



1956-2006

Celebrating 50 years
of Service to America's
Urban Public Schools



About the Council

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 66 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research, technical assistance and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information, and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth.

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Council of the Great City Schools: A Look Back, A Current Assessment And a Look Ahead

**By
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October 2006



Preface

This history commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Council of the Great City Schools is divided into three major sections. The first section consists of a chronology of selected developments in the Council's history. I have chosen to discuss issues that illustrate the organization's evolution, but the review does not purport to be either scientific or comprehensive. Rather, I culled the brief year-to-year examples of the Council's development subjectively to illustrate the organization's growth through its 50-year history.

At the same time, the examples that I selected reflect the Council's core strengths, namely: being bipartisan, being passionately committed to its unique mission, being transparent and responsive to issues of accountability, and being politically effective in its influence and advocacy for the nation's large city school systems.

The second section of this report provides an analysis of how and why the Council has been able to grow so impressively in stature, respect, and influence, as well as a discussion of the Council's weaknesses.

The third section speculates about the Council's future and its potential for even greater influence in the challenging years ahead.

The author is indebted to the Council board members and staff—both past and present—who generously provided time for interviews. I also thank educators and policymakers outside the Council who provided their perspectives on the organization. I interviewed 35 people, 29 in person, and six by phone. Interviewees are listed in the appendix.

In gathering information for this report, I read Council minutes dating back to 1956 and drew on my own personal experience working for the organization in Chicago from 1964 to 1966. I also read two doctoral dissertations that were written about the Council's early history, which I cite at the end of the narrative.

I would particularly like to thank Executive Director Michael Casserly, Director of Administration Teri ValeCruz, and other Council staff members for supporting this effort and helping me to find relevant materials and contact the individuals interviewed. Thank you Tonya Harris for the outstanding job in laying out and producing this report.

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A Look Back: Section 1

Genesis of an Urban School Coalition

Few periods in modern American history have been so important to the school systems of the nation's big cities as the years between 1954 and 1957. It was during this period that the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *de jure segregation* in *Brown v. Board of Education*. A year after that epochal decision, in 1955, Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi, accelerating the great migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North that started after World War II. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus in December of that year. Levittown-type housing in the nation's suburbs represented 75 percent of all new housing starts in 1955, marking the point when the majority of the nation's largest cities began losing population. And conservative economist Milton Friedman initially proposed the idea of private school vouchers the same year. In 1956, President Eisenhower signed the Interstate Highway Act, providing a ready exit from cities that many African-Americans were flocking to for opportunities and jobs. And a year later, in 1957, a reluctant President Eisenhower called the Army's 101 Airborne division into Little Rock to protect nine black high school students, who would form the vanguard of efforts to make the promise of *Brown* real.



Ben Willis

The fall of 1956 was also the time when Chicago School Superintendent Ben Willis convened a meeting attended by leaders of 12 of the nation's largest city public school systems to discuss the future of vocational education. The Council of the Great City Schools had its genesis at this meeting.

It is lost to history how significantly the tumultuous social and political events of the period shaped the thinking of the Chicago superintendent and provided the impetus for forming an urban school coalition. But the coalesc-

ing of big city school leaders that year would lay the groundwork for an organization that would eventually devote itself to addressing the issues of equity and equality that emerged during this volatile period.

In 1956, offering vocational education in urban high schools was viewed as a critical strategy for providing America's pre-Sputnik-era industrial workforce with talent, particularly in the major metropolitan manufacturing areas of the Northeast and Midwest. Willis earlier had served as school superintendent in Buffalo, then an industrial powerhouse. He had a special interest, as did many of his urban school colleagues, in ensuring that big city vocational programs were compatible with the needs of an ever-changing workforce.

Sargent Shriver, who was serving as president of the Chicago Board of Education, delivered the keynote address at that initial meeting of the big city school leaders in 1956. At the time, Shriver, John F. Kennedy's brother-in-law, was managing Kennedy family business interests in the area. Later, of course, his brother-in-law would become President of the United States and Shriver, himself, would become nationally known for his guiding role in developing the Peace Corps and serving as its first director. In his speech to the gathered educators, Shriver emphasized the importance of standardizing vocational terms, boosting the quality of urban vocational education programs, and eliminating the dichotomy between regular and vocational education tracks.



Sargent Shriver

The meeting was a success, as evidenced by the fact that the participants planned another session in 1957 to which only top-level representatives of school systems from cities with populations of more than 600,000 were invited. These representatives included the superintendent, school board president, and head of vocational education in each of the participating school districts. As an outgrowth of this meeting, the group launched a multicity vocational education project, which was supported by the Chicago-based Sears-Roebuck Foundation. The fledgling group went on to publish a number of well-regarded reports on vocational education and the world of work under the auspices of the Great City Schools Improvement Studies that would help to undergird the rationale for the federal Vocational Education Act of 1963.

It quickly became apparent to the ad hoc coalition of school leaders that

a more formal organization would be needed if city school systems were going to address the broader set of educational, social, and economic issues that were becoming increasingly evident to urban educators. The Council evolved, then, from a series of periodic meetings driven by a single district and leader (Chicago and Superintendent Willis) on a single issue (vocational education) into an influential national organization that would focus on raising urban student achievement, improving school leadership and management, and boosting public confidence in big city public schools.

As early as 1956, this ad hoc coalition took the steps necessary to ensure its sustainability. It formed an executive committee to plan for future activities, created bylaws, and offered membership to school systems in cities with populations of 600,000 and above. The group also stipulated that each city would be represented on the board of directors by either the superintendent or a school board member—making the governance structure unique in including both board members and administrators under the same roof.

In January 1959, the group identified a broad range of issues on which its leadership would focus, including demographic changes, fiscal constraints, curriculum needs, teacher recruitment, aging physical facilities, and urban economic development. That year, the group adopted the Great Cities Program for School Improvement as its official name.

The new entity's emergence was enhanced by a series of grants that the Ford Foundation made to 11 cities in the late 1950s and early 1960s to help educate disadvantaged urban children. This initiative was known as the Gray Area Projects and helped make the unique educational problems of the large cities more visible nationally. The projects were not coordinated centrally by the budding organization, but representatives of the participating cities frequently met at Council gatherings. This coming together under a single umbrella helped to solidify the new group's unique role in providing opportunities for educational leaders from the nation's largest school districts to share information and discuss issues of common concern.

The organization was formally incorporated in 1961 as the Research Council of the Great Cities Program for School Improvement. Its earlier name, Great Cities Program for School Improvement, was now an interesting historical footnote but was to be echoed in yet another name change later on. The inclusion of the term "research" in the new name reportedly arose because of the organization's interest in research as an important tool for

school improvement, but it also reflected a practical response to a Pennsylvania regulation that prohibited school systems from joining organizations other than for research purposes. The 14 charter members of the Research Council were Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

The primary purposes of the organization, as articulated in the articles of incorporation, were “to study the unique problems” faced by the Great Cities in their efforts to meet the comprehensive public school needs of urban citizens and to coordinate projects designed “to provide solutions to these problems.” In addition, the bylaws of the new group contained a provision (which was to remain a unique feature of the organization) that ensured that its leadership would be constituted of both school board members and superintendents. At the time, however, each city school district was repre-



First Council Executive Director Fred Bertolaet and Council staff member Michael Usdan in 1964.

sented on the board by either the superintendent or a board member, but not both. Once the organization was incorporated, it leased space for its offices in the headquarters of the Chicago Board of Education and hired full-time staff. In 1962, Fred Bertolaet became the first executive director of the newly chartered Council.

Four critical areas of interest emerged for the organization immediately following incorporation: (1) the special needs of the educationally and socially disadvantaged, (2) vocational education, (3) fiscal policies, and (4) teacher education. The Council developed activities around each of these areas, enabling the organization to define its roles in identifying common problems, pooling resources, and taking collective action designed specifically on behalf of students in the nation’s largest cities.

In these early days, the Council gained national visibility by writing papers and reports, particularly on vocational education, and serving as a sounding board for the cities. The new visibility began to reach maturity in 1962 when President Kennedy appointed Council President Ben Willis to chair the national Panel of Consultants on Vocational Education. The panel’s recommendations would be influential in shaping the Vocational Education Act.

As the 1960s evolved and the civil rights movement developed greater momentum, the Council responded. The group's destiny, in fact, was to be intertwined with the civil rights issues of the day, as its member districts became the epicenter of volatile school desegregation struggles in the courtrooms and on the streets. Accordingly, the Council's agenda broadened beyond vocational education. The organization's reports, testimony, and meetings on the special needs of disadvantaged urban students helped to shape the rationale for creating the Office of Civil Rights and the Office of Economic Opportunity and enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This work also helped pave the way for the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965.

The ESEA, in particular, broke new ground, as the federal government embarked on its most significant involvement in public education up until that time. Dozens of Council board members and superintendents testified at congressional hearings and helped to build the momentum for ESEA's early and decisive passage. The extensive testimony by leaders of urban school districts also helped target federal Title I dollars on the poorest communities, a need that the organization would emphasize over the years in subsequent reauthorizations of the Act.

The role that the Council played in the passage of ESEA and other Great Society programs made it clear to the membership that there was strength in alliance. This involvement in the most significant federal education legislation of the day and the accompanying national visibility dramatically changed the Council's history. From then on, the Council's research efforts on common problems would be accompanied by public advocacy on the Washington legislative scene aimed at pushing for federal help in addressing the special financial and program needs of the nation's large city school systems.

The mid-60s were watershed years for the Council on the national scene. ESEA would have passed Congress without the Council's support, but the organization played a significant role in documenting and articulating the needs of urban school students and ensuring that these needs were heard and considered. Council members and staff worked closely with key legislative leaders and the U.S. Office of Education, providing data that were unavailable elsewhere. At least part of the development of the original Title I formula, for example, was predicated on data provided by the Council on the number of children in households receiving welfare payments.

The Council's growing role in the federal legislative process in the 1960s hastened the organization's move from Chicago to Washington, D.C. That move took place in 1967. A year later, Executive Vice President Alva Ditrack closed the Chicago office.

The Second Decade

The summer of 1966 marked another turning point in the Council's history as two of its founders left the group. Ben Willis, the Chicago school superintendent, and Sam Brownell, the veteran Detroit school superintendent, had served as the Council's president and vice president, respectively, since the organization's inception a decade earlier. Willis was the Council's driving force and prime mover, while the highly respected Brownell, a former U.S. Commissioner of Education, provided seasoned and thoughtful leadership. Brownell's brother, Herbert Brownell, was Attorney General of the United States under President Eisenhower and played a pivotal role in convincing the President to send federal troops into Little Rock to enforce the desegregation of Central High School. In addition, Executive Director Fred Bertolaet left the Council in the fall of 1966 to accept a professorship at the University of Michigan and was replaced by staff member Carl Thornblad. With these changes at the top, the organization's compass changed significantly and tensions in the membership became more evident.

Some school board members began to feel dominated by the superintendents on the Council and pushed to assume larger leadership roles after Willis left. In response, the Council instituted an annually rotating leadership and broadened its membership into different sections of the country. Periodically, racial tensions within the group also sprang up. There had been, in fact, only one African-American on the first board of directors that was established after the Council was chartered in 1961. Since there were virtually no minority superintendents in these early days, school boards were the only source of African-American or Hispanic leaders. Ultimately, the executive committee was doubled in size (with board members in the majority) to accommodate these racial concerns. The Rev. Darneau Stewart of Detroit, the first African-American to chair the board of directors, was also the first school board member to serve in that capacity. He assumed this leadership position in 1969.

The partnership between school board members and superintendents, with leadership of the Council rotating annually between the two groups, was unique to the organization. No other national education group crossed constituency lines in the way that the Council did from the beginning. This arrangement remains a continuing strength of the organization. It allows for stronger political connections, since most board members continue to be elected. It facilitates ongoing and confidential dialogue between board members and superintendents. It provides greater stability in leadership because of the longer tenure of many board members. And it keeps the organization from evolving into another single constituency organization of superintendents or board members.

The Council's agenda continued to expand through the late 1960s as it addressed the same controversial and seemingly intractable social and economic issues that challenged its membership—collective bargaining, financial inequities, school integration, busing, aging facilities, job training, and urban poverty.



In 1970, the organization changed its name to the Council of the Great City Schools, removing "Research" from the title. The thinking at the time was that "research" conveyed too narrow a sense of the organization's multifaceted mission and role. Indeed, at a 1970 meeting of the group, the Council adopted "advocacy" as its working and operational focus. This shift in emphasis reflected a deliberate decision on the Council's part to project the special needs of urban schools on a national scale and to enhance the group's capacity to exchange information between and among the member districts.

This reassessment of goals and priorities led to a reorganization of the Council's staff to reflect three major objectives: (1) information exchange, (2) staff services to members, and (3) the national projection of policy viewpoints. In 1971, Sam Husk was hired from the Office of Economic Opportunity to push the public advocacy agenda of the Council and Jack Hornback, former superintendent of the San Diego public school system, was appointed the group's executive vice president. (A list of former Council chief executives can be found in the appendix.)

The Council also changed the requirements for membership in the organization in the early 1970s. Under the original requirements, each city represented in the organization had to have an overall population of 600,000 or a student enrollment of 90,000. The result was that membership was limited to school systems in 20 cities. The new requirements opened up the organization to a greater range of communities. Now, communities of at least 300,000 people and with a student enrollment of at least 70,000 were eligible for membership.

By the early 1970s, some people raised concerns that the Council had become too dependent on “soft money” and was too project-oriented. As more emphasis was put on advocacy, communications between member districts, and data collection, foundation funding dried up, forcing reductions in staff. Conflicts also emerged about the optimum size of the organization, an issue that persists to this day. Most of the representatives of member districts believed that the Council would be stronger and more cohesive if membership was limited. The consensus was that a smaller entity would facilitate closer relationships and retain a common focus on urban schools. Virtually no one wanted the Council to emulate the much larger national educational organizations of superintendents and board members.

During this period, the Council increased its attention to more systematic data gathering among its member districts. It also established consultative services and study teams to enhance communications and information sharing. And, increasingly, the organization became a resource to its members in areas such as curriculum and instruction, administration and personnel, facilities, school-community relations, special education, finance, and legislative relations.

The evolving and proactive nature of the Council was illustrated in 1972 when the organization mobilized its legislative liaison network and threatened to file suit unless the federal government used 1970 census data in determining eligibility for federal education funds. In 1972, the Council also joined court cases that sought to reform and equalize school finance formulas, and it advocated for more urban involvement in the National Institute of Education and other federal research and demonstration programs.

In 1973, the Council conducted a needs-assessment among the member districts and identified student achievement and the financing of urban

school districts as top priorities. The organization also set up task forces in finance and early childhood education and launched projects in teacher education, student involvement, reading, and vocational education. At the same time, the Council urged its staff to strengthen the organization's financial position and legislative thrust.

In 1974, Jack Hornback left the Council and Sam Husk became executive vice president. Milton Bins, a former official with Harcourt-Brace,



Sam Husk, Detroit Superintendent Art Jefferson, and New York City Chancellor Richard R. Green

was brought on as a senior associate and Kristi Hanson as legislative specialist. The organization had 24 member districts that year, but it continued to struggle financially as foundation and government projects evaporated and its legislative agenda took on a higher priority.

Legislative advocacy continued to take on greater importance for the organization, as reflected in the Council's establishment of a new standing committee on legislative advocacy that was embedded in the organization's governance structure and in the regional legislative conferences that it convened throughout the first half of the 1970s.

With a staff of sometimes no more than four or five people throughout the decade and a budget that was a constant source of angst to the organization's fiscal stewards, the Council remained involved in conferences and projects that dealt with an array of major education issues. These issues included declining enrollments, school violence, education of disabled students, school finance, declining test scores, youth employment, and the need for common databases. Despite this involvement and the continuing relevance of the Council's mission, the end of the Council's second decade found the organization in financial difficulty.

The Next Fifteen Years

In the 1970s, the Council of the Great City Schools had limited staff capacity, a weak financial outlook, and uncertain prospects. Membership had stagnated at 24 districts and morale problems began to beset the organization. It was not always clear that the group could meet payroll, and lines of credit or loans from foundations and banks were sometimes necessary to keep the organization afloat. One veteran staff member characterized the period as “living in poverty.” Indeed, fiscal issues plagued the Council throughout the 1980s as well.

The organization made some significant staff changes in the late 1970s. Michael Casserly was hired in 1977 as a research assistant after having consulted for the organization in the area of school crime. He was soon moved to the legislative affairs unit, when Hanson left the Council, but retained his research responsibilities.



Michael Casserly

In 1979, Congress approved the creation of the cabinet-level U.S. Department of Education at the behest of President Jimmy Carter. But, the views of Council members, who were almost equally divided between those having American Federation of Teachers (AFT)-affiliated unions (which opposed the creation of the department) and those with National Education Association (NEA)-affiliated unions (which favored the creation of the department), were divided. Some members feared greater federal intrusion in local school affairs; others welcomed it. The Council tilted against creating the department, but did not play a proactive role in the policy debates.

The organization was also involved in various youth employment projects in the late 1970s that were funded by the Department of Labor, and played a role in support of the youth employment legislation developed by the office of Vice President Walter Mondale, who headed the initiative.

As the organization entered the 1980s, it continued to be involved in a variety of small-scale projects and operated at a less visible and intense level than it had in its early days. The Council focused on international student exchanges, special education, single parents, dropout prevention, computer

technology, economic and human capital development, and the need for standardized data.

Escalating demographic changes in member districts continued to profoundly influence the Council's priorities and activities. The burgeoning Latino population introduced new educational challenges, including bilingual education. And issues such as magnet schools, promotion and retention policies, early childhood, and postsecondary access took on more prominence.

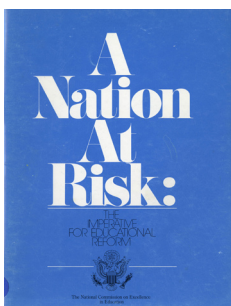
The early 1980s, however, were also marked by a string of legislative successes spearheaded by the Council. Between 1981 and 1984, the organization was instrumental in blocking President Reagan's proposal to consolidate Title I and the Education of All Handicapped Act (the precursor to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA]) and change them into block grant programs. The Council tied up a House-Senate conference committee for months over the funding of the Title I concentration grants. The Council also played a central and strategic role in bottling up the President's tuition tax credit bill in the Senate Finance Committee, then helping to defeat it on the Senate floor. In addition, the Council led a bipartisan coalition to write and approve the Magnet Schools of America Act, and it spearheaded an effort to target aid from the federal Vocational Education Act into urban schools. The next year, 1985, the Council and the Chicago schools would team up to write and spur passage of the federal Dropout Prevention Demonstration Act.



U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos at Council meeting in Miami in 1989.

These successes paved the way for the Council to take a strong role in targeting federal aid under the new Drug Free Schools Act and the Math and Science Education Act, and to initiate such legislative packages as the Teacher Professional Development Act, Smart Start, and the Urban Schools of America (USA) Act in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the outcome of these efforts was mixed, the Council perceived its role as initiating federal legislation rather than simply reacting to the proposals of others.

The nationally visible legislative activities also spurred an increase in the organization's membership, which jumped to 32 member districts in 1983



and 44 member districts by 1988. Further membership increases were spurred in 1983 when the Council amended its eligibility rules to allow school districts in cities with populations of 250,000 or enrollments of 35,000 students to join the organization.

In 1982, the Council made another important hire in Teri ValeCruz, who would eventually form an administrative team with Terry Tabor and Alisa Adams that would help the organization strengthen its finances and elevate the quality of the growing number of Council meetings and conferences.

In 1983, an event occurred that presented a huge challenge to public education, particularly in the cities—the publication of the U.S. Department of Education’s *A Nation at Risk* report. The report, which harshly criticized the quality of public education, was a landmark development in American education and it received widespread attention throughout the country. The report’s powerful rhetoric suggested that the faltering of the country’s schools amounted to “unilateral disarmament” in an increasingly competitive global economy.

A Nation at Risk ignited the education reform movement that continues to this day. Business groups such as the Business Roundtable, the Committee for Economic Development, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce took on the issue of public education in unprecedented ways, and major associations of political leaders such as the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures followed suit. The governors’ report, *Time for Results*, was particularly influential, prompting the first President Bush to convene an historic education summit at the University of Virginia in 1989 at which six national education goals were formulated. The Council attended the summit and responded by releasing its report, *Results in the Making*, describing what big city schools were doing to meet the national goals.



President George H. W. Bush addresses historic education summit in Charlottesville, Va.

These national developments placed new pressures on the Council and other education associations. Educators and their organizations were clearly entering a new era of accountability and the Council was not immune from this trend. The organization had seen periods of dissatisfaction among factions of its membership since the late 1960s. But rumbling began to reach a greater level of intensity in the late-1980s as some members of the group feared becoming little more than a narrow “club” that could not respond to growing public pressures for better results and greater accountability.

Some members of the organization felt that Council staff was not providing strong enough leadership in areas other than legislation at a time when public education was being subjected to such intense scrutiny. These apprehensions led the Council to commission a study in 1989 by the McKenzie Group titled “A Performance and Efficiency Study of the Council of Great City Schools.” In a survey of the organization’s membership, which was conducted as part of the study, representatives of the Council’s member districts indicated that the value of the group rested in its ability to exercise its collective political strength. Survey respondents also viewed the Council’s work in promoting collaboration, networking, and information sharing as particularly useful.

Still, approximately one-third of the membership expressed disaffection with the Council. Critics claimed that the group was focused too narrowly on project-like work, was too inward-looking, and was too parochial to be effective, contending that the organization was not living up to its potential and was not active enough in national debates about educational reform. In other words, critics worried that the Council was too oriented toward the status quo at a time of dynamic change in public education. At the same time, members praised the Council’s lobbying and legislative efforts. Paradoxically, perhaps, they were also worried that these efforts were coming to define the organization at the expense of other needs in research, communications, conferences, and other functions. The McKenzie study set the stage for a substantial turnover of staff in 1991.

This period was capped by a 1991 National Urban School Summit in Washington, D.C., convened by the Council, organized in part by the McKenzie Group, and attended by representatives of the Council’s member districts and many of the nation’s leading education policy leaders. The summit laid out a series of National Urban Education Goals, a research agenda, and the proposed Urban Schools of America bill.

The Last Fifteen Years

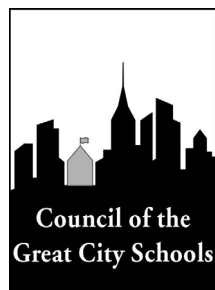


Philadelphia Superintendent
Connie Clayton

The findings of the McKenzie Group's study provided support to those who advocated for major leadership changes within the Council. In 1991, both the executive director and deputy executive director left the Council after almost two decades of service. In January 1992, Connie Clayton, the Philadelphia superintendent and Council chair, appointed Michael Casserly, who had served for many years as head of the group's legislative and research units, as interim executive director. And the Council launched a national search for permanent leadership. At the time, the Council had 47 members.

Despite the continued search for top leadership, the Council moved quickly to resolve some of the members' dissatisfaction with the organization and to broaden the group's outreach with a more focused communications program. The Council initiated a newsletter called *The Urban Educator*; it changed the group's logo; and it began to produce annual reports. The Council recruited Henry Duvall from the national office of the American Red Cross to serve as Communications Director. And the Council made an explicit effort to accentuate the positive and communicate successes but, at the same time, to provide a more balanced and credible assessment of the serious challenges facing urban schools.

Late in 1992, the Council issued a first-ever report card, *National Urban Education Goals: Baseline Indicators 1990-91*, on the quality of urban education in the member districts. This unprecedented document—the first to publish disaggregated test scores—triggered widespread media attention, drew a favorable editorial from the *Washington Post*, and helped the organization earn plaudits for its transparency in revealing hitherto unrevealed data. Three examples of a new proactive style in Council communications included a blistering letter by Casserly to the editor of the *Chicago Sun Times* on what the Council saw as misuse of its data, an opinion piece by Casserly published by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in the aftermath of the Los Angeles race riots that called the public's attention to the fact that none



of the schools in the riot-torn area had been damaged, and a November 4, 1992, letter to President-elect Bill Clinton challenging him to begin addressing the needs of the nation's urban schools.

In January 1993, Richard Riley, the new Secretary of Education under President Clinton, met with the Council's executive committee in his first meeting with a national education organization. Every U.S. Secretary of Education from Shirley Hofstadter and William Bennett through Rod Paige (a former Houston superintendent and officer in the Council) and Margaret Spellings, in fact, has met with the organization and its leadership.



U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley

Also in 1993, the Council made another important change in its membership criteria, deciding that henceforth, the largest school district in each state regardless of size would be eligible for membership. This change led to the entry of school districts from such cities as Providence, Des Moines, and Salt Lake City into the membership and broadened the scope of the organization's political reach in Congress.

In March 1993, Casserly was appointed executive director of the Council after having served in the post for a year on an interim basis.



Dan Rather moderates Council Town Hall Meeting.

The Council's visibility continued to grow during the 1990s. In May, 1992, the organization and the National Science Foundation convened a major conference on improving math and science instruction in the nation's urban schools. And, in October 1993, the organization convened a highly visible National Town Hall Meeting on school safety and violence. CBS anchor Dan Rather moderated the meeting. A town-hall style event has since become a feature of all annual meetings

and has been moderated over the years by such news luminaries as Carole Simpson, Carl Rowan, and Clarence Page.

Attendance began to increase dramatically at the Council's annual meetings and legislative conferences as staff sought to make these gatherings more interesting and relevant for participants. Increasingly, the Council chose speakers for these events who could provide broad perspectives on national, political, and media issues and who could generate heightened visibility for the organization.

During this period, the organization also formed the Council of the

Great City Colleges of Education—to address teacher and administrator recruitment and professional development issues. Phil Rusche, Dean of the College of Education at the University of Toledo spearheaded the effort, and served as the group's chair from 1992 to 2000. Shirley Schwartz, an administrator and professor at Trinity College in Washington, D.C., was recruited in 1995 to staff this group.



U.S. Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, left, with Philadelphia Superintendent Connie Clayton and Joseph Fernandez.

Among other developments in 1993 and 1994, the Council experimented with having a standing president, in addition to having an annually rotating chair. The Council recruited Joseph Fernandez, (former Dade County superintendent and New York City chancellor) to serve in the role, but the position

was reconsidered after two years and Fernandez returned to Florida. During his short tenure, however, Fernandez helped to raise the organization's public profile, in particular, when the National Press Club invited him to serve as a featured luncheon speaker in 1993. It marked the first time that such an honor had been bestowed upon a Council leader and Fernandez delivered his remarks to a packed house of influential journalists and association leaders.

The period between 1993 and 1996, then, was marked by efforts to stabilize the organization after years of turmoil, raise the dues levels, hire new staff, and experiment with differing mixes of programs and initiatives. Forrest Rieke, Portland school board member, and Norbert Schuerman, Omaha superintendent, played key leadership roles in the organization during this transitional period.



Portland School Board Member Forrest Rieke

Late in 1993, Robert Carlson, a former official in the office of the D.C. school superintendent, was appointed as the Council's director of management services, with the responsibility of developing partnerships with the private sector and introducing relevant technologies into the organization and its member districts. The Council recruited Cecilia Ottinger to serve as director of research and, in 1994, Jeff Simering, a former Chicago school lobbyist, was appointed director of legislation.

The period was also marked by a sharp uptick in "job alike" meetings of the members' line administrators, once the sole province of the research directors and legislative liaisons. Eventually, the Council would hold annual meetings of member school districts' chief operating officers, chief finance officers, human resource and personnel directors, technology and management information services directors, legislative liaisons, research directors, public relations officers, chief academic officers, and other school system specialists.

A considerable amount of time and energy during the period was also devoted to technology and partnership efforts. The Council was one of the first national education organizations with a site on the World Wide Web in 1992. In October 1993, the organization sponsored its first satellite teleconference, which focused on management and leadership training for urban school leaders. An online partnership with United Press International followed this event. The Council launched the National Urban Learning Network in 1995 at a Smithsonian Institution event attended by then-Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Librarian of Congress James Billington. "Technology alone cannot bring literacy or solve the nation's educational problems. But if we do not use technology to make more knowledge accessible to all Americans, we will have forfeited an enormous opportunity to move this country forward," said Billington at the event.

Subsequently, the Council began devoting a portion of its annual fall conferences to technology challenges. The efforts eventually led the organization to take a leading role in translating a small provision of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 into the e-rate program, the federal program to provide assistance to wire schools for Internet access, and to advocate successfully for targeting aid on the nation's poorest schools. The Council's technology manager, Mark Root, held the first meetings of Council technology directors and officials from the Federal Communications Commission, sessions that continue today under Legislative Manager Manish Naik.

The Council also worked with Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., to recruit more minority teachers into urban schools, an effort that continues with funding from the Corporation for National Service. In the summer of 1995, the Council convened a special meeting with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to address health and nutrition issues among urban schoolchildren. And in 1996, the organization published *Becoming the Best: Standards and Assessment Development in the Great City Schools*, which outlined and affirmed efforts by the school systems in major cities to raise standards and align assessments. Urban school leaders such as Fernandez, Richard Wallace (Pittsburgh superintendent), and John Murphy (Charlotte-Mecklenburg superintendent), in fact, were early pioneers in the standards movement.

Legislative advocacy continued to be a strong suit of the organization during the early 1990s. The Council played a major role in the formulation and passage of the Goals 2000 Act and the Improving America's Schools Act under President Clinton. The organization also prompted Senator Carol Moseley Braun (D-Ill.) to request the General Accounting Office



Sen. Carol Moseley Braun at Council Legislative Conference.

(GAO) to conduct a national study of repairs that needed to be made to school infrastructure. The GAO estimated that it would cost \$112 billion to make these needed repairs.

In its legislative advocacy, the Council took a decidedly nonpartisan stance. For example, it joined the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the American Association of School Administrators, and the National School Boards Association in protesting Republican-proposed budget cuts. It also assailed the Clinton administration in 1995 for diluting federal education aid and rolling back “opportunity to learn” standards.

In January of 1996, the Council celebrated its 40th anniversary. In that year, the organization was composed of 50 member districts serving 5.8 million students, 42 percent of whom were African-American, 29 percent Hispanic, 23 percent white, and 6 percent Asian-American. It was also the year in which the Council revamped its fall conference to place more emphasis on student achievement, systemic reform, governance, teacher re-

cruitment, and dropout prevention. The conference has grown in size since then but retains the structure developed that year.

The mid 1990s saw the emergence of two trends that would have a big impact on the nation's urban school systems. One was the rise of big city mayoral interest in education, as Chicago Mayor Richard Daley took control of his city's schools. The second was the appointment of nontraditional superintendents such as John Stanford (Seattle) and Peter Hutchison (Minneapolis) to take the helm of big city school systems.



Seattle Superintendent John Stanford unveils the Marshall Plan at a press conference.

Another turning point for the Council came in 1997. Three critical events occurred that year that solidified the organization's standing as an independent and aggressive leader in education reform. In March, the group called for an urban school "Marshall Plan" (named for Thurgood Marshall rather than George Marshall) to address funding inequities, plant modernization needs, and greater federal investment in long-deferred urban school programs. The Council had no way to fund the plan on its own, but the call served as a rallying point for the cities and a reminder to the country of unmet urban needs.

The second initiative that year was the Council's vigorous endorsement of President Clinton's proposal to institute Voluntary National Tests. The organization saw the proposed reading and math tests as a way of demonstrating its commitment to a skeptical public that urban schools were thoroughly committed to high standards and were willing to be assessed on these standards. Fifteen Council member districts stood with the President at a White House event and volunteered to take the test, if approved by Congress, but the legislation to institute the tests was defeated in the House of Representatives. Nonetheless, the act of supporting the idea of such tests marked a singular point of pride for the organization and reflected a desire



President Clinton meets Council staff at Voluntary National Test event.

for greater transparency, accountability, and academic results. In introducing President Clinton that day in 1997, Stan Paz (El Paso superintendent) said, “Let the thought that urban children cannot achieve die with our presence here today.”



Council Chair and Toledo board member Wilma Brown opens summit.

The third seminal event that year for the organization involved its partnership with the U.S. Conference of Mayors in convening the nation’s first summit of big city mayors and school superintendents. The meeting, which was held in Detroit, attracted mayors from the host city and from Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, and many other cities. The summit drew favorable news coverage,

including an opinion piece written by nationally syndicated columnist David Broder, who praised the session as a turning point in big city political cooperation. “What started here can only bring hope to a generation of youngsters—and to the cities where they live,” said Broder in his column.

1997 ended with the recruitment of Sharon Lewis from the Detroit Public Schools to serve as the Council’s research director.

In 1998, Waldermar Rojas, San Francisco’s superintendent of schools, became the first Hispanic chair of the Council. The Council, that year also, saw the first gains in student achievement since the dawn of the standards movement, and began to talk about these gains publicly as signs of progress.

That same year, the Council developed its technical assistance teams, later called Strategic Support Teams. The effort began with a request for assistance from then-superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools, Arlene Ackerman, who later served as superintendent of the San Francisco schools and chair of the Council. The Council responded by marshalling senior managers from the membership to review the D.C. school system’s personnel, finance, special education, facilities, communica-



San Francisco Superintendent Waldermar “Bill” Rojas

tions, legal, and management information services operations. Cleveland school superintendent Barbara Byrd-Bennett later made a similar request. Thus was born a service that would evolve into one of the Council's most widely heralded and successful programs. Indeed, by 2006, the Council had provided some 140 teams to about 35 member districts under the banner of "Cities Building Cities." Robert Carlson has led the management teams as part of this initiative and Ricki Price-Baugh, hired in 2005 as the Council's first director of academic achievement, has led many of the instructional teams.

The operational teams would eventually be put to unusual effect in the fall of 2005, when the Council led a group of facilities experts from the membership into New Orleans days after Hurricane Katrina to assess the damage caused to the city's school buildings.

The 1998-1999 period also saw the Council initiate a series of task forces to address issues in bilingual education and school finance, followed up by task forces focusing on student achievement and achievement gaps, leadership and governance, and professional development. The task forces came to define the organization's priorities and functions. In 2005, the Council supplemented the achievement gaps task force, under the leadership of D.C. superintendent and Council chair Clifford Janey, with a subcommittee focusing on secondary school reforms.

The Council continued to produce new and innovative reports during the period, including analyses of school funding adequacy in New York City and Philadelphia conducted by research specialist Adriane Williams. These analyses formed the basis for the Council's participation in subsequent legal suits that pressed for more adequate funding of urban schools. The Council also prepared two reports on class-size reduction in the Great City

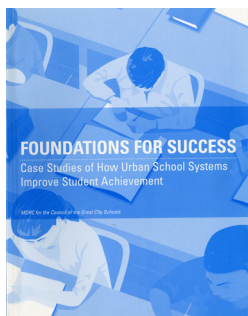
Schools that caught the attention of President Clinton, and were released by the President in separate events at the White House in 1999 and 2000. "The report is more unequivocal proof that cutting class size and investing in teacher quality does produce results, whether the schools are urban or



Michael Casserly, left, and Manish Naik, manager of legislative services, flank President Clinton at the White House before the President releases the Council report on class size reduction.

rural, large or small,” said Clinton at a Rose Garden press event in 2000.

The dawn of the new century also saw the Council take the lead in writing guides on managing the Y2K problem that the U.S. Department of Education published and circulated to school personnel nationwide. In 2000, the organization also forged a research partnership with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. And the Council sponsored joint conferences with the U.S. Department of Education on high school reform, student achievement, and ending social promotions.



This later conference set the stage for a new period in the Council’s history, one focused on helping the organization’s membership to raise student achievement. That focus, of course, continues to drive the Council’s work today. The organization sought support from the U.S. Department of Education and the Ford Foundation to determine why and how some of the member districts were making faster academic progress than were others. The study, *Foundations for Success*, done in conjunction with the research firm MDRC and eventually published in 2002, became one of the Council’s best-known and most influential reports.

In 2000, the Council took three other steps that continued to build its reputation as a proponent of reform and an advocate on behalf of urban schools. It prepared a letter to the “next president” calling on the winner of the election to embrace a series of reforms to assist urban schools in raising student achievement. The letter was signed by Rod Paige, among others, who was serving as the Council’s secretary/treasurer at the time and would be named later that year as U.S. Secretary of Education. The Council held a reception at its Washington offices over inaugural weekend in January 2001 to introduce Paige to many of the nation’s education leaders.



U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige addresses Council reception on inaugural weekend in 2001.

Late in 2000, the Council also approached the National Assessment Governing Board with an unusual proposal to permit city school systems

that volunteered to be oversampled on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to allow education leaders and the public to get comparable city-by-city achievement data. Six city school districts initially responded and 11 now participate, including many that had stepped up to volunteer for President Clinton's Voluntary National Tests in 1997.

Also in 2000, the Council began collecting state assessment data on its member school districts. In 2001, the Council published a compilation of these test score data for the first time under the title *Beating the Odds* and has continued to release this report annually since. *Beating the Odds* shows steady gains in student achievement across the member districts, and these results have been corroborated by results from the NAEP assessments as well. Indeed, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings described the progress as an “educational rebirth” in the cities.



U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

The publication of the state and national data on urban school achievement put the Council on the leading edge of efforts to demonstrate the commitment of big city school systems to high standards, higher student achievement, and greater transparency. It also allowed the organization to demonstrate urban school progress on benchmarks that the nation was now using to measure gains.

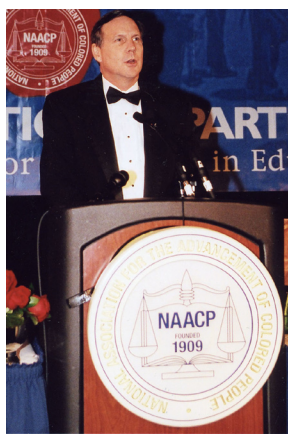
The following year, 2001, saw the Council assisting the New York City Schools on the heels of the 9/11 terrorist attacks with technical assistance, connections with the Department of Education, and experts from other cities with experience with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In 2002, the Council published its long-awaited *Foundations for Success* study and took the unusual step of giving its qualified support to President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind* legislation, the only national education association to give the law any measure of support. The law represented a substantial shift in federal education policy toward accountability for student achievement gains, reductions in achievement gaps, and student choice. The Council faced an important choice as NCLB headed to the floors of the House and Senate: it could support the legislation because of its emphasis on raising student achievement or it could oppose the bill

because its technical provisions were poorly calibrated. The Council chose student achievement—a position that was consistent with the organization’s commitment to high standards and expectations for urban children, even when the organization later became critical of the way that the Bush administration was implementing the law.

The Council’s support for the law also helped the organization broadcast to the American public the achievement gains that urban schools were making. “In the first year under *No Child Left Behind*, students in large urban schools made strong advancements in reading and math. The Council of the Great City Schools found that 47 percent of fourth graders scored at or above proficient in reading, a gain of almost five points from 2002. More than 50 percent of the students tested scored at or above proficient in math—a seven-point gain,” said First Lady Laura Bush in a speech.

The combination of steps—*Beating the Odds*, *Foundations for Success*, the Trial Urban NAEP, *No Child Left Behind*, and the group’s Strategic Support Teams—put the Council of the Great City Schools in the vanguard of national education organizations supporting greater accountability and attention to student achievement.



Michael Casserly accepts the Daisy Bates Award from the NAACP on behalf of the Council.

The Council in 2002, received the NAACP’s Daisy Bates Award for its professional advocacy on behalf of urban children. The award was named for the civil rights leader who had led the Little Rock Nine in their efforts to desegregate that city’s schools in 1957.

After the publication of *Foundations for Success*, the Council began translating the study’s findings into lessons that the organization’s Strategic Support Teams would use to help member districts requesting instructional support to raise student achievement. Districts accepting the help have seen substantial gains in academic performance. By 2004, the Council began to accelerate its efforts to tell the public about the progress that many urban school systems were making. Under the direction of communications staffers Duvall and Tonya Harris, the Council launched a series of television and radio public service announcements (PSAs) designed to shatter

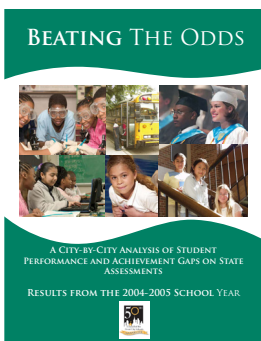
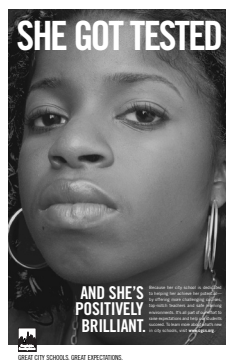
public stereotypes about urban schools and urban schoolchildren and highlight achievement gains they had achieved. The three ads developed by the Council—“Thank You,” “Tested,” and “Pop Quiz”—had been seen more than 250 million times by 2006, giving the organization unprecedented national visibility and putting its PSAs in the top 16 percent of all ads in the country.

By 2004, the Council had seen its membership grow to 66 districts, attendance at its meetings and conferences reach record levels, and staff members increased to 20. Large numbers of smaller cities were also seeking membership, prompting the organization’s executive committee to revisit membership criteria and ultimately deciding to leave them unchanged. The organization also held a national summit that year in Chicago on urban high school transformation.

Research again played a major role in determining the Council’s priorities in 2006. The Council’s senior staff met with the Board for Education Sciences, the policymaking body for the recently created Institute for Education Sciences (IES). The purpose of the meetings was to articulate a bold new federal and national research strategy to help urban schools improve student achievement, including student achievement at the secondary school level. The Council also hired Jason Snipes, lead author on the *Foundations for Success* study, to replace the retiring Sharon Lewis as

research director. The Council also launched an effort to develop indicators to measure the operational practices of its member districts. And it filed an *amicus* brief in the U.S. Supreme Court—with Legislative Counsel Julie Wright Halbert—on behalf of two of its member districts, Louisville and Seattle, which were making limited use of race to ensure desegregated schools. Finally, in 2006, the Council released the sixth edition of its *Beating the Odds* series, which for the first time, showed significant gains in reading and math performance

by students in its member districts on both state assessments and on the National Assessment of Education Progress.



A Current Assessment: Section 2

Strengths of the Council

As the Council's history shows, the organization has increased its influence over the years, although sometimes in fits and starts, and now plays a leading role in the reform and improvement of urban education nationally. This section focuses on some of the reasons for this success.

The Council is widely regarded as the premier voice for the unique needs of large urban school districts. The organization also provides opportunities for leaders of these districts to discuss their special and common problems candidly, allowing them to learn from each other and to do so in a family-like setting, away from the public fray. In addition to the networking opportunities that the Council affords, the 66 districts that now form the Council of the Great City Schools have found membership to be valuable because of the group's legislative successes in acquiring additional resources and in informing the federal legislative process.

Numerous people interviewed for this report, moreover, believe that the Council's relatively small size constitutes one of the organization's greatest strengths. Other national education groups—such

as the National School Boards Association and the American Association of School Administrators—represent broad interests and hold meetings of thousands of people from mostly rural and suburban settings. In contrast, the Council's sessions are small enough to allow participants to develop strong interpersonal relationships, which in turn, help to bolster mutual support for addressing common problems. Many urban school leaders are under constant pressure and unremitting criticism. But under the Council's umbrella, these leaders can focus on solutions and can celebrate each other's efforts to tackle seemingly intractable urban school issues.



Coretta Scott King speaking at the Fall Conference in Detroit 1997.

Without question, another strength of the Council is its governance structure, in which school board members and superintendents participate on equal footing. Council meetings



San Diego Schools School Board President Luis Ace and Broward Schools Superintendent Franklin Till at Legislative Conference.

provide a special and unique venue in which board members and superintendents can network and share perspectives away from the pressure cookers in their hometowns. This informal interaction provides a valuable and unique opportunity for urban school leaders to socialize informally in an “off-the-record” setting, a different environment than the larger associations can provide. The rotation of

the Council’s leadership between superintendents and school board members reinforces this organizational asset.

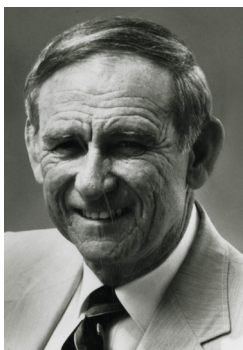
The quality of the Council’s staff and its leadership also received universal plaudits from people interviewed for this project. Their knowledge and their passionate commitment to the organization’s core values, beliefs, and mission were viewed as enormous assets. Indeed, many people wondered how such a small organization could exercise influence that was so disproportionate to its limited size and resources, compared with much larger education groups with vastly larger memberships, staff, and fiscal resources. Many interviewees attributed this strength to the common mission, priorities and concerns shared by a membership confronting similar issues of race, poverty, and income disparities.

Moreover, many of those interviewed agreed that the organization showed its determination to address these issues in a way that was more direct and relentless than was apparent in other larger education associations.

Another advantage of the Council in recent years has been its ability to change with the times without compromising its underlying commitments to excellence and equity. Few things exemplify that ability better than the Council’s support for the standards movement and its accountability, assessment, and transparency components—elements that have emerged as critical components of national educational policy. The Council has shown



**Arlene Ackerman
Council Chair
2005-2006**



Holmes Braddock,
Council Chair
1990-1991

its willingness to keep its members' "faces to the wind" and lead urban schools into the risky (if not treacherous) territory of educational reform. This commitment has earned the organization great respect among the nation's most influential political and business leaders who have been in the forefront of the national education reform and accountability movements. The Council's support of the federal *No Child Left Behind* law serves as an example of the organization's leadership in educational reform in the face of criticism from other education groups.

In recent years, the Council's strategic support teams also have emerged as a particularly popular and useful activity for the membership. Member districts view the services provided by these teams as one of the Council's most important activities. These peer reviews have provided assistance to the member districts in such areas as finance, information technology, curriculum and instruction, human resources, special education, and food and transportation services. Moreover, the reviews have demonstrated to the outside world that the Council is able to provide first-class—and sometimes brutally honest—assessments of urban school practices.

Another asset of the Council has been the involvement of the private sector in sponsoring functions and participating in the group's meetings. Quite naturally, various education-related companies are interested in building relationships with the nation's largest school systems, but have done so with the Council in ways that are sensitive to potential markets without being intrusive in Council affairs. The Council has benefited from the support of these companies, while not succumbing to rampant commercialism. Vendors continue to send representatives to Council meetings and have expressed strong pride in their connections and affiliations with the organization.



Dorothy Height, chair and president emerita of the National Council of Negro Women, at Town Hall Meeting in Chicago in 2003.



Pittsburgh school board president Jake Million with Speaker of the House Rep. Jim Wright.

The Council's public visibility is also much greater than it was in the past, clearly another plus for the organization. The national news media frequently quote the views of the Council's executive director and staff on urban education issues. And the group's public service announcements have further extended the Council's image nationally. The Council has achieved considerable success in mitigating the widespread negative views of urban schools by projecting the progress that has been made by its member districts, while acknowledging that serious problems persist.

The organization's constituency services have also enhanced the Council's reputation. The membership is able to call the Council offices for data, information, and advice on urban issues that the member districts cannot get elsewhere. People from the member districts acknowledge that sometimes these requests appear to overwhelm the Council's relatively small staff, but they also know that the requested information will always be forthcoming.

Finally, the Council's historic and continuing forte has been its effectiveness in advocacy and bipartisan lobbying. This strength merits elaboration, for it elicits universal praise and has for many years. The Council's executive director and the director of legislation have decades of legislative experience, unquestioned passion for addressing urban issues, considerable expertise in the legislative process and federal programming, and substantial political savvy. The duo's strong, longstanding relationships with Congressional staff members, moreover, have helped to build trust and credibility that has benefited the organization.

A notable feature of the success of the Council's staff has been its use of good data and solid research as it takes positions on behalf of the nation's



(Left to right) Sen. Claiborne Pell, Sen. Edward Kennedy, Joseph Fernandez and Al Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, at a press conference in the U.S. Senate Education and Labor Committee hearing room.



Maya Angelou addresses the Annual Fall Conference in Minneapolis in 1996.

urban school systems. The expertise of Council staff on financial and formula issues, in particular, has helped in the education advocacy universe and has helped the group target scarce federal dollars to its member districts. The general analytic skills and familiarity with the lawmaking process demonstrated by Council staff also have meant that people in the federal government listen to the staff even when the Council's positions are not congruent

with either Congress or the Executive Branch.

Representatives of state-based school organizations, while frequently competing for resources and control, expressed respect for the Council in interviews for this project, observing that the organization's "fingerprints" and influence are "everywhere" in the legislative process. The organization is respected for putting politics and ideology aside in recognizing that it must deal with those in power if it is to effectively represent the interests of its constituency. The Council has been effective legislatively because it recognizes that it is legitimate to disagree, keep options open, and know when and how to compromise without sacrificing basic values and beliefs.

The staff has been helped along the way, of course, by the homogeneity of the Council's membership. Dissent over major policies is often limited, a rare political luxury for an advocacy group. Most other organizations must cater to varied priorities and engage in trade-offs that can alienate segments of their own constituency. The Council's staff knows where the membership stands and can bargain over legislative technicalities knowing that it will be able to resolve these technicalities relatively easily and not get bogged down. This understanding helps the Council be more consistent in its legislative positions, further building the credibility that is so critical in politics.



Rev. Jesse Jackson holds a press conference with urban school leaders during the Fall Conference in Dayton in 1999.

The Council has been able to maintain an admirably bipartisan stance despite the fact that the great majority of its members probably are Democrats. The Council, in fact, has evolved to a place where it cannot be taken for granted by either major political party.

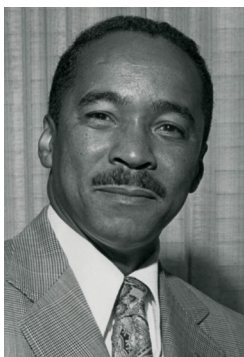
When Democrats late in the Clinton years appeared to compromise on urban needs in favor of suburban issues, the Council was not bashful in criticizing the administration with which it had considerable rapport. Likewise, the Council has not hesitated to criticize the current Bush administration publicly despite its generally good relations with the administration. Republicans have been particularly clear that they will treat the Council and its interests fairly because they know that the Council will treat them fairly. This evenhanded treatment can be seen in the Council's successes in advocating for changes in



Rep. William Goodling, chairman of the House of Representatives' Education and Workforce Committee, is honored by the Council at a Capitol Hill reception.

IDEA and in securing new Title I funding after endorsing *No Child Left Behind*. The Council's willingness to support or oppose legislation on its merits has given the organization special access to both the Republican and Democratic-controlled executive and legislative branches.

Addressing the Council's 2006 Legislative Conference, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings publicly cited her Department's partnership with the Council. She praised the organization for its bipartisanship, willingness to tackle tough issues, and focus on raising student achievement. Secretary Riley said much the same thing in the eight-straight years that he appeared before the Council.



Alonzo Crim
Council Chair
1979-80

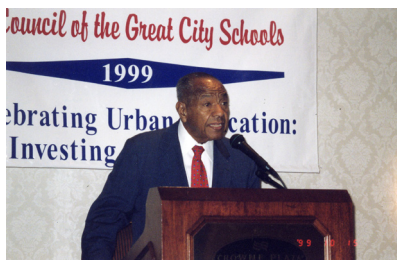
Weaknesses of the Council

As the Council commemorates its 50th anniversary, it has much to celebrate. The organization has an impressive record of achievement, and feedback has been consistently positive about both its staff and its programs. In fact, criticism of the organization is rare. However, some people interviewed for this report expressed some concerns about the organization and its future. This section will briefly discuss these concerns.

To many, the Council's executive director, Michael Casserly, embodies the organization and his special skills and experience may not be readily transferable to a future leader when the time comes to replace him. Many individuals interviewed for this project saw the need for some contingency or succession planning should something unforeseen occur. For his part, Casserly is not always confident that his close identity with the group is necessarily a good thing and is not an advocate of the "indispensable" leader theory.

Some people criticized the Council for what they saw as the organization's sometimes-"standoffish" posture towards other organizations. The Council is fiercely independent and many times goes it alone in its policy positions. In this regard, the Council is not always seen as cooperating as fully as it might with organizations such as the National School Boards

Association (NSBA) and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). NSBA's Federal Relations Network, for example, reaches into all congressional districts and might be a potent political ally. Forging stronger ties with NSBA's Council for Urban Boards of Education, likewise, might be politically useful to the Council.



Journalist Carl Rowan addresses conferees at the Fall Conference in Dayton in 1999.



Judy Farmer,
Council Chair
2004-2005

Some observers also believe that the Council should be more proactive in broadening and diversifying its financial base. This belief reflects a strong feeling that the Council could successfully attract more corporate and foundation support because of the organization's vital mission, growing prestige, and expanding influence. And, in fact, despite the great strides the organization has made over the years, it has even greater potential to expand its leadership role if additional resources could be obtained to strengthen staff research and program activities.

The Council offers special access to large markets for private corporations and some people contend that these corporations would be willing to contribute more generously to the organization without it necessarily having to sell its soul commercially or compromise its independence.

Others who advocate for expanding the Council's revenue base believe that the current dues structure is too low to support services over the long range. The members, they believe, would be willing to raise dues to a level that would be more commensurate with both the services provided and the additional financial resources the Council brings to large districts through its congressional lobbying.

The Council is also a more staff-driven organization than it was in the beginning, although Ben Willis and Sargent Shriver delegated much of the detailed work to their own Chicago school staff. This greater reliance on staff now is both a strength and a weakness. It allows for greater consistency and inoculates the organization from the instability and rapid turnover that characterize the leadership of many urban school districts. It also allows the group to build more long-term capacity. But, it also means that oversight by the board of directors is critical to ensure that the organization is heading in the direction that the members want it to go.



Council participates in 1992 March on Washington to support federal investment in America's cities and children.

Finally, the Council has had an active Task Force on Leadership and Governance for some years, but numerous people believe that the group could be even more proactive in providing leadership on the issue. School board-superintendent relationships remain a central issue of concern. Some people believe that many urban schools will continue to experience leadership turmoil and political instability until the governance issue is addressed more forthrightly and explicitly.

A Look Ahead:

Section 3

The nation's Great City Schools have educated some of America's most important, influential, and talented people. Such noted historical figures as Orville and Wilbur Wright, Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others all were graduates of the nation's urban schools. Big city schools have produced considerable talent in the modern era as well. As the Council celebrates its 50th anniversary, it is only appropriate that thought be given to the next half-century and how its members can continue to address some of the great challenges that lie ahead.

It is reasonable to predict that external pressures will continue to compel the Council to assess periodically the recurrent issue of expansion. The pros and cons of enlarging the Council have been debated persistently through the years. The trade-offs are real and ever-shifting. Additional members would provide a broader base and greater political muscle, but would also affect the intimacy, sense of focus, and core values so treasured by its current members.

Many of the Council's members, moreover, continue to grow poorer economically and to lose population. Many suburban districts, particularly large inner-ring suburbs, now look to the Council for guidance on how to handle critical urban-related issues. Arrangements that would allow these or similar districts to participate in the organization have been rejected repeatedly by Council members, but the pressures to admit these districts will continue to mount if the organization is to sustain its political influence.

In the future, the Council will also need to nurture and encourage greater participation of Latino educators in the organization's work, as Hispanic student enrollment continues to burgeon. The Council must anticipate such profoundly significant demographic changes.

The Council is uniquely positioned to be in the forefront as *No Child Left Behind* is reframed and reauthorized. The organization's bipartisan

stance will enable the Council to play a leadership role in building on the strengths of this landmark legislation, which the Council sees as the law's emphasis on closing achievement gaps, and trying to rectify its weaknesses, which the organization sees as the law's narrow emphasis on regulatory compliance.

A great need also exists for the Council to help stabilize the leadership—both superintendents and school board members—of its member districts. A corollary governance issue is the growing movement to have mayors more involved in urban school districts. The Council has already played a leadership role in this area by convening the first national summit meeting of big city mayors and school superintendents, and more initiatives of this kind will be needed. Another salient issue is teacher quality. The Council must intensify its efforts in this realm and be even more purposeful in efforts to push higher education institutions to produce teachers capable of meeting the special needs of urban youngsters.

The Council might also want to step up its efforts and put more energy into generating partnerships with the private sector. The intellectual capital of the private sector may even be more important than the resources it could provide. Technology and education-related companies have a natural synergy with the Council and the potential markets that it provides. These companies know that they have enormous potential for “doing well by doing good.”

The organization might also devote more time and energy to international comparisons, and to discussions of the impact of global competition, science, and technology on its schools. A number of other major cities around the world are also dealing with some of the same issues that the Council is addressing. The Council might think about creating more opportunities for foreign travel and international exchanges.

Finally, the Council will need to deal eventually with a succession plan should something happen to its current executive director and senior staff.

The Council has built an impressive launching pad for the future. For a small organization with a small staff, it has had great impact. Some observers suggest that the organization's credibility positions it well to focus more explicitly on issues such as English language learners and urban high schools. The organization's growing research capacity and unique access must be more fully capitalized upon.

The organization, however, has little reason for complacency. The youngsters it serves have a long way to go to compete with their more advantaged suburban and exurban counterparts. Children of color are still lagging disproportionately behind white children when it comes to academic performance, and equity issues remain unresolved.

In many ways, however, the Council has helped to halt or slow down the declining performance of many urban school districts and has been an invaluable source of support to its member districts as they begin to see measurable improvements in student achievement. The organization can take great pride in its efforts to make urban educational issues more visible and, more importantly, to show that poor city youngsters can achieve and their schools can improve.

The Council of the Great City Schools, then, has evolved well beyond what was a single meeting in 1956 of a handful of Midwest cities. It is now an established national organization with membership from coast to coast. It has a reputation for excellence and a talented staff. And it has a mission that is among the most important in the nation, the improvement of public education in America's urban communities. The future of the Council of the Great City Schools is bright, and its vitality and energy are needed now more than ever.

References

Christine Bialek. "The Research Council of the Great City Schools Program for School Improvement and National Education Policy" Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1976.

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Appendix

Chairs of the Council of the Great City Schools

Past Chairs	Position	City	Year
George Thompson III	School Board	Nashville	2006-07
Arlene Ackerman	Superintendent	San Francisco	2005-06
Judy Farmer	School Board	Minneapolis	2004-05
Carlos Garcia	Superintendent	Clark County	2003-04
Anna Dodson	School Board	Norfolk	2002-03
Manuel Nunez	School Board	Fresno	2001-02
Cliff Janey	Superintendent	Rochester	2000-01
Becky Montgomery	School Board	St. Paul	1999-00
Waldemar Rojas	Superintendent	San Francisco	1998-99
Wilma Brown	School Board	Toledo	1997-98
Franklin Smith	Superintendent	Washington	1996-97
Ellen Roe	School Board	Seattle	1995-96
Norbert Schuerman	Superintendent	Omaha	1994-95
Loretta Heard	School Board	Columbus	1993-94
Forrest Rieke	School Board	Portland	1992-93
Connie Clayton	Superintendent	Philadelphia	1991-92
Holmes Braddock	School Board	Miami-Dade Cty	1990-91
Larry Zenke	Superintendent	Tulsa	1989-90
Florence Baugh	School Board	Buffalo	1988-89
Richard Green	Superintendent	New York City	1987-88
Myra Kopf	School Board	San Francisco	1986-87
Charles Frazier	Superintendent	Nashville	1985-86
Betty Benjamin	School Board	Washington	1984-85
Arthur Jefferson	Superintendent	Detroit	1983-84
Omar Blair	School Board	Denver	1982-83
Lee McMurrin	Superintendent	Milwaukee	1981-82
Arthur Thomas	School Board	Philadelphia	1980-81
Alonzo Crim	Superintendent	Atlanta	1979-80
Louise Malis	School Board	Chicago	1978-79
Nolan Estes	Superintendent	Dallas	1977-78

Paul Tierney	School Board	Boston	1976-77
Paul Briggs	Superintendent	Cleveland	1975-76
Cornelius Golightly	School Board	Detroit	1974-75
Richard Gousha	Superintendent	Milwaukee	1973-74
George Smith	School Board	San Diego	1972-73
Joseph Manch	Superintendent	Buffalo	1971-72
Joseph Manch	Superintendent	Buffalo	1970-71
Darneau Stewart	School Board	Detroit	1969-70
Bernard Donovan	Superintendent	New York City	1968-69
Sidney Marland	Superintendent	Pittsburgh	1967-68
Harold Vincent	Superintendent	Milwaukee	1966-67
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1965-66
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1964-65
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1963-64
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1962-63
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1961-62
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1960-61
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1959-60
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1958-59
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1957-58
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1956-57

Executive Directors¹

Name	Year
Michael Casserly	1992-present
Sam Husk	1974-1991
Jack Hornback	1972-1974
Alvin Skelly	1969-1972
Alva Dittrick	1967-1969
Carl Thornblad	1966-1967
Fred Bertolaet	1961-1966

¹ Council Executive Directors were known as Executive Vice Presidents or Executive Secretaries up through the tenure of Sam Husk.

Sites of Fall Conferences

Host City	Year
San Diego	2006
Atlanta	2005
Clark County	2004
Chicago	2003
Broward County	2002
Norfolk	2001
Los Angeles	2000
Dayton	1999
San Francisco	1998
Detroit	1997
Minneapolis	1996
Oklahoma City	1995
Seattle	1994
Houston	1993
Milwaukee	1992
Columbus	1991
Boston	1990
Miami-Dade County	1989
Toledo	1988
Seattle	1987
New York City	1986
Pittsburgh	1985
Albuquerque	1984
San Francisco	1983
Buffalo	1982
Memphis	1981
Norfolk	1980

New York City	1979
San Francisco	1978
Dallas	1977
Chicago	1976
Cleveland	1975
Denver	1974
St. Louis	1973
Houston	1972
Minneapolis	1971
Dallas	1970
Washington, D.C.	1969
Philadelphia	1968
Cleveland	1967
Milwaukee	1966
Los Angeles	1965
Pittsburgh	1964
St. Louis	1963
Detroit	1962
Chicago	1961
Chicago	1960
Chicago	1959
Chicago	1958
Chicago	1957
Chicago	1956

Individuals Interviewed for Project

Arlene Ackerman

Former Superintendent
San Francisco Unified School District

Fred Bertolaet

Former Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

James Bray

Vice President
Scientific Learning Corporation

Robert Carlson

Director of Management Services
Council of the Great City Schools

Michael Casserly

Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

Carol Comeau

Superintendent
Anchorage School District

John de Beck

School Board Member
San Diego Unified School District

Henry Duvall

Director of Communications
Council of the Great City Schools

Judy Farmer

School Board Member and Former
Council Chair
Minneapolis Public Schools

Carlos Garcia

Former Superintendent
Clark County School District

Ed Garner

Former School Board Member
Denver Public Schools

Arthur Griffin

Former School Board Member
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Beverly Hall

Superintendent
Atlanta Public Schools

Samuel Halperin

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Health, Education
and Welfare

Clifford Janey

Superintendent
District of Columbia Public Schools

Floretta McKenzie

Former Superintendent
District of Columbia Public Schools

Candy Olson

School Board President
Hillsborough County Public Schools

Rod Paige

Former U.S. Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education

Tom Payzant

Former Superintendent
Boston Public Schools

Joseph Schneider

Former Deputy Executive Director
American Association of School
Administrators

Susan Sclafani

Former Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Education

Jason Snipes

Director of Research
Council of the Great City Schools

Patti Sullivan

Former Legislative Director
Council of Chief State School Officers

Terry Tabor

Conference Manager
Council of the Great City Schools

George Thompson III

School Board Member and Council
Chair
Nashville Public Schools

Teri ValeCruz

Director of Administration, Finance
and Conferences
Council of the Great City Schools

James Williams

Superintendent
Buffalo Public Schools

Individuals Interviewed by Phone**Milton Bins**

Former Associate Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

Holmes Braddock

Former School Board Member
Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Constance Clayton

Former Superintendent
School District of Philadelphia

Rachel Hedding

Former School Board Member
Rochester City School District

Arthur Jefferson

Former Superintendent
Detroit Public Schools

Forrest Rieke

Former School Board Member
Portland Public Schools

Council Staff

ADMINISTRATION



Michael Casserly
Executive Director



Teri Valecruz
*Director of Administration,
Finance & Conferences*



Alisa Adams
Finance Manager



Terry Tabor
Conference Manager



Shirley Lathern
Executive Assistant



Lenise Rutherford
*Accounting & Conference
Assistant*

COMMUNICATIONS



Henry Duvall
Director of Communications



Tonya Harris
Communications Manager

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION



Ricki Price-Baugh
Director of Academic Achievement

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS



Robert Carlson
*Director of Management
Services*

LEGISLATION



Jeff Simering
Director of Legislation



Julie Wright Halbert
Legislative Counsel



Manish Naik
Manager of Legislative Services

RESEARCH



Jason Snipes
Director of Research



Adriane Williams
Research Manager

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Shirley Schwartz
Director of Special Projects



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