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Council, *USA TODAY* Plan Second Education Forum



With the success of last year's program, the Council of the Great City Schools is teaming up

with *USA TODAY* to hold another "Unite to Make a Difference" Education Forum aimed at building support for urban schoolchildren.

Urban school leaders will unite with business and news executives on March 16 at *USA TODAY* headquarters in a Council pre-Legislative/Policy Conference event.

"This education forum is unique because it brings together fellow superintendents, school board members, state education leaders, politicians, business leaders and media executives to discuss the nation's most important issue – education," says Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks, chair of the Council's Board of Directors.

"There is no better setting for such a discussion than the headquarters of the nation's largest newspaper," he emphasizes.

The inaugural forum last March was so successful that participants wanted to continue discussions lead-

Education Forum *continued on page 12*

Education Secretary to Address Urban School Leaders at Conference

Leaders from urban school districts nationwide will converge in Washington to hear from U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Capitol Hill leaders and staff members at the Council of the Great City Schools' Annual Legislative/Policy Conference, March 17-20.

The conference at the landmark Mayflower Hotel will focus on topics such as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), school modernization and education jobs legislation and President Obama's budget proposal for FY 2013.

A breakout session on education issues at the state level is also planned, but opens only to members of the Council.

Conference highlights are on page 9, and registration information can be accessed at www.cgcs.org.

Annual Legislative/ Policy Conference

Registration Information



March 17 - 20, 2012
Renaissance Mayflower Hotel
Washington, DC

New Year Marks 20th Anniversary at the Helm For Council's Executive Director



Michael Casserly

The 2012 New Year began in January with the 20th anniversary of Michael Casserly's appointment as executive director of the Council of the

Great City Schools and the beginning of a strategic plan on the part of the nation's urban-school coalition to plot direction for the years ahead.

Called a "crusader" for city schoolchildren by *USA TODAY*, Casserly took the reins of the Council in January 1992 after serving as the group's director of legislative *Council's Leadership continued on page 4*

Fort Worth District Launches 'It's Not Okay' Anti-Bullying Campaign

Bullying is an issue that school administrators across the nation are grappling with but Texas' Fort Worth Independent School District is dealing with it head on by launching a campaign designed to address the social norms that encourage bullying.

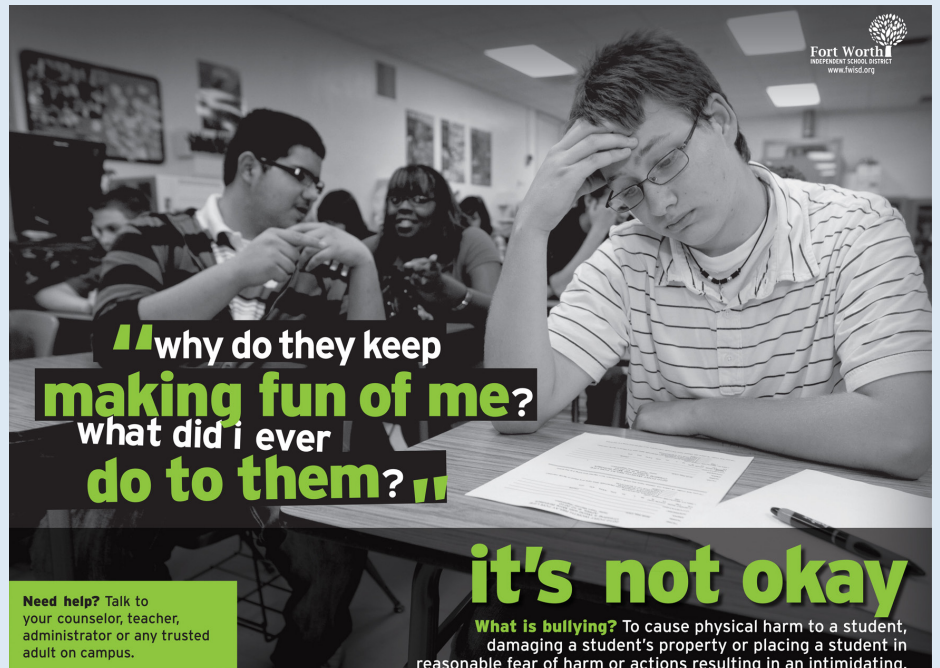
The "It's Not Okay" (INOK) campaign is an effort to encourage students to make healthy decisions and ask for help when they or their friends are in need.

The initiative will focus on behaviors that can place students at risk. These behaviors include: bullying, cyberbullying, sexting, teen dating violence, suicidal thinking, sexual harassment, gang involvement and substance abuse.

The campaign will focus on one topic each month through a series of posters that will be displayed in schools. Citywide billboards have also been created to help the community understand the importance of the project.

A web site, www.fwisd.org/safe, includes information and resources for students, including a "friends 4 life" button in which students are able to report bullying incidents via e-mail.

The campaign also encourages students, staff, parents and the community to sign a



A poster about bullying is part of Fort Worth Unified School District's "It's Not Okay" campaign.

pledge card committing themselves to creating a safe school environment.

As part of the campaign, INOK student organizations will exist on each campus to plan and participate in activities, and INOK campus committees, composed of

teachers and staff, will promote ways to impact the campus culture in positive ways.

"We will also have information for our teachers and staff to discuss," said Rene'

Anti-Bullying Campaign continued on page 3



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A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 67 of the nation's largest urban public school districts.

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All news items should be submitted to:
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Philadelphia and Fort Worth Select New Leaders

The School District of Philadelphia recently appointed energy executive Tom Knudsen as the district's new chief recovery officer. Knudsen will serve as both the district's superintendent and chief financial officer in the newly created post. He succeeds acting superintendent Leroy Nunery.

Knudsen served 10 years as the chief executive officer of the Philadelphia Gas Works, where he was credited with turning the company around. Knudsen will be employed by the school district under a six-month contract.



Walter Dansby

In Texas, Walter Dansby has served as the interim superintendent of Fort Worth Independent School District since June 2011, and after conducting a nationwide superintendent search,

the school board recently selected Dansby as its sole finalist.

A graduate of the school district, Dansby previously served as the deputy superintendent, responsible for overseeing the district's \$593.6 million Capital Improvement Program. He's slated to succeed Melody Johnson, who resigned from the district in May.

Texas law requires the school board to wait for 21 days before it can confirm Dansby as superintendent.

Contract Extensions

Winston Brooks, the superintendent of New Mexico's Albuquerque Public Schools,

Anti-Bullying Campaign *continued from page 2*

Moore, district guidance & counseling department coordinator. "We want students to receive a consistent message that they can't behave in certain ways or accept being victims of bad behavior."



Winston Brooks

was recently given a contract extension through June 2015. Brooks has been superintendent of the 90,000-student school district since 2008. "We continue to be pleased with the superintendent's performance," said Albuquerque school board president Paula Maes. "We believe that it is important to have continuity in leadership and Mr. Brooks is making progress in moving this district forward."

Also receiving a contract extension was Yvonne Brandon, the superintendent of Virginia's Richmond Public Schools. Brandon's contract was extended through June 2015.



Yvonne Brandon

She has served as superintendent since 2009, and under her leadership the district reached 100 percent state accreditation last year for the first time since the creation of state-wide benchmarks.

Other Developments

Florida's School District of Palm Beach County has named E. Wayne Gent, the district's chief officer of administration, as its interim superintendent. Gent succeeds interim superintendent Bill Malone.

Virginia's Norfolk Public Schools named Michael Spencer, the district's associate superintendent for operations, as its interim superintendent. Spencer succeeds Richard Bentley, who resigned from the district in November. Bentley served as the district's superintendent since August 2010.

Council Offers STEM Scholarships To City Students

For the third year, the Council of the Great City Schools is offering Exxon-Mobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships to students underrepresented in the career fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Named for former astronaut, physician and businessman Bernard Harris, who was the first African American to walk in space, the scholarships are available to 2012 graduating seniors in the 67 urban school districts represented by the Council.

Four \$5,000 scholarships for two males and two females each will be awarded to two African American and two Hispanic high school seniors pursuing studies in STEM-related fields in college next fall.

The Council last summer honored four students from school districts in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Miami-Dade County and Baton Rouge, respectively, as 2011 ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math Science Scholars.

The 2012 scholarship application is available on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org. Deadline for student submissions is April 2.



Bernard Harris

Council's Leadership *continued from page 1*

tion and research for 15 years. He is now believed to be the longest serving chief among the major national education membership organizations.

"When I was CEO of Chicago's schools, Mike was my advocate in Washington," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "Now that I am in Washington myself, I see what an effective advocate he is for urban education.

"Mike also has been a courageous leader on raising standards and holding schools accountable," the nation's top education leader continued. "Representing districts where leadership changes are frequent, Mike's own leadership has been constant throughout a period of systemic change in America's schools."

In a recent address on the state of urban education in America, Casserly indicated that he was more optimistic about the future of urban education than at any time during his long tenure with the organization because urban schools not only are making gains but are figuring out how to make more. "The nation's urban schoolchildren over the past several years have demonstrated significant progress in reading and math proficiency on federal assessments," he stressed.

"Every public school student in the country represented by the CGCS has a voice at the national level because of Michael Casserly's leadership," said New Mexico's Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks, chair of the Council's Board of Directors. "Michael understands the unprecedented complex challenges our anemic economy has created for public education, and more importantly has the skill set, energy and relationships to move our schools forward."

In 1992, the Council of the Great City Schools and its team of expert staff members began unifying big-city school districts around a vision for improvement and reform that has helped produce significant academic gains for urban schoolchildren and created new momentum for urban schools.



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, left, poses with Robert Kennedy Jr., Council Chair Winston Brooks and Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson.

To move urban education forward, the Council initiated the federal Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) for inner-city schoolchildren to take the rigorous national test known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), considered the *Nation's Report Card*.

TUDA now provides 21 major city school systems that volunteered to measure student progress on the nation's toughest benchmark with comparable academic data across state lines that yields unique and detailed information on how urban schoolchildren are doing academically.

In addition, to improve transparency of urban-school progress, the Council began publishing the nation's first annual compendium of student performance on state-mandated tests in major cities with its continuing series of reports titled *Beating the Odds*.

Achievement No. 1 Goal

The Council has a special mission to educate the nation's most culturally diverse student body to the highest academic standards. Consequently, it was the first national education membership organization to call for what became the Common Core State Standards, and is now actively working in support of their implementation in urban school systems nationwide.

The Council also initiated and wrote ground-breaking studies of why some urban school systems improve faster than others in order to inform the improvement of all urban schools. And it has produced

important studies on African-American males, Hispanic students, language acquisition strategies, bilingual education and dropout prediction.

To back up its academic priorities at the ground level, the Council initiated and launched more than 210 hard-hitting technical assistance teams in more than 50 major city school systems that invited help in improving instruction, special and bilingual education, budget and finance operations, food services, transportation and other services.

Moreover, the Council has taken national policy and legislative positions that consistently reflect bi-partisan urban school priorities for high standards, academic results, accountability and equity.

Other Initiatives in 20 Years

In addition to spearheading academic reforms, the Council has worked to improve management operations in urban school systems. It initiated and developed the first nationwide educational performance-management system with comparable data on nearly 400 non-instructional key performance indicators. Results have saved urban school districts millions of dollars in non-instructional costs and improved efficiencies.

The Council has also worked to improve public confidence of urban schools. It produced three major public-service announcements on urban school progress and stereotypes of urban schoolchildren that were viewed some 310 million times over four years on broadcast and cable television.

It also convened the first-ever summit meeting of the nation's big-city mayors and school superintendents to improve collaboration. And since 1992, the Council has expanded its membership from 44 city school systems in 1992 to 67 urban districts today.

"The Council of the Great City Schools is not here to reflect or perpetuate the inequities under which too many of our urban students suffer but to overcome them. Our next 20 years will be devoted to making sure that all our children have the academic tools for success," noted Casserly.



Dallas Independent School District kicked off its inaugural African American Female Success Initiative with guest speaker Ocelia Gibson, the current Miss Black USA and a Dallas native. Gibson is also a mentor in the initiative created to empower young black females.

Dallas Expands Black Male Success Program To Female Students

In 2010, the Dallas Independent School District created an African American Male Success Initiative to improve academic achievement of young black males. The district is now expanding its efforts to include young black females.

The school system recently launched the African American Female Success Initiative, which aims to empower young African American female students through education, mentoring and enrichment opportunities. According to school district officials, it is one of the only initiatives of its kind in the nation.

The initiative combines mentoring with supplemental activities to help students build a positive future.

Though it is African-American specific, the program is open to all female students in 4th through 12th grades. The girls are placed with a designated mentor at each school who they meet with throughout the school year to support their academic, social, cultural and emotional growth. Mentors and students will also participate in activities such as community service projects,

trips to colleges, museums and plays.

While African American females in Dallas schools have made gains in the classroom, according to recent standardized test scores, they still lag behind some other student groups in mathematics and science.

"...As educators, we must continue to adjust to the changing needs of our students as we work to educate them for success," said Dallas Schools Interim Superintendent Alan King. "Having this many young girls come together to share their voices and to affirm their ability to succeed is a worthwhile effort, and hopefully, it will further the success we're starting to see in the classroom."

Students participating in the events and activities of the initiative will have the opportunity to showcase their efforts and program highlights over the year at the Earth Day Dallas 2012 festival in April.

Earth Day Dallas has partnered with the female initiative to promote academic success while bringing environmental awareness to students.

Boston, Philly Recognized for Environmentally Friendly Schools

Boston Public Schools and the School District of Philadelphia were the only school districts to be named to the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Center for Green Schools inaugural "Best of Green Schools 2011" list.

The list recognized school administrators and government leaders in 10 categories for their efforts in creating healthy and energy efficient schools.

The School District of Philadelphia was recognized in the "Best City" category for making significant steps in 2011 toward the greening of the city's 291 public schools. The district has made a commitment that all new school facilities be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified.

Boston Public Schools and Boston Mayor Thomas Menino were recognized in the "Convener" category for hosting the Research Summit on Childhood Health and School Buildings, which brought together a team of researchers to explore the connection between school facilities and student health.

"We have a responsibility as educators to teach our children what it means to be good environmental stewards, so we are pleased to have been recognized for our efforts in this area," said Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson.

The recipients of the "Best of Green Schools" list serve as models for greening the nation's schools and were recognized for a variety of sustainable, cost-cutting measures, including energy conservation and collaborative platforms and policies to green U.S. school infrastructure.

The USGBC Center for Green Schools provides the resources and support to elevate dialogue, accelerate policy and institute innovation toward green schools and campuses.

Four Council Districts Win U.S. Innovation Grants

Baltimore City Public Schools created a summer learning program that provides middle school students with instruction in robotics to improve their mathematics proficiency, while Boston Public Schools developed a program to improve two middle schools by adding 300 hours to the school year for students.

These programs will now expand because they are the recipients of an *Investing in Innovation* (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

The Department awarded \$150 million in grants to 23 projects across the nation aimed at increasing innovation in education and improving student achievement. The projects had to secure matching funds in order to receive the grants.

Baltimore's \$3 million grant and Boston's \$2.9 million grant were not the only (i3) grants awarded to urban school districts. California's Oakland Unified School District received a \$3 million grant to implement the College Board's EXCEerator program which partners with school district leaders to improve college readiness.

And New York City Schools received a \$3 million grant to identify barriers to students' success in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. "This \$3 million grant will help our Office of Innovation coordinate efforts among schools, the private sector, and other school districts to ensure that new technology meets the needs of students in low-income communities," said New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott.

The 2011 Investing in Innovation Fund competition reviewed nearly 600 projects from school districts and nonprofit organizations.

Applicants were required to submit proposals on how they would meet certain criteria, including how their projects would promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics education.

Judge Recognized for Creating St. Louis School

St. Louis Juvenile Court Judge Jimmie Edwards was selected as one of *PEOPLE* magazine's 2011 "Heroes of the Year" for opening the Innovative Concept Academy in St. Louis Public Schools.

Edwards' profile in a recent issue of the magazine details his transformation of an abandoned school into the Innovative Concept Academy, which serves at-risk students in grades 6-12.

As a juvenile judge, Edwards was troubled by the teen offenders he saw in his courtroom, so in 2009 he, along with 45 community partners, took over an abandoned school and created an academic environment for students unable to learn in a traditional school setting. Providing strict discipline, counseling and programs like chess, music and creative writing, the school enables students who have been suspended or expelled the opportunity to graduate from high school and lead productive lives.



Judge Jimmie Edwards poses with two students who attend the Innovative Concept Academy in St. Louis, which Edwards helped open.

The school is a collaborative partnership among St. Louis Public Schools, MERS Goodwill and the Twenty-Second

Judicial Circuit of Missouri Family Court-Juvenile Division. The district provides the personnel, supplies and transportation, while MERS Goodwill offers job training programs, placement and GED programming. And

the family court-juvenile division, under the direction of Edwards, supports court-involved youth with programming and services.

The alternative academy provides four levels of service for students which include: academic day programs, after-school programming and summer programs as well as an evening reporting center operated by the Family Court for students who require extra community supervision while awaiting their court hearing.

As one of six winners selected by *PEOPLE*, Edwards received \$10,000 for the Academy, which will be used to create a new arts and drama program at the school.

Santa Ana, Bridgeport Districts Join Council

California's Santa Ana Unified School District and Connecticut's Bridgeport Public Schools have joined the Council of the Great City Schools, raising the organization's membership to 67 urban public school systems.

With some 56,000 students, Santa Ana is the sixth largest school system in California, and the largest in Orange County. The district is led by Superintendent Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana, formerly U.S. assistant secretary for

elementary and secondary education in Washington.

A familiar urban-district and Council superintendent, Paul Vallas, leads the Bridgeport school system, with some 21,000 students and considered the largest school system in Connecticut along with Hartford. Vallas has headed public schools in Chicago,

Philadelphia and the Recovery School District in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.



Urban Schools Advance in Managing Dollars, Improving Efficiencies

Urban public school districts have pioneered and advanced a data-driven performance management system that helps save dollars and improve business efficiencies, especially beneficial during the nation's economic uncertainties.

A new report -- *Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools 2011*--- by the Council of the Great City Schools shows how the business and finance sides of urban schools can now access an online system to give non-instructional executives immediate strategic performance data to improve operations.

The new Performance Management System is an outgrowth of the Council's Performance Measurement and Benchmarking Project, launched in 2004 that pioneered the development of key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge financial, information technology, business services and human resource operations in big-city school districts.

"With its online data dashboard, the Performance Management System helps school executives focus on needed areas of improvement; connects them to peers who are performing well; and provides a business-modeling tool for planning and validating targets that is saving millions of dollars," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

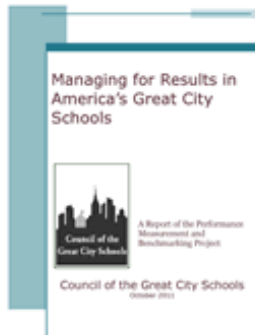
The 2011 edition of the *Managing for Results* report series, a compilation of key performance indicators based on data in business services, finances and technology, also explains the "value-add" benefit in utilizing the key performance indicators. "Benchmarking or comparing data from city-to-city pays special dividends," says the report.

A number of urban school districts,

including Albuquerque, Boston, Chicago and Florida's Orange County in Orlando, have tapped into the key performance indicators and have saved dollars and improved business and operational efficiencies as a result.

The Cincinnati Public Schools in Ohio, for example, took advantage of the KPIs to streamline staffing and supply practices in food and custodial services, resulting in the district saving between \$10 million and \$12 million a year.

The urban school performance-management system has also been recently evaluated independently by the American Institutes for Research and results show substantial use of the Council's system and numerous examples of urban school savings and improvements.



Four Urban Principals Honored



Christine Collier

Christine Collier co-designed and opened the Center for Inquiry (CFI) at School 2, a K-8 magnet school in Indianapolis, more than 10 years ago.

In 2006, Collier replicated the model and opened another school, CFI at School 84. Both schools have achieved Adequate Yearly Progress, and this fall the district opened a third CFI school.

Collier was recognized for her achievements when she was selected among 61 principals across the nation to be named 2011 National Distinguished Principals.

Sponsored by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the

Miami Issues First Monetary Bonuses To Teachers

Miami-Dade County Public Schools recently awarded teachers performance pay checks up to \$25,000 for improving student achievement.

The monetary bonuses, up to \$14 million this year, were funded through a Race to the Top (RTTT) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. More than 16,500 teachers in the district will or have received a RTTT award.

According to district officials, the Miami school system is the first in Florida to reward educators under RTTT, even though the state does not require performance pay plans for teachers until 2014. Officials credit the support of the teacher's union and school board members who have strongly maintained their commitment to local classrooms.

"We leveraged the financial benefit of Race to the Top funding through negotia-

Monetary Bonuses continued on page 11

award program recognizes school principals who make superior contributions to their schools and communities. The program honors both public and private elementary and middle school principals for setting high standards for instruction, student achievement, character and parental involvement in their learning environments.

Collier received the honor along with three other big-city school principals: Joan Steffes-Franks, principal of Armatage Montessori School in Minneapolis; Traci Davis, principal of William E. Synder Empowerment Elementary School in Las Vegas' Clark County School District; and Elizabeth Kennedy, principal of Bak Middle School of the Arts in Florida's School District of Palm Beach County.

Miami-Dade Co. Schools Honored For 'Excellence in Financial Management'

The Council of the Great City Schools recently recognized the Miami-Dade County Public Schools for employing the highest standards in financial management, accountability and fiscal control.

It presented the **Award for Excellence in Financial Management** to the nation's fourth largest school district for its financial performance in safeguarding and protecting the financial integrity of the school system.

This is only the third time since the Council initiated the award six years ago that it has honored a school district with its highest national award for sound financial management. And Miami-Dade County is the first major urban school district in the nation to meet *all* mandatory and recommended management practices of 136 practices across nine broad categories of financial operations.

Florida's Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale and the Houston Independent School District had won the Council's top management award in 2008 and 2011, respectively.

Calling the school district the "Miami Miracle," Council Executive Director Michael Casserly recognized the school board, superintendent, chief financial officer and staff for providing exemplary financial management and stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

"The Miami-Dade County Public Schools is leading the way in demonstrating that excellence in urban education is attainable, that rigor in financial operations is doable, and that public confidence and trust are winnable," stressed Casserly.

Seven years ago, the Council embarked on an initiative called the Performance Measurement and Benchmarking Project to identify performance measures, key indicators and best practices to improve and maximize school-district operations in finance and budget, business services, human resources, and information technology.

As a result, the Council developed rigorous standards leading to the establishment of criteria to create an award for excellence.

The Council convened a panel to conduct the review process, including an extensive site visit.



After the award presentation, pictured are Miami-Dade County School Board Chair Perla Tabares Hantman, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, Superintendent Alberto Carvalho and Chief Financial Officer Richard Hinds.

Florida High Schools In Urban Districts Score High Marks

Several urban school districts had reason to celebrate when the Florida Department of Education recently released its grades for high schools.

The high school grading system calculates grades in high schools based on the performance of each school's students on the state exam, FCAT, as well as the school's graduation rate, performance and participation of students in Advanced Placement, and the high school graduation rate of at-risk students.

Broward County

Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale had 76.3 percent of its high schools earn a grade of "A" or "B," compared to 73.6 percent last year. In addition, 14 high schools received an "A," compared to 10 last year and no high schools received an "F" grade.

Duval County

In Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, 16 of 19 high schools, 84 percent, scored "A," "B" or "C" grades. The district has also decreased the number of schools that scored "D" grades, from 10 to 2. And one high school, Frank H. Peterson Academies, rose three letter grades, from "D" to "A."

Hillsborough County

Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa had more high schools earn "A" or "B" grades this year than ever before. Five high schools earned their first-ever "A" grade and 25 of 27 high schools, or 93 percent, earned "A" or "B" grades. This is up from 79 percent last year.

Miami-Dade County

For the first time in many years, no high schools in Miami-Dade County Public Schools received a grade of "F." Four years ago, seven district high schools were rated

High Schools continued on page 9

Council of the Great City Schools

Annual Legislative/Policy Conference
March 17-20, 2012
Renaissance Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC



Saturday, March 17, 2012

Registration
Continental Breakfast
Fall Conference Planning Meeting
Blue Ribbon Corporate Advisory Group Meeting
Lunch & Meeting of Legislative & Federal Program Liasons
Executive Committee Meeting
Task Force Meetings
Great City Colleges of Education Steering Committee Meeting
New Member & New Attendees Orientation
Welcome Reception

Sunday, March 18, 2012

Registration
Buffet Breakfast
Board of Directors Meeting
Great City Colleges of Education Meeting
Luncheon with Speaker: **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**
Legislative Briefings
Reception: Taste of Indianapolis, Site of Council's Fall Conference

Monday, March 19, 2012

Breakfast with Speaker
Legislative Briefings
Luncheon with Speaker
Capitol Hill Visits (You must arrange your own appointments)
Capitol Hill Reception

Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Breakfast with Speaker
Adjourn

K.C. 5th-Grader Publishes Research

Clara Lazen, a fifth-grade student at Border Star Montessori in Kansas City Public Schools, used a classroom kit to combine molecules and chemical bonds and the result was explosive!

Lazen showed her creation to her teacher, Ken Boehr, who was so impressed that he emailed the creation to his friend and researcher Robert Zoellner, a professor at Humboldt State University in California.

The creation was significant for two reasons. The first reason was because Lazen's molecule has the potential to store energy and can be used to produce energy. The second reason was because few chemist researchers have explored this molecule.

Zoellner eventually submitted an academic paper on the molecule that will be published by the *Computational and Theoretical Chemistry* scientific journal. And 11-year-old Clara, as well as her teacher, will be listed as co-authors.

Zoellner told the *Kansas City Star* that he hopes Clara's role in the research will inspire her and other students, especially girls, who are underrepresented in science at the university level.

High Schools continued from page 8

"F." And in three years, the district has doubled the number of schools receiving "As," from 15 to 31; increased the number of "Bs" by 33 percent; and decreased the number of "Ds" by 43 percent.

Orange County

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando had their best results in 13 years of high school grading, with 16 of its 19 high schools earning grades of "A" or "B."

And for the first time, the district had no high schools that received a "D" or "F" grade.

Palm Beach

The School District of Palm Beach County had 82 percent of its schools earn an "A" or "B" grade this year and no school received an "F" grade.

State Waiver Applicants Seek to Evade Accountability For Subgroup Performance

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

After a decade of exploiting loopholes in the accountability requirements for underperforming student groups (subgroups) under *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), the first round of U.S. Department of Education waiver applications from state departments of education have demonstrated more of the same.

Familiar statistical techniques--like large N's sizes, school population minimums, high confidence intervals, and margins of error--have allowed states to exclude millions of students attending non-diverse, small, and not-so-small schools from such NCLB sanctions as low-performance designation, school-improvement measures, and mandated private tutoring. A review of the waiver applications from the initial eleven states to file them finds new and creative ways that states have proposed to revise, redefine, ignore, or delink the performance of traditional subgroups from the new state-designed accountability systems required by the Department.

In fact, U.S. Department of Education guidelines for the waivers do not surrender accountability for subgroups in the assessment, reporting or accountability under the new flexibility package. To the contrary, the guidance outlines three main options states have in folding subgroup accountability into their procedures. Yet, analyses by a number of independent organizations of the initial state applications found a significant commonality among most of them: subgroups were not being fully integrated into the state accountability systems. For instance, an analysis by former Congressional Research Service guru, Wayne Riddle, for the Center for Education Policy spells out the techniques used in many state waiver proposals that would put an end to years of disaggregating student data and targeting of remedial action (at <http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=387>).



In addition, comments from the Peer Review Panels examining the applications underscore the lack of connection between subgroup performance and the accountability and improvement systems in the initial state waiver applications. The creation of “super-subgroups” whereby all groups were lumped together, the replacement of subgroups with consolidated quartiles, and the obfuscation of individual subgroup performance were among the strategies being proposed in order to avoid triggering school identification and improvement actions. Peer reviewers also questioned the lack of information in the application packages on exclusionary practices, assessment participation rates, reporting, and accountability requirements.

The proposed retreat from subgroup accountability by many states is troubling in its own right, and a red flag for additional state discretion in the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The fallout from a decade of overly prescriptive NCLB requirements has prompted this instinct to cede more discretion to the States – many which have a history of inequitable treatment of schools and communities with concentrations of poor and minority children. With little likelihood of enacting an ESEA reauthorization bill this year, school districts will be functioning within the NCLB Waiver framework for the near future. But, the fundamental premise of maintaining subgroup accountability and closing achievement gaps should not be subverted no matter how far the federal pendulum has swung.



Council Launches Redesigned Web Site

The Council of the Great City Schools recently launched a new web site designed to be more visually appealing, information driven and user friendly.

The redesigned web site, www.cgcs.org, includes a new and improved homepage that features rotating images with highlighted text areas, a calendar of events and a Quick Links section that provides easy access to information such as member school districts, press releases and urban school statistics.

The web site also features a new section called Academics to support the work of urban school districts to improve student achievement. Included in this section is information for districts on how to implement the Common Core State Standards.

The web site also reflects the growing popularity of online video, with a video player on the homepage and a multimedia section that contains videos from the Council's past fall conferences.

Theatrical Production Benefits School in Austin

A major theatrical production recently ended at Washington's famous John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts that brought the spirit of a colorful Texas governor to the nation's capital.

In a one-woman show, Emmy Award-winning stage and screen actress Holland Taylor of the TV sitcom *Two and a Half Men* portrayed the tough-talking, white-haired former Texas governor Ann Richards in *Ann...An Affectionate Portrait of Ann Richards*.

The theatrical production not only entertained Kennedy Center audiences in December and January but also benefitted an all-girls school in the capital of the Lone Star State named for the brassy governor who headed Texas from 1991 to 1995.

The Ann Richards School for Young Women opened in 2007 through a unique

public-private partnership with the Austin Independent School District. The single-gender school serves students in sixth-through 11th-grades, and will add a 12th grade, according to the school's web site.

The school's academic emphasis is on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).



Actress Holland Taylor as Ann Richards. Photo Credit: Ave Bonar

Minneapolis School Official Addresses President Obama



Hashim Yonis Photo Credit: AchieveMpls

When Hashim Yonis arrived in Minneapolis 12 years ago with his family from war-torn Somalia, he could not speak English. But earlier this month, Yonis addressed President Barack Obama at a White House event to kick off the Obama

Administration's summer-jobs initiative.

Yonis, 23, a graduate of Minneapolis Public Schools, works in the district helping recent immigrants. And as a high school student, he participated in the STEP-UP summer jobs program, a joint initiative of the City of Minneapolis and AchieveMpls, which places teens in paid summer internships.

Yonis interned at a local law firm and in the Minneapolis' Public Works Department, where he met important mentors, including Minneapolis Mayor R. T. Rybak.

The co-chair of STEP-UP, Rybak invited Yonis with him to the recent White House event where Yonis was part of a panel of young people who spoke about how they have benefited from meaningful summer employment and work-readiness training.

Monetary Bonuses *continued from page 7*

tion rather than imposition," said Miami-Dade Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho.

The performance plan rewards teachers based on four categories related to student performance. The categories are: whole schools, content area within a school, individual teachers within the school and Superintendent's Progressive Teacher Awards.



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Education Forum *continued from page 1*

ing to “Steps to Build Support for Urban Schoolchildren” – theme of the 2012 forum.

The daylong forum will begin with an address by Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, followed by a panel discussion on “What’s Needed to Improve, Support and Report Achievement in Urban Education.”

A prominent speaker will deliver a lunch address, followed by afternoon breakout sessions to give forum participants an opportunity to interact around key subjects aimed at improving urban-school technology, resources and perception.

There is no registration fee for the forum, but space is limited. Transportation will be provided. For information on how to register for the program at *USA TODAY*, access the Council’s Legislative/Policy Conference brochure at www.cgcs.org.

The Council-*USA TODAY* “Unite to Make a Difference” Education Forum is supported by State Farm Insurance Company, Microsoft Partners in Learning, Best Buy, the History Channel and Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation.

Council of the Great City Schools 2012 Conference Schedule

HRD/Personnel Directors Meeting	February 1-3	Las Vegas, NV
“Unite to Make a Difference” Education Forum with <i>USA TODAY</i>	March 16	McLean, VA
Legislative/Policy Conference	March 17-20	Washington, DC
Chief Operating Officers Conference	April 3-6	Cincinnati, OH
Bilingual Directors Meeting	May 16-19	Seattle, WA
Chief Information Officers Meeting	June 12-15	Minneapolis, MN
Public Relations Executives Meeting	July 6-8	Chicago, IL
Curriculum & Research Directors Meeting	July 11-14	Las Vegas, NV
Executive Committee Meeting	July 20-21	Oakland, CA
Annual Fall Conference	October 17-21	Indianapolis, IN
Chief Financial Officers Conference	November 12-16	Ft. Lauderdale, FL