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FOR RELEASE
March 16, 2015

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Urban School Leaders Meet President Obama To Discuss Legislation, Reforms and Challenges

WASHINGTON, March 16 – The Council of the Great City Schools, the nation’s primary coalition of large urban public school systems, today led more than 10 urban school superintendents and board members to a meeting with President Obama at the White House to discuss a range of issues, reforms and challenges aimed at improving American urban public education.

The president heard from urban school leaders on the negative impact the U.S. House of Representatives’ proposed legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act – HR5 – would have on urban schools, which serve a large percentage of minority and disadvantaged students, English language learners and students with disabilities.

“From our perspective, we would rather have no reauthorization at all than a bill that wrecks the momentum we have been creating,” Council Executive Director Michael Casserly told the president. “But we worry that the fragile progress we are making under the initiatives you have launched and other programs would now be put in jeopardy if anything close to the House ESEA bill emerges from Congress.”

Urban-school leaders described academic progress that has been made in their school districts, including the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, increased student participation in Advanced Placement courses, turning around struggling schools, and helping males of color and English language learners succeed.

Superintendent Barbara Jenkins of Florida’s Orange County Public Schools in Orlando told the president that much of urban-school progress that has been created under his leadership would be at risk if a bill is passed that undercuts accountability, annual testing, high college and career-ready standards and equity.

“Now is not the time for Congress to be pulling back on resources that urban schools have used to produce substantial progress,” Casserly stressed.

Other urban-school leaders who met with the president today were Oakland School District board member Jumoke Hinton Hodge, San Francisco School District Superintendent Richard Carranza, District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson, St. Paul Public Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva, Kansas City (Mo.) school board member Airick West, Fresno School District Superintendent Michael Hanson, Cleveland Municipal School District CEO Eric Gordon, Boston Public Schools board member Michael O’Neill, Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Darienne Driver and El Paso School District Superintendent Juan Cabrera.

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