

- New Leader in Orlando, p.3
- New Council Report, p.7
- Conference Pictorial, p.11

Council and *USA TODAY* Hold Second Forum

Six big-city school superintendents were recently asked by the publisher of *USA TODAY* to describe what a person would experience if holding the job of superintendent for six weeks.

Lack of sleep, financial challenges, and a majority of time spent not in the classroom but on external issues such as negotiating contracts were mentioned. But the superintendents also noted a person would see dedicated professionals strongly committed to helping all students achieve.

"You would see heroic work done every day," said Michael Hanson, superintendent of California's Fresno Unified School District. "[We believe] the district has a responsibility to create stability in a kid's life that no other institution can do."

Hanson was part of a panel discussion held at *USA TODAY* headquarters in McLean, Va., at the second annual *Unite to Make a Difference* Education Forum, sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools and *USA TODAY*. Education, business and media leaders came together in a daylong program to discuss steps to build support for urban schoolchildren.

The panel --"What's Needed to Improve, Support and Report Achievement in Urban Education?"-- was moderated by David Hunke, president and publisher of *USA TODAY*. He asked participants to explain what programs are succeeding in their respective school districts and what programs they would devote the most resources to protect.

Eugene White, the superintendent of Indianapolis Public Schools, believes it's



Urban school superintendents participate in a panel discussion at *USA TODAY* headquarters. From left to right, Hillsborough County Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia, Fresno Schools Superintendent Michael Hanson, District of Columbia Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson, *USA TODAY* president and publisher David Hunke, Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, Cincinnati Schools Superintendent Mary Ronan and Indianapolis Schools Superintendent Eugene White.

Education Secretary, Civil Rights Official Address Council Conference

The only way for the nation to get a strong economy is to improve education so students would be able to compete in a global society, Arne Duncan, the nation's ninth U.S. secretary of education, told urban school leaders at the Council of the Great City Schools' recent Annual Legislative/Policy Conference.

"[Other countries] are out-investing us, out-innovating us and jobs are going to go where the knowledge workers are," warned Duncan. "This is not a time when the status quo system is going to get us where we need to go."

The secretary said the Department of Education continues to push strongly for its "Cradle to Career" initiative, investing \$500 million in early childhood education in an effort to prepare students to enter kindergarten, ready to learn with



Education Secretary Arne Duncan walks with Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, left, and Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks on his way to addressing urban educators.

socialization and literacy skills in tact.

He believes that the adoption of common core standards is a big step in the right

Education Secretary continued on page 4



Students from Sumner Elementary School in Greensboro, N.C., join other students from across the country to pose with First Lady Michelle Obama in front of the White House kitchen garden.



A student looks over her shoulder at her t-shirt that was signed by First Lady Michelle Obama. (Photo Credit: Laurie Hogan)

Greensboro, N.C., Students Get Hands Dirty at White House

Students from Sumner Elementary School in Greensboro, N.C., recently got down on their knees with first lady Michelle Obama to plant the White House kitchen garden, receiving firsthand advice on the best fruits and vegetables to plant this spring.

Five students, three teachers and the principal of the school traveled to Washington, D.C., March 26 to attend the first

lady's fourth year of planting the White House kitchen garden, which helps Mrs. Obama have a conversation about children's health. Groups of students from other states also participated.

A schoolwide book project at Sumner Elementary inspired students and staff to plant their own garden. Everyone in the school, including teachers, support staff and PTA members, read

First Garden: The White House Garden and How It Grew by Robbin Gourley in November. "The school community was moved by reading the book and learning more about healthy eating," said Principal Thyais Maxwell in a press release.

Students wrote letters to Mrs. Obama about their plans for a school garden, seeking advice from her. In response, they were invited to the White House.



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New Superintendents Named in Orlando, Palm Beach and Omaha; San Francisco Leader to Retire



Barbara Jenkins

Barbara Jenkins began her career as a teacher in Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., in 1983 and has risen in the ranks, serving as principal, staff developer, senior director for elementary education and chief of staff.

And in June, she will take another job in the school district: superintendent.

Jenkins was recently selected to lead the 180,000-student school system, succeeding Ronald Blocker, who will retire in June after serving as superintendent since 2000.

A graduate of the Orange County school system, Jenkins is currently the district's deputy superintendent. She had been the assistant superintendent of human resources for North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Florida's School District of Palm Beach County also decided to look within for a leader, selecting interim superintendent Earl Wayne Gent as its new superintendent.



Earl Wayne Gent

Gent will take the reins of the 174,000-student school district, succeeding Bill Malone. He has held several positions in the school system, including chief officer of administration.



Nancy Sebring

Also selecting a new leader is Nebraska's Omaha Public Schools, which recently chose Nancy Sebring to take the helm of the 46,000-student school district. Sebring is currently the superintendent of Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools, where she has led the 31,275-student school district since 2006.

Under her leadership, the district's graduation rate has increased, scores in fourth-grade reading and math have improved and the district is the only one in Iowa with the International Baccalaureate program.

Sebring will succeed John Mackiel, who is retiring from the Omaha school system after serving 15 years as superintendent.

Stepping Down



Carlos Garcia

Before Carlos Garcia became superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District, he headed two urban school districts -- California's Fresno Unified School District and the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, the nation's fifth largest school system.

But after serving 37 years in education, Garcia recently announced his plans to retire this July. He has led the San Francisco school system since 2007 and under his leadership, the district has seen gains

in academic achievement for all students, including increased gains for Hispanic and African American students.

"Ending my career here in the SFUSD is like a dream come true; for I must admit, these last five years have given me an opportunity like no other," said Garcia in a news statement.

The board of education has recently entered into negotiations with Deputy Superintendent Richard Carranza to become the next superintendent. Carranza has served as the district's deputy superintendent since 2009, implementing the district's strategic plan.

Also departing is Susan Enfield, the interim superintendent for Seattle Public Schools. She has served as the interim leader of the school district for the 2011-2012 school year, succeeding Maria Goodloe-Johnson.

Miami, Nashville Pilot College Program

Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools will pilot a new rigorous program to help equip students with the knowledge and skills valued by colleges and necessary to compete in a global world.

The AP|Cambridge Capstone Program combines the in-depth subject matter offered through Advanced Placement courses and exams with the interdisciplinary global seminar curricula and the assessment of research projects and presentations offered by University of Cambridge International Examinations.

The program was developed based on feedback from colleges and universities requesting that high school students develop stronger backgrounds in independent research, collaborative teamwork and 21st-

College Program continued on page 10

Education Secretary *continued from page 1*

direction; however, the hard part will be implementing the standards in classrooms. “We have to raise the bar, but if we don’t give our teachers and principals the skills to hit that bar then we are setting ourselves up for failure,” Duncan stressed.

The former head of Chicago Public Schools lauded the efforts of big-city school districts to implement school turnaround efforts and said he is very encouraged by the progress being made in these schools, such as double-digit increases in reading and math and decreases in student discipline issues.

“I did not begin to think we would see the progress we’ve had in a year, which is significant,” said Duncan.

On the issue of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act, the secretary said he is frustrated that Congress did not fix NCLB and wants to give states the flexibility to make changes in the law through waivers. He said that for the first time school districts will be rewarded on the academic gains and growth students make, and not just on one test score. “We will have a much clearer view of district and school success,” said Duncan.

The nation’s top education official said that big-city educators need to ask themselves how to lift up the teaching profession to attract and retain the best and the brightest teachers.

According to Duncan, the difference between students being taught by an average teacher and a bad teacher is significant and encouraged leaders to mentor and train young educators, build career ladders and create attractive compensation packages.

“The stakes for our work has never been higher,” Duncan emphasized.

Fighting for Civil Rights

Conferees also heard from Russlyn Ali, assistant secretary of 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.



Assistant Secretary Russlyn Ali on civil rights

Last month, the department released the results of a national survey of more than 72,000 schools serving 85 percent of the nation’s students. “We wanted to find out what students in the nation experience as they journey from pre-K to college,” said Ali.

The results were “a wake-up call,” she noted, revealing that African American students were three and a half times more likely to be suspended more than once from school. The survey also revealed that while blacks made up 18 percent of the students sampled, they made up 35 percent of students suspended and 39 percent of students expelled.

The data also revealed that in high schools serving a majority of African American and Latino students, only 29 percent of those schools offered calculus, compared to 55 percent of schools that mostly served white students.

“For the first time we were able to see who has access to these [high level] courses,” said Ali.

The assistant secretary also addressed the issue of bullying in schools. She noted that OCR is examining civil rights law to determine how they can give school district officials the tools to prevent bullying.

She recalled how she had a conversation with the mother of a 10-year-old who committed suicide after students taunted him because they thought he was gay.

“He was bullied and harassed because he wasn’t conforming to what people thought he should be,” said Ali. “All students have a right to feel safe to learn and we have a responsibility to help you ensure students feel safe.”

Council Pays Tribute To Congressman

As a member of the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Education and Workforce, Congressman Dale Kildee (D-Mich.) has supported funds for school construction, fought to improve the quality of vocational education, and championed dropout prevention legislation. And after serving 18 consecutive terms, he has decided to retire.

“For 36 years, Dale Kildee has been a true supporter and champion of disadvantaged urban schoolchildren,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools. The organization recently presented the congressman with a lifetime achievement award for his years of public service at the Council’s Annual Legislative/Policy Conference. In the audience were many of his former staffers, who joined conferees in giving him a standing ovation.

Upon accepting the award, Kildee, a former teacher, noted that some people mistakenly believe that the federal government should not have a role in education.

“Today is the 225th anniversary of the Northwest Ordinance, the first education bill passed by the United States of America,” said Kildee.

He cited historic education legislation such as the Morrill Act of 1862, in which the federal government gave land to colleges; and the GI Bill of Rights and challenged conferees to continue to nourish the roots of education that began so long ago in this country.

“I have spent my career fighting to ensure access to a quality education,” said Kildee. “...Those who take my place must make sure that we keep our commitment.”



Congressman Dale Kildee

Anchorage Adopts Common Standards In a State Not on Board

Alaska's biggest school system, the Anchorage School District, recently adopted the Common Core State Standards in a state that has not followed some 45 states and the District of Columbia, which have adopted the higher academic standards.

The Anchorage School Board approved the adoption of what it calls "a set of rigorous, evidence-based standards that are clear, consistent and aligned with college and career expectations."

Anchorage Schools Superintendent Carol Comeau recommended the new standards to the school board after the district began working on the Common Core Standards in 2010 with other major city school systems nationwide through the Council of the Great City Schools.

The Council is currently facilitating the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in a number of big-city public school systems, including Anchorage.

"By adopting the Common Core State Standards," says Anchorage School Board President Gretchen Guess, "we've drawn a clear line in the sand of where we're going, what we're doing and what our expectations are. We're focusing the district."

Columbus School Recognized by FBI

Columbus Global Academy in Ohio is the only school to receive the 2011 FBI Director's Community Leadership Award. The Cincinnati FBI Division selected Columbus Global Academy for its demonstrated leadership in support of young people and for its valuable partnership with the FBI.

Columbus Global Academy is an English as a Second Language school for immigrant and refugee students with limited English language skills. It serves almost 500 students between the ages of 11 and 22 from more than 50 different countries.

For the past three years the campus has hosted a FBI Teen Academy. Students have learned about the work of special agents, seen evidence-response and recovery techniques, learned online safety and viewed a SWAT presentation. In addition, FBI employees and their families volunteer at the Columbus Global Academy, participating in Career Day presentations and serving on the school's Community Advisory Council.

Established in 1990, the FBI Director's



FBI Director Robert Mueller presents the 2011 FBI Director's Community Leadership Award to Kimberly Normand, principal of Columbus Global Academy.

Community Leadership Award was created to honor individuals and organizations for their efforts in combating crime, terrorism, drugs and violence in America.

"Whatever the motivation—an unfilled need, a tragic occurrence, a desire to give back—these are people who make things happen and enlist others in their cause," said FBI Director Robert Mueller. "They are activists who have earned their prestige through good works."

Palm Beach Is 1st-Time Finalist For Big Prize In Urban Education

Florida's School District of Palm Beach County has been named a finalist for the first time since the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation began awarding its million-dollar prize a decade ago.

The prize goes to four urban school districts annually for making substantial progress in raising student achievement, particularly for traditionally disadvantaged students.

The finalists for the 2012 Broad Prize for Urban Education also include the inaugural Broad Prize winner, the Houston Independent School District, which won in 2002. And this marks the fifth year that the Miami-Dade County Public Schools is a finalist. The fourth district is the Corona-Norco Unified School District in Southern California.

The winner of the 2012 prize, to be announced Oct. 23, will receive \$550,000 in college scholarships for high school seniors who will graduate in 2013, while each of the three finalist school districts will receive \$150,000 in scholarships, totaling the \$1 million prize.

"These four school districts can be proud that they are paving the way by demonstrating that students of all backgrounds can achieve if they are given equal opportunities to learn," said Eli Broad, founder of the foundation.

Some 75 of the nation's largest school districts were eligible for the Broad Prize. The four finalists were selected by a review board of 13 education researchers, policy-makers, civil rights advocates and executives from universities, education associations, think tanks and foundations.

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools won the 2011 Broad Prize for Urban Education.

Second Forum *continued from page 1*

important to give children courses in music and the arts. "I would love to have money to start a foreign language program in kindergarten," said White, indicating this would help prepare students for a global economy.

Mary Ronan, superintendent of Cincinnati Public Schools, believes preserving all-day kindergarten and English Language Learners programs are vital, as well as working with college teacher training programs to help educators develop necessary skills.

MaryEllen Elia, the superintendent of Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, said that one of the district's most important priorities is teachers, and has implemented a reform model for how to recruit and compensate them. "We make sure it's a continuous improvement approach, supporting teachers," said Elia. "It makes a huge difference in achievement."

Kaya Henderson, chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools, said that her school district is ensuring there is a highly effective teacher in every classroom by creating "an evaluation system that supports, develops, rewards and recognizes excellent teachers."

"I really don't think we're going to achieve true capacity for common core standards without taking time and resources in investing in people in classrooms who have to deliver them every single day," said Carol Johnson, superintendent of the Boston Public Schools.

"Investment in people primarily by teaching, but also leadership skills, is so key in trying to get the results we want."

Urban Schools Make Strides

The progress urban schools are making as well as the next steps urban educators must take was the focus of an address by Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council.

Casserly said that large city schools have made substantial gains in reading and math at both fourth- and eighth-grade levels between 2003, when districts first took the



Michael Casserly

National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), and 2011, the most recent year of the tests.

"The gains have been made in students across the board--white students, black students, Hispanic students, and economically disadvantaged students alike," said Casserly.

Despite the progress being made, Casserly said that a study recently released by the Council found that too few urban school district graduates are prepared for higher education or a good job.

He urged the nation's urban public schools to focus on five major priorities--implementing common core standards; pursuing a coordinated effort to turnaround the lowest performing schools; improving the achievement of African American male students, English-language learners and students with disabilities; enhancing

the capacity of urban school leaders to improve their governance and management; and embarking on an aggressive effort to increase graduation rates.

"We have made considerable progress over the last 10-15 years," said Casserly, "and I promise to devote my remaining time in urban education to rallying our cities around these five priorities to further improve our schools."

The Age of Wonder

Forum participants were treated to a stimulating discussion by Michael Wesch, associate professor of cultural anthropology at Kansas State University.

Wesch believes that students must go beyond being knowledgeable to being knowledge-able.

"We have to engage wonder," said Wesch, "because wonder inspires students to make them knowledge-able."

The professor noted that students today live in a world in which more than two billion people are connecting and collaborating and that people who don't have wonder become stagnant, whereas people who are full of wonder are observant.



Michael Wesch

"Help students find their voice and have the courage to express their voice," urged Wesch. "...Let technology not be a distraction but find a way to inspire wonder in kids in a way to lead us forward."

Positive Female Images

The importance of positive gender roles in the media was the focus of a thought-provoking keynote address by Academy Award-winning actor Geena Davis. Five years ago, she launched the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, which works within the entertainment industry to influence gender balance in films and television.

Davis pointed out that there is a stark gender gap in shows and movies aimed at children. Not only are there less female characters compared to male characters, but female characters often wear highly sexualized clothing and are stereotyped in the role of a princess.

According to research, Davis said that the more hours of television a girl watches



Actor Geena Davis

Second Forum *continued on page 7*

Second Forum continued from page 6

the fewer career options she thinks she has, and the more hours a boy watches the more sexist his views become.

“We are in effect indoctrinating generation after generation [of children to think] women and girls are less significant to us than boys and men,” said Davis.

That is why it is important for the actor, who has appeared in movies such as *“Thelma and Louise,”* and portrayed the president on the television show *“Commander in Chief,”* to choose roles where the characters decide their own fate.

“Female media images that show women in control of their own fate can have a positive effect to counterbalance negative media portrayals,” said Davis, who prefers to be called “actor.” She believes that if girls watch female characters engaged in unsteretyped activities they are more likely to grow up pursuing nontraditional vocations, such as science.

“If they see it, they can be it,” said Davis. “Girls need to see both fictional characters and real women role models doing important things and doing important jobs.”

Breakout Sessions



Miami Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho facilitates a session.

The daylong forum also featured three panel sessions on education issues facilitated by urban school superintendents alongside business leaders.

The first session titled “How Can Technology Help Urban Students Advance?” was moderated by Alberto Carvalho, superintendent of Miami-Dade County Schools, and Siegfried Behrens from Microsoft and focused on the difficulties school districts face in training teachers on how to use technology and the lack of funding available to purchase new technology.

Recommendations included school districts and businesses creating public/private



Chicago Schools CEO Jean-Claude Brizard, State Farm's Kathy Payne and Mary Wong from the Office Depot Foundation facilitate a session.

partnerships and incorporating technology education as a part of professional development for teachers.

Jean-Claude Brizard, chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools, and representatives from State Farm and the Office Depot Foundation facilitated a panel on ways to harness resources to combat the dropout rate.

Educators were recommended to look at ways to revamp the school structure, such as extending the school day and school year, developing Saturday academies, creating smaller high schools and creating a mechanism to share best practices.

“How Do You Gain a Fair and Balanced View of Urban Students and Schools?” was the topic of a third session featuring Winston Brooks, the superintendent of Albuquerque Public Schools, and Brent Jones from *USA TODAY*.



Brent Jones from USA TODAY and Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks moderate a session.

Urban school districts often have to overcome stereotypes and national misconceptions, while dealing with a lack of resources.

Recommendations included school districts developing a good relationship with local media as well as being proactive and using web sites and social media such as Facebook and Twitter, to tell their own stories.

Study Shows Increase In Urban Students Taking ACT Exams

The percentage of students in urban public schools taking ACT college-entrance exams between 2007 and 2011 jumped by 49 percent compared with a 25 percent increase nationally of ACT test takers, according to a new report.

In the nation and urban school districts, the percentage of African American and especially Hispanic test takers rose, but decreased among Caucasian urban students and remained unchanged for white students nationwide.

ACT: A Benchmark for College Readiness 2007-2011, a joint report by the Council of the Great City Schools and the ACT testing service, found an increase in the percentage of students meeting ACT college-ready benchmarks in composite ACT scores over the past four years in urban schools and nationally. But saw a decrease in English and reading in both urban and national scores.

In mathematics and science, there was no change in the percentage of urban students meeting ACT college-ready benchmarks, while the nation registered an increase in both disciplines.

ACT's college readiness benchmarks are based on minimum ACT test scores required for students to have a high probability of success in credit-bearing college and university courses.

Of the 67 big-city school systems in the Council, South Carolina's Charleston County school system improved at a faster rate than other big-city school districts on the ACT composite, reading, mathematics and science scores. It also had the highest increase of students meeting college readiness benchmarks.

The Minneapolis school system between 2007 and 2011 was the most improved district in ACT English and the second most improved district on ACT composite, math and science scores.

The report can be accessed at www.cgcs.org.

NYC Student Wins \$50,000 Intel Award

Mimi Yen, a senior at Stuyvesant High School in New York City, was recently awarded a \$50,000 scholarship for her study of evolution and genetics.

Receiving 3rd place honors in the Intel Science Talent Search, Yen was one of 10 finalists to receive \$530,000 in scholarships.

Some 1,800 high school seniors nationwide competed for the award in the nation's oldest and most prestigious high school science competition, sponsored by the Intel Corporation and the Society for Science & the Public.

For Yen's prize-winning research, she studied the evolution of microscopic worms, specifically their sex habits and hermaphrodite tendencies, for two summers along with 20 hours a week during the school year. Yen believes that research such as hers will lead to a better understanding of the genes that contribute to behavioral variations in humans.

The teen credits her high school biology teachers for her interest in science. Outside of the classroom, Yen plays the French horn and volunteers to prepare and deliver meals to people with serious illnesses.



Mimi Yen is congratulated for winning third place in the Intel Science Talent Search by Paul Otellini, president and CEO of Intel Corporation. Photo Credit: Society for Science & the Public

"I want to congratulate Mimi Yen, a senior at Stuyvesant High School, for winning one of the top three awards in the Intel Science Talent Search," said Dennis Walcott, chancellor of the New York City Department of Education. "...We should all aspire to Mimi's commitment to education and dedication to her community."

EPA Gives Energy Award to Des Moines School District

In three years, Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools has cut its energy use by more than 20 percent and has saved more than \$1.7 million in energy costs. For its efforts, the school district was recently recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a 2012 ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year.

The award honors 41 organizations that have made outstanding contributions to protecting the environment through superior energy efficiency. Award winners were selected from about 20,000 partners that participate in the ENERGY STAR program.

The school system has implemented a number of energy performance improvements throughout the district, such as installing geothermal systems at 27 schools,

providing more efficient lighting systems and replacing inefficient windows and doors.

The district also incorporates energy lessons into student curricula and emails energy tips to staff.

So far, 43 district schools are currently ENERGY STAR-rated, with four additional schools soon to be added to the list this spring.

"As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ENERGY STAR program, EPA is proud to recognize Des Moines Public Schools with the 2012 ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year Award," said EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson. Des Moines was one of only two school districts in the nation to receive the Partner of the Year Award.

Urban Schools Win 'Grammy' Awards

Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville, Fla., was named the top 2012 National GRAMMY Signature School for its excellent music education program for the second time in the past three years.

Awarded a cash prize of \$15,000 to improve its music department, Douglas Anderson was one of 18 schools across the nation selected as 2012 GRAMMY Signature Schools. Established in 1998 by the GRAMMY Foundation, the award program honors exceptional public high school music programs across the nation.



"I always dreamed of our department winning the National Grammy Award," said Ace Martin, Douglas Anderson's music education chair. "To win it twice [first in 2010] is an amazing achievement that makes us very proud of our students and the music education in Duval County."

In addition to Douglas Anderson, Green Valley High School and the Las Vegas Academy of International Studies Performing and Visual Arts in Nevada's Clark County School District were recognized as "Grammy Signature Schools Gold." Each school was awarded a \$5,000 prize.

Big-city schools also received four of the 11 "Grammy Signature Schools Enterprise Awards," which recognize efforts made by schools that are economically underserved.

Receiving a \$5,500 grant were Miami-Dade County's Hialeah Gardens High School; Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center in Columbus, Ohio; and Bartlett High School and East Anchorage High School, both in Anchorage.

Schools are selected for the award by an independent blue ribbon committee of top music educators and professionals.

National School Transformation Center Honors Urban Schools

At Trinidad Garza Early College High School in Dallas, students work to earn their high school diplomas while also attaining an associate's degree from a local community college. And even though 86 percent of its 393 students are eligible for free/reduced price lunch and 27 percent

are limited English proficient, the school received the second highest ranking based on academic performance by the Texas Education Agency.

For its efforts in beating the odds, the school was one of 14 across the nation to receive the 2012 National Excellence in

Urban Education Award, presented by San Diego State University's National Center for Urban School Transformation (NCUST).

In order to be eligible for the award, schools had to have a large number of students from economically disadvantaged families, high test scores, little or no achievement gaps and high attendance and graduation rates.

In addition to Garza, William Dandy Middle School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Jim Thorpe Fundamental School in Santa Ana, Calif.; and William Cullen Bryant Middle School and MC2 STEM High School; both in Cleveland, were honored.

The schools were selected from among 27 finalists that were visited by a team of evaluators. The winning schools were found to have students learning challenging academic content and skills that exceeded grade level expectations as well as teachers who used engaging instructional methods that helped make learning interesting, relevant and fun for students.

"I know it sounds corny, but every child can learn," said Melissa Watts, principal of Cleveland's William Cullen Bryant Middle School. "We proved it. It's just taking the time to get to know what the kids need and give it to them."

Each winning school will be presented with a \$2,500 award at the NCUST's Excellence in Urban Education National Symposium in May in San Diego, where Michael Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, will be the keynote speaker.

Students Create Own Menus With Chefs in Orlando

Florida's Orange County Public Schools in Orlando recently unveiled new school recipes that are "chef-inspired, kid-approved" in the *Chefs Move to Schools* program, part of first lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* initiative to reduce childhood obesity.

For the past five months, elementary and secondary school students moved from the school cafeteria into the school kitchen under the guidance of award-winning chefs and food-service managers to learn about nutrition, and create new menu selections with less sugar, salt and fat.

For the second consecutive year, chefs, students and food-service managers showcased their new meat and vegetarian menu items for hundreds of students and staff at a fast-paced *Food Network* meets *Nickelodean* style event in Orlando.

For its efforts in beating the odds, the school was one of 14 across the nation to receive the 2012 National Excellence in

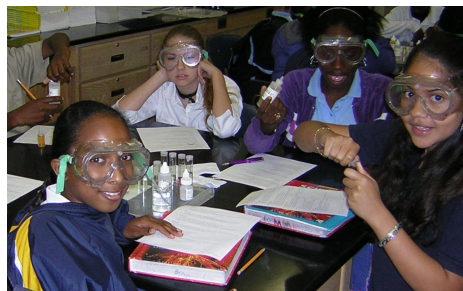
New menu items include Saigon vegetable sandwich, beef taco lettuce wrap, veggie tacos with mango guacamole and meatball-palooza wrap.

"The *Chefs Move to Schools* initiative offers an innovative opportunity to involve and educate our students about foods and nutrition," says Lora Gilbert, senior director of Orange County Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services. "This interaction with chefs and food-service managers offers them a behind-the-scenes perspective of school nutrition."

The Orange County school district has earned national recognition with its accomplishments through the *Chefs Move to Schools* program.



Chefs surround Florida's Orange County Schools incoming superintendent Barbara Jenkins, (lower center), and district food-service chief Lora Gilbert (red).



Students at William Dandy Middle School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., work on a science project. The school was one of the winners of a 2012 National Excellence in Urban Education Award.

Council Research Director Named To National Panel



Sharon Lewis

Sharon Lewis, research director of the Council of the Great City Schools, has been named to a prestigious National Research Council committee to help improve elementary and secondary education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in the nation.

She has been appointed to the NRC's Committee to Develop an Evaluation Framework for Successful K-12 STEM Education, which will conduct a consensus study to identify methods for tracking and evaluating the implementation of improvements for kindergarten-12th grade education recommended by the 2011 NRC report *Successful K-12 STEM Education*.

The recommended improvements at the school and district levels include adequate instructional time and resources for science, coherent standards and curriculum, greater teacher capacity and supportive school conditions that have been identified in the research.

At the state and national levels, the recommended improvements include greater attention to science, taking into account assessments for science, investment in support of STEM teachers, and increased support for research programs that can identify instructional practices that improve student outcomes in STEM.

College Program *continued from page 3*

century knowledge and skills.

Four schools in Miami and one school in Nashville have been selected to pilot the program in the fall. The program is scheduled to be piloted in up to 20 schools across the nation.

Nation's Top Magnet Schools Named

Miami-Dade County Public Schools opened its first magnet program in 1973 and the district now has more than 43,000 students enrolled in 360 magnet programs at 103 schools.

Twelve of those schools were recently recognized as among the top magnet schools in the nation by Magnet Schools of America.

The organization awards the Magnet School of Excellence Award to magnet schools that show a commitment to high academic standards, curriculum innovation, successful desegregation/diversity efforts, specialized teaching staffs and parent and community involvement.

Schools in Miami-Dade were not the

only big-city schools to receive an Excellence Award. In addition, 10 schools in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools; six in Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas; three in Tampa's Hillsborough County Public Schools; and three in Louisiana's East Baton Rouge Parish School System received awards.

And Indianapolis Public Schools, Omaha Public Schools and Florida's School District of Palm Beach County and Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale each had one school honored.

The winning schools were selected from a field of approximately 250 schools and had to submit an application that was scored by a panel of educators.



Tampa Area 'Environmentalists'

Teams of environmental resource students from two schools in Florida's Hillsborough County school system in Tampa waded into a filtration pond to stem a potential environmental problem that could clog the pond's drains. They literally jumped right in to clean up ponds that are the only source of fresh water in the downtown Tampa area. The students also put their environmental resource STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) skills to work in testing the water quality.

Pictorial of 2012 Legislative Conference and *USA TODAY* Forum



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly and Council Director of Legislation Jeff Simering present Congressman Dale Kildee with the Council's Lifetime Achievement Award for his long years of public service.



Council Chair and Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks welcomes conferees to the Legislative Conference.



Santa Ana Schools Superintendent Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana asks a question at the Legislative Conference as Cincinnati Schools board member Eileen Cooper Reed (foreground) looks on.



Florida's Hillsborough County school board member and Council Chair-elect Candy Olson moderates a question-and-answer session at the *USA TODAY* forum with panelists, including District of Columbia Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson and Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson (pictured).



Philadelphia Eagles professional football player Nnamdi Asomugha discusses the importance of volunteering at the *USA TODAY* forum.

Photos by Alex Jones



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Urban Districts Win Management Award

The Council of the Great City Schools recently presented its 2011 Managing for Results Achievement Award to five big-city school districts at its Chief Operating Officers Conference in Cincinnati.

Sponsored by the Council and Chartwells, the award was presented to Minneapolis Public Schools, Austin Indepen-

dent School District, Dallas Independent School District, St. Paul Public Schools and Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., for their efficient and effective use of resources in critical areas, such as child nutrition, maintenance and operations, safety and security and student transportation.

Support Needed For Scholarships



Shirley Schwartz

The Council of the Great City Schools is calling for donations to support the Dr. Shirley S. Schwartz Scholarship Fund, named for the organization's director of special projects who unexpectedly

died in 2009.

A scholarship was developed to coincide with the Dr. Shirley S. Schwartz Urban Education Impact Award, which recognizes an outstanding partnership between a big-city school district and college of education for their significant impact on

student learning.

The Urban Impact Award was renamed to honor Dr. Shirley Schwartz, who was the Council's longtime liaison to the Great City Colleges of Education, a coalition of deans affiliated with the urban educators.

Each year, the winning Impact Award collaboration between a school district and college of education jointly select a student who has graduated from the school system and either will attend or currently attends the partner education college. The student is awarded a two-year scholarship.

For information on how to support the scholarship fund, access the Council's web site at: www.cgcs.org/Page/48.



U.S. Senator Opens Omaha School Clinic

Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) is joined by Mandila Arno and Asia McCree, students at Omaha Public Schools' Northwest High Magnet, for the ribbon cutting of the school's new health clinic.

The clinic is the district's first health center located in a high school. It has the potential to provide care to all 50,000 district students and their siblings from birth to age 18. The clinic is staffed by nurse practitioners and a medical assistant.