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## Education Secretary, Noted Congressman Address Council

Arne Duncan led Chicago Public Schools for more than seven years before becoming the U.S. secretary of education in 2009. But if he was still serving as chief executive officer of the nation's third largest school district, he would put a huge focus on providing children with early learning.

"If I had one more tax dollar, I would put that behind putting one more kid in early childhood education," Duncan told big-city school leaders assembled in Washington, D.C., for the Council of the Great City Schools' recent Annual Legislative/Policy Conference.

Duncan said that even though the Department of Education has put a billion dollars behind states that are increasing access to early childhood programs, there is still a tremendous need and that it doesn't make sense to deny opportunity to 3 and 5 year-olds.



U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, right, talks with Council Executive Director Michael Casserly before addressing urban educators.

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President Obama briefs the news media in his discussion with big-city school leaders. (Photo credit: Win McNamee/Getty Images)

## Meeting with President Obama Highlights Urban School Progress and Challenges

The timing appeared ideal for President Obama to meet with urban school leaders recently to discuss legislation, reforms, progress and challenges aimed at improving urban public education.

The nation's big-city public schools have made progress over the past 10 years on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, considered the *Nation's Report Card*.

High school graduation rates have increased for African American and Hispanic students, outpacing the growth for all students in the nation, according to recent data released by the National Center for Education Statistics. Urban schools serve a large percentage of these students.

Calling the visit "a timely moment," President Obama said after meeting with a delegation of 12 urban school leaders on March 16 at the White House, "The good news is that we are seeing...improved reading scores, improved math scores, improved graduation rates. We're seeing improvement in some of the previously lowest-performing schools...."

"The challenge we face is that this is a monumental task and it requires resources," he noted. "But all that is dependent on a budget and approach at the federal level that says we care about all kids and not just some."

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# Des Moines Students Spend Spring Break in 'Dream to Teach' Program

Spring Break is often a time for students to relax, but approximately 40 middle and high school students in Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools spent their Spring Break hard at work in a classroom at Grand View University learning how to be teachers.

The students were participants in the district's *Dream to Teach* program, aimed at working with minority students in middle and high school who have an interest in becoming educators.

The students spent their Spring Break participating in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) competition and working on a social justice project.

*Dream to Teach* is in its first year and was created to address the shortage of minority teachers in the Des Moines school system by providing students support to help them go on to college and careers in education.

According to district officials, minority students make up 55 percent of the school system's enrollment, yet only 6 percent of district teachers are minorities.

"If you're in a classroom, or you're in a school building and the only person you see who looks like you is the janitor, well



Desmund Adams was the keynote speaker at a *Dream to Teach* workshop. Adams, the author of the book "*From Dropout to Doctorate*," shared his inspiring story of growing up in poverty, dropping out of school and working hard to become a successful businessman.

then subconsciously you might get the feeling that the only thing I can do is be a janitor," said Sarai Tillinghast, an African American high school teacher who coordinates the *Dream to Teach* program, in an interview with Iowa Public Radio.

"We don't want our students to think that. We want them to know you can be a teacher, you can be an administrator."

There are currently 70 middle and high school students participating in *Dream to Teach* and one of the most vital compo-

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## New Leader in Charlotte; St. Paul School Chief's Tenure Extended; Norfolk Superintendent Departing



Ann Clark

In 1983, Ann Clark joined North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as a teacher of behaviorally and emotionally handicapped children.

Thirty-two years later, she is now leading the 145,363-student school district, succeeding Heath Morrison, who resigned from the school system in November 2014.

Clark, who had served as the school system's acting superintendent, has held a

variety of teaching and administrative positions in the district, including chief academic officer.

"Teaching every child effectively is the responsibility and the privilege of public education," said Clark in a press release. "It is my honor and privilege to serve CMS as superintendent, and I look forward to working together with our Board of Education, our staff, our families and our community as we prepare every CMS student to graduate ready for college and career success."

Clark was actually ready to announce late last year her retirement from the district, but decided to postpone her announcement because she didn't want to

leave during such a critical time of leadership transition.

She will serve as superintendent through July 2016, giving the board enough time to conduct a comprehensive search for her successor.

### St. Paul Leader's Tenure

The Council of the Great City Schools' most recent report on urban school superintendents found that the average tenure for big-city school superintendents is 3.18 years.

Bucking the trend is Minnesota's Saint Paul Public Schools, which recently gave a contract extension to Valeria Silva through 2018. Silva has been superintendent since 2009.

"We are in an enviable position in St. Paul of having a long serving superintendent who is committed to seeing our strategic plan through to implementation," the school board said in a statement.

The board also praised Silva for "coming up through the ranks" of the district, which she joined in 1987 as a teacher. Silva has also served as a principal, director of English Language Learning and chief academic officer.

During Silva's tenure, the district has embarked on an effort to address the root causes of gaps in educational achievement between white students and students of color, as well as created high quality programs to boost graduation rates and college and career readiness.

And while St. Paul is stabilizing its leadership, Virginia's Norfolk Public Schools is losing its superintendent. The Norfolk school board recently voted to terminate the contract of Samuel King, who has led the district since 2012.

Michael Thornton, the district's chief operations officer, will take over as acting superintendent of schools in May.

### Des Moines continued from page 2

nents of the initiative is providing students with mentors, who are teachers or other school personnel in the Des Moines school district.

At the beginning of the school year, mentors helped students to form personal and academic goals and then help them monitor their academic, behavioral, and social progress. Mentors also make sure that the students are reflecting on their experiences in the program, whether they participate in college awareness activities, hear a guest speaker or do a social impact project.

Carrie Romo is a Spanish teacher at Des Moines' Meredith Middle School and not only mentors five students directly, but also oversees the program for her school, which has about 30 students and six mentors.

Romo, who is African American, decided to become a mentor because she credits her teachers in middle and high school with contributing to her success as an educator.

"The mentors who I remember most were the teachers who looked like me and assured me every day that I mattered, I

had something to offer this world and that education was important," said Romo in an interview with the *Urban Educator*.

Serving as a mentor has been an extremely satisfying experience for Romo, who has enjoyed being a role model while forming relationships with students and helping them to realize their potential to succeed.

"The most rewarding part of this whole experience is knowing that in the near future, the employees within our school district will reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of our student population," said Romo. "That is by far the greatest reward."

*Dream to Teach* has developed relationships with local colleges and universities, meeting with them to ensure that students will have financial and other support systems in place when they are ready for college. Students also go on college field trips where they engage in literacy and STEM activities, meet colleges of education students and faculty and tour campuses. These college visits are designed to allow the students to visualize themselves on these campuses after graduating high school.

## Kansas City Leader Honored



Stephen Green

Superintendent R. Stephen Green of the Kansas City Public Schools recently won the 2015 Robert L. Pearce Award, presented by the Missouri Association of School Administrators each year to an outstanding school district leader in the state.

Eight school district superintendents in Missouri were nominated for the award. Green was selected by a committee of his peers, and he receives a \$500 cash award and a \$500 scholarship for a student in his district as the Pearce Award recipient.

Taking the reins of the Kansas City school system in 2011, Superintendent Green has been credited with his district's making "unprecedented gains" in state test scores among other achievements, according to the Missouri Association of School Administrators.

## Former D.C. Superintendent Remembered

A former District of Columbia Public Schools superintendent, Floretta McKenzie, died recently at the age of 79, reportedly due to complications from Parkinson's disease.

She led the school district in the nation's capital from 1981 to 1988 before launching an education consulting firm.

"Floretta McKenzie was the consummate educator and mentored untold numbers of today's school district leaders," said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools. "In fact, she had a great deal to do with ensuring that the Council of the Great City Schools had a strong and vibrant future, something I will be endlessly grateful for. Floretta will be profoundly missed."

## Four Urban School Officials Tapped As 'Leaders to Learn From'



Terry Grier

Two big-city school superintendents, a chief technology officer and an administrator heading an office to improve African American male achievement were recently profiled in *Education Week's* annual report called "Leaders to Learn From."

The 2015 report profiles 16 school leaders the newspaper recognizes as "forward-thinking district leaders who are working to enact, and inspire, change in our nation's public schools."

They were chosen from hundreds of nominations around the nation. "These leaders have found great opportunities to innovate and achieve ambitious goals, despite changing policy and budget environments and ever-increasing demands for better performance from teachers and students," said Lesli Maxwell, executive project editor for "Leaders to Learn From."

Houston Independent School District Superintendent Terry Grier and the dis-

trict's chief technology information officer, Lenny Schad, were featured in the report under the headline "With Patient Approach, Houston Sets Bar for Digital Transformation."

San Francisco Unified School District Superintendent Richard Carranza, pictured on the cover of the report, was profiled under the headline "A One-Time English-Language Learner Puts Premium on Bilingual, Bicultural Education."



Richard Carranza

"Educator Leads Campaign to Transform Lives of Black Boys" headlines the profile of Christopher Chatmon, executive director, Office of African-American Male Achievement in California's Oakland Unified School District.

The 2015 "Leaders to Learn From" report can be accessed at <http://leaders-ed-week.org>.

## Top Magnet Schools Named

Howard Middle School in Florida's Orange County Public Schools in Orlando is the only middle school in the district to host a visual and performing arts magnet program.

In recognition of its high performance, Howard Middle School recently received the Magnet Schools of Excellence Award.

Sponsored by the Magnet Schools of America, the organization presents the Magnet Schools of Excellence Award to magnet schools that show a commitment to high academic standards, curriculum innovation, successful desegregation/diversity efforts, specialized teaching staff and parent and community involvement.

In addition to Orange County, big-city school districts to receive Excellence Awards include: Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas (15 schools); North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg (9); Miami-Dade County Public Schools (6); and Tampa's Hillsborough County School District (4).

And Indianapolis Public Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District, North Carolina's Guilford County Public Schools and Memphis' Shelby County Schools each had one school honored.

The winning schools were selected from a field of approximately 208 schools and had to submit an application that was scored by a panel of educators.



President Obama discusses the progress urban school districts are making as, left to right, El Paso Schools Superintendent Juan Cabrera and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan look on.

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Led by the Council of the Great City Schools, urban school superintendents and board members explained to President Obama in the White House's Roosevelt Room that the progress urban schools have made is being jeopardized as Congress considers a new budget that could decrease federal investments in public education.

The president heard from urban school leaders on the negative impact the U.S. House of Representatives' proposed legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act would have on urban schools. They believe the bill would undermine the financial infrastructure of ESEA, dilute scarce federal resources, redistribute aid from the poorest to less poor schools, open the door to state cuts in education and freeze federal funds through fiscal year 2021.

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

Obama understood the consequences. "The notion that we would be going back-

wards instead of forwards in how we're devoting resources to educating our kids makes absolutely no sense," he stressed.

Urban school leaders described academic progress that has been made in their school districts, including the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, increased student participa-

tion in Advanced Placement courses, turning around struggling schools, and helping males of color and English language learners succeed.

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

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

"I hope that people get familiar with some of the stories of progress that have

been made," the president said, citing the District of Columbia, Fresno and Cleveland public school systems as examples of urban districts that have made strides. "These are school districts that, despite enormous challenges, have made real progress," he argued, noting that he plans "to continue to fight to make sure that this progress continues."

After meeting with President Obama, District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson said in *The Washington Post* that "...it really feels heartening when the President of the United States is with you on the same issues you are fighting for and the things that are important to you are important to him."

Another meeting participant, Kansas City, Mo., school board member Airick West told *Education Week*, "We know the strategies that we are implementing, with the support of this administration, are beginning to bear fruit... Clearly we are nowhere near the finish line, but it's absolutely encouraging to have that level of support as we continue that day-to-day journey of bringing children who are dramatically behind, and clearly disadvantaged, forward..." he said.

Other urban school leaders who met with the president were Oakland School District board member Jumoke Hinton Hodge, San Francisco School District Superintendent Richard Carranza, St. Paul Public Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva, Fresno School District Superintendent Michael Hanson, Cleveland Municipal School District CEO Eric Gordon, Boston Public Schools board member Michael O'Neill, Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Darienne Driver and El Paso School District Superintendent Juan Cabrera.



Florida's Orange County Schools Superintendent Barbara Jenkins addresses reporters after the meeting urban school leaders had with President Obama at the White House.

**Education Secretary** *continued from page 1*

He said that the United States, relatively to other industrialized nations, ranks 28<sup>th</sup> in offering access to high-quality early learning opportunities. “That is not a badge of honor, and we should be ashamed by that,” lamented Duncan.

He noted that early childhood education has become a bipartisan issue with governors across the political spectrum and that the federal government should co-invest with them.

### **Fixing NCLB**

Duncan acknowledged that educators often ask, “Can we fix the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB)?” because it has been broken and outdated for years. The secretary believes the law, which was passed in a bipartisan fashion in 2001, needs to be fixed, but in the right way.

Duncan said he, along with President Obama, believes the three values NCLB must address is ensuring equity, excellence and innovation. “At its heart, NCLB is not just an education law,” stressed Duncan, “but a civil rights law.”

The secretary said the jury is still out on whether Congress will fix NCLB and outlined three possible outcomes:

- A bipartisan bill that the president supports that puts more money behind the greatest needs;
- A bill that is not bipartisan and the president vetoes it; or
- No bill is passed and the Department of Education continues to issue waivers.

The nation’s top education official said that the *Student Success Act*, which was passed by the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee in February and would ultimately replace NCLB, is very troubling and criticized the bill for taking money from poor school districts, including many urban school systems, and giving it to wealthier school districts.

“I keep asking myself, what educational

problem does that solve?” said Duncan, who urged big-city school leaders to make sure their voices are heard because there is a lot at stake.

The nation’s ninth secretary of education praised urban school districts for taking the lead in improving graduation rates for students of color as well as raising standards, and said they must continue to accelerate the pace of change.

“I don’t want to go back to that time when far too often expectations for students of color were ‘if you are lucky, you will graduate from high school, but don’t even think about college,’” said Duncan.

He recalled during a recent visit to Chicago hearing a story about how First Lady Michelle Obama, who is a graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School, had educators in her life who discouraged her from believing she could attend an Ivy League school.

Duncan said that it is heartbreaking that there may be students across the country who have the same potential, talent and work ethic as Michelle Obama, but whose dreams are being dashed by adult educators.

“I think all of our jobs is to not put limits and ceilings on children’s lives,” said Duncan. “We must let them know the world is your oyster and we are going to help you, whatever your path is. We are not going to set limits on what you can achieve.”

### **Equity in Education**

Also addressing the conference was Rep. Robert “Bobby” Scott (D-Va.), who noted that the nation is at a crossroads in education with one path leading to greater success for students and the other path taking the nation backwards.

The ranking Democrat of the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee recalled that in 1965 Congress passed the first Elementary Secondary and Education Act (ESEA) to close the huge gaps in educational opportunity that existed between wealthier students and students in economically disadvantaged communities.

He said that with the passage of ESEA as well as the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which ended legal segregation in schools, public education is fundamentally different than it was a half century ago.

And while he acknowledged the progress being made, especially for students of color, he lamented the fact that there is a persistent achievement gap between minority students and their white counterparts as well as a gap between rich and poor students.

“This gap is getting worse as time draws on,” said Scott. “We must address that or the long term reality is that low-income



**Congressman Bobby Scott**

students will be more left behind in society.”

In addition, Scott cited a recent report released by the UCLA Civil Rights Project showing that black students on average are suspended about three times the rate of all students in elementary school and twice the rate in secondary schools.

The congressman said that education achievement is profoundly connected to every measure of life’s success, and to systematically under educate and over discipline a large portion of the population is to condemn these children not only to less wealth, but more likely involvement in the criminal justice and social service system.

“Persistent achievement and discipline gaps in public education are among the most pressing civil rights issue of this generation, kind of our *Brown vs. Board of Education* moment,” said Scott.

Congressman Scott criticized the Re-

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**Education Secretary** *continued from page 6*

publican bill, the *Student Success Act* (H.R. 5), because funds that are now intended for areas of concentrated poverty would be reallocated to wealthier areas.

He said that a study by the Center of American Progress found that under the bill districts with high concentrations of poverty could lose an average of \$85 per student in funding, while districts in more affluent areas would gain almost \$300 per student.

“Los Angeles, with about 70 percent of poverty, would lose almost a quarter of its funding,” noted Scott, “while Beverly Hills, with virtually no poverty, would have a 28 percent increase.”

The congressman said that ESEA was designed to provide equity in education by giving funds to schools and students that would otherwise be left behind, not giving less funds to low-income areas and giving more funds to wealthier communities.

He urged conferees to lobby their congressional representatives to fix H.R. 5 and ensure all children receive a high-quality education.

“Together, we can galvanize a new movement to improve education in America, dismantle the cradle-to-prison pipeline and create a cradle-to-college/career pipeline,” said Scott.

### ***Disparities in Discipline***

Conferees also heard from Catherine Lhamon, assistant secretary in the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) for the U.S. Department of Education. The mission of OCR is to ensure equal access to education through vigorous enforcement of the nation’s civil rights laws.

Lhamon led off introducing the Civil Rights Data Collection, a tool used to collect data every two years on key education and civil rights issues in public schools.

“The data that we will be using tells a picture of the life of a child in each and every one of the schools we have across the country,” said Lhamon. “They are not projections. They are actual pictures of the experience of our kids in schools and they tell us very, very distressing information.”



**Assistant Secretary Catherine Lhamon**

The most recent data revealed gaps in college and career readiness in urban schools. Lhamon noted only 50 percent of the nation’s high schools offer calculus courses, while 25 percent of high schools with the highest percentage of African American and Latino students do not offer Algebra II.

The collection also revealed disparities in school discipline, with African American students three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from high school than their white peers. And one in four African American males with disabilities receives an out-of-school suspension versus 12 percent of their white peers, while nearly one in five girls of color with disabilities receives an out-of-school suspension compared with just 6 percent of their white peers.

“So we are really seeing very, very stark disparities in the experience of students in school,” said Lhamon, “from the courses they are offered to the ways they are told they are not welcomed.”

OCR also works to resolve complaints of discrimination and provide technical assistance to help school districts achieve voluntary compliance with the civil rights laws that OCR enforces. An important part of OCR’s technical assistance are partnerships designed to develop creative approaches to preventing and addressing discrimination. The assistant secretary told big-city school educators that her department wants to partner with them.

“I know how hard it is every day to lead for your kids and I’m so grateful to you for doing it,” said Lhamon. “I would like all 600 people in my office to be a resource to you so that we can help you do that work, and we can help ensure that all of our kids have what they need in school.”

## **Council Honors Guilford County School Board For ‘Courage’**

The school board of North Carolina’s third largest school district recently received the Profiles in Courage Award from the Council of the Great City Schools for “outstanding leadership and courage in advocating for urban public education.”

The award also honors the Guilford County Board of Education, located in Greensboro, N.C., for “the improvement of student outcomes in our Great City Schools.”

“The Guilford County Schools are leading some of the broadest and most effective school improvement efforts in public education today,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “The Council of the Great City Schools wants the community and the nation to know about them.”

In presenting the award, Casserly recognized the school district for its pioneering work in improving African-American male achievement and high school graduation rates; launching one of the nation’s most robust character education and service-learning initiatives; successful efforts to close racially identifiable achievement gaps; increasing poor and minority access to Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes; as well as the school board’s legal action in support of public education, among other accomplishments.



**Alan Duncan, right, chairman of North Carolina’s Guilford County Board of Education, receives “Courage” award from Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.**

## Boston Study Outlines Practices to Help Males of Color

Boston Public Schools recently released the second phase of a groundbreaking study examining factors leading to low academic performance for black and Latino males in the school system.

The new study – “Promising Practices and Unfinished Business: Fostering Equity and Excellence for Black and Latino Males” – offers four case studies of Boston public schools where black and Latino males perform better academically in comparison to the district average.

As a result of examining the practices and policies of these schools, the study suggests a need for a more intentional approach to supporting black and Latino male students, which could significantly strengthen outcomes.

“...We need to apply systemwide approaches that work specifically with black and Latino males, like celebrating who they are and providing them with access to rigorous and culturally responsive curricular supports,” said Warren Simmons, executive director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, one of the research groups commissioned by Boston Public Schools to conduct the study.

“Unless we do, we will continue to maintain two predictable paths for our students – one that leads to success for some and another that undermines the engagement and achievement of a growing number of BPS {Boston Public Schools} students,” he concluded.

The first phase of the study found that black and Latino males in the Boston school system, where these students comprise more than 40 percent of the district’s enrollment and lag behind their white and Asian peers academically, had inequitable access to more rigorous programs in schools, contributing partially to opportunity and achievement gaps.

**Males of Color** continued on page 12

## \$129.5-Million School Improvement Plan Approved in Dallas

Dallas Independent School District will add approximately 800 pre-kindergarten seats, open four schools and renovate and make repairs at more than 20 schools as a result of a new \$129.5-million plan.

The Bridge Plan was recently approved by the Dallas Board of Trustees to address the 160,000-student district’s most pressing needs, based on an external facilities study and overcrowded conditions.

In addition to making upgrades at schools, the plan will also renovate or create additional space to serve more pre-K students. And funds will be used to launch a girls’ STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math) transformation school.

District officials admit that the Bridge Plan will not be able to address the wide-ranging needs throughout the district and make repairs at all schools that need them. A Future Facilities Task Force, comprised of community and staff members, will

continue to work on a long-range plan to make upgrades and repairs at other district schools.

But Dallas Schools Superintendent Mike Miles believes the Bridge Plan will be able to address the school system’s most important priorities.

“We designed the bridge plan to attack the most severe schools with regards to district facilities and overcapacity,” said Miles.

According to the *Dallas Morning News*, the plan will be paid for using \$43 million from the district reserve fund and up to \$30 million remaining from the \$1.35-billion bond program approved by voters in 2008. The plan will also require the sale of up to \$75 million in limited-maintenance tax notes, which is a loan that can be paid back over 20 years.

District leaders said the \$129.5-million figure is an estimate that is subject to change after architects formally develop and plan the improvements.

## Urban Districts Recognized for Music Education

*Music Makes Us* is a collaborative initiative in Tennessee’s Metropolitan Nashville School District with a focus on music literacy and student participation. By joining with the city’s mayor, music industry and community leaders, the district has set out to strengthen music education with a contemporary curriculum that reflects a diverse musical landscape.

As a result, for the second year in a row the school district is being recognized as a national leader in music education. It was recently named as one of the Best Communities for Music Education by the National Association of Music Merchants.

The district joins 388 districts across the country to receive this distinction in 2015. Other big-city districts recognized as Best Communities for Music Education were Atlanta Public Schools, Texas’ Austin Independent School District, Las Vegas’

Clark County School District, Texas’ Fort Worth Independent School District, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Memphis’ Shelby County Schools and Florida’s Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa.

In addition, 120 individual schools across the nation were awarded the Support Music Merit Award, which recognizes support for school-based music education programs. Urban districts with schools that received the Support Music Merit Award include: Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, New York City, San Diego, St. Louis, Washington, D.C., and Louisiana’s East Baton Rouge.

Celebrating its 16th annual Best Communities for Music Education designations, the annual survey recognizes and celebrates commitment to music education for all children.

## Actor and Astronaut to Address Council



Levar Burton

Actor and director Levar Burton, associated with television productions such as *Roots*, *Star Trek* and *Reading Rainbow*, will address urban school leaders

at the Council of the Great City Schools' 59<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 7-11, in Long Beach, Calif.

Burton's first professional acting audition landed him in the acclaimed TV miniseries *Roots*, cast as the major character "Kunta Kinte."

A science fiction buff, he later appeared in and directed episodes of the *Star Trek* series, and has had a long association with the *Star Trek* franchise.

For 25 years, Burton hosted and served as executive producer of the highly acclaimed PBS children's television series *Reading Rainbow*.

Today, he primarily exercises his talents as a film and television director.

Also addressing the Council's Fall Conference will be engineer and former NASA astronaut José M. Hernandez, who is believed to be the first person to tweet in Spanish while in space. He was

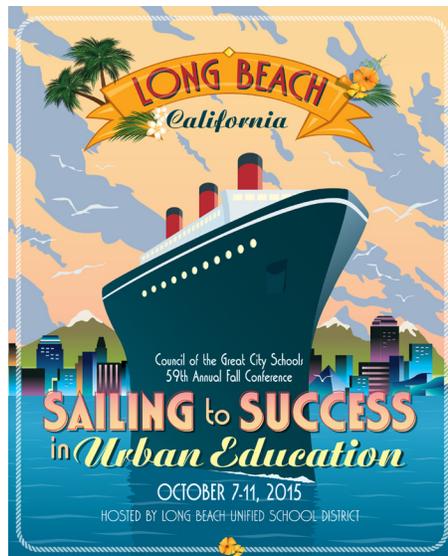
part of the crew of the Space Shuttle STS-128 Discovery mission.



José Hernandez

Hernandez has also served as chief of the Materials and Processes branch at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. And as an engineer, he developed equipment for full-field digital

mammography at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.



## School District in Las Vegas Recognized As Leader in Advanced Placement

Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas recently became the College Board's "Advanced Placement District of the Year" for expanding student access to Advanced Placement courses while improving performance on AP exams, especially for traditionally underserved minority students.

The school system was one of 547 school districts in the nation and Canada that achieved placement on the 5<sup>th</sup> annual AP District Honor Roll. Three were chosen AP Districts of the Year, each representing small, medium and large student enrollments. Clark County was named top

**Advanced Placement** continued on page 12

## Urban School Districts Partner with Orchestras for Music Symposium at Yale U.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools offers "OPERA LAB: a laboratory of learning through opera," which teaches students basic academic subjects as they relate to building scenery and props for the stage. The 10-month, in-school residency program is part of "Cultural Passport Through Opera," a collaborative music partnership the district has with Florida Grand Opera.

The partnership was recently selected to participate in the Yale School of Music 2015 Symposium on Music in Schools. This year's symposium, which is in its fifth year, will focus on partnerships between professional music organizations and public school music programs. The Miami partnership is one of 38 honored nationwide.

Other big-city districts selected for their partnership programs include: Baltimore City Public Schools, Connecticut's Bridgeport Public Schools, New York's Buffalo Public Schools, Texas' Fort Worth Independent School District, Mississippi's Jackson Public Schools, the School District of Philadelphia, San Diego Unified School District, San Francisco Unified School District, Ohio's Toledo Public Schools and the District of Columbia Public Schools in Washington, D.C.

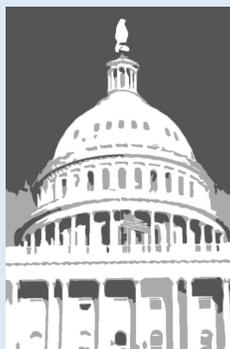
The Symposium on Music in Schools will be held June 2015 on the campus of Yale University. During the course of three days, one representative from the public school district and one from the professional music organization will participate in a variety of workshops, discussions and other events. All participants will receive the Yale Distinguished Music Educator Award.

The Symposium on Music in Schools is held once every two years.

## Senate Committee Considers ESEA Reauthorization Bill

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee is marking-up the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bill this month. The “Every Child Achieves Act of 2015” is the product of lengthy negotiations and a bipartisan agreement between Chairman Lamar Alexander (R- TN) and Ranking Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash) along with support from other committee members on both sides of the aisle. The new bill replaces the initial ESEA Discussion Draft that received extensive comments from the Council of the Great City Schools and other interested organizations earlier this year.



change maintenance of effort, supplement not supplant, private school services, and schoolwide program provisions have been modified, though not enough in the opinion of the Council.

The new 601-page Committee bill has also grown in volume by some 50 percent compared to the initial discussion draft. The new verbiage contains a number of new requirements, including some that exceed current NCLB language. In some instances, it is difficult to determine what is required and what is optional. And, a number of provisions could still divert funding and benefits away from the most disadvantaged students who either generated the funds or deserve continuing assistance.

The new bipartisan measure retains the basic framework of the early draft, but contains significant modifications, additions, and deletions reached during the last three months of bipartisan negotiations and lobbying. The new work product is a major improvement over the discussion draft, and is in many ways an improvement over No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Most of the NCLB-mandated spending provisions or set-asides amounting to some 40 percent of Title I program funding would be repealed—a good thing. The old adequate yearly progress (AYP) accountability and intervention systems would be replaced with a state-defined accountability and intervention system—an uncertain thing. And the new accountability system might be commended for its differentiation and flexibility, and criticized for failing to link the under-performance of at-risk groups to appropriate corrective measures.

Nonetheless, enough progress has been made by the Committee on the “Every Child Achieves” legislation that the Council has expressed preliminary support for the Committee bill, a stance that is consistent with our support of the 2011 bipartisan Senate Committee bill. In producing this new bipartisan measure, the Committee has also addressed many significant concerns of the Council and its members. Moreover, the Committee’s commitment to continue working on remaining issues allows for the legislative process to continue. Still, the open amendment process in Committee and on the Senate floor could result in damaging amendments, including formula changes, major funding shifts, and private school proposals that could undercut the growing consensus in support of the current Committee bill.

Revisions in the troubling fiscal provisions of the initial discussion draft have been pivotal in securing bipartisan support for the new Committee bill, as well as overcoming widespread opposition to the earlier draft. The “portability” provisions allowing for the redistribution of Title I funding away from high-poverty communities have been removed. The six-year funding freeze has been revised to allow congressional appropriations committees to determine funding levels without authorization caps. And, the disconcerting proposals to

At this point, the “Every Child Achieves Act” holds more potential for success than any other ESEA reauthorization since the 2002 enactment. Yet, on the House side, the “Student Success Act” (H.R. 5) was pulled from the House floor and has not been rescheduled to date. Unfortunately, the fast start to the ESEA reauthorization in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress is not an assurance of a swift or successful legislative outcome. Stay tuned.

# Pictorial of 2015 Legislative Conference



Urban school leaders pose with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office after their meeting. Official White House Photo by Pete Souza



Council Chair and Oakland school board member Jumoke Hinton Hodge welcomes conferees to the Legislative Conference.



Sacramento school board president Darrell Woo, left, and Sacramento first vice president Christina Pritchett share notes.



Albuquerque school board member David Percy asks a question at the Legislative Conference as Florida's Duval County school board member Paula Wright looks on.



Denver school board president Happy Haynes, right, talks with Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

## Photos by Alex Jones



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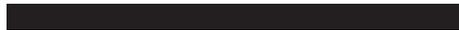
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**Advanced Placement** *continued from page 9*

district among large school systems.

“The devoted teachers and administrators in CCSD {Clark County School District} are delivering an undeniable benefit to their students: opportunity,” said Trevor Packer, senior vice president of AP and instruction at the College Board.

“I’m extremely proud of this important distinction,” said Clark County Schools Superintendent Pat Skorkowsky. “This award reinforces that our district is headed in the right direction....”



**Males of Color** *continued from page 8*

“This study provides an enormous opportunity for BPS, and for school districts across America, to ensure that all students receive the support and access they need to academic achievement,” said Interim Superintendent John McDonough.

The study outlines a series of recommendations, and was also conducted by the Center for Collaborative Education with the support of the Barr Foundation. It can be accessed at <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/opportunity>.

## Guilford Co. District Offers Families New Resources

North Carolina’s Guilford County Schools in Greensboro recently launched free online academic resources to benefit both students and parents. With access 24 hours a day, seven days a week, students and parents can tap into the expansive knowledge bank to customize their learning experience.

Guilford Parent Academy expanded its online learning presence through Brainfuse Help Now and Brainfuse Adult Learners, which offers students tutoring services, designed for a range of academic needs. Students can now get assistance with classwork, aid with difficult subjects and prepare for college entrance tests such as the SAT.

Families without access to home computers are able to obtain tablets through the district’s mobile checkout labs at all middle schools. The academic resources are funded through a federal Race to the Top grant.

## Great City Grads



**Harry Reid**

**U.S. Senator**

**1957 Graduate**

**Basic High School**

**Clark County School District  
 (Las Vegas)**