 2,500 students in some 17 of the school district’s middle and secondary schools.

Other big-city school districts receiving GEAR UP grants include Birmingham, Los Angeles, Hillsborough County in Tampa, Fla., the School District of Philadelphia and Portland in Oregon.

NYC Schools *continued from page 4*

test scores that must be considered in order to build strong schools and truly understand how well a school is doing,” said Chancellor Fariña in a news statement.

“The new capacity framework and accountability system provide a clear and well-rounded mission and view of each of our schools that will allow families and school leaders to meaningfully engage about every aspect of their school community,” she added.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, noted that the new capacity framework “represents real positive change for New York City’s schools, and will be a model for urban school systems across the country.”

Five Big-City School Superintendents Vie for Top Urban Educator Award

Who will receive the nation’s highest honor for urban-school leadership?

The nominees for the 2014 Green-Garner Award, recognizing the “Urban Educator of the Year,” are big-city school superintendents:

- Alberto Carvalho of Miami-Dade County Public Schools;
- Eric Gordon of Cleveland Metropolitan School District;
- R. Stephen Green of Kansas City Public Schools in Missouri;
- Terry Grier of Houston Independent School District; and
- Valeria Silva of St. Paul Public Schools in Minnesota.

Anticipation will be in the air on the evening of Oct. 23 at the Council of the Great City Schools’ 25th Annual Green-Garner Award Banquet in Milwaukee, held during the Council’s 58th Annual Fall Conference hosted by Milwaukee Public Schools.

Sponsored by the Council, Aramark K-12 Education and Voyager Sopris Learning, the Green-Garner Award is given in memory of 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.

The award is presented to an urban-school superintendent and board member in alternate years. The winner receives a \$10,000 college scholarship to present to a student.

And the 2014 winner is ...!

Last year, the standing ovation went to Denise Link, a board member of the Cleveland school district, when called to the stage to receive the prestigious award.



Alberto Carvalho



Eric Gordon



R. Stephen Green



Terry Grier



Valeria Silva

Bay Area Tech Companies Adopting San Francisco Schools

The San Francisco area has a vibrant tech industry with approximately 1,000 technology companies, so last spring an initiative was launched to connect these companies with schools in the San Francisco Unified School District.

The *Circle the Schools* initiative began as a pilot program with five schools that were connected with a partner company over the course of the school year. The companies worked with principals and teachers to organize volunteer activities tailored to meet each school's individual needs, ranging from donating books to hosting career tours.

The initiative grew to 20 schools and was so successful that tech leaders recently announced plans to have every school in the district, approximately 116, "circled" by the end of the school year.

Companies that participate in *Circle the Schools* work with the San Francisco Education Fund, a nonprofit that engages community resources to lend extra support to teachers and administrators. In elementary schools, the focus is on literacy while in middle schools the focus is on math. And in high schools, companies in the initiative will help prepare students for college and careers.

One of the schools benefiting from the initiative is Thurgood Marshall High School, which has partnered with high-tech company Tagged. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the employees of the company have helped teachers prepare classrooms for the school year, donated tables to replace worn desks, and will offer internships to seniors at the school, where more than 80 percent of the students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

San Francisco Schools Superintendent Richard Carranza praised the initiative for helping to build lasting relationships between tech employees and students through a year-long partnership. "The benefit from people volunteering their time and resources is invaluable. We need partners who are actively engaged with our schools, who are willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work in order to help improve the lives of our public school students," he said.

According to the *Chronicle*, each participating company must pay \$5,000 to cover expenses involved in implementing the program. Companies must also volunteer at a minimum of three events in the course of the year.

Currently, there are about 20 companies participating in *Circle the Schools*, including Dropbox, RadioShack and Sprint.

Seattle Educator Named Washington State Teacher of the Year

Lyon Terry wants his 4th grade students to learn to be both kind and smart. He is described as a teacher who focuses on creating confident, hard-working and compassionate learners.

For his efforts, Terry was recently named Washington State's Teacher of the Year.

Terry, who joined Seattle Public Schools Lawton Elementary in 2005, is a National Board Certified Teacher and his teaching philosophy is grounded in community en-

gagement.

For example, when Terry noticed many Lawton students riding to school in cars instead of walking, he organized Seattle's first *Walking School Bus* program. He also recruited older students to serve as crossing guards and bus greeters to aid the safety of younger students.

Terry has also served in numerous leadership roles in his school and district, most

Seattle Educator continued on page 8



Duval County Schools Superintendent Nikolai Vitti paints a bowl to donate to a Jacksonville food bank's Empty Bowls Luncheon.

Leader in Jacksonville Recognized for Art Education

Jacksonville's Duval County Public Schools Superintendent Nikolai Vitti was recently named 2014-2015 Superintendent of the Year by the Florida Art Education Association for exemplary support for arts education.

Under his leadership, Duval County schools has expanded art offerings in schools districtwide. Vitti committed to employing at least one full-time art and one full-time music teacher in each elementary school, resulting in 240 full-time permanent positions in schools districtwide. Additionally, there is an art or music program in every middle and high school. And at each location, art and music material allocation was increased, with a particular focus on high school band programs.

The district also implemented the Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) Cultural Passport program, which ensures that every child from pre-K to 5th grade at 60 Title I elementary schools experience three cultural events a year in the city.

"I am incredibly honored to be recognized by the Florida Art Education Association," said Vitti. "The award sheds positive light on our district and community for its commitment to the whole child. The honor would not happen without the school board's support for my vision to ensure that all students are exposed to and inspired by the arts."

Philadelphia Leader Doesn't Let Budget Crisis Deter Him From Mission

This past May, William Hite, superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, addressed a meeting of the School Reform Commission (SRC), which governs the school district. He discussed how the \$304-million budget shortfall facing the district had resulted in a shortage of counselors and nurses, and that a principal at one of the district's high-achieving schools may have to begin the new school year with no money for copy paper.

"It is one thing to ask parents to fundraise for extras – field trips, for instance," said Hite. "But to ask them, our business partners, or the greater Philadelphia community to provide the basics because we cannot, causes me to question how we got here and whether there is public will to get back on track."

Getting the school district back on track in the midst of severe budget problems has been a mission of Hite's since he arrived in the district in 2012, after serving at the helm of a large suburban school system in Maryland.

Even before Hite accepted the position, the Philadelphia school district was facing a budget deficit of around \$720 million. But during his visits to the district as a candidate for superintendent, he was impressed by the people he met and their passion.

"I saw the energy in people from all sectors, from the faith-based community to higher education, business, parents and staff," said Hite in an interview with the *Urban Educator*. "That level of energy was none like any I had ever seen before, and I wanted to work in an environment where so many individuals were passionate and committed to improving public education."

In his two years at the helm of the 131,000-student school district, Hite has had to make some tough decisions, including closing 31 schools, reducing the workforce by approximately 5,000 and restructuring employee contracts.

Hite has had to take these measures



Philadelphia Schools Superintendent William Hite has lunch with district students.

while at the same time trying to improve the academic achievement of students in a district where approximately 80 percent of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

Making Progress

Despite the revenue challenges, the superintendent ticks off a number of accomplishments the district has been able to achieve, including opening three new innovative high schools and launching a School Redesign Initiative, in which educators, community organizations and universities are invited to submit a proposal to redesign a school.

"We're excited that we have been able to progress in some of those areas," said Hite.

As superintendent of Philadelphia schools, the veteran educator has learned how incredibly daunting and hard the work is, especially in this day and age when there are more things that are mandated with fewer resources.

But the reason he goes to work every morning is because he enjoys talking

with children and hearing their hopes and dreams of what they want to do in spite of their circumstances and conditions.

"Children who are faced with significant circumstances choose to come to school every day," said Hite. "Those are the things that inspire me."

The district recently received some good news when state legislators approved a cigarette tax bill that will raise an estimated \$49 million for the school system. Hite expressed his relief that the legislation was passed, but noted that the funds are already built into the district's current school-year budget, enabling the district to only keep the resources already allocated to schools, which are at best "inadequate."

While Philadelphia is not the only big-city school district experiencing budget challenges, the problem is exacerbated, according to Hite, because the state has reduced funding to school systems, with Philadelphia bearing the brunt because it is the largest in the state and has the highest proportion of students in poverty.

Hite also noted that it is the only school district in the state of Pennsylvania that does not have the ability to generate revenue and the SRC has no authority to raise

Philadelphia Leader *continued on page 8*



During a school visit, Philadelphia Schools Superintendent William Hite greets a student.

D.C. Schools Fellowship Program Graduates First Class of Principals



Mary Jane Patterson

Mary Jane Patterson was the first African American woman to receive a bachelor's degree when she graduated from Oberlin College in 1862, and after teaching for several years,

became the first black principal of Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., the nation's first public school for black students.

Patterson's legacy lives on when eight Mary Jane Patterson Fellows recently began the 2014-2015 school year as principals in the District of Columbia Public Schools.

The principals were part of the first group of graduates from the Mary Jane Patterson Fellowship, an 18-month rigorous training program to prepare talented District of Columbia educators to become school principals.

The fellowship included individualized leadership coaching, mentoring by successful principals and learning sessions with professors from Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business. Fellows also had to serve one year as Resident Principals at two schools, alongside their mentor principals. Upon successful completion of the program, the fellowship graduates engaged in a comprehensive selection and matching process for principal positions.

District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson said the fellowship was a way for the district to target and build the leadership skills of future school leaders and to keep them in the

school system.

"Now, we have eight new awesome principals who are trained, ready and excited in their new roles," said Henderson. "I am so proud of these inaugural members of our MJP Fellowship and can't wait to see them in action as principals!"

The fellowship is currently in its second year of training the next cohort. District officials hope the program will not only provide high-quality preparation for school leadership, but also weave the Patterson Fellowship into internal district leadership pipelines to prepare talented employees for leadership positions at all levels of the school system.

To qualify for the fellowship, employees must have a master's degree, two years of classroom instruction, an ability to analyze data to help teachers inform instruction, strong communications skills and the ability to work collaboratively in a learning community.

Philadelphia Leader *continued from page 7*

taxes. This situation forces the district to depend on other entities for funding, such as the city council, the mayor, the governor and state legislators.

Hite says that the district has done everything it can, from less frequent cleaning of schools to reducing the number of police officers. In order to open schools on time this September, he had to make approximately \$32 million in cuts.

"We can't cut our way to resolving this problem because there's not enough left to cut," declared Hite. "This is a problem that is going to require additional revenue from the city and the state as well as restructuring labor agreements."

While he doesn't have a great deal of spare time, the 53-year-old, who attended Virginia Tech on a football scholarship, loves to go cycling on the weekends as well as play golf and read. The married father of two also enjoys visiting his only grandson in Richmond, Va., and participating in Philadelphia's growing restaurant scene.

And what advice would Hite, who has been a teacher, principal and central office administrator, give to those who want to follow in his footsteps and one day lead a big-city school district?

"If individuals are coming to an urban school district concerned about what people say about them, it's probably not the place for them," said Hite. "Be focused in your vision of how you want to improve educational outcomes and be very intentional about what you are trying to accomplish because detractors will be constantly working against it."

Seattle Educator *continued from page 6*

often in the areas of writing and literacy. During his time at Lawton, 4th-grade writing proficiency rates on the state Measurements of Student Progress test have risen more than 10 percentage points.

As the recipient of the State Teacher of the Year Award, Terry received donated cash awards, technology prizes and scholarships for classroom improvements.

Baton Rouge Program To Help At-Risk Students

East Baton Rouge Parish School System in Louisiana is currently recruiting students for enrollment in an innovative new academic program specifically tailored for high school students 17 years of age and older who are at risk of dropping out of school, as well as for former students who have left school before earning a high school diploma.

Moving Forward is a comprehensive, flexible academic program that involves an interactive web-based instructional approach with teachers available on-line on an around-the-clock basis to interact with students. The program requires only a half day of in-class participation by students.

Students who successfully complete the *Moving Forward* alternative education program will earn a regular high school diploma.

Baton Rouge *continued on page 9*

Chicago Opens First On-Site Job Center

Chicago Public Schools' mission to provide students with a strong academic foundation and applicable skills to prepare for success in college, career and life takes on new meaning for students at Roger C. Sullivan High School.

Nearly 700 students now have access to "The Outpost," the district's first on-site job program recently announced in partnership with the Youth Job Center. The program gives students access to free employment guidance that will prepare them with the skills they need to be successful in the 21st century workforce.

The Youth Job Center will work with students to secure part-time employment and internships that match their long-term goals through various partnerships with locally owned businesses. A career advisor will be on-site three days a week during school hours.

To support the students in building jobs skills in order to secure employment, staff will teach interview and resume skills, assist students in researching careers and aid students during the job application process.

Baton Rouge *continued from page 8*

"This program is intended to engage at-risk students and former students who have dropped out of school in a quality alternative education experience tailored to their needs," said Baton Rouge Schools Superintendent Bernard Taylor Jr. "It is certainly the case that some of our students and former students are challenged for many reasons taking the traditional path to a high school diploma. This program provides an attractive alternative way of achieving this goal."

The district has begun actively recruiting eligible current and former students for enrollment in the *Moving Forward* program through direct contact by guidance counselors and by various promotional methods, including flyers and telephone calls.

Dallas Heightens Focus on Pre-K Quality

As part of his Destination 2020 plan for transformational improvement in the Dallas Independent School District, Superintendent Mike Miles wants bold changes for the district's pre-K program – with the goal of dramatically improving the school readiness rates of incoming kindergarten students.

Today, only 38 percent of students in Dallas ISD are beginning kindergarten "school ready", according to the school district. It attributes low kindergarten readiness to a combination of not enough students attending pre-K in Dallas and the need to improve program quality for those students who do attend.

As a first step, Superintendent Miles created the office of Early Childhood Development, which is solely focused on pre-K education and the development of children from birth to age 5.

Last spring, Dallas ISD held a week-long event at every one of its more than 145 elementary schools to increase early registration for its pre-K program. The event, which was a first for the district, was a huge success – more than doubling the number of parents registering their 4 year olds for pre-K early.

"Studies show that 85 percent of brain development occurs by age 5, so pre-K is critical to catching kids early with educational interventions," says Alan Cohen, executive director of the district's office of Early Childhood Development. "Particularly for at-risk children, the longer we wait, the more difficult, more expensive, and less effective all of our interventions will be."

Dallas ISD will continue to stay aggressive in its efforts to increase pre-K enrollment. "By 2020, we want to be serving all eligible 4 year olds and a significant number of 3 year olds in high quality classrooms

throughout Dallas," Cohen emphasizes.

Investing in Quality

In addition to increasing the number of pre-K students, Dallas ISD is looking to place major bets on improving classroom

quality. According to the district, even just one year of high quality pre-K should be enough to flip the odds of future success back in favor of the student.

Yet, only 47 percent of the students who attended pre-K in the district are entering kindergarten on track for success.

"We need to be brutally honest about where we are starting with our program quality," says Cohen. "It is clear that we have some big opportunities to improve the support we provide our students. A lot of that will come naturally from providing additional supports for our teachers."

To that end, Dallas ISD has already hired a team of pre-K specialists, experts on early childhood education who will serve as mentors and coaches to classroom teachers. In their new role, each specialist is adopting 15 classrooms, where they will be able to model best practices, provide mentorship, monitor continuous improvement, and help teachers scaffold instruction to meet the needs of every child.

Already, more than half of its over 465 pre-K classrooms are being supported by a specialist, and the district anticipates full coverage by the beginning of next school year. But Dallas ISD says this is only the first step.

"We are focused on a robust set of tactics that are proven by research to improve a child's kindergarten readiness and lifelong success," Cohen points out. "We want to invest in quality initiatives like lowering classroom ratios, providing year-



Two students practice their literacy skills in a Dallas pre-kindergarten classroom.

Dallas Pre-K *continued on page 12*

The Lame Duck and Beyond

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

The 113th Congress will reconvene in a lame duck session in mid-November, having already departed Washington until after the elections.

The main agenda item when Congress returns will be the passage of annual appropriations bills or a year-long omnibus funding measure. The election results, particularly those that determine control of the U.S. Senate, will affect how the annual funding bills are handled.

Since most federal education programs have not been fully restored to their pre-sequestration funding levels, decisions in the lame duck session on the FY 2015 spending measures will be critical for school districts. There is also a chance that funding bills could be delayed through another short-term continuing resolution until the 114th Congress convenes in January.

In any case, there is scant authority within the current budget ceilings to increase funding for current programs without cutting others. Attempts at accommodating new international and domestic priorities, including funding for refugee children from Central America enrolling in U.S. schools by the tens of thousands, will further stress the already-controversial appropriations process.

In its remaining few months, the 113th Congress may take up other legislation as well. On the education front, only procedural hurdles remain to passage of the education research reauthorization (H.R. 4366) and child-care and development block-grant bills (S. 1086).

Both measures have been managed by retiring Senate Education Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Ia.) and House Education Chairman John Kline (R-Minn.), who may be subject in 2015 to a House Republican term-limitation on his chairmanship.

Second-term presidents are also considered lame ducks, since they cannot serve another term. The Obama



Administration, which has struggled politically under federal budget constraints since 2011 to fund its priority programs, is facing further complications due to its second-term status. As a result, the Administration has emphasized executive branch actions that do not need congressional concurrence.

However, the Education Department has not yet fully explored opportunities for executive action on such issues as local-level flexibility and regulatory reform that could overcome inefficiencies in current federal education law and help improve program performance and practice.

Until the make-up of the 114th Congress is settled in November, nearly everything remains speculative. The constant clamoring of education interest groups to reauthorize their particular education programs, including elementary and secondary education, career and technical education, higher education, and the like, has not borne fruit in the 113th Congress and their efforts appear premature given the uncertain composition of the 114th.

Recent history suggests that even with strong bipartisan support for *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in 2001, Congress got most of the operational details wrong. In any case, the Senate and House leadership and the Committee Chairs on both sides will set their legislative agendas for the 114th Congress regardless of the predispositions of the education community.

It is certainly likely that the new Congress will want to reauthorize a number of overdue education laws. Whether the 114th Congress can actually write legislation that helps local school districts over and above the current framework of NCLB alongside flexibility waivers is still an open question.

Jackson School District Expands Male Mentoring Program

Mentor support continues to grow for males of color in Mississippi's Jackson Public Schools. The City of Jackson and the school district recently announced the expansion of the Ambassadors of the Evers Academy for African-American Males (A-TEAAM) mentoring program.

The mentorship program, named for slain civil-rights pioneer Medgar Evers, was launched last year at Blackburn Middle School, with the district receiving a grant for \$1,500 to provide mentorships to 40 students. An increase in organizations signing on to participate has spurred the program's growth to now include Hardy and Powell middle schools.

The goal of the A-TEAAM mentoring program is to improve the quality of life for young males of color by equipping them

with skills, knowledge, and support of caring mentors. Their interactions are guided by a meaningful curriculum designed to empower students as they navigate through middle school.

During a recent orientation ceremony to commemorate the program's launch, Jackson Schools Superintendent Cedrick Gray advised the mentorees to be aware that their roles as ambassadors come with a responsibility to others.

"These young men will be the drivers of the mission," said Gray, "to provide a better quality of life for the young black boys in the City of Jackson. 'Gentlemen, please don't take what you are doing for granted. You are embarking upon a journey that will forever set a precedent and a bar for other young men to rise to.'"

Urban Teachers Receive Yale U. Educator Award



Kevin Murchie

As an Advanced Placement English Language Arts teacher at Los Angeles' Garfield Senior High School, Kevin Murchie challenged his students to critically examine social issues

written in literary classics. As the newspaper faculty sponsor, Murchie also encouraged students to explore self-expression through their writing, especially student editor Janet Juarez.

For Juarez, a 2014 Garfield graduate who is currently a freshman at Yale University, Murchie's rigorous approach to educating his students played a critical role in shaping her future. As a result, she nominated Murchie for the 2014 Yale University Educator Award, and he won.

The Yale Educator Recognition Program honored 54 teachers and 30 counselors from around the world who support and inspire their students to achieve at high levels. Matriculating Yale students are invited to nominate high school educators, and a committee composed of Yale admissions officers review the nominations.

"Receiving this award, any award for that matter, for teaching is humbling," Murchie said. "...Teaching is, largely, a thankless profession... So, it is moments like this, when a young person feels compelled to tell you and others how important it all was and will be, that you made a difference in their lives, that makes it all worth it."

In addition to Murchie, big-city teachers and counselors from Anchorage, Austin, Houston, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Oakland, San Diego and Tampa, Fla., were selected as 2014 recipients of the Yale University Educator Award.



New Orleans Student Selected as National Poet

Madeleine LeCesne, second from left, a senior at Lusher Charter School in New Orleans, was among five students recently appointed as 2014 National Student Poets, the nation's highest honor for teen poets, with First Lady Michelle Obama hosting a poetry reading at the White House in their honor. The students were appointed by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and will serve a year as youth ambassadors for poetry, leading readings and workshops at libraries and schools across the country. The National Student Poets will each receive an academic award of \$5,000. Photo credit: Paul Morse for the National Student Poets Program



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Students Learn Life Skills in Baltimore Bike Club

Just like at a typical bike repair shop, greasy hands fix flats and pry tires from frames, while badly broken bikes are completely taken apart and reassembled, and are now ready to ride. These bike enthusiasts are not only skilled at repairs, they also enjoy learning about bike safety and riding together – and they are all students at Baltimore City’s Digital Harbor High School.

Located in the school’s basement, Digital Harbor’s bike club has about 20 members.

“It’s life changing because the kids get to have hands-on, authentic learning,” says Nicole Veltre, a science teacher at Digital Harbor, who helps the club.

Dallas Pre-K continued from page 9

round professional development training for teachers and administrators, expanding summer enrichment, and strengthening parent engagement with our community partners to reach children as early as birth.

“Investing in quality early education is the single best investment we can make for our kids,” Cohen concludes.



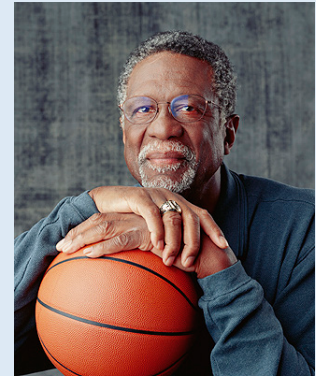
Students in Baltimore’s Digital Harbor High School repair a bicycle.

Three years ago, a local nonprofit, a Baltimore bike shop, and several of the school’s police officers donated dozens of bikes to the school, but they were badly in need of repairs. The students asked a few community members to teach them how to fix the bikes, and within the next few months, the bike club was formed. One student recently landed a part-time job at a local bike shop.

Now the club sells some of the bikes they repair. All proceeds go back to the club – for more learning, riding, and fun.

“The club has become a really cool kid-run bike shop,” said Veltre.

Great City Grads



Bill Russell

Retired Basketball Star

1952 Graduate

McClymonds High School

Oakland Unified School District