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Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. ♦ Suite 702 ♦ Washington, D.C. ♦ 20004
<http://www.cgcs.org>

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CONTACT: Henry Duvall
(202) 393-2427

\$4.6-Million Project Launched to Help Urban Schools Implement Common Core Standards

WASHINGTON, Aug. 15 – The Council of the Great City Schools today announced that it has received a grant of \$4.6 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The three-year grant is aimed at promoting and coordinating successful implementation of the new kindergarten to 12th-grade common core standards in English-language arts and mathematics in big-city public school systems nationwide.

“We’re about to undergo a sea change in instituting new academic standards,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “Common core standards are necessary to make real the promise of American public education to expect the best of all our schoolchildren.”

The grant will contribute to strategic communications, capacity building, curriculum and assessment alignments, professional development, pilot testing and a host of other measures needed to provide strategies, tools, advice and counsel to the nation's urban school districts as they prepare to implement the state-led common core standards.

The Council wants to make sure that big-city school districts don't slip through the cracks in a broader state adoption and implementation process. It plans to help the urban districts work together and maintain flexibility to permit coordination with their respective states.

More than 50 superintendents, chancellors and CEOs of the nation's big-city school systems signed a letter last year supporting common core state standards to prepare students for success in college and careers in a global economy. They believe that the internationally benchmarked standards will help them advance reform efforts in their respective districts.

The Council was the first group of education officials nationally to call for common core standards in America, and participated in their grade-to-grade development.

To prepare urban schools to implement the standards by 2014 when they are expected to be rolled out across the country, the Council plans to develop a “change management” booklet for school leaders. This will serve as a guide to aid urban educators in incorporating the new academic standards into their instructional programs, including integration of the common core into current district strategic plans and transformation efforts.

Also under the grant, the Council will develop communication tools and strategies to help urban school leaders build both internal and external buy-in of the common core. It will conduct information-sharing activities among its 65 member urban school districts to increase understanding of the standards, provide a forum for sharing materials, and to offer technical assistance in the implementation process.

Externally, the Council will also develop materials that will build public awareness to engage communities. This will include development of public service announcements for broadcast, cable and social media outlets to educate the public and communities to the need and importance of common core standards.

“We want to get the message out that high standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents and students with a set of clear expectations that everyone can work toward together,” Casserly explains. “This contributes to America maintaining its competitive edge in a growing global marketplace.”

The Council has already convened chief academic officers, curriculum and research directors, reading and math specialists, English-language learner directors and special education leaders from its eight “lead districts” -- New York City, Boston, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Cleveland, St. Paul, Albuquerque and the Districts of Columbia -- to begin development of the implementation process. This would include creating guidelines for teacher professional development.

Council districts will serve as test sites for piloting draft instructional tools, assessments and other materials emerging from other organizations. And the Council will help its school systems plan and build capacity in preparation for extensive changes in adoption of the common core.

“By the end of the project, we expect to have all member urban school districts aware of and prepared to implement common core standards comprehensively,” stresses Casserly. And the districts should also be better prepared to manage change, communicate effectively, and have the tools they need “to implement the standards faithfully with the highly diverse students enrolled in the nation’s major urban public school districts,” he adds.

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(The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition representing the nation’s largest urban public school systems.)