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Education Secretary Margaret Spellings

Education Secretary, Senator Address Urban School Leaders

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings believes this is a critical year for education because the landmark *No Child Left Behind* legislation is up for reauthorization.

"It's important we perfect and tweak NCLB as we head into reauthorization," Spellings told big-city school leaders, board members, senior administrators and deans from colleges of education who converged in Washington, D.C., recently to attend the Council of the Great City Schools' Annual Legislative/Policy Conference.

According to Spellings, NCLB was enacted five years ago to "perfect, implement and stabilize learning" and that many good things have occurred under the law, including educators focusing more on data and implementing effective teaching, especially in challenging educational settings.

She acknowledged that urban school systems are making strides in education

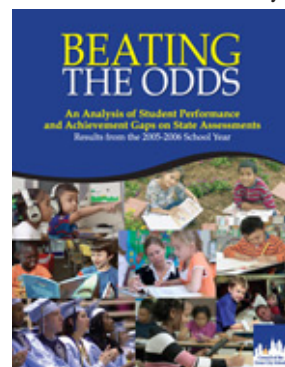
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Urban School Progress Advancing, Says Study

A new study shows that the nation's big-city school districts continue to improve in reading and mathematics on state-mandated tests, with evidence of racial achievement gaps narrowing and low-performing students making gains.

Students in 67 major city school systems in 37 states posted higher test scores in fourth- and eighth-grade mathematics and reading on state assessments in 2006, according to *Beating the Odds: A City-by-City Analysis of Student Performance and Achievement Gaps on State Assessments* by the Council of the Great City Schools.

In the report's seventh annual analysis, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly notes, "The data not only show consistent gains over the past several years, but a more complete, fuller picture of progress in urban schools on state assessments."



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Council Testifies Before Rare Joint House-Senate Hearing

In an opportunity to address both houses of Congress, the Council of the Great City Schools last month weighed in on the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind* Act when it testified before a rare joint hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate education committees.

Council Executive Director Michael Casserly told congressmen and senators that the nation's coalition of urban public schools has supported NCLB, "knowing that it had numerous challenges for urban schools, multiple requirements, and many poorly calibrated provisions."

Despite the challenges, the Council has backed up its NCLB support by helping its member urban school districts implement the law; publishing annual state test scores; initiating the Trial Urban District Assessment to track city district progress on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) among other efforts, Casserly testified.

He told both the House Committee on Education and Labor and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor

Council testifies continued on page 5

Baltimore Student A Top Winner In Science Talent Search

Emma Call, a senior at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, was recently awarded a \$20,000 scholarship for her innovative engineering project.

As the 10th place winner in the Intel Science Talent Search, Call was one of more than 1,700 high school seniors nationwide to compete for the top honors in the nation's oldest and most prestigious high school science competition.

Call's award-winning project uses the fabrication of 3-D microcubes, which have the potential use as novel drug-delivery devices, to illustrate possible methods for tissue replacement and as a means to treat diseases such as diabetes.

The graduating senior is the author of peer-reviewed papers and several abstracts, and is the captain of her high school swim team. Call hopes to attend Case Western Re-

serve University or John Hopkins University in the fall.

Established in 1942, the math and science competition is sponsored by the Intel Corporation and administered by Science Service. In 2007, the competition hit a participation record with 40 finalists receiving \$1.25 million in scholarships.



Emma Call, center, receives her Intel award from Science Service President Elizabeth Marincola and Intel Chairman Craig Barrett.

International School To Open in Houston

The Houston school board recently approved the creation of an international school to prepare students for college with a global perspective.

Beginning this fall, ninth-grade students at Houston's Sharpstown High School will be able to attend a new international school on campus.

The rigorous curriculum will require students to take Advanced Placement courses, four years of foreign language, and complete an internship with an international focus to graduate. Students will also participate in projects and trips to gain a global perspective.

"The new international school will give our students another choice to achieve their educational goals and ensure kids are better prepared for college," said Houston school board member Greg Meyers.

A projected 100 ninth graders are expected to enroll this fall. The goal is for the international school to grow and enroll some 400 students in grades nine to 12.



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Detroit Names New Leader; Pittsburgh Chief's Tenure Extended

Detroit Public Schools recently selected a 30-year veteran educator to head the district. Connie Kennedy Calloway was chosen to take the reins of the 116,000-student school system, succeeding William Coleman, who served as superintendent for nearly two years.



Connie Kennedy Calloway

Calloway is the superintendent of the Normandy School District, a 5,600-student school district outside of St. Louis. She will begin her superintendency in Detroit on July 1.

Lamont Satchel, the Motor City district's chief labor relations officer, will serve as the district's interim superintendent.

Contract Extension

Mark Roosevelt was named the superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools in 2005 and during his tenure he implemented a plan for improving student achievement, closed schools with low student populations, and reduced the district's deficit.



Mark Roosevelt

As a result, the district recently chose to extend his contract by three years to August 2011. "We're pleased at how Superintendent Roosevelt is committed to making a difference for Pittsburgh," said Pittsburgh school board member Theresa Colaizzi in a news release.

Roosevelt is a former member of the Massachusetts Legislature, where he spearheaded the state's landmark education reform law.

State to Take Control Of St. Louis Schools

The Missouri State Board of Education last month voted to strip the St. Louis Public Schools of accreditation, leading to a state takeover of the district.

Under the board's decision, a transitional three-member panel, appointed by state and local officials, will assume control of public schools in St. Louis. The locally elected school board will remain in place, but without governing authority.

The takeover is reportedly scheduled to become effective June 15, following months of debate over school governance.

Sacramento Student Aces ACT College Entrance Exam

Graduating senior Lyndsie Harris of Sacramento, Calif., is not your average student--just check her latest test score.

The John F. Kennedy High School student is one of only 26 students in the nation to achieve a perfect score of 36 on the ACT college entrance exam. In addition, she was one of only five students in her home state to achieve this feat.

Approximately 351,500 students nationwide and 14,500 students in California took the December exam. The average score for the 2006 graduating class was 21.1.

Harris is a student at her school's Program in American and California Explorations (PACE), a small learning community developed to create smaller learning environments for students and provide more personalized instruction.

With her perfect score, Harris anxiously awaits news of acceptance from the University of California, Berkeley, which is her number one choice. She would like to pursue a career in engineering.

D.C. Mayor Gets Preliminary Nod To Head Schools

District of Columbia Mayor Adrian Fenty recently won a preliminary vote in the D.C. Council to seize control of the school system in the nation's capital from the Board of Education.

His takeover plan, which would include the City Council taking control of the school budget and relegating the school board to setting academic standards, still has to pass a final council vote. Congress also has to approve it.

Fenty wants to appoint a cabinet-level chancellor to run the school system, as well as establish a school construction and modernization entity.

D.C. Graduation Requirements Toughened

It's going to be tougher for students in the District of Columbia Public Schools to earn high school diplomas thanks to new graduation requirements adopted by the school system.

To graduate from high school, students will be required to take four years of math, science, social studies and English to boost academic rigor in the curriculum.

"The policy puts teeth in the goals we have laid out in the Master Education Plan," says Superintendent Clifford Janey in a press release. "The Master Education Plan in concert with new academic standards and assessments provides for raising expectations for performance for students as well as staff."

According to the *Washington Post*, D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty's administration praised the new graduation policy, although the new mayor is trying to take control of the school system in the nation's capital.

Education Secretary *continued from page 1*

under NCLB, but believes that now is the time for educators and lawmakers to assess what needs to be done to improve the law and what are the next steps that must be taken to achieve the goal of all students reaching reading and math grade-level proficiency by 2014.

"In my opinion, 2014 is nonnegotiable for full literacy and on-time graduation," Spellings said.

Reforming High Schools

The nation's top education official noted that while NCLB focuses on students in grades 3-8, educators must pay more attention to reforming high schools. She told conferees that 40 percent of high schools in the nation offer no Advanced Placement courses and that there is a lack of equity on the educational landscape.

"There's something wrong when right here in the nation's capital, [Virginia's] suburban Langley High School offers 24 AP courses while D.C.'s inner city Ballou High School offers but four," said Spellings. "This isn't about students failing to succeed in challenging environments; it's about schools failing to challenge them in the first place."



Buffalo school board president Florence Johnson poses a question to Education Secretary Spellings as Houston Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra, left, looks on.

The secretary said she hears a lot of concern from the business community around the need to reform high schools, especially since 90 percent of the fastest growing jobs require post-secondary education.



Senator Bingaman

"We have to bridge the divide between post-secondary and high school education," said Spellings, noting that business leaders must get involved in the effort to reform high schools.

Spellings cited the fact that all 50 states have accountability systems in place to demonstrate the progress school systems are making under NCLB, stressing that it is imperative for lawmakers to reauthorize the federal education law in building on the law's core principles to improve student achievement.

"We are proud of how far we've come and all the work that's been done," said Spellings. "We are encouraged by how it is going."

Improving Graduation Rates

As Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) celebrates 25 years of service in the U.S. Senate, he admits there are some unresolved issues in education that have been addressed in the '80s and '90s, yet still persist in the 21st century.

"One of the unresolved issues in education is that high school graduation rates are too low," said Bingaman, a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

The son of a public school teacher and a college professor, Sen. Bingaman believes that it is time for the nation to focus on improving American high schools.

He recalled that nearly 20 years ago, the nation's governors met with President George Bush at the first and only education summit, where they agreed to set

national education goals and increase the graduation rate to 90 percent by 2000.

"Eighteen years later we are not even close," stressed Bingaman. He noted that the graduation rate is less than 70 percent, while the graduation rate for African Americans and Hispanics is even lower.

He told conferees that technology and research can be used to identify chronic underperforming high schools and identify future dropouts as early as the ninth grade.

According to Bingaman, students who show "clear signs of disengagement" from school, such as chronic absenteeism, course failure and poor behavior, are most likely to quit high school before graduating.

"We located the schools, we can identify the students," said Bingaman.

"We now need to focus on reform," he emphasized. He said that there are effective reforms that need to be implemented at high schools with the lowest student achievement that will keep students on the path to graduating.

These reforms include creating smaller, personalized school settings to offer students and parents better educational options and providing high quality professional development for teachers combined with instructional improvements.

"We have to target resources to high schools that need the assistance the most," said Bingaman.

The senator insisted that urban school districts cannot turn around high school performance alone and that the federal government, as well as the states, have a critical role to play.

He believes that states should be required to establish high school improvement systems to boost graduation rates and performance, while the federal government should partner with school districts across the nation to ensure they have what is needed to succeed.

"We need to better target the resources we have at the right priorities," said Bingaman, who is hopeful that if legislators take the lead on educational reform for high schools it will transform the path to graduation for future generations.

Council testifies *continued from page 1*

and Pensions that although the law has its shortcomings, it has been helpful by:

- Continuing and strengthening the academic standards movement;
- Spurring the use of regular assessments to measure student progress;
- Placing more emphasis on the use of reading research;
- Introducing accountability for results; and
- Underscoring the importance of having highly qualified teachers in the classroom.



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, center, testifies at joint House-Senate hearing along with Arthur Rothkopf, left, from the Business Coalition for Student Achievement, and Ed McElroy of the American Federation of Teachers.

Problems with NCLB

However, Casserly noted that the Council views many of the same problems with the law that its harshest critics see, such as:

- Lack of focus on good instructional practice in many of the law's multiple provisions;

- Non-instructional requirements that have resulted in an overemphasis on the implementation of and compliance with the law's technical provisions;

- Diversion of Title I funds into ineffective supplemental educational services;

- Annually cascading sanctions that result in school districts not having the time for strategies to work; and

- Limited federal and state government assistance on how to meet NCLB's performance goals, and inadequate funding.

Recommendations

How would the Council improve the law? Casserly testified that "we are recommending that Congress retain the overall framework of *No Child Left Behind*, but refocus the law's provisions around instructional strategies that improve student achievement and move away from procedures that don't."

The Council presented proposals designed to spell out clearly the standards that urban school districts are expected to achieve, "and to eliminate some of the inequities in expectations that our nation's current 50-state educational system has produced," he stressed.

The proposals in general call for setting high academic standards; improving teaching and learning without sanctions penalizing schools; boosting efforts to assure highly qualified teachers; improving assessments and data systems; and increasing accountability.

Specific recommendations include developing national education standards; reorienting NCLB toward instructional interventions; limiting less experienced educators from teaching in low-performing schools; improving state data systems to provide assessment results to local school systems in an instructionally useful format; and allowing states to adopt progress growth models to determine Adequate Yearly Progress.

Urban Educators Testify in Congress

Now that discussions have begun in earnest to reauthorize the *No Child Left Behind* Act, the nation's legislators are hearing more and more from urban school leaders testifying on how the law could help improve education in the big cities.

Last month, Superintendent Deborah Jewell-Sherman of Virginia's Richmond Public Schools testified before the U.S. Senate's Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations, focusing on federal funding of NCLB.

After explaining a number of initiatives leading to progress in her school district, she told the panel, "Mr. Chairman, these types of instructional reforms ... take money."

In February, Richmond Associate Superintendent Yvonne Brandon participated in a roundtable hearing on "NCLB Reauthorization: Strategies that Promote School Improvement" before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

In late March, Jane Rhyne, assistant superintendent for exceptional children in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, testified before the U.S. House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education.

In early April, another urban school leader, Valeria Silva, chief academic officer for Minnesota's St. Paul Public Schools, gave testimony on bilingual education before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

Urban school leaders often testify in Congress as witnesses, giving legislators perspectives from the field, on behalf of the Council of the Great City Schools.

Urban School Progress *continued from page 1*

The *Beating the Odds* findings for the 2005-2006 school year show that 59 percent of urban school students scored at or above proficiency in fourth-grade math, a whopping 15 percentage point increase from 44 percent in 2002 on state tests. For eighth graders, the percentage climbed to 46 percent, compared with 35 percent in 2002, an 11 percentage point rise.

In reading, urban schoolchildren also posted gains, but not as fast as in math. From 2002 to 2006, the percentage of fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency in reading on state tests rose to 55 percent from 43 percent in 2002 – a 12 percentage point gain. For eighth graders, the percentage increased to 42 percent from 34 percent in 2002, an 8 percentage point hike.

Math Achievement

Although urban school achievement is advancing, it still lags behind state averages. However, 20 percent of big-city school systems scored at or above their respective states in fourth-grade math, while 16 percent at the eighth-grade level.

Seven major urban school districts – Anchorage, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Palm Beach, Portland (Oregon), Sacramento, San Diego and San Francisco -- had both fourth- and eighth-grade math scores that were equal to or greater than their respective states.

Other urban school systems that had average math scores in the fourth grade equal to or greater than their states were Charleston, Christina (Delaware), Long Beach and Seattle. In eighth grade, the urban systems were Hillsborough County (Tampa), Omaha, and Orange County (Orlando).

In examining the proficiency gap of math achievement in city schools compared to the states, the study found the gap declined by 4 percentage points among fourth graders proficient in math from 2002 to 2006. The gap of eighth graders proficient in math fell by 2 percentage points.

Beating the Odds VII also examined academic trends among the most “struggling urban students” – those who scored “below basic” levels of proficiency.

From 2002 to 2006, the percentage of urban fourth graders who scored “below basic” achievement levels in math on their respective state tests decreased from 29 percent in 2002 to 19 percent in 2006 – an improvement of 10 percentage points.

In eighth-grade math, urban students who scored “below basic” achievement levels on their respective state tests decreased from 30 percent in 2002 to 26 percent in 2006 – an improvement of 4 percentage points.

Reading Achievement

Similar to math, reading scores in urban schools were generally below state averages. But some 18 percent of urban districts had reading scores in grade four that were equal to or greater than their respective states, and 20 percent in eighth-grade reading.

Five urban districts – Anchorage, Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Portland (Oregon), San Diego and San Francisco – showed reading scores that were equal to or greater than their respective states.

Other urban districts – Long Beach, Norfolk, Christina (Delaware) and Seattle -- had fourth-grade reading scores matching or exceeding their states. In eighth-grade reading, Charleston, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach and Tucson had scores equal to or greater than their states.

In analyzing the proficiency gap of reading achievement in city schools compared to the states, *Beating the Odds* found the gap declined by 3 percentage points among fourth graders proficient in reading from 2002 to 2006. The gap of eighth graders proficient in reading fell by 2 percentage points.

Among the most low-performing students, the study found that the percentage of urban fourth graders who scored “below basic” achievement levels in reading on their respective state tests decreased from

	2002	2006	Change
4th Grade Reading	43%	55%	+12
4th Grade Math	44%	59%	+15
8th Grade Reading	34%	42%	+8
8th Grade Math	35%	46%	+11

*Percentages reflect student performances on differing state assessments in cities that administered the same test in each of five consecutive years

27 percent in 2002 to 21 percent in 2006 – an improvement of 6 percentage points.

In eighth-grade reading, urban students who scored “below basic” achievement levels of their respective state tests decreased from 29 percent in 2002 to 25 percent in 2006 – an improvement of 4 percentage points.

Racial Achievement Gaps

Beating the Odds VII found that racial gaps in math and reading achievement in urban schools narrowed between 2002 and 2006.

In math proficiency, 67 percent of urban school districts in the study narrowed the gap between their fourth-grade African-American students and their white peers statewide. In eighth grade, 60 percent of the districts saw the gap narrow.

Among Hispanic students in the major cities, 62 percent of school districts narrowed the gap between their fourth graders and white peers, while 53 percent did in the eighth grade.

In reading proficiency, 77 percent of urban school districts in the study reduced the gap between their fourth-grade African-American students and their white peers statewide, while the districts saw a 67 percent reduction in eighth grade.

Sixty-seven percent of urban school districts narrowed the reading gap between their fourth-grade Hispanic students and their white peers statewide. Some 60 percent reduced the reading gap in eighth grade.

City-by-city profiles of the seventh edition of *Beating the Odds* can be found on the Council’s web site at www.cgcs.org.

Council Outlines Past, Present and Future of the *No Child Left Behind* Law

As Congress considers the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind* Act, urban school leaders recently were reminded of the law's beginning as a prelude to improving the future of the federal law on education.

"We had a choice when NCLB was heading to the House and Senate floors in 2001," Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, told urban educators at the Council's Legislative/Policy Conference in Washington.

"We chose to support it. And we woke up the next morning as the only education association to do so," he emphasized during a luncheon address.

"What did we get for it? Not much," he emphasized. But he noted that the Council's support was able to:

- Drive new federal resources into urban schools initially;
- Access some U.S. Department of Education decisions;
- Spur the Bush administration to praise the progress of urban schools;
- Spark talk about urban schools leading change; and
- Make the urban school coalition more bipartisan on Capitol Hill.

He reminded urban school leaders that *No Child Left Behind* passed in Congress with strong bipartisan support. "The Republicans gave us testing, disaggregation, choice and supplemental services," Casserly pointed out.

"The Democrats gave us 'highly qualified teacher,' AYP (Annually Yearly Progress), and endless reporting requirements."

But has the *No Child Left Behind* Act helped or hindered the progress of America's urban schools?

"It is not clear how NCLB has affected student achievement in urban schools,"



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly puts the *No Child Left Behind* law in perspective at the Council's Legislative/Policy conference.

said Casserly, noting that although urban schools have made steady gains in reading and math over the past few years, he is not sure which provisions of the law created or advanced the progress.

He also noted that city school leaders have worked hard at implementing a law that many consider an exercise in compliance with rules not necessarily contributing to raising student achievement.

Moreover, Casserly criticized Title I funds being used to pay for external supplemental services that appear to be producing mixed results. And he stressed that the annually cascading sanctions in the law aren't effective to spur academic performance.

The Move to Reauthorization

What are urban school leaders to do to help improve *No Child Left Behind*?

Casserly explained that "we are looking down the barrel of the reauthorization of a bill that we supported but does not work."

And now experiencing his seventh reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 30 years with the

Council, Casserly indicated that the nation faces a huge political challenge to extend NCLB. "I have never seen the political forces so fractured about the direction of federal education law as I see them now."

Some Capitol Hill legislators want *more* requirements, others want more stringent sanctions and vouchers, while still others would rather repeal the law and allow states to opt out, Casserly told the urban educators.

He maintained that it's possible the various factions will battle to a draw, resulting in the bill being held over until after the 2008 elections. "I don't think any of us want that to happen, so we should want a bill to move now," he insisted.

The Council's Executive Committee has been grappling with NCLB since its inception. "There have been times when all of us wanted to bail on the whole thing," Casserly stressed.

"But I am reminded of the words of the great hockey player Wayne Gretsky, who when asked why he was so successful said, 'I don't chase the puck; I skate to where I *think* the puck is going to be.'"

Casserly pointed out that the Council's leadership settled on skating to where "we think Congress is going to be as it reauthorizes this law."

In projecting an outcome of the reauthorization, Casserly said, "At the end of the day, I expect to end up with a law that is better than what we have today, but probably not what we would really like."

He assured urban school leaders that "if I guess wrong about where the puck is going to be, then you should hold me accountable for steering you down the wrong path.

"But, I believe the path we are proposing will put urban education in a better place than it is today," he contended.

Following Casserly's overview, the Council fine-tuned its NCLB recommendations at the conference that have since been submitted to Congress.

Football Legend Kicks Off After-School Program in Cleveland

Jim Brown spent eight years in Cleveland as a star running back for the Cleveland Browns football team, but during a recent visit to the city, he didn't focus on football. Instead, he was in Cleveland to help improve the lives of youths.

Brown launched his Amer-I-Can after-school program, which will provide a 90-hour crime reducing curriculum to four high schools and one K-8 school in the Cleveland Municipal School District.

Under the program, 100 students will participate in after-school classes that will cover such topics as low self-esteem, problem solving, overcoming negative behavior, finding and retaining a job, maintaining financial stability and communicating effectively.

According to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, as part of the after-school initiative peace squad members will distribute literature and try to connect students with churches and neighborhood centers around the five schools.

The \$1.4 million program is being funded by the Cleveland Browns Foundation.

"There's an epidemic in this country with gang wars and our schools are falling



Cleveland Mayor Frank Johnson, left, joins football legend Jim Brown and Cleveland Superintendent Eugene Sanders, at the podium, in a press conference announcing the launch of Brown's Amer-I-Can program in five Cleveland schools.

apart," Brown said in the *Plain Dealer* at the press conference announcing the launch of the initiative. "We need a safe environment for the kids so they can get their education."

The Amer-I-Can program was founded in 1988 by Brown as a way to empower youths to take charge of their lives and achieve their full potential. The program is operating in several cities across the nation.

Charlotte District Holds Faith Summit

In an effort to increase community involvement and improve student achievement, North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools recently held a faith summit for more than 600 educators and representatives of local houses of worship.

The faith summit was sponsored by Charlotte Schools Superintendent Peter Gorman and the district's Interfaith Advisory Council to build on existing partnerships between the school system and local religious leaders.

"Much has been made of the separation of church and state," said Gorman, who ad-

ressed the overflow crowd at the two-hour summit. "I think it's time we talk about how we can join together."

Three principals, whose schools have partnered with area houses of worship, discussed how the partnerships have benefited their students academically.

Participants at the summit attended workshops where they learned ways to help students with after-school programs, including information on serving as mentors and students.

School principals will follow up in coming weeks to build partnerships that will best serve their students' needs.

"For many of our students, an afternoon or two a week spent with a mentor or tutor can make an enormous difference in academic achievement," Superintendent Gorman told the summit attendees. "We think area houses of worship are well placed to help kids understand that school is important, and that they need to work at it. Faith leaders help our community set values, and education is something we value."

The 62 schools that participated in the summit have a significant number of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch, the federal standard for measuring poverty.

NCLB Reauthorization Focus of Conference Talks

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind* Act (NCLB), designed to ensure students receive a high quality education by mandating extensive testing, disaggregating data to observe progress, providing parental choice and holding school officials accountable for results.

Five years later, the law is up for reauthorization and lawmakers are holding extensive discussions to see whether the law is fulfilling its promise of all students becoming proficient in math and reading by 2014.

At the Council of the Great City Schools' recent Legislative/Policy Conference, urban educators received a briefing on reauthorizing NCLB from Roberto Rodriguez of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

The committee is chaired by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), one of the authors of NCLB and who, according to Rodriguez, "is still a strong supporter of NCLB but is cognizant of changes that need to be made."

Rodriguez said the senator believes one of the main problems with NCLB is that not enough resources have been allocated to schools to implement the law effectively.

"[NCLB] is \$70 billion behind the levels promised when the law was authorized in 2001," said Rodriguez.

He said that Sen. Kennedy is advocating discussions on how to create better assessments at the state level to track the progress and growth of all students, and that Congress must look at changes that will provide new solutions to problems not currently being addressed in NCLB, such as how to leverage better parent involvement.

Rodriguez said that while the basic framework of NCLB is to provide students with an education, "the law doesn't recognize students coming to schools with diverse learning needs."

As a result, he said that Kennedy is a strong proponent of including in NCLB measures that strongly support, recruit and



Congressional staffer Denise Forte, Council legislation director Jeff Simering and congressional staffer Roberto Rodriguez brief conferees on the reauthorization of NCLB.

retain high quality teachers, particularly in schools that are the most disadvantaged.

"We must identify effective teachers in classrooms and provide them with additional support," said Rodriguez.

The Achievement Gap

Also addressing the conference was Denise Forte, a staffer on the House Education and Labor Committee.

She said that NCLB has inspired vigorous debate and is "the first time we are having a national conversation about the achievement gap," said Forte. "It's going on in boardrooms and at dinner tables."

She believes that before NCLB many school districts were able to gloss over the issue, but for the first time everyone is now able to see the data and "people don't like what we see."

Forte noted that Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, will be instrumental in its reauthorization.

"The chairman will be the first to acknowledge changes need to be made when it comes to NCLB," Forte told urban educators. "We are looking for your help to develop real solutions."

She acknowledged that lawmakers are ready to confront the hard questions that need to be addressed in the law, such as how to best help schools reach adequate yearly progress.

"But Congress is holding fast to the tenets of this act," warned Forte, to ensure that all students are reading and doing math at grade level by 2014.

Big-city educators also heard from Alex Nock, senior education aide on the House Committee on Education and Labor.

Nock said that Congress relies heavily on thoughts from people in the field and those educators who directly work in the classroom.

He noted that there are a number of key issues concerning NCLB and that the committee is still figuring out where changes in the law need to be made.

"We should make changes in NCLB," said Nock, "but let's make changes that operationally improve the law."

Nock said urban school districts can help lawmakers find answers to such ques-



Congressional staffer Alex Nock discusses the NCLB reauthorization.

tions as how is the supplemental education services provision in NCLB proceeding and how is the accountability system working.

"We want to learn from your experiences," Nock told conferees. "We need to ensure that we get specific recommendations for NCLB."

Nock said the overall goal for Rep. Miller in the reauthorization of NCLB, which he wants to complete this year, is to figure out how to improve the job of raising student achievement and closing gaps.

"We have a great opportunity from the past four or five years to learn from the law and improve it."

Cultural Critic To Address Urban Educators

Author, scholar and cultural critic Michael Eric Dyson will address urban school leaders at the Council of the Great City Schools' 51st Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 31-Nov. 4, in Nashville, Tenn.

Dyson tackles some of the toughest and most controversial issues in his books and commentaries. He is listed in *Ebony* magazine as one of the 100 most influential blacks in the nation and named by *Essence* magazine as one of the 40 most inspiring African Americans.



Michael Eric Dyson

The Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities and professor of religious and Africana studies at the University of Pennsylvania will be the Council's lunch speaker on Nov. 1.

More than 1,000 urban educators will convene at the Renaissance Nashville Hotel under the banner "Live from Nashville: Singing Student Success."

They will also hear from Julianne Malveaux, an economist, author and commentator, who will deliver the Nov. 2 breakfast address.

She focuses on issues such as race, culture and gender in her syndicated newspaper columns and television appearances.

For more information on the conference, access the Council's web site at <http://www.cgcs.org/conferences/fall.aspx>.



Council Of The Great City Schools
October 31st - November 4th, 2007

Scholarship Named For Former Boston Superintendent

Thomas Payzant served nearly 11 years as superintendent of Boston Public Schools and during his tenure he expanded early education offerings, raised student proficiency and narrowed achievement gaps. In honor of his service, a scholarship has been established in his name.

The Thomas W. Payzant Public Service in Education Scholarship will be awarded annually to a graduating senior from the Boston school system.

The first \$2,000 Payzant scholarship will be given to a 2007 graduate this spring.



Thomas Payzant

Students who meet all graduation requirements, demonstrate academic proficiency, make contributions to improve the level of education in Boston Public Schools and have gained acceptance into an accredited college/university are eligible for the scholarship.

"Tom Payzant has left a valuable legacy, not only in terms of a revitalized school system, but also in demonstrating the power of engagement and leadership to make a difference," said Elizabeth Reilinger, chair of the Boston School Committee.

"He served as a role model for many of us, and to honor his tireless dedication to the students in Boston Public Schools, the Boston School Committee is proud to establish this scholarship."

Urban Teachers Awarded Milken Educator Award

After 20 years, the Milken Educator Awards Program still generates the element of surprise when it recognizes educators for outstanding performance.

When Monica Chase, a second-grade teacher at Park View Elementary in Washington, D.C., was recently presented with the \$25,000 Milken National Educator Award, she stood in disbelief as students and teachers cheered her on at a secret school-wide assembly in her honor.

She was one of 82 secondary teachers, principals and specialists across the nation who received the award, called the "Oscars of Teaching" by *Teaching Magazine*, for demonstrating a commitment to educational excellence.

Chase, who has taught at Park View Elementary for 12 years, was honored for helping raise students' test scores and operating the after-school program. She also assists fifth-grade girls in making the transition to middle school by educating them on a range of issues.



Washington, D.C., teacher Monica Chase displays her Milken Educator Award.

Parent Macelina Aledan credits Chase's teaching as the reason her daughter is doing eighth-grade math as a seventh-grader.

"She's excellent," said Aledan in the *Washington Post*.

The teaching award was also presented to urban educators in Albuquerque, Anchorage, Austin, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Las Vegas, Louisville, Memphis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Seattle and Shreveport, La.

Pictorial of 2007 Legislative Conference



Council Chair and Nashville school board member George Thompson, left, poses with Education Secretary Margaret Spellings and Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.



Oakland school board member Gary Yee shares his views at a legislative session.



Memphis Superintendent Carol Johnson weighs in on *No Child Left Behind*.



Anchorage Superintendent Carol Comeau, Hillsborough County (Tampa) Superintendent MaryEllen Elia and Hillsborough board member Candy Olson listen intently during a conference session.



San Diego school board president Luis Acle makes a point at a legislative briefing.

Photos by Alex Jones

Great City Grads



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Jennifer Hudson

Oscar-winning actress

1999 graduate

Paul L. Dunbar Vocational Career
Academy

Chicago Public Schools

Orlando Students Put Their Taste Buds To Good Use to Help District Plan School Menus

Officials in Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., are relying on students' taste buds to decide what food the district will serve its 177,000 students.

The district's Food and Nutrition Services department recently held a tasting expo and invited students from two high schools and two middle schools to taste-test food items provided by approximately 30 vendors.

All of the foods were approved by the school system in advance.

Students were able to sample from six different food centers that featured items such as dipping sauces, ethnic food, beverages, breakfast items and snack food.

After the students tasted the food, they were provided with a scorecard and stickers to rate the foods. Foods receiving a green sticker were the items students enjoyed the most, while a yellow sticker was given to foods that were moderately liked. The foods most disliked by the students received a red sticker.

This is the second year the district has sponsored a tasting expo involving students.

"The kids will give you honest feedback," said Kern Halls, training manager for the district's Food and Nutrition Services department in the *Orlando Sentinel*. "Before, the staff would sit in a room and decide what to put on the menu based on what we ate, and our taste buds are different from the kids."

Using the results from the students' scorecard, the department will determine which products earned the most green stickers. Those items will be included on the district's bid for school meals.

According to the *Sentinel*, the school system serves 133,168 meals a day to students at 186 locations, which is almost double the number of meals served by local fast food restaurants such as Burger King and McDonald's.



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