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## Miami-Dade District Takes Step to Prevent Gun Violence

Gun violence in the nation grabs headlines daily, with a number of mass shootings occurring in recent years in schools, malls and theaters.

To prevent gun violence before it happens, the nation's fourth largest school district, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, has partnered with Sandy Hook Promise, a national nonprofit group formed by several family members whose loved ones were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School four years ago in Newton, Conn.

The recent rollout of the violence prevention initiative throughout the city of Miami has been called unprecedented, as it is believed that no other city in the nation has proactively decided to educate all of its

**Gun Violence** continued on page 5

## Houston High School Named 'Super School'

The Houston Independent School District's Furr High School is one of 10 winning "Super Schools" recently named by the XQ Institute, an organization seeking to create innovative schools.

Each of the winning schools will receive \$10 million over five years "to serve as catalysts for change, making high school more relevant, engaging and effective for every student..." says XQ: The Super School Project announcement.

**Super Schools** continued on page 4

## L.A. Grads Promised Free College Tuition In New Program Hailed by Jill Biden

Crystal Cortez is a senior at Alexander Hamilton High School in Los Angeles who dreams of being the first in her family to earn a college degree.

Her dream recently became one step closer to reality as a result of a new program to provide graduates of the Los Angeles Unified School District with a year's free tuition at a local community college.

L.A. College Promise is a partnership among the Los Angeles school system, the Los Angeles Community College District and the city of Los Angeles. Beginning next fall, tuition will be free for one year for eligible Los Angeles graduates who attend any of the nine Los Angeles community college campuses.

At a recent press conference at Los Angeles City College, Los Angeles Schools Superintendent Michelle King was joined by cheering high school students, school board members, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and special guest Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

"This is not just about policy. It's about people," said Biden, a professor at a community college in Virginia. "For millions of people across our country, community college is the single best path to achieving dreams."

The College Promise program was inspired by a 2015 campaign led by President Barack Obama, who advocated mak-

**L.A. Grads** continued on page 4



Los Angeles Schools Superintendent Michelle King and school board president Steve Zimmer celebrate the new College Promise program with students from Alexander Hamilton and Helen Bernstein High schools.

## 'Call Me Mister' Program Graduates First Student in Jackson, Miss.

After graduating from Mississippi's Jackson Public Schools in 2012, Edward Williams entered Jackson State University (JSU) as an undecided major. And though he never envisioned himself being an educator, he was soon introduced to a leadership development program for African American males to become teachers.

Four years later, Williams is a fifth-grade teacher at John Hopkins Elementary School in Jackson. He is the first graduate of the Call Me Mister® (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) program created at JSU to increase the number of African-American male teachers in Mississippi K-8 classrooms, particularly in the state's lowest-performing elementary schools.

Students in the program major in elementary or early childhood education and receive tuition assistance, professional development opportunities and academic and social mentoring provided by a program coordinator and a faculty academic coach. They must maintain a 2.75 grade-point av-

erage, develop an academic support plan, and satisfy all requirements for the JSU Teacher Education program. Participants are also involved in community service and service-learning projects and recruit males to major in elementary education at JSU.

Graduates of the program must commit to teaching a year in an elementary school

in the state for each year they received tuition assistance.

"The MISTER program helped prepare me for the classroom through student teaching, understudying at different schools and volunteering programs,"

**Mister Program** *continued on page 12*



First-year teacher Edward Williams teaches his fifth-grade students at John Hopkins Elementary School in Jackson, Miss.



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A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 70 of the nation's largest urban public school districts.

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# Nine Finalists Vie for Top Urban Education Award

With nine superintendents nominated, one of them will walk away with the nation's top prize in urban education for 2016 at the Council of the Great City Schools' 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 19-23, in Miami.

Anticipation will be in the air on the evening of Oct. 20, when the envelope is given to announce the winner at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Green-Garner Award Banquet.

The Green-Garner Award recognizes outstanding leadership, and is presented to a big-city school superintendent and board member in alternative years. The winner is considered by peers as the Urban Educator of the Year.

The 2016 finalists are superintendents:

- John Allison of Wichita Public Schools;
- Juan Cabrera of El Paso Independent School District;
- Alberto Carvalho of Miami-Dade County Public Schools;
- Eric Gordon of Cleveland Metropolitan School District;

- Michael Grego of Florida's Pinellas County Public Schools;
- Kaya Henderson of District of Columbia Public Schools;
- Barbara Jenkins of Florida's Orange County Public Schools;
- Mary Ronan of Cincinnati Public Schools; and
- Leticia Rodriguez-Rosario of New York City Department of Education (Bronx)

And the winner is...!

Sponsored by the Council, Aramark K-12 Education, and Scholastic, Inc., the Green-Garner Award is named in memory of Richard R. Green, the first African American chancellor of the New York City school system, and businessman Edward Garner, who served on the Denver school board.

The winner receives a \$10,000 college scholarship to present to a student.

Last year's awardee was William "Bill" Isler, a longtime school board member in Pittsburgh.



## Student Receives Award Scholarship

Naomi Dowden, left, a 2016 graduate of Pittsburgh Public Schools, is joined by her mom as she holds her \$10,000 Green-Garner college scholarship she was presented with at a school board meeting. She received the scholarship from former Pittsburgh school board member Bill Isler, the recipient of the 2015 Green-Garner Award. Dowden, who attended Pittsburgh's Barack Obama Academy of International Studies, is a theater major at Temple University.



John Allison



Juan Cabrera



Alberto Carvalho



Eric Gordon



Michael Grego



Kaya Henderson



Barbara Jenkins



Mary Ronan



Leticia Rodriguez-Rosario

**L.A. Grads** *continued from page 1*

ing community college free for two years. As part of the program, a college-readiness course is being developed for students to help them develop good study habits.

Mayor Garcetti has raised \$1.75 million to cover more than half the cost of the first year of the program, and donors include business, educational and philanthropic organizations. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, L.A. College Promise is expected to cost \$3 million.

There are approximately two dozen other College Promise programs in California, including a very successful one in Long Beach, but Los Angeles school officials believe their program will be the largest. Of the approximately 30,000 students who graduated from the Los Angeles school system in 2015, more than 10,000 of them immediately enrolled in community college. As a result, district officials are expecting L.A. College Promise to have a significant impact by expanding the number of students who will get the opportunity to attend community college.

“No longer will our students have to worry about the financial burdens of what



**Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, left, sits next to L.A. student Crystal Cortez at a press conference announcing the creation of the L.A. College Promise program.**

to do about college,” said Superintendent King. “They can focus on their education. They will be welcomed in. They will have a seat in the community college.”

And Crystal Cortez plans to be one of those students next year. “Thanks to L.A. College Promise, I will be able to attend college full time during my first year and I won’t have to juggle going to school and working,” she said at the press conference. Cortez plans to attend West Los Angeles College for two years before transferring to the University of Oregon and attaining a teaching degree.

## Urban Schools Recognized for Closing ‘Opportunity Gap’

Ranier High School in Seattle had only 320 students in a facility built for 1,200, forcing the school to eliminate all but the most essential classes. After receiving input from parents, the community, staff and officials from Seattle Public Schools, the school decided to implement an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program that would serve all students.

Six years later, all 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, including those who receive special education services, must take at least one IB class. The student population has doubled and a strong community outreach program has been created. As a result, the school was recently selected as a “School of Opportunity” by the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder.

The first-time designation honors 20 public high schools across the nation that strive to close opportunity gaps and build on student strengths by creating and supporting engaged and successful learning environments for all their students.

The Center chose schools based not on test scores, but on how well they use research-based practices to support all students and their teachers.

Schools were judged on six different education-opportunity practices that they are successfully implementing, such as how they create and maintain a healthy school culture, enrich school curriculum and support teachers as professionals.

A review team comprised of 40 researchers, teachers, policymakers and administrators selected eight “gold” schools and 12 “silver schools.”

In addition to Seattle’s Ranier High School, New York’s Rochester International Academy, which serves newly arrived immigrant and refugee students and is in a community that is an official resettlement site for the United Nations, was also des-

**Opportunity Gap** *continued on page 12*

**Super Schools** *continued from page 1*

The winners were chosen from nearly 700 submitted proposals in the “Super Schools” competition after a rigorous 11-month application and evaluation process.

“We are proud to partner with each of these 10 amazing teams who represent the power of communities coming together to restore the goals and excellence that the founders of our public schools envisioned,” stresses Russlynn Ali, chief executive officer of XQ Institute in a press release.

Houston’s Furr High School reportedly has made significant progress over the past 15 years. Once viewed as a

“drop-out factory,” the school has seen its graduation rate climb from 57 percent to 95 percent in 2015.

“We are so thankful and honored by this generous award,” says Furr Principal Bertie Simmons. “Here at Furr, we have always been focused on creating greater opportunity for our students. Now, our whole community has come together to push ourselves further and co-create a new model for high school with our students at the helm.”

XQ: The Super School Project was launched in September 2015 as an open call to America to rethink high school.

**Gun Violence** *continued from page 1*

middle and high school students district-wide in such an endeavor.

“We are honored that Miami-Dade County Public Schools was chosen by Sandy Hook Promise as the launching site for this program,” said Miami-Dade Public Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho. “Our *Values Matter Miami* Initiative, which empowers our youth and strengthens character development in our classrooms, is seamlessly aligned with this national gun violence program.”

Sandy Hook Promise offers “Know the Signs” education programs that teach students how to prevent and combat violence, focusing on precursors and identifying at-risk behaviors in people who need help. There are two programs that train students -- “Start with Hello” to prevent social isolation and promote inclusiveness among students and “Say Something” to identify students exhibiting at-risk behavior in person or via social media.

A third program called “Safety Assessment & Intervention” trains educators on how to assess and act on threats of violence or self-harm.

In addressing the kickoff of the violence prevention initiative at Miami’s Ferguson High School on Sept. 19, Sandy Hook Promise Co-founder and Managing Director Nicole Hockley said, “I truly believe that the best way that we can prevent these acts of violence and self-harm is to get ahead of them, is to learn the signs and signals of someone who is in need of help and to get them help long before they decide to take action.”

Former Miami Heat basketball star Alonzo Mourning also attended the launch of the violence prevention initiative. “As a father, as parents of three, my wife and I can’t imagine the feeling of loss that parents like Nicole and many others have endured. In the U.S. alone, the gun homicide rate is 43 times higher than the rate of 50 other countries,” he noted in a press release.

Sandy Hook Promise believes most gun violence is preventable when one knows the signs. It claims, through its violence prevention programs, that to date the national non-profit has helped avert a school bombing and shooting plot in Ohio, as well as multiple suicide attempts and other acts of violence.



Students at Miami’s Ferguson High School present a gift to Nicole Hockley, center, who lost her first-grade son in the 2012 Sandy Hook shootings, as Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, right, and former basketball star Alonzo Mourning, left, look on.

## Three Urban Districts Receive Grants To Aid Traumatized Students

The U.S. Department of Education in mid-September awarded more than \$5 million to the St. Louis, Baltimore City and Chicago school districts in a new grant program called Promoting Student Resilience, aimed at helping meet the emotional and social needs of students experiencing traumas following civil unrest in their communities.

The federal funding is intended to help school districts establish school-based mental-health, counseling and behavioral programs for students who have been traumatized due to demonstrations of mass protests and civil unrest.

“Violence tears at the fabric of a school community, and the long-term effects can be devastating,” said U.S. Secretary of Education John King Jr. in a press statement. “The Department of Education is committed to addressing the mental health and social support needs of students who are impacted, directly or indirectly, by traumatic events in their communities.”

Thirty schools in St. Louis and St. Louis County will benefit from a nearly \$1.5 million award in response to the protests and violence that erupted following the fatal shooting in Ferguson, Mo., and other incidents in the region.

The Baltimore City Public Schools received more than \$2.3 million from the grant program to partner with the Baltimore City Health Department to increase the capacity of school communities to meet the needs of traumatized students.

“With all of the potential and power that resides within our young people, we know that the stress from conflict, poverty, and a lack of opportunity often makes it harder for them to thrive academically and grow into the adults they were meant to be,” said Baltimore City Schools Chief Ex-

**Trauma Grants** *continued on page 12*

## Yale University Honors Inspiring Teachers, Counselors

When Amanda Rector graduated from Los Angeles Unified School District's Venice High School, she believed that the support and encouragement she received from her biology teacher Tory Toyama helped shaped her future.

Which is why the Yale University freshman nominated Toyama to receive the 2016 Yale Educator Award, which recognizes outstanding educators who have supported and inspired their students to achieve at high levels.

Toyama was one of 55 teachers and 28 counselors to receive the award, in which students at Yale University nominate educators who have inspired them to succeed.

Rector, a pre-med major who would like a career in public health, credits Toyama's intense study guides and lab projects for giving her a valuable understanding of biology. "But what makes him a special teacher to me is how he opened our eyes to the applications of science and the ethical and political struggles within the field," said Rector in an interview with the *Daily*, Los Angeles' school district online newspaper.

Yale University received 326 nominations from this year's freshman class. In addition to Toyama, several other educators and counselors from big-city school districts, including California's Santa Ana, Jacksonville, Orlando, Chicago, Las Vegas, New York City and St. Petersburg, Fla., were recognized.



L.A. biology teacher Tory Toyama received the 2016 Yale Educator Award.

## Des Moines District Launches Water-Testing Program in Schools

After high levels of lead were found in children in Flint, Mich., last April due to the city's contaminated drinking water, attention then turned to the safety of drinking water at facilities in the nation's school systems.

Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools has dealt with the issue by taking a proactive approach and testing the water in all of its 87 school facilities.

In April, the district began a program to monitor lead levels in school drinking water, even though such testing was not required under Iowa law.

"Our district wanted to take proactive measures immediately to assure our schools were in compliance with Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) regulatory guidelines," wrote Bill Good, the district's chief operation officer, in an email to the *Urban Educator*. "We wanted to assure our drinking water was safe for our students, staff and community."

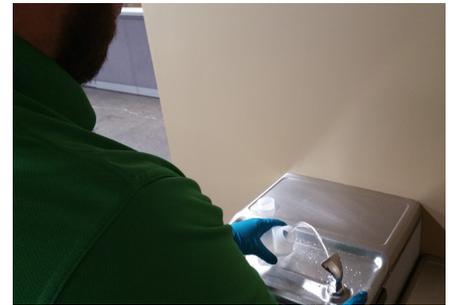
Samples were collected from water fountains, kitchens, nurses' offices and other sources of drinking water at each of the district's school buildings.

The majority of samples analyzed were below the EPA's action level of 15 parts per billion, however some samples came back above.

Those samples became the focus of follow-up testing. In some cases, corrective actions were taken to reduce lead from the building's drinking water such as replacing equipment and regularly flushing drinking fountains or sinks. The district also partnered with their local water provider for expertise and advice.

According to Good, the testing program conducted at its 87 facilities cost the district approximately \$18,000.

Des Moines has created a web page at [water.dmschools.org](http://water.dmschools.org) that provides additional information for parents and the public, including a searchable database for a summary of results for each school. And in an effort to stay on top of the issue, district



A Des Moines school district official collects a sample from a water fountain as part of the district's lead-testing program.

officials are implementing a maintenance program that will regularly test the drinking water on a five-year revolving basis.

And what advice would Good give to other urban school districts? "Be proactive and thorough," wrote Good. "Be transparent with testing protocol and results, and make it simple for a parent to check the results of each school."

## Teachers Receive Environmental Award

Laura Tyler, a teacher at South Shore PK-9 School in Seattle, helped start a recycling and composting program that now exists in every school in the district.

In recognition of her efforts, she was recently presented with a Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators. The award recognizes K-12 teachers who use innovative approaches to incorporate environmental education in their classrooms and teaching methods.

The award is administered by the White House Council on Environmental Quality in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Teachers from each of EPA's 10 regions received awards.

In addition to Tyler, Shakira Provasoli, a teacher at New York City's Manhattan School for Children; and Shawn Graham, a teacher at Omaha's Accelerate Program, received awards.

## Khan Academy Founder to Address Conference



Sal Khan

Sal Khan, founder and CEO of the Khan Academy, a free online education platform providing video lessons on a wide spectrum of academic subjects, will address urban school leaders at a luncheon on Oct. 20 at the Council of the Great City Schools' 60th Annual Fall Conference in Miami.



Eric Holder

He joins former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and political commentator Donna Brazille as keynote speakers during the five-day conference from Oct. 19-23.



Donna Brazille

They both address the conference, host-



Dan Rather

ed by the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, on Oct. 21, which will also feature a town hall meeting on "Urban Education and the Presidential Campaign."

The town meeting will be a debate between surrogates of both the Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump presidential campaigns with big-city school leaders weighing in on urban school needs and issues the next president should consider.

## Council Publishes Guide to Help Districts Assess Standards Implementation

The Council of the Great City Schools has published a guide to help big-city school districts gauge how well they are implementing college and career-ready standards.

*Indicators of Success* covers visioning and goal-setting, resource allocations, parent and community outreach, curriculum and instruction, professional development, assessments, and student data.

"It is meant to be used at the district level, and it includes examples of how districts can be on-track with your standards implementation and how you can go off-track," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

The document was reviewed and piloted by a number of the Council's 70 member

school districts and their chief academic officers.

The guide can be accessed on the Council's website at [www.cgcs.org](http://www.cgcs.org).

### Indicators of Success

A Guide for Assessing District-Level Implementation of College- and Career-Readiness Standards

SUMMER 2016



## NYC, San Diego, And Palm Beach Receive Magnet Grants

The U.S. Department of Education recently awarded \$91 million to nine school districts in five states to support racial and socioeconomic integration through magnet schools.

Most of the grants went to big-city school districts -- New York City, San Diego and Florida's Palm Beach County -- represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The grants have been awarded through federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program competition, aimed at helping districts "create rigorous academic programs that attract a diverse group of students from throughout their communities," according to the department's Sept. 26 announcement.

"Magnet schools help break down barriers that too often get in the way of our highest need students attending diverse, well-resourced schools," said U.S. Secretary of Education John King Jr. "These grants will expand learning opportunities for students and help districts foster schools that reflect the full diversity of their communities."

The grants ranged in size from \$4.6 million to \$11.9 million, providing funding to districts for three-year periods. Together, the nine districts receiving the magnet-school grants will launch or expand 38 magnet schools, the U.S. Department of Education notes.

The New York City Department of Education, the nation's largest school system, received the most funding -- with grants awarded to two Brooklyn districts and two districts in Queens, totaling more than \$45 million.

The San Diego Unified School District received some \$10.3 million and Florida's School District of Palm Beach County was awarded \$7.2 million.

Magnet Grants continued on page 9



San Diego student Maya Salameh, second from right, and Chicago student Stella Binion, far right, are two of the students selected as 2016 National Student Poets. The students recently attended a ceremony at the White House presided by First Lady Michelle Obama. Photo credit: Kevin Wolf/AP Images for Alliance for Young Artists & Writers

## San Diego and Chicago Student-Poets Honored By First Lady Michelle Obama

Maya Salameh is a junior at San Diego High School of International Studies and the oldest daughter of Lebanese-Americans. She is fluent in English, French, and Arabic and writes poems about the duality of being Arab and American and the effects of war.

Stella Binion is a senior at Walter Payton College Prep in Chicago who began her high school writing career by attending Young Chicago Authors workshops and open mics, becoming a co-captain of a performance poetry team. She writes poems about environmental racism and the experience of being an African American young woman.

In addition to poetry, these two students have something else in common. They were recently selected as 2016 National Student Poets, the nation's highest honor for high school poets in grades 10-11 creating original works.

The five poets were selected from different regions across the country. They will spend the year serving as poetry ambassa-

dors promoting poetry through readings and workshops at libraries, museums and schools. They will also create a community service project and participate in events during National Poetry Month in April.

In addition, each poet will receive an academic award of \$5,000 and will serve as a resource to the U.S. Department of Education and the Library of Congress.

By elevating and showcasing their work for a national audience, the National Student Poets program aims to inspire young people to achieve excellence in their own creative endeavors and promote writing and the arts.

At a recent ceremony at the White House, the poets were appointed by First Lady Michelle Obama. As part of the appointment ceremony, each of the students did a reading of an original poem.

"So I have one request that I make of all of our student poets, and I'm going to make that of you all here today," said Obama to the new class of poets. "I want you to go

**Student Poets** continued on page 12

## NYC Launches Traffic Safety Curriculum For Students

More than 1,000 children under the age of 17 were involved in traffic accidents last year in New York City, with nine killed, according to the city's Department of Transportation.

To educate city students on traffic safety, New York City Schools Chancellor Carmen Farina and Transportation Commissioner Polly Tottenberg in mid-September announced a new curriculum designed to provide all fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade classes a ground-breaking curriculum called *Cross the Way*.

They chose a school in Brooklyn to launch the new curriculum, a school that lost two fifth-grade boys in 2004 who were struck and killed by a truck while walking home from the school.

"*Cross the Way* discusses safely navigating streets --by using language and visuals that are really compelling, even fun," says Commissioner Tottenberg. "Our hope is that students and teachers alike enjoy the curriculum and come away smarter and safer pedestrians."

"Safety comes first, and increasing enforcement, having speed cameras in school zones and providing curriculum to schools ensures that we are taking the necessary steps to prevent students from being injured as they travel to and from school each day," says Chancellor Farina.

Beginning this school year, the *Cross the Way* curriculum will focus on the dangers specifically posed to elementary and middle-school students, who have reached the age when they may be navigating city streets without supervision for the first time.

The curriculum, developed by the New York City Transportation Department's Safety Education and Outreach division with support from the city's Department of Education, has been developed to cover an entire classroom period.

# Tech Program in Toledo Helps Students Find Employment -- and a Career

In 2014, Romules Durant, the superintendent of Ohio's Toledo Public Schools, visited Germany and got an up close and personal look at Germany's lauded apprenticeship system in which major corporations invest millions of dollars into the training of their young workers.

The apprenticeship system in Germany made a long lasting impression on him. "Among people ages 16 to 24, only 7 percent of them are unemployed," he said. "Everyone is contributing to the local economy. They can pay for themselves; choice becomes an option."

## Finding a Career

Creating choices for students is one of the reasons Durant has placed a big emphasis on strengthening Toledo's Career Tech Program. The initiative offers students 31 career paths to explore while still in high school.

One of the students the program has helped was Boston Demecs. As a student at the district's Waite High School, he had trouble adjusting to high school because he wasn't as academically gifted as other classmates.

That is, until he was introduced to the carpentry program at his school as a junior and successfully became part of its School to Work program.

As a senior, Demecs worked with a local company, Lakeside Interior Contractors, helping to build a sports complex for a school. And after his graduation this past June, he was hired by the company and is looking forward to joining the carpentry union and eventually becoming a foreman.

According to district officials, there are 10 contractors that have hired 17 students from the carpentry class at Waite High School within the last five years.



Toledo Schools Superintendent Romules Durant, right, tours a construction site with carpentry teacher Rob Materni, left, and student Boston Demecs.

"We are trying to do a better job of aligning students with their skill set and their career interest, so the emphasis on education is on career development now," said Tom Dimitrew, director of the district's agriculture, construction and engineering technologies in an interview with the *Toledo Blade*.

"We've sort of blindly sent students down a college-only path as a marker of success and that ... is not a guarantee."

It is a message that is being eagerly received by local companies such as Lakeside Interior. Randy Hayes, the company's safety director, is an enthusiastic supporter and firm believer of the district's Career Tech program.

"I was one of those kids, and I found this and I have a nice career," he said in the *Blade*.

## Birmingham Names Interim Leader

Birmingham City Schools recently selected administrator Larry Contri as interim superintendent. Contri, who oversees 12 schools, has worked in the school system for 40 years.

He succeeds Kelley Castlin-Gacutan, who has led the district since July 1, 2015.

Magnet Grants continued from page 7

## Reduced Funding

The \$91 million in magnet-school grants for fiscal year 2016 represents a reduction in funding since fiscal year 2000, when \$110 million was allotted for magnet schools, according to Jeff Simering, director of legislation at the Council of the Great City Schools.

"Money for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program has significantly eroded over the past decade and a half," he points out. "The program hasn't been given priority by Congress and the last two Administrations."

The Council was instrumental in the development of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program in the mid-1980s.

## Great City Grads



Photo Credit: Nadege Green/WLRN

### Brianna Rollins

2016 Gold Medalist in 100-meter hurdles

2009 Graduate

Miami Northwestern Senior High  
Miami-Dade County Public Schools

## Lame Ducks Affect Upcoming School Year

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

It is unusual – though not unprecedented – for Washington’s “lame ducks” to have a significant effect on public schools in the year after they leave town, but they are poised to do so this fall. Despite the fact they are winding down their terms, both the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress and the two-term Obama Administration still have the authority and responsibility to pass a full-year’s worth of appropriations bills to keep the federal government and its programs operating through most of 2017. And the outgoing Obama administration still has the authority and predisposition to finalize regulations governing the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In fact, both the appropriations action by Congress and ESSA regulatory measures by the U.S. Education Department are likely to be finalized before the lame ducks depart Washington at end of this calendar year.

In the first year of ESSA’s implementation beginning with the 2017-18 school year, the annual FY 2017 appropriations for Title I will determine whether most school districts across the country will have their local formula grants cut or not. As the Council of the Great City Schools pointed out both during and after ESSA deliberations, the new law substantially increases a variety of state set-asides that are likely to dig into funding available for local school districts. For instance, the State “school improvement set-aside” was increased from 4 percent to 7 percent of the annual Title I formula grant under the new act. Without a substantial increase in the Title I appropriation for FY 2017 to cover the 3 percent difference, States will siphon-off some \$450 million from school districts nationwide in school year 2017-18. Additionally, ESSA authorizes States to reserve, at their option, another 3 percent—or about \$450 million for “direct services”—further cutting into local funds. The House and Senate appropriations committees have taken initial steps to provide a 3 percent increase in local Title I formula grants to cover part of the loss, but the amount is too small to offset the entire loss of local funding. And, the potential increase is taken from a previous Title I line-item account, which means no real net gain for the Title I program.

Unfortunately, these new state set-asides are among a variety of questionable provisions included in ESSA that the bill’s cheerleaders never bothered to highlight for school officials.



Other major program revisions are in limbo as well, awaiting Education Department regulatory action before the end of the calendar year. The scope of the new ESSA accountability system, including when and how many schools will be identified for comprehensive or targeted school interventions, hangs in the balance. Unbeknownst to many, the new ESSA accountability provisions were quietly designed to result in more schools being identified for interventions than under the waiver-based *No Child Left Behind* accountability system.

What is likely to produce even greater impact, however, are the proposed federal regulations on the revised ESSA “supplement not supplant” provision of Title I. The proposed regulations would direct school districts on how they spend their own state and local education funds in ways that are unprecedented. Ironically, Congress sought to simplify the traditional “activities-based” compliance process when it rewrote the language, but the Department’s proposed regulations subvert that intent by requiring school districts to raise and expend additional state and local funds or redistribute existing funds in an attempt to create greater equity. At this point, Washington lawyers are concocting strategies by which local school systems can avoid the over \$2 billion in costs they will incur in order to comply with the regulations. For some school districts, including many Great City Schools, the pending federal regulations could result in having to shuffle personnel from very poor schools into extremely poor schools in order to minimize compliance costs.

The post-election lame-duck Congress and Administration are not subject to the normal forces of political deliberation. Nonetheless, the impact of their legislative and regulatory decisions in November and December will be felt in the upcoming school year and beyond. Unfortunately, the late-2015 passage of ESSA has placed critical federal education funding and policy decisions in the hands of an outgoing Congress and Administration with few of the normal checks and balances—or any mechanism by which to hold them to account. The rest of us will be forced to pick up the pieces on our own.

## 2016 Blue Ribbon Schools Named

The Young Women’s Leadership Academy in Fort Worth, Texas, is the school system’s first single-gender school. It opened its doors in 2010 to 75 sixth-graders and 75 seventh-graders and graduated its first class of seniors this past June.

The school is also one of 329 public and private schools in the nation to be selected as a 2016 National Blue Ribbon School. The honor is awarded to schools based on overall academic excellence or progress in closing achievement gaps.

In addition to the Young Women’s Leadership Academy, big-city schools in Anchorage, Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago, Fresno, Dallas, Denver, District of Columbia, Greensboro, Hawaii, Houston, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Louisville, Memphis, Miami, Nashville, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, Richmond, Va., San Diego, San Francisco, Tulsa, and a school in Florida’s Broward County school district were named Blue Ribbon schools. New York City had five schools awarded.

Schools were selected for Blue Ribbon distinction in two categories. The first category is “Exemplary High Performing Schools,” for schools who are among their state’s highest performing schools as measured by state assessment tests.

The second category is “Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools,” for schools that 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.

“National Blue Ribbon Schools are proof that we can prepare every child for college and meaningful careers,” said U.S. Secretary John King in a video message to honorees.



## Council Historic Moments

In 1977, the Council of the Great City Schools hired an Army veteran named Michael Casserly as a research assistant after he had been a consultant for the organization in the area of school crime. He was soon moved to the legislative affairs unit.

This was two years before Congress approved the creation of the U.S. Department of Education at the behest of President Jimmy Carter.

Casserly went on to become the Council’s director of legislation and research for 15 years before being named the executive director in 1992.

Called a “crusader” for city school-children by *USA TODAY*, Casserly is believed to be the longest-serving chief among the major national education membership organizations, heading the coalition of 70 urban school districts for almost 25 years.

“When I was CEO of Chicago’s schools, Mike was my advocate in Washington,” said Arne Duncan in 2012 as U.S. secretary of educa-



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, right, participates in 1992 March on Washington to support federal investment in America’s cities and children.

tion. “...Mike has been a courageous leader on raising standards and holding schools accountable.”

Casserly has been with the Council for nearly 40 years of the coalition’s 60-year existence, and has been instrumental in developing the national education policy and research organization to where it is today.

“The Council of the Great City Schools is not here to reflect or perpetuate the inequities under which too many of our urban students suffer, but to overcome them,” he says. “Our next 20 years will be devoted to making sure that all our children have the academic tools for success.”



Michael Casserly





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**Mister Program** *continued from page 2*



said Williams in a story on Jackson Public Schools' website. "As a first-year teacher, it can be overwhelming sometimes, but my principal and colleagues have offered support

and guidance, and I know I will make it."

The Call Me Mister® program started at Clemson University in 2000 and expanded to JSU in 2012 with a five-student cohort. An additional five MISTERS were added in 2013; a total of 20 MISTERS will be trained at JSU by 2017.

The program has received national acclaim for addressing the lack of African American male teachers by investing in male college students who desire to teach.

According to studies, less than 2 percent of public school teachers in the nation are African American men and less than 5 percent of Mississippi's public elementary school teachers are African American men.

## Editor's Note

Darrell Robinson, a content specialist with PR Newswire, now becomes a staff writer for the award-winning *Urban Educator*. He has been named the Council of the Great City Schools' new communications specialist, and will have social-media and other responsibilities.

**Student Poets** *continued from page 8*

out there and share your gifts with others. That's your job now, all right?"

The National Student Poets program was created five years ago and is a partnership among the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Alliance for Young Artists and Writers.

The five poets were selected from a pool of more than 20,000 students who applied through the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. From this pool, 35 semi-finalists were chosen and their work was given to a jury of distinguished artists, who selected the five National Student Poets.

**Opportunity Gap** *continued from page 4*

ignated as a Gold School of Opportunity.

Receiving a silver designation were Boston Arts Academy, New York's East Rockaway High School, California's Oakland International High School, and St. Paul's Washington Technology Magnet School.

The Center hopes that the Schools of Opportunity will serve as models, informing and inspiring the efforts of educators and communities throughout the nation to become high schools that promote excellence as well as equity.

**Trauma Grants** *continued from page 5*

ective Officer Sonja Brookins Santelises. "The grant will deliver the support and services these young people deserve directly in their school communities."

The Chicago school system received more than \$1.2 million to expand the district's capacity to meet behavioral and mental health needs of students in 10 high schools in communities facing violence and civil unrest.