

Council Reaches 50-Year Mark

With the beginning of the New Year, the Council of the Great City Schools celebrates a golden anniversary -- 50 years of service to America's urban public schools.

In 1956, superintendents of the nation's 10 largest urban public school districts banded together in Chicago to form a coalition that would later serve as the "voice" for urban education.

Initially created as a networking and study group, the Council today has grown into a national education policy and research organization in Washington, D.C., with a membership of 66 urban school systems.

The Council works on behalf of urban schools in initiating legislation, conducting city-by-city research and serving as a clearinghouse for information to the news media and others inquiring about urban schools nationally. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common challenges to exchange information and address issues.

The Early Years

When the urban educators first convened, there was no other American organization giving "an adequate voice to urban schools," recalls Executive Director Michael

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City Schools Make Significant Gains In Math, Modest Rise in Reading

Big-city school districts made significant gains in mathematics, especially in fourth grade, but more modest increases in reading on what is considered the *Nation's Report Card*.

These were the 2005 results of the National Assessment of Educa-

tional Progress (NAEP), showing the achievement of 11 city public school systems that had volunteered to be tested on the rigorous federal exam.

"Urban education is simply a condition of residence, rather than a reason for poor performance," said

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Sacramento School Wraps Arms Around Katrina Evacuees

Parkway School in Sacramento, Calif., has opened its arms to welcome several students displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

One of those students is 11-year-old De'John Mack. He arrived in Sacramento in September with his family after fleeing their home in New Orleans.

When De'John first arrived, he chipped a tooth and refused to smile. The principal of his school, Deborah Nelson, contacted a local dentist, who repaired the tooth for free.

The school has also collected donations to help Katrina evacuees adjust to life in California.



Donna Johnson, left, watches as her son, De'John, writes thank you notes to people who have donated items. Parkway Principal Deborah Nelson looks on. (Photo by Marcus Walton)

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urban Educator

A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 66 of the nation's largest urban public school districts.

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Casserly, who's been with the group for nearly 29 years.

The Council began as the Research Council for the Great City Schools Improvement, with then-superintendent of Chicago Public Schools as its first president. The ad hoc group became incorporated in 1961, with an executive director named, a staff formed, bylaws drawn up and dues charged to school districts for membership.

But it was in 1969 that the group broadened its focus to include education policy, and adopted its present-day name. And to help improve the quality of urban education in America, the coalition invited school board members from its districts to join its ranks.

With a swirl of congressional activity flourishing in the nation's capital at the time, the Council moved its headquarters to Washington, D.C., from Chicago. It began lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill and its membership had grown to about 20 urban school districts.

War on Poverty

During the era of the '60s, legislation brought increased federal government involvement in education. The first Elementary and Secondary Education Act was enacted in 1965. President Lyndon Johnson had launched a "War on Poverty," and there was a major influx of minorities migrating to the big cities from the rural South.

The first formulas to target federal

money toward cities occurred in the '70s. The Council had played a major role in pushing through or amending legislation in favor of urban schools.

Initiating Legislation

During the 1980s, the Council began initiating legislation. It was successful in spearheading the federal Magnet School Assistance Act, Dropout Prevention Demonstration Act, Teacher Professional Development Act, Urban Schools of America (USA) Act and Smart Start, while leading reforms in Chapter 1, Vocational Education and the Drug Free School Act.

In 1982, the Council's membership skyrocketed, growing to 37 districts almost overnight. President Ronald Reagan was in office and during his administration federal support for urban education was under attack.



Accountability

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education's "Nation at Risk" report brought the issue of accountability to the forefront. The report, and the National Governors Association's 1986 "Time of Results" report, were wake-up calls to Americans about the need to improve public education.

The Council's member school districts went through what Casserly calls "a period of self-examination" from the late '80s to 1991.

Urban School Goals

To respond to the growing concerns about American education, President George Bush in 1989 and the National

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Governors Association formulated six national education goals. The Council also sprang into action to develop a parallel set of goals to reflect the specific needs of urban schools and students. Then in 1991, it held an urban education summit, which officially adopted the goals.

A year later, the coalition released its first-ever “report card” on the state of urban education in America, which gave indicators of urban school progress toward achieving the National Urban Education Goals.

New Leadership

Leadership of the Council changed in 1992, when Casserly took the helm after the long-time tenure of Samuel Husk, who had been executive director for 17 years.

Under Casserly, the Council has unified urban schools nationwide around a vision of reform and improvement. National task forces have been launched to focus on achievement gaps, leadership and governance, finance, professional development and bilingual education.

Milestones

In 1997, the Council convened what news reports called a “landmark” meeting between big-city mayors and urban school superintendents. The historic summit resulted in a pledge of cooperation and a call for further dialogue between schools and government.

A few years later in 2000, the Council approached the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) to request a trial National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for big-city school systems that wanted to volunteer for the rigorous national test.

“The Council and its member dis-

tricts are fully committed to the standards movement, yet we have no way to determine our status or our progress on those standards,” argued Casserly before the governing board.

“This is a courageous act by the urban schools. It’s a sea change,” said then-NAGB chairman Mark Musick in *Education Week*. NAGB supported the idea, and subsequently the urban NAEP was launched.

Major Research

In 2001, the Council released the first compilation of how the nation’s large city school systems are performing on the academic goals and standards set by the individual states for their children. It launched the annual *Beating the Odds: A City-by-City Analysis of Reading and Math Performance and Achievement Gaps on State Assessments*.

A year later, the Council released a first-of-its-kind study with research group MDRC called *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*, which looks at the similarities among urban school systems that are boosting performance citywide and contrasts their practices with systems that have not seen major gains.

Today’s Council

The Council continues to grow, with 16 big-city school districts joining the coalition since the organization’s 40th anniversary in 1996, when it had some 50 members.

It currently is spearheading efforts to boost academic performance and strengthen management and operations in America’s urban school districts, as well as challenging inequitable state financing systems and improving the public’s image of urban education.

Says Casserly, “The Council will continue to tackle the challenges and trumpet the victories ahead.”

3 Superintendents Selected Tops In Their States

Stephen Daeschner has been at the helm of Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Ky., since 1993, while both Earl Watkins of Mississippi’s Jackson Public Schools and Manuel Rivera of New York’s Rochester City Schools have led their districts since 2002.

Besides being urban school superintendents, they now have gained the distinction of being selected as superintendent of the year in their respective states.

Rivera was named the 2006 New York State School Superintendent of the Year for demonstrating outstanding all-around leadership in guiding his district’s successful efforts to raise academic performance.



Manuel Rivera

In addition, Rivera has been selected as one of the four finalists in the American Association of School Administrators’ 2006 National Superintendent of the Year awards program. The winner will be announced in February at the AASA national conference.

During Rivera’s tenure as superintendent, the district has increased the number of the students meeting standards on state math and English language arts tests, and passing rates for all ethnic groups have increased.

Daeschner is the Kentucky 2006 Superintendent of the Year, and during his 12-year tenure he is credited with bringing the district’s schools into the 91 to 100 percent improvement rating in the

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City Schools...

Darvin Winick, chair of the National Assessment Governing Board that released the report card last month in Boston.

“While also showing room for growth, these results demonstrate that students in some of our nation’s largest cities are keeping pace with – and in many cases, outperforming – their peers nationwide,” he pointed out.

Fourth-Grade Math

Eight out of 10 city school districts made a statistically significant jump in average scores since 2003 in fourth-grade math.

These same cities posted fourth-grade math gains that outpaced national increases and their respective state gains: Atlanta (five points), Boston (nine points), Cleveland (five points), District of Columbia (six points), Houston (six points), Los Angeles (four points), New York City (five points), and San Diego (six points).

Two urban school districts – Austin, Tex., and Charlotte -- have average scores in fourth-grade math above the national average. And four districts -- Boston, Houston, New York City and San Diego – have scores now approaching the national average.

The participating Chicago and Charlotte school systems made modest gains in fourth-grade math, which were higher than 2003, but not large enough to be statistically significant by NAEP rules.

Since 2002, 11 big-city school districts have volunteered for the Trial Urban District Assessment, a special project in NAEP to assess the academic performance of urban school districts that want to measure their reform efforts to higher standards. Austin stepped up to the national test for the first time this year.

“The NAEP is the gold standard for comparing our students’ work to students in Texas and across the nation,” said Austin Superintendent Pat Forgione. “We were given the opportunity to join the test this past year, and we went for it.”

Eighth-Grade Math

In eighth-grade mathematics, four of 10 city school systems made significant progress on NAEP: Boston, Houston, Los Angeles and San Diego. Austin and Charlotte outpaced the national average, while Boston, Houston, New York City and San Diego are approaching it.

Also making modest gains in eighth-grade math were Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago, the District of Columbia and New York City, while Cleveland’s average score dipped.

“We are very encouraged by the math scores in these big city school districts that volunteered to measure themselves on the nation’s toughest test,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.

“The upward trend in math scores demonstrates that urban public schools are stepping up to the plate to improve performance in this critical area,” he emphasized.

Fourth-Grade Reading

In addition to mathematics, the 11 cities taking the 2005 NAEP also were assessed in fourth- and eighth-grade reading. The participating districts saw progress in this area, but the gains did not appear to be as strong as those in math.

Results of the fourth-grade reading scores showed an upward tilt on the 2005 trial urban NAEP, administered by the

U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics.

Since 2002, Atlanta and New York City registered significant gains in fourth-grade reading, but there was only modest improvement in Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston and Los Angeles over the past two to three years. And test scores were flat in the District of Columbia and San Diego.

Seven cities, moreover, have posted fourth grade reading gains that outpaced national increases and their respective state gains: Atlanta (six points), Charlotte (two points), Chicago (five points), Cleveland (two points), Houston (five points), Los Angeles (five points), and New York City (seven points).



Michael Casserly at press event

“The Atlanta public school district implemented comprehensive reform models five years ago that are beginning to show results, particularly among our elementary grade students,” said Superintendent Beverly Hall. “This progress is reflected in the test results.”

Eighth-Grade Reading

In eighth grade, reading scores were generally flat in the big cities compared to a slight downward slide in public schools nationwide. Los Angeles, however, registered significant gains in NAEP eighth grade reading scores since 2003, while Atlanta made significant gains since 2002. Boston, Chicago, Houston and San Diego saw slight gains since 2003.

“We are pleased to see some of our cities making significant gains in reading but we need to see significant progress in all of them,” says Casserly. “We are conducting research now on why we are seeing faster gains in some cities than in others.”

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Inside the Council

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City Schools...

New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein noted, "Strengthening middle schools is a challenge in all large cities, but these results affirm the need for the reforms we've recently implemented in our middle schools.

"Putting an end to social promotion in the seventh grade, coupled with our focus on intervention strategies and extended time, including Saturday Prep Academy, should lead to significant improvements in the future," he stressed in a press release.

Math Proficiency Levels

Six out of 10 big-city school districts have made statistically significant gains in the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient since 2003 in fourth-grade math. Boston, the District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Diego saw the substantial increases.

Austin and Charlotte have a higher percentage of students scoring at or above proficient than the nation, 40 percent and 44 percent, respectively, compared with 35 percent of the nation.

In eighth-grade math, four of 10 urban school districts – Boston, Houston, Los Angeles and San Diego -- made significant gains in the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient. Austin and Charlotte students outperformed students nationally.

Reading Proficiency Levels

Los Angeles is the only big-city district to have posted significant improvements in students scoring at or above proficient in fourth-grade reading in 2005. The other nine cities, excluding Austin since this is its first year taking

NAEP, registered slight increases or no jump at all.

Charlotte is the only district that has a higher percentage of eighth-grade students who score at or above proficient than the nation, with 33 percent compared with 30 percent, respectively.

Generally, eighth-grade reading proficiency was flat in the cities and the nation.

Racial, Ethnic Scores

The 2005 trial urban NAEP also reports data by race/ethnicity, poverty, English-language proficiency and gender. When comparing test scores by race/ethnicity, the 2005 NAEP found that students in some cities outperformed their counterparts of the same race nationwide. For example, in fourth-grade reading:

- White fourth graders with reading scores above the national white average: Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Charlotte, D.C., Houston and Los Angeles.
- African American fourth graders with reading scores above the national African American average: Austin, Boston, Charlotte, Houston and New York.
- Hispanic fourth graders with reading scores at or above the national Hispanic average: Austin, Charlotte, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston and New York City.

The Council of the Great City Schools initiated the Trial Urban District Assessment in 2000, when it approached the National Assessment Governing Board with the idea. "We – as urban school systems – wanted to make it crystal clear that we were fully committed to the highest academic standards for our children," Casserly explained.

Tenure Extended For Anchorage, Milwaukee Leaders

Two big-city school districts— Alaska's Anchorage Unified School District and Milwaukee Public Schools—are starting the new year with familiar faces at the helm.

In Anchorage, the board of education extended the term of Superintendent Carol Comeau's contract for a year to December 2008.

Comeau has led the 50,000-student school system since 2001, and under her tenure there has been a 40 percent improvement in the number of schools making adequate yearly progress under the *No Child Left Behind* law. In addition, the district has increased and improved its summer school program, implemented a six-year instructional plan, and is transitioning high schools into smaller learning communities.

In a statement announcing the extension, the board praised Comeau for her outreach to students, her effective relations with employees and community groups and her leadership at the local, state and national levels.

Comeau was recently elected secretary-treasurer of the Council of the Great City Schools.

The board of education for Milwaukee Public Schools has extended the contract of Superintendent William Andrekopoulos through 2008.



Carol Comeau



William Andrekopoulos

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Salt Lake City Approves Hybrid Charter School

In an effort to provide students with specialized and rigorous training in the arts, the Salt Lake City School District recently approved a new and unique performing arts charter high school.

The Salt Lake School for the Performing Arts (SLSPA) is unique in that it will be located on the campus of the district's Highland High School and share academic programs. Students will take their core academic classes at Highland High and their performing arts classes at the charter school.

In addition, students at Highland will also be able to take courses at the performing arts school.

Course offerings at SLSPA will include a theater arts program, orchestra/band program, and an AP music program. Students will also be able to take classes in piano, guitar, dance and concert choir and all students will take at least one visual/performing arts class per year.

The combined charter-traditional school is expected to open in Fall 2006 and will serve approximately 400 students in grades 9-12.

"This is really unique and exciting – it's a hybrid—and if we figure it out and do it well, we will be able to stretch tax dollars like it's never been done before," said Salt Lake City Superintendent McKell Withers in the *Deseret Morning News*.

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Stephen Daeschner

state's accountability testing system.

Daeschner has also worked with business and community leaders to create *Every 1 Reads*, a community-wide initiative to make sure every student reads at grade level or above within four years.



Earl Watkins

Watkins was named the 2006 Mississippi Association of School Administrators Superintendent of the Year, and under his leadership the district has implemented the only Mississippi International Baccalaureate program from elementary through high school.

Watkins, who began his career as a mathematics teacher at a Jackson middle school, is the district's youngest superintendent in recent history.

Urban Districts Conducting Superintendent Searches

Boston Public Schools

Christina School District

Clark County School District

Cleveland Municipal School District

Detroit Public Schools

Kansas City Missouri School District

San Francisco Unified School District

St. Paul Public Schools

Toledo Public Schools

Continued from page 5 **Tenure Extended...**

Andreopoulos has been at the helm of the 95,600-student school district since 2002, and during his tenure has focused on educational and fiscal reform. Prior to being named superintendent, he was the principal of a district middle school for 14 years.

Leaders Departing

While Milwaukee and Anchorage are holding onto their superintendents, Toledo and Kansas City are losing their leaders.

After serving at the helm of Ohio's Toledo Public Schools since 2000, Eugene Sanders recently announced his resignation. He is scheduled to leave the district on Aug. 31.



Eugene Sanders

In September, the district merited the state's "continuous improvement" ranking, making the district the only large urban school system in Ohio to attain this status for two consecutive years.

The district also received the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Daisy Bates Education Advocacy Award in recognition of outstanding service to minority youth, and for narrowing the racial achievement gap.

And in November, voters approved a 2.5-mill renewal levy to help the school system fund infrastructure and equipment costs.

Also departing is Bernard Taylor, superintendent of the Kansas City Missouri School District. Taylor, who has led the district for five years, plans to leave the district on June 30.

Council Launches 'Pop Quiz' Ad Drive

For the third consecutive year, the Council of the Great City Schools has launched a national advertising campaign to highlight the progress of America's urban schools, aiming to build public support for the nation's largest public school systems.

The new public service announcement is called "Pop Quiz," giving a counterintuitive approach to recognize the efforts of urban schools and schoolchildren to succeed. "What did you expect?" asks the ad's tagline.

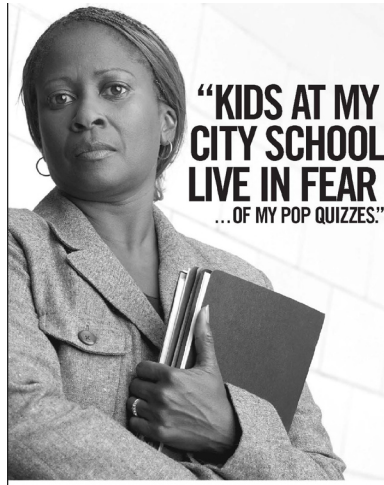
Television, radio and print "Pop Quiz" PSAs have been delivered to the 66 urban school districts the Council represents. The districts can utilize the ads as they deem appropriate in their respective markets at no cost to them.

A national distributor is also pitching the TV and radio PSAs, which include the last two ads as well, to national broadcast and cable networks in addition to broadcast outlets in individual markets.

"Pop Quiz" follows last year's ad called "Tested" and the Council's first-ever spot called "Thank You," which was launched in 2003. Both award-winning PSA drives last year ranked in the top quartile of 446 TV campaigns tracked by Nielson Media Research.

"We believe all three PSAs – "Thank You," "Tested" and "Pop Quiz" – will help boost public confidence in urban schools," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, urging the coalition's districts to utilize the ads to their "best advantage."

Before the Council launched its family of ads, the messages leading to the PSA concepts were tested in a national telephone survey, focus groups and journalists' interviews.



Broward District Headquarters Back In Business

Hurricane Katrina was not the only hurricane to have caused significant damage last year.

Hurricane Wilma also caused major devastation, especially to Broward County Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in late October.

The district shut down for two weeks and virtually every school and work site was struck by the hurricane's fury.

One of the buildings that sustained the most damage was the K.C. Wright administration building. The intensity of the storm resulted in the siding of the building being ripped off.

Custodial crews immediately went to work and the building was reopened in two weeks. Subsequently, the school board held a meeting in the building the day after classes resumed for students.

District officials estimate that the total cost associated with recovery from the effects of Hurricane Wilma will be \$267 million.

Broward District TV Program Wins Emmy Award

An educational science program for K-2 students in Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., recently took home an Emmy Award.

Science and Me won the award for best children's

program from the National Television Academy Suncoast Chapter, which presents Emmy Awards to television shows in Florida and neighboring states.



"The shows we produce are meant to supplement curriculum and enhance student achievement with highly motivating lessons using state of the art animation," said show host Michael Moscatello, who also goes by the name of Molecular Mike.

As a result of a grant from a local foundation, *Science and Me* will be distributed to every elementary school in the district. It is one of 12 television shows produced by the Broward Education Communications Network (BECON), which produces educational programming for the classroom and is owned and operated by the Broward County school board.

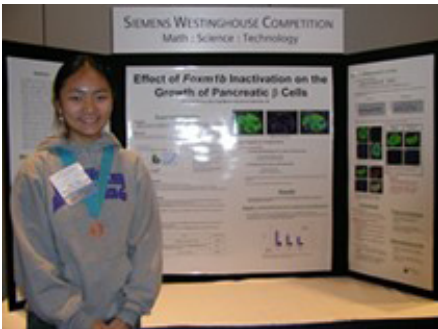
Beginning this month, *Science and Me* will also be available to television viewers at home on BECON-TV, a cable channel.

BECON also provides online and distance learning courses for Broward County district students.

Nashville Student Wins Prestigious National Science Award

Xue Feng, a senior at Martin Luther King, Jr. Magnet High School in Nashville, was recently awarded a \$10,000 college scholarship for her research project on diabetes.

The project took fifth place in the Siemens Westinghouse Competition in Math, Science and Technology, considered the nation's premier high school science competition.



Xue Feng displays her research project.

Launched in 1998 by the Siemens Foundation and administered by the College Board, the competition awarded \$500,000 in scholarships to 19 finalists.

Feng's project provides evidence that the Foxm1b gene plays an important role in cell development in the pancreas, specifically in the growth of cells that produce insulin, which regulates blood sugar level. Her research may advance the understanding of Type 2 diabetes, which is caused by the failure

of insulin-producing cells in the pancreas.

Feng was born in China and lived there until the age of seven. She speaks fluent Chinese and Japanese and is an accomplished pianist. In the fall, she will attend Vanderbilt University and major in bioengineering.



John McDonough, right, is congratulated by Council Director of Management Services Robert Carlson, left, and award namesake Bill Wise.

Boston Executive Wins Award

John McDonough, the chief financial officer of the Boston Public Schools, was recently awarded the Bill Wise Award in Education at the Council of the Great City Schools' Chief Financial Officers conference in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

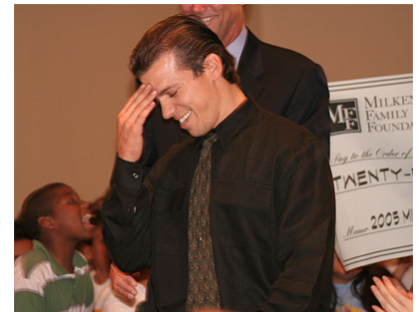
Sponsored by SAP Public Services, the award is presented annually to an outstanding school business official who has demonstrated distinguished service to urban education.

Milken Foundation Awards Given

James Orihuela, a Spanish and language arts middle school teacher in California's Long Beach Unified School District, has been so successful in improving the academic performance of his students that he is visited by educators from throughout the state who want to learn more about his instructional strategies.

Orihuela recently received national recognition for his efforts when he was presented with a \$25,000 Milken National Educator Award.

Dubbed the "Oscars of Teaching" by *Teaching Magazine*, the award was presented to 100 secondary teachers, principals and specialists across the nation who have demonstrated outstanding instructional practices.



Long Beach teacher James Orihuela reacts to a surprise announcement that he won a \$25,000 Milken Award.

"He's [Orihuela] a great teacher," said eighth grader Sheridan Riley in the district's newsletter. "...Everyone's vocabulary in Spanish and English has improved so much because of the way he teaches and reaches out to every student based on their individual needs."

Orihuela is not the only big-city teacher to receive a Milken Award. The \$25,000 awards were presented to urban educators in Atlanta, Albuquerque, Birmingham, Las Vegas, Newark, Chicago,

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Inside the Council

Teacher in Jackson, Miss., Wins Top ‘Unsung Hero’ Prize

Peggy Carlisle, a teacher at Pecan Park Elementary School in Jackson, Miss., created a program to help her students gain a first-hand account of how students live in Kenya.

For her efforts, she was recently awarded first place in the 2005 ING Unsung Heroes awards program, which recognized 100 K-12 educators across the nation for their unique teaching methods, creative educational projects and ability to make a positive influence on the children they teach.

As the first-place winner, Carlisle received \$27,000 to fund her social studies and economic benefit program, “The Kenyan Project,” a partnership with three schools in Kenya.

Students at Pecan Park have learned Swahili, written letters to the Kenyan students and exchanged class books and photographs with them.

In addition, 156 third- and fourth-grade students have raised \$650 to benefit the Kenyan schools.

“With this program, Peggy Carlisle has provided her students with priceless knowledge and understanding of the Kenyan culture, resources and environment to further broaden their lives and help us all make connections with a larger community,” said Pecan Park Principal Wanda Quon.

The 100 finalists in this year’s ING Unsung Heroes award program received \$2,000 and were selected from a group of more than 1,100 educators. The program is now in its 10th year and has awarded more than \$2.3 million.

Houston Launches Teacher Incentive Pay Program

In an effort to improve academic achievement, the Houston Independent School District recently launched the largest teacher pay-for-performance program in the nation, which will be directly tied to classroom results.

School teachers will be awarded up to \$3,000 this year -- \$3,500 in the case of some fifth-grade science teachers – if their students make strong progress on state and national standardized exams.

“We want to put the very best teachers in front of our children in the classroom every day,” said Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra. “To do that, we need to find a way to pay top dollar to those teachers for outstanding performance.”

Saavedra pointed out that there is a need to change the way teachers are compensated to improve student academic achievement. “We cannot continue to pay every teacher the same – based solely on how many years they have been on the job and regardless of what kind of job they do in the classroom.”

The district plans to build the program over the next few years so that eventually Houston public school teachers can earn as much as \$10,000 in annual performance bonuses.

The incentive pay program “is a critical step, not just in Houston but across the nation, in our efforts to improve urban public education,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.

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Great City Grads



Oprah Winfrey

Talk Show Host

1971 graduate
(voted most popular)

East High School
Metropolitan Nashville
Public Schools

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Milken Foundation...

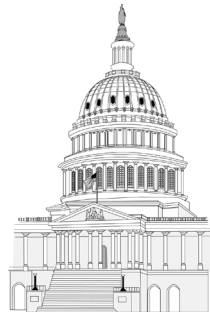
Louisville, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Cleveland, Seattle and Jackson, Miss.

Educators are recommended for the award without their knowledge by a panel appointed by each state’s department of education. Recipients of the award are chosen on the basis of numerous criteria, including outstanding educational talent, leadership potential and the ability to motivate students, colleagues and the community.

Fight Against the Education Funding Cuts!

By Jeff Simering, Director of Legislation

Rarely do House and Senate conference committees result in a legislative outcome that is worse than either body would have done on their own. Yet, lawmakers passed the FY2006 education appropriations before they adjourned for the holiday recess that cut funds below last year's level and below what either side had originally proposed. They added insult to injury by cutting 1 percent across-the-board from virtually all domestic discretionary programs.



LEGISLATIVE COLUMN

The increases in federal education funding for elementary and secondary education have trended downward over the last few years, as this column has repeatedly pointed out, but they are now heading pointedly in the wrong direction.

Overall, the U.S. Department of Education was cut by \$635 million. Programs under *No Child Left Behind* were cut by \$1.01 billion. Title I was cut \$26.4 million; IDEA was cut \$6.8 million; and Titles II, III, IV, and V were cut for the third consecutive year. They are the deepest cuts in federal education funding since the Reagan rescissions of 1981 and were not offset by the additional \$1.6 billion in Hurricane Katrina school aid approved by Congress, aid which should have been provided over and above the regular school assistance rather than being deducted from it.

The 109th Congress is primarily responsible for the cuts. But the Bush Administration shares responsibility by proposing an actual cut in the FY2006 federal education budget in the first place, and

making no serious effort to fight for the small increases in Title I and IDEA that it had originally proposed.

It is high time for some accountability among our elected officials in Washington who are so eager to lecture urban public schools on taking responsibility for results. Parents, teachers, administrators, and citizens need to express some outrage over these funding cuts. Without some sense of indignation from the public, Congress will return later this month and repeat the cuts

all over again—but this time they will be deeper. To the barricades!

Ed. Department Seeks 'Star Teachers'

The U.S. Department of Education is seeking outstanding classroom teachers to recognize as the 2006 American Stars of Teaching.

Teachers across all grade levels and disciplines are eligible for the award. One teacher will be recognized in every state and the District of Columbia.

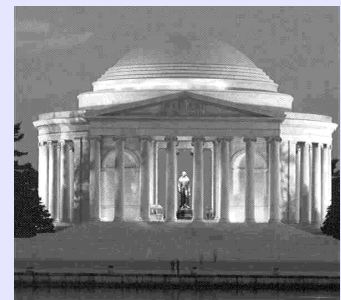
Teachers can be nominated by parents, students, colleagues or anyone who believes they have the qualities to be an American Star of Teaching.

The deadline to nominate a teacher for the award is April 15 and nominations can be found at www.ed.gov/teacherinitiative.

Council of the Great City Schools

Annual Legislative/Policy Conference

**March 18-21, 2006
Marriott Hotel
Washington, DC**



- Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind in 2007
- Education Funding and Federal Spending Priorities
- Final Special Education Regulations for the New Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

You may register online for the conference at www.cgcs.org

Inside the Council

Dallas District Aims To Be the Best

Sets Five-Year Goal

The Dallas Independent School District has launched an initiative aimed at making the school system the best in the nation, setting a timetable of five years.

The school board and superintendent recently announced a bold assessment plan that they believe, when completed, will make the district the top in the nation within five years by reaching newly adopted academic goals and ensuring all tax dollars are spent wisely and efficiently.

Superintendent Michael Hinojosa said in a district news release that assessments are being conducted to produce recommendations this spring that can be applied to the next school year, beginning this summer.

“The public education system in Dallas has reached the point where significant improvement will not be possible absent major changes,” Hinojosa explained. “This school district has to get better and it has to get better faster than our urban counterparts.”

Dallas Board of Trustees President Lois Parrott indicated that the board and the superintendent are in lock-step to elevate the school system. “From our universal desires to see Dallas students achieve greatness in our schools came the adoption of the academic performance targets we approved at the November board meeting,” she said.

“The time has come for us to push the district to the next level so that we may become the best large district in the nation,” stressed Board Vice President Ron Price.

Charlotte District Earns Accreditation

North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools recently received district-wide accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI).

The school district is reportedly the nation’s first large urban school system and one of only 20 districts of any size nationally to receive district-wide accreditation from SACS CASI, an agency that accredits both public and nonpublic educational institutions.

“This is a significant achievement that demonstrates CMS is committed to improving student achievement and has programs in place to drive continuous improvement,” said Superintendent Frances Haithcock in a district news release.

Nikki Armato, associate executive director for SACS CASI, pointed out, “Our review team was most impressed with the quality and scope of system-wide programs, methods of assistance and resources provided to schools to support them in meeting district goals.”

Council of the Great City Schools Calendar of Events for Year 2006

Executive Committee Meeting	Jan. 20-21	Tampa, FL
Personnel Directors Meeting	Feb. 1-4	Tampa, FL
Legislative/Policy Conference	March 18-21	Washington, DC
Chief Operating Officers Conference	April 5-8	Dallas, TX
Management Information System & IT Symposium	June	TBD
Public Relations Executives Meeting	July 7-9	Chicago
Curriculum Directors Meeting & Research/Assessment Symposium	July 12-15	Louisville
Executive Committee Meeting	July	TBD
Annual Fall Conference	Oct. 25-29	San Diego
Chief Financial Officers Conference	Nov.	TBD

Philly District Continues Climb *Math Supplement Helps Boost Progress*

The School District of Philadelphia recently saw test-score gains for a fourth consecutive year.

The nation's eighth largest school system showed measurable growth on the standardized, nationally normed TerraNova test, with overall increases in district schools scoring at or above the national average in reading, language arts and math.

The percentage of third through eighth graders scoring at or above the national average on the TerraNova increased more than 13 points in reading and language arts, and jumped 18.3 points in math, compared with 2001-2002, the district reports.

Contributing to the math gains has been an intervention supplement called *First in Math*, part of the 24 Challenge Math Program that offers elementary and middle school students a fast-paced mathematics game to improve their skills. The Council of the Great City Schools

has been the national sponsor of 24 Challenge.

The Philadelphia *First in Math* online program was used in more than 2,600 third through eighth grade classrooms throughout the district during the 2003-2004 school year, when the program was implemented. Math scores went up.

The district recorded more math gains in the second year of the program. The 2004-05 mandated Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) test results showed an 8.5 percentage point hike in overall math scores. Reading scores rose nearly 2 percentage points above 2003-04 results.

Among top-ranked *First in Math* schools in Pennsylvania, 23 out of 27 schools that scored double-digit increases on the 2004-05 PSSA in eighth grade were in the School District of Philadelphia, according to Bob Sun, creator of the 24 Game family of math programs.

Paul Vallas, chief executive officer of the Philadelphia school system, once reportedly said at a press conference, "When you look at the children who drop out of high school, it's not because they're failing their language arts, it's because they are failing their math and science courses.

"So, from the very beginning, as we move to reform our curriculum instructional models, we have moved to focus not only on language arts but also to focus on math – and to give math the same status and high priority of importance," he emphasized.

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Houston Launches...

Houston district administrators developed the pay-for-performance program, designed to offer three different levels of incentive pay, with the help of its school teachers and board members.



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