



- New Chief in Wichita, p.3
- Pittsburgh 'Promise,' p.9
- **LEGISLATIVE**
- Stimulus Funding Issue, p. 10



Education Secretary Arne Duncan addresses reporters on the White House grounds following a meeting with urban education leaders who look on. Photo Credit: Manish Naik

Council Leads Urban Educators To White House

In a rare two-hour, closed-door meeting, some 30 urban school superintendents and board members from around the nation had the opportunity recently to discuss with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and senior presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett how best to utilize the Obama Administration's economic stimulus package to improve and advance America's urban public schools.

Immediately after the March 16 meeting, the urban school leaders emerged on the White House grounds to meet with reporters before returning to a legislative/policy conference held by the Council of the Great City Schools

in Washington, who had arranged the special meeting with Administration officials.

"We had an opportunity to learn how we might take advantage of the stimulus funds in creating and saving hundreds of programs to help our inner-city children achieve, implementing shovel-ready projects to aid in modernizing our school buildings, and investing in initiatives to provide the best school teachers and principals in underserved schools," said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

Known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the \$787 billion

White House continued on page 4

Ed. Secretary Cites 'Historic Opportunity' To Improve Education

When Arne Duncan was the chief executive officer for Chicago Public Schools, he attended several conferences sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools.

So he received a standing ovation when he appeared at the Council's recent Legislative/Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., in his new role: U.S. Secretary of Education.

"I consider this the home team," said Duncan to the nearly 300 big-city educators from across the nation who convened in the nation's capital to attend the conference.

Duncan, the nation's ninth secretary of education, noted that urban school systems have made tremendous progress and that his role as secretary is to help districts continue to improve student achievement.

"If we can transform public education in cities, we'll do something we've never done before," said Duncan. "The stakes are huge."

The secretary observed that the nation is facing a time of tremendous economic crisis, but also a time of educational crisis with far too many students not graduating and ready to attend college or enter the workforce.

However, he also noted that "in this time of crisis, is a time of a historic opportunity."

The nation's top education official told conferees that people in the Obama administration, starting with President Barack Obama himself, fundamentally care

Ed. Secretary continued on page 6

MTV Reality Show Spotlights Cincinnati Students

The School of Creative and Performing Arts (SCPA) is a well-kept secret in the city of Cincinnati, but that is about to change because the school is now the setting of a new television show airing nationally.

“Taking the Stage” is a show on cable channel MTV that follows five students at the school as they pursue their artistic goals, which range from singing and songwriting to ballet and hip-hop dancing.

The 10-episode musical reality show is the brainchild of SCPA alumnus and singer Nick Lachey, who brought the idea to MTV executives of shooting a television show at his high school alma mater, similar to the 1980 movie “Fame” about students at a performing arts high school in New York City.

“My intention in doing this show and bringing it to MTV was to only present the school in the best positive light,” he said in an interview with the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. “It was a great place when I was there and it still is now.”

Auditions to find students to follow on the show were held last year and



The cast of the MTV television show “Taking the Stage.” Photo credit: MTV

the program started filming in September. Cincinnati district officials welcome the show and the exposure it may bring the school, which was created in 1973 as one of the district’s first magnet schools.

At a recent screening of the television show’s premier episode held at the school’s theater, Interim Superintendent Mary

Ronan told the audience that SCPA was created by school leaders as a place to transcend the barriers of class and race to attract diverse students from across the entire city, linked by a common desire to nurture their talent and performance.

MTV Show continued on page 3



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Wichita, Baton Rouge, Dayton and Austin Name New School District Leaders



John Allison

Wichita Public Schools in Kansas recently selected a veteran educator to head the district. John Allison was chosen to take the reins of the 49,146-student school system, succeeding Winston Brooks,

who now heads New Mexico's Albuquerque school district.

Allison, a Kansas native, is the superintendent of the Mt. Lebanon School District, a 5,294-student school system near Pittsburgh.

"The Wichita Public Schools is a strong educational system and I am looking forward to working with everyone in Wichita," said Allison in a press statement.

Also selecting a new leader was Louisiana's East Baton Rouge School System, which named John Dilworth to take the reins of the 45,056-student school district.

Dilworth is currently the superintendent of Alabama's Montgomery Public Schools, where he has led the 31,500-student



John Dilworth

school district for two years. He has also served as vice president of university affairs at Northwestern State University and chief operating officer of the Caddo Public School District, both in Louisiana.

He succeeds Charlotte Placide, who is retiring from the district in June after serving at the helm since 2004.

Dayton Leader Named

Kurt Stanic was named the interim superintendent of Ohio's Dayton Public Schools in July 2008 and has focused on three issues: passage of the November operating levy, teaching and learning and the school environment.

Since passage of the district's operating levy, the first in more than 16 years, academic and athletic programs have been restored. And the district recently decided to change Stanic's title from interim superintendent to superintendent.

Stanic succeeds Percy Mack, who left the district after six years to become the superintendent of the Richland One School District in Columbia, S.C.

Austin Selects Leader

After being named the sole finalist for the superintendent position in Texas' Austin Unified School District, Meria Carstarphen was recently appointed the district's next superintendent.

Carstarphen, who is the superintendent of Minnesota's St. Paul Public Schools, begins her tenure on July 1, succeeding Pat Forgione, who will retire from the district in June.

Council and NAACP Legal Defense Fund Collaborate in Project

The Council of the Great City Schools is working in a joint project with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to provide technical assistance and support to school districts and communities trying to promote cultural diversity and prevent racial isolation in public schools.

The project has been developed as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2007 ruling striking down student assignment plans in Louisville and Seattle designed to promote racial diversity in their public schools.

By a 5-4 majority, the high court decision now makes it more difficult for cities to maintain an integrated student body, prevent racial resegregation and improve academic performance in public schools, according to the Council.

The Council decried the court's decision as a "deliberate and pronounced step backwards in the nation's long march toward racial equality," said Executive Director Michael Casserly immediately following the ruling almost two years ago.

The joint project between the Council and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund aims to address racial inequality and divisions within the nation's urban public schools; provide technical assistance to a select group of schools; develop models to confront racial isolation in schools; and launch a website for educators to access in promoting diversity and preventing racial isolation in schools.

"We have already laid a foundation for this work," Casserly said. "The Council and the Legal Defense Fund have led the litigation, advocacy and public education efforts around school diversity and racial isolation for the past several years," he explained, noting that the two organizations are an "essential resource" for school systems and communities seeking guidance to respond to the Supreme Court's decision.

MTV Show continued from page 2

"And that is exactly what's happened," said Ronan. "It's what makes this school so dynamic—and what attracted Nick and MTV to tell our students' stories through 'Taking the Stage.'"

According to the *Enquirer*, the district is receiving \$10,000 an episode and has secured a promise from MTV not to broadcast images of negative behavior, such as students' fighting or taking drugs.

And the show has already made an impact, at least locally. The school's artistic director said that since people became aware of the show, inquiries from prospective students and parents have increased approximately 30 percent.

White House continued from page 1

stimulus package includes more than \$100 billion for education programs.

Showing gratitude for the stimulus funds, Bill Isler, chair of the Council and member of the Pittsburgh school board, stressed, “We know that we need to spend the funds wisely, transparently and effectively in a short period. With this meeting today, we have a better idea of how to channel the funds to spur progress in the classrooms and throughout our school systems to enhance reform efforts.”

Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson noted that the roundtable discussion gave her a better understanding about the stimulus provisions, guidelines and funds, and how they can be put to use in accelerating reform efforts. “We believe that Secretary Duncan and President Obama appreciate the need to spur progress in the nation’s urban centers to improve the economy



Senior presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett addresses urban school leaders at a White House meeting as Great City Schools Executive Director Michael Casserly and Education Secretary Arne Duncan listen.

and better prepare our students for global competition.”

The nation’s Superintendent of the Year, Atlanta’s Beverly Hall, welcomes the stimulus funds to help lift her reform initiatives to new heights. “With this new support, Atlanta Public Schools is ready to put the funds to the best use in elevating our educational programs to increase student progress.”

School leaders from New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Miami, Detroit, Philadelphia and other major cities throughout the nation attended the special meeting.

Two Council Districts Named Finalists For Urban Ed. Prize

Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Long Beach Unified School District in California are among the five school districts recently named finalists for the 2009 Broad Prize for Urban Education.

Every year, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation honors the nation’s urban school districts that have made significant progress in raising student achievement. The winner of the Broad Prize, to be announced Sept. 16, will receive \$1 million in scholarships for graduating seniors, while each of the four finalist school systems will receive \$250,000 in scholarships.

This is the second consecutive year that Broward County Public Schools has vied for the prize. “Broward’s student-centered strategy has created the learning conditions that have empowered Broward students to make some of the strongest gains in the country,” said Broad Foundation founder Eli Broad in a press release.

Winner of the Broad Prize in 2003, the Long Beach school system was also in the running for the award last year. Both Broward and Long Beach are members of the Council of the Great City Schools.

The five finalist districts, which also include Georgia’s Gwinnett County, as well as Texas’ Aldine and Socorro school systems, were selected by a review board of 20 education researchers, policymakers and executives from universities, national education associations, think tanks and foundations. Some 100 of the nation’s largest school districts were eligible for the award.

Since its inception in 2002, the Broad Prize has been bestowed upon five big-city school districts that are members of the Council – New York City, Boston, Norfolk and Houston in addition to Long Beach.

District in Jacksonville Earns Accreditation

Florida’s Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville recently earned district-wide accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI).

The accreditation report commended the district for its establishment and articulation of the vision, mission, goals and strategic plan that has established the foundation for the school district’s improvement efforts.

“Receiving accreditation for our district is proof that our education system is working together and heading in the right direction as a team,” said Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals.

Among other big-city school districts that have earned SACS CASI district accreditation are Florida’s Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale and the School District of Palm Beach County, as well as North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Mississippi’s Jackson Public Schools.

Portland District Gets Help Closing Racial Achievement Gap

Black and white students in Portland, Ore., learn at the same rate once they get into school, but black students start at about one-and-a-half grade levels behind their white peers, making it difficult to catch up.

These findings are part of a recent report that studied the achievement gap between white and minority students in Portland.

The report, "A Deeper Look at the Black-White Achievement Gap in Multnomah County," is based on research at six Oregon school districts, including Portland Public Schools, focusing specifically on white and black student achievement.

The Black Parent Initiative, an organization to mobilize black parents in Portland to close the educational achievement gap, released the report along with the Chalkboard Project, a state education nonprofit.

The report not only lists statistics about how many black and white students meet or exceed academic benchmarks, but also spotlights the academic journey that students in Multnomah County travel as they reach for those benchmarks.

"This is the kind of valuable work that as a school district we need from our partners," said Portland Superintendent Carole Smith at a news conference where the data was released. "The deep dive they did in looking at the issue will be of tremendous value and a great guide for all of our school districts."

Among the findings in the report:

- Black students, across all grades, are significantly more likely than white students to change schools from one year to the next,

with black students in the early grades one and a half more likely to change schools and twice as likely to do so in high school;

- Teacher turnover affects black students more frequently than white students, especially in middle school where black students have a 27 percent likelihood of having a teacher new to their school and whites have a 17 percent chance; and

- While a significant portion of the achievement gap is linked to poverty, when controlling for income, about 40 percent of the achievement gap disappears.

A coalition, including former Portland board member Lorenzo Poe and the president of Portland Community College, will investigate early learning strategies, support for quality educators and the impact of poverty on the achievement gap. Their recommendations will be completed by December.

Maria Hinojosa To Speak at Council Bilingual Conference



Maria Hinojosa

Maria Hinojosa, the senior correspondent for the national news program *NOW* on PBS, will moderate a panel on May 7 at the Council of Great City Schools' Bilingual, Immigrant and Refugee Education Directors Meeting, scheduled May 6-9 in Minneapolis.

The panel will feature students from St. Paul Public Schools, who will discuss their experiences as English Learners.

To register for the conference, access the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org



A Surprise Visit in Orlando

U.S. Army Sgt. Pablo Otero surprises his fifth-grade son, Luis, at Meadow Woods Elementary School in Orlando, Fla., after returning recently from a year of duty in Iraq. He also surprised his fourth-grade daughter at the school while the news media captured the surprise reunion, organized by Luis' classroom teacher. The soldier reportedly returns to war-torn Iraq in a month. Photo Credit: Jason Smith/Orange County Public Schools

Ed. Secretary *continued from page 1*

about education. “No one can doubt the president’s sincerity and his passion and his commitment on this issue,” said Duncan.

He said that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 recently signed by President Obama will provide more than \$100 billion to improve public education.

“Having some resources to really make a difference is historic,” Duncan told big-city educators. “We may never see this money again for public education.”

Transforming Education

He outlined four issues in which the Department of Education will focus on to transform public education in America.

The first issue is encouraging states to adopt rigorous standards that are internationally benchmarked so that the nation’s students can successfully compete with students in other countries such as China and India.

He also said that a nation without true career-and college-ready standards is lying to children by telling them that they are doing well when they are not.

“The idea of 50 states doing their own thing just doesn’t make sense any more,” said Duncan.

The second issue the Department of Education will focus on is creating assessments and comprehensive data systems to support rigorous standards. According to Duncan, school districts should be able to track students’ progress from the age of 3 to 23. “We should be able to tell a 7th grader and his or her parents what their strengths and weaknesses are.”

The third issue is looking at ways to get the nation’s best and brightest to enter the teaching profession because teachers are the most important factor for student success.

“We know that if a child has three great teachers in a row, an average child can do extraordinary things,” said Duncan.

The former leader of the nation’s third largest school district said education officials must ask themselves the question,



Education Secretary Arne Duncan at Council conference

“How do we get the next generation of talent to come into public education and keep them in?”

The fourth issue the department will address is the need to turn around the lowest performing schools. He suggested school districts may have to implement longer school days or lessen the amount of time students have off in the summer.

Duncan said that while funds from the AARA should be used to avert education cuts and teacher layoffs, the money should also be used to drive fundamental change in the way students are educated.

“If all we do is use stimulus money to invest in the status quo, we are not doing anything,” he stressed.

Duncan recalled when he was the head of the Chicago school system, the district took control of a poor performing school and hired new staff. He said that test scores of students eventually improved, even though they were the same students that had attended the school in the past.

Duncan attributed the improvement in academic achievement to the fact that the adults, not the students, were different. “The adults behaved in a different way,” said Duncan, and “children were given the chance to fundamentally change their outcomes.”

“If we work together,” Duncan told conferees, “we have the chance to do something dramatically different in the years ahead.”

Stimulus Funds

Also addressing the conference was Joseph Conaty, the acting assistant secretary of the office of elementary and secondary education at the U.S. Department of Education.

Conaty discussed the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) program, a new program that will be administered by the department under the AARA. The program will give governors across the nation approximately \$48.6 billion in exchange for a commitment to advance essential education reforms to help students from early learning through post-secondary education.

In order to receive SFSF funds, a state must submit to the department an application that provides assurances that the state will make progress in advancing education reforms, as well as share baseline data and meet record-keeping and transparency requirements.

Conaty told conferees, “It will require a high degree of cooperation among yourselves, state education agencies and the governor’s office.”

The education official also said that superintendents are the key to the outcome of the program because they will make the decisions about where a major portion of the stabilization funds will go toward. “These decisions will determine success,” said Conaty.

Conferees also heard from Zollie Stevenson, the director of student achievement and school accountability at the U.S. Department of Education. He explained that the ARRA provides \$10 billion in additional funds to local educational agencies for schools with high concentrations of impoverished students and that school systems will be accountable for these dollars.

Stevenson also noted that there is \$25 billion available for Title I schools and encouraged school systems to use the funds in innovative ways such as providing students with supplemental online learning materials.

“The funds are temporary, focusing on reform strategies to help strengthen in-

Ed. Secretary *continued on page 7*

Ed. Secretary *continued from page 6*

struction,” said Stevenson. “View it as an unprecedented opportunity to provide results in an innovative way.”

Education Disparities

Before he became a congressman, Danny Davis (D-Ill.) was a teacher for six years in Chicago and so he applauds educators for the work they do.

“Educators are the most important people in society because they hold the future of our country in their hands,” said Davis. “The preparation of future generations enables us to provide leadership to move our country from one level to another.”

A former member of the House Education and Labor Committee, he noted that educators are dealing with the most difficult problem the nation faces: the massive disparities that exist among people of different ethnicities.



Congressman Danny Davis at conference

According to the congressman, schools have failed too many African American and Hispanic children and are setting them up to enter a system of revolving incarceration and a life of failure.

The congressman noted that black and Hispanic male students are more likely to be suspended or expelled, experience corporal punishment, drop out of school or held back a grade.

He believes that all of these experiences result in negative academic outcomes and cited statistics such as only 13 percent of blacks and 15 percent of Hispanic children can read at grade level by the time they en-

ter fourth grade, compared to more than 40 percent of white students.

Davis recalled that people in this country have grown up with the idea that they were going to be better off than the generation before them.

“Something has dampened that kind of thinking,” said Davis. “I’m afraid that some people have given up on too many of our children.”

He said he is pleased that President Obama’s economic stimulus package devotes so much money toward education, which he believes is essential for children in this nation to effectively compete with children from other countries.

“If we are to have the kind of education system we hope and talk about, we are going to have to pay for it,” stressed Davis. “If we value this commodity called education, than leaders of our country must decide it has to be paid for.”

Faith-Based Movement Rallies Volunteers To Aid Jackson Schools

More than 2,000 volunteers in metropolitan Jackson, Miss., recently flocked to eight public schools in the city in a school and campus improvement blitz called “Shine ’09.”

The school beautification project was organized by Transformation Jackson, a faith-based community development movement seeking to improve the entire Jackson landscape.

A witness of the painting, repairing, cleaning, mowing and remodeling efforts at one school indicated that the work looked like an episode of the television program “Extreme Makeover.”

“My heart is overwhelmed with this kind of gratitude from the community,” said Jackson Public Schools Superintendent Lonnie Edwards, who visited all eight

Faith-Based *continued on page 12*

NCLB Reauthorization Addressed

Gary Huggins is the director of the Aspen Institute’s Commission on No Child Left Behind, a bipartisan independent effort to improve the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act*, which was signed into law seven years ago in an effort to change the culture of America’s schools and hold states and schools accountable for the academic achievement of all students.

As Congress gets closer to reauthorizing the law, which he believes will occur in 2010, Huggins said the commission on NCLB will focus on issues such as how to better target professional development for teachers, how to create data systems that can track student achievement, how to better help struggling schools and how to best reward effective teachers.

Huggins has traveled across the country for the past year holding hearings and listening to the experiences of those affected by the law. He has concluded that NCLB “was an enormously good step forward in improving student achievement.”

He praised the law for demanding improved achievement from all students. However, he noted that “there is still a lot of work to do to improve the law.”

NCLB Reauthorization *continued on page 12*



Aspen Institute’s Gary Huggins at conference

Boston Opens Academy For New Immigrant Students

A study commissioned by the Boston Public Schools in 2007 showed that 13 percent of the district's dropouts were late-entrant English Language Learners -- students with limited English proficiency who entered the Boston school system for the first time in high school.

The high dropout rate among these students prompted Superintendent Carol Johnson to create Newcomers Academy, which opened last month to welcome and support high school students who arrive in the United States during the school year with limited English skills and interrupted schooling in their home countries.

"We are proud that Boston is home to so many families arriving in the United States for the first time," said Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, who participated with Boston school officials in the launch of the school.

"This program will help ensure that high school students new to our city and our country will get the support they need to make a successful start in our schools," he added.

Newcomers Academy opened with 24 students, newly arrived from 10 different countries and speaking five different lan-



Boston Mayor Menino and Superintendent Johnson visit Newcomers Academy.

guages. At full capacity, the academy will enroll up to 250 students ages 14 to 18.

"The transition to life in the United States can be incredibly challenging....," said Superintendent Johnson in a news release. "Newcomers Academy provides these young men and women with the academic and social supports needed to graduate from high school prepared for college and career success."

Faith-Based Initiative Aids St. Louis Schools

Congregations from two churches in St. Louis regularly tutor students from the Yeatman-Liddell Preparatory Junior High School and on Saturdays paint and make needed repairs to classrooms.

The volunteers provide their services as part of the St. Louis Public Schools' Faith Based Initiative, which connects schools with local churches, synagogues and mosques in an effort to increase academic achievement and provide positive role models for students in the district.

Created in 2007, the initiative includes more than 20 congregations, who volunteer their services and resources to provide students the support they need to achieve not only in school, but as members of the community.

One of the most successful partnerships the school district has developed under the initiative is with the St. Louis Dream Center, a church of nearly 1,000 members. After visiting schools around the district and asking staff what they needed, the center created the Character Building Assemblies to supplement the school district's character traits curriculum.

St. Louis continued on page 9

Top U.S. Students and Teachers In AP Math, Science Named

Six big-city students were among the winners of the 2008-2009 Siemens Awards for Advanced Placement (AP), which honors high school students who excel on AP courses in science and math.

Up to one male and one female from each state were chosen by the College Board to receive the award and a \$2,000 scholarship.

Students are chosen for the award for earning the highest scores on exams in seven AP courses: biology, calculus, chemistry, computer science, environmental science,

physics, electricity and magnetism and mechanics and statistics.

Students from urban schools in Little Rock, Chicago, Louisville, Baton Rouge, New Orleans and the Clark County School District in Las Vegas were honored.

The Siemens Awards also recognized 50 math, science and technology teachers for their exemplary teaching and dedication to students and the AP Program.

Big-city school teachers in Anchorage, Chicago, Omaha and Florida's School District of Palm Beach County were honored

with a \$1,000 award. In addition, the program honors one high school in each state for its commitment to students and leadership in AP participation and performance.

Urban schools in Louisville, Baton Rouge, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Providence, as well as one school in Florida's Broward County school district received a \$1,000 grant to support math and science education.

Since 1998, the Siemens Foundation has awarded \$300,000 in grants annually to Siemens Award winners.

Pittsburgh 'Promise' Program Expands

In 2007, Pittsburgh Public Schools joined forces with the city of Pittsburgh to launch a college access program called *The Pittsburgh Promise*, in which graduates of the school system received scholarships to attend approximately 100 colleges or universities within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

In an effort to make the program more inclusive, officials have recently expanded the list of schools where students may use the program's scholarships to an additional 140 private colleges, universities and trade schools.

When the program was created, students could use scholarships to attend only private schools in Allegheny County, and all public higher education institutions statewide. But by expanding the program, high school graduates may now receive funds to attend any private or public school in the state.

St. Louis continued from page 8

Since 2005, the St. Louis Dream Center has traveled to elementary schools to provide a 45-minute show along with games and activities to teach lessons such as how to forgive, be responsible and be kind.

The church also provides instructional camps, sports leagues and special sporting events to students, such as the DC Sports program. Currently, 19 schools participate in the program, which includes a flag football league sponsored by the St. Louis Rams that gives teams the opportunity to compete against other teams across the state and win an all-expense paid trip to Disney World.

The program also offers a free St. Louis Cardinals baseball league and a basketball league that provides uniforms, coaches and bus transportation to arranged games. At the end of each sporting season, a banquet is provided for children and their families to recognize the players' accomplishments and to receive trophies. The DC Sports program is so popular that three schools are on the waiting list to participate.

"We have made the decision to expand the choice for our students because we believe it is right and fair to be as inclusive as possible while maintaining sound financial oversight," said Saleem Ghubril, executive director of the *Pittsburgh Promise*. "At the same time, we believe it will increase the attractiveness of the scholarship program for families considering moving into the city."

The first round of scholarships was awarded to 710 students in the Class of 2008, but approximately 70 of the students had to return their scholarships because they attended private universities outside Allegheny County. However, these students will now be eligible for scholarships.

The Pittsburgh Promise was developed by the district and the city to provide higher education to students and to enhance the economic development of the city. It provides students with scholarships of up to \$5,000 a year for four years, increasing in 2012 to a maximum of \$10,000 a year for four years.

Students eligible for the program must have attended a district school since the ninth grade, have a minimum grade point average of 2.25, and must make progress toward the completion of a degree or certification-seeking program.

Urban Schools Win 'Grammy' Awards

The School of the Arts in Rochester, N.Y., requires students to carry a full academic course load as well as a fine arts sequence, resulting in more than 90 percent of its graduates attending post secondary institutions.



Recently, the school was one of 14 across the nation selected as a GRAMMY Signature School for 2009. The award program honors exceptional public high school music programs across the nation.

In addition to the Rochester school, Mi-

Buffalo Plans Use Of Stimulus Funds

New York's Buffalo Public Schools will receive \$37 million from the federal stimulus bill that was signed by President Obama in February.

Buffalo Schools Superintendent James Williams recently announced that the district will use the money it is scheduled to receive to extend the school day and school year at 34 district schools.

Williams plans to expand the school day by one hour and to expand half-day summer classes to full-day sessions at 34 schools that receive Title I funding. Currently, 17 district schools have a longer school day and school year.

"In order to catch students up, we're giving them more time with a structured curriculum, a good teacher and a good administrator," said Williams in the *Buffalo News*. "I think we're on to something good."

The school system is scheduled to receive \$24 million in Title I grant money and \$13 million in Individuals with Disabilities Education grant money.

Superintendent Williams said he will also use some of the funds from the federal stimulus package to implement professional development for teachers and administrators.

ami Coral Park Senior High and the Detroit School of the Arts received a "Grammy Signature Schools Enterprise Award." The award recognizes efforts made by six schools that are economically undeserved and presents them with a cash award of \$5,000 to benefit their music program.

Also receiving a \$5,000 award was the Las Vegas International Academy of Performing & Visual Arts, one of two schools designated as a "Grammy Signature Schools Gold" recipient.

The GRAMMY Signature Schools program was created in 1998 to honor top public high schools that are making an outstanding commitment to music education.

School Districts Wary of State Role in Stimulus Process

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

The Great City Schools, like most other school districts, have spent most of February and all of March planning for the upcoming receipt of their share of the initial education stimulus funds. The planning for this unprecedented infusion of federal aid, however, has been complicated by the lack of information from states on district funding levels, timing on the availability of funds, state add-on requirements and procedures, and ever-changing estimates of state education budget cuts. And at the federal level, the use of novel funding mechanisms by Congress in enacting the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund and the need for U.S. Department of Education interpretations of intersecting provisions controlling the stimulus funds has added further uncertainty to local planning efforts.

In the spotlight of the major media markets, urban school superintendents and board members are being pressed in a number of differing directions about how they will use their stimulus funds despite being unable to obtain finite answers about how much money will come their way, when funds will be distributed, and conditions and procedures under which the funds can be spent.

The nation's Great City Schools have maintained ongoing and productive discussions with Secretary Duncan, Education Department officials, and White House staff to obtain the most up-to-date information on how the stimulus initiative can be used to jumpstart the economy, backfill reductions in local programs, and support education reform efforts. We have



also pressed for more local control over use of funds, something that the Department's most recent guidance appears to grant.

Urban school leaders have ample reason to worry that their states will use "Bait and Switch" tactics to increase their budget cutting down to the FY06 levels in anticipation of federal "replacement" funds. The stories emerging from the local level bear out the concerns. Some states have reportedly planned to accelerate their own budget cuts on the expectation that they would be backfilled by the stabilization funds and then used to shore up the state pension system. This type of budgetary manipulation at the state level would ultimately provide little new funding for local schools from the \$40 billion education portion of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund if allowed to stand. Other districts have reported their states' intentions to make dollar-for-dollar reductions in state education aid in amounts equivalent to the new Title I and IDEA grants, leaving some districts with no greater resources than before the economic stimulus package.

Political and budgetary pressures on governors, state legislatures, and state education officials could easily produce results that were never intended in the enactment of the new stimulus package. As the first wave of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) allocations are made available to states, the potential and the pitfalls of these unprecedented investments become more apparent. However wary, it's a set of concerns that the Great City Schools would rather have than not have.

Alternative Energy Program Launched in Houston District

The Houston Independent School District has created a new program that will challenge nearly 6,000 students in grades eighth, ninth and tenth to create clean, efficient and renewable energy.

The *New Science Energy Program* is a collaboration among the school district, Chevron, the U.S. Department of Energy

and other partners to educate students about efficient alternative energy and technology.

The program incorporates a computer game simulation, classroom energy experiments and industry mentor support.

The energy science initiative will be launched in fall 2009, and approximately

80 teachers will receive training on how to adopt the program into their science classes. At the training, teachers will be paired with mentors and learn how to best implement the game and energy experiments.

Houston district officials will track the academic performance of students participating in the program.

Pictorial of 2009 Legislative Conference



Education Secretary Arne Duncan poses with the Council's leadership, left to right, past Council Chair Carol Comeau, Chair-elect Carol Johnson, Secretary-Treasurer Dilafruz Williams, Chair William Isler and Executive Director Michael Casserly.



Little Rock Superintendent Linda Watson takes notes at the legislative briefing.



Toledo Superintendent John Foley listens intently during a conference session.



Atlanta Superintendent Beverly Hall asks Education Secretary Arne Duncan a question as Atlanta school board member Cecily Harsch-Kinnane looks on.



Houston school board member Dianne Johnson asks a question as fellow school board member Paula Harris, left, listens.

Photos by Alex Jones

NCLB Reauthorization *continued from page 7*

Huggins believes that the quality of assessments need to be improved, especially for English Language Learners. He also believes NCLB needs to focus more strongly on establishing new standards of effectiveness for teachers and ensuring disadvantaged students have access to highly effective teachers.

“We need to change the focus away from teacher qualifications and look at teacher effectiveness,” said Huggins. “We also need to do a better job of supporting teachers.”

He also noted that it was encouraging that the issue of creating national standards, which had been put on the back burner in recent years, is once again being discussed, with the effort being led by chief state education officers and governors.

Huggins said the commission recommends developing voluntary national model standards which states could adopt. He also wants to give states, who believe they have tough standards, the option of keeping their existing standards and tests as long as the results of those tests are compared to those states who have adopted national model standards. “You don’t want a national version that brings down some

states,” said Huggins, but “states who opt out of the national model must be prepared to defend their standards.”

Huggins admitted that there is opposition to NCLB, which will only increase as the law gets closer to reauthorization, and that supporters need to do a better job of explaining the law to the public. And while he believes the law needs to be improved, the accountability measures under NCLB need to continue.

“We can’t go back to the time of invisible children; not knowing how students are doing,” said Huggins. “It’s hard for us in education to make the case that we need more [resources] if we don’t have anything to measure progress.”

Faith-Based *continued from page 7*

sites. “We welcome and look forward to collaboration with Transformation Jackson on other projects in the future.”

The Rev. Stan Buckley, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Jackson, noted, “Schools are key institutions in our community. We know our schools are in need of partners to help them achieve their purpose.”

Great City Grads



Photo credit: Money-rx.com

Warren Buffett

Billionaire businessman

1947 graduate

Woodrow Wilson High School

District of Columbia Public Schools



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