



- Cleveland Keeps CEO, p.3
  - "Best High Schools", p.7
- LEGISLATIVE**
- Nevada Bill Goes Too Far, p. 10



Orlando student James Turner and his college counselor Margaret Weese Cullen attend a ceremony honoring his academic achievements.

## Foster Care Student Achieves Dream

By the time he was 18, James Turner had lived in more than 10 foster homes and attended as many as 10 schools. A 2015 graduate of William Boone High School in Orlando, Fla., Turner currently lives in a group home and has been in the foster care system since he was a year old; one of the 400,000 youths living in foster care in the United States.

Last August, Turner went with his English class to an orientation in Orange County Schools' College and Career Center, where he met college counselor Margaret Weese Cullen. The following week he returned to see Cullen because he thought he might want to attend Florida State University (FSU) but confessed that he had no clue how to get into college.

"There was never discussion of college admissions in his foster care environment

so we had to start at square one," said Cullen in an email interview with the *Urban Educator*. She liked Turner from the moment she met him and, recognizing his potential, thought he would be a great candidate for FSU's CARE program, which provides services and support to first-generation college students.

Over the course of Turner's senior year, Cullen worked with him to complete multiple college applications, strategized about his standardized testing, completed financial aid forms and labored over his essays.

Turner enrolled in honors courses and challenged himself with Advanced Placement classes and graduated with a 3.1 grade-point average. And the dream that he had in August became a reality when he received an acceptance letter to attend FSU.

**Achieves Dream** continued on page 5

## L.A. Schools Dominate Academic Decathlon

The U.S. Academic Decathlon® has been held for 34 years and a school from the Los Angeles Unified School District has won the title for 15 of those years.

The winning streak for Los Angeles continues, with the district's Granada Hills Charter High School winning first place in this year's competition. The 2015 champions reclaimed the title after a second-place loss to Los Angeles' El Camino Real Charter High School last year. This year's win marks Granada Hills fourth national

**L.A. Schools** continued on page 7



## Class of 2015

Two sisters in Buffalo, N.Y., Sumitra and Laxmi Acharya, beam after graduating as valedictorian and salutatorian from the city's Burgard High School. Their educational journey began in Nepal in a refugee camp.

They are just two of the outstanding urban school graduates from the Class of 2015 featured in this edition.

Story on page 4 as part of a three-page graduation spread.

# Council Awards Scholarships with ExxonMobil and Former Astronaut

Four graduating high school seniors from different cities this summer share something in common: ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships.

The Council of the Great City Schools recently named the 2015 math and science scholars among several hundred applicants from across the nation. They were chosen for their academic performance, leadership qualities and community involvement.

Now in its sixth year, the scholarship was created by former NASA astronaut Dr. Bernard Harris, the first African American to walk in space, and ExxonMobil to assist and encourage promising students of diverse backgrounds who plan to pursue

science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies.

The awards are given annually to African-American and Hispanic seniors from high schools in the 67 urban school districts represented by the Council.

“These highly competitive scholarships provide an enormous opportunity for talented urban students to pursue STEM postsecondary studies and careers,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “The generous support of Dr. Harris and ExxonMobil contributes to the growth of these young men and women as they begin the next stage of their lives.”

Each scholar receives \$5,000 for continued education in a STEM-related field.

This year’s award winners are:

- Matthew Guillory, Robert A. Millikan High School, Long Beach (CA) Unified School District;
- Sofia Kennedy, Liberal Arts and Science Academy, Austin (TX) Independent School District;
- Summer Kollie, Girard Academic Music Program, School District of Philadelphia (PA); and
- Nicolas Pena, Western High School, Broward County (FL) Public Schools.

**Scholarships** continued on page 3



Matthew Guillory



Sofia Kennedy



Summer Kollie



Nicolas Pena



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# Baton Rouge and Providence Name Superintendents; Chicago, Dallas, Newark and K.C. Lose Chiefs; L.A. and Cleveland Keep Leaders



Warren Drake

Louisiana's East Baton Rouge Parish School System recently selected a veteran educator to lead the school district.

Warren Drake, a top administrator for the Louisiana Department of Education, will become superintendent of the school system in July, succeeding Bernard Taylor.

Drake is no stranger to the East Baton Rouge school system, having served as a teacher, principal and administrator. He also served 10 years as superintendent of Louisiana's Zachary School District.

And Rhode Island's Providence school district has named Christopher Ndeki Maher as interim superintendent to replace Susan Lusi, who is resigning from the top post at the end of June.

Maher is currently the president of Mass Insight Education, a public education consultancy firm that has worked with the school district to increase student achievement. He will serve as interim leader for one year while the Providence School

Board conducts a search for a permanent leader.

## Leaders Step Down

Barbara Byrd-Bennett, the CEO of Chicago Public Schools, has resigned from the nation's third largest public school system after serving in the position since 2012. Chicago school board member Jesse Ruiz is serving as the district's interim CEO.

Also departing is Superintendent Mike Miles of the Dallas Independent School District after being at the helm since 2012. Deputy Superintendent Ann Smisko will serve as acting superintendent.

Moreover, Superintendent Cami Anderson of New Jersey's Newark Public Schools is stepping down after heading the state-run district since 2011. And R. Stephen Green, superintendent of Missouri's Kansas City Public Schools, is leaving after leading the district since 2011. He becomes the superintendent of Georgia's DeKalb County School District.

## Contracts Extended

Ramon Cortines will be at the helm of the nation's second largest school district



Eric Gordon

for another year. He was recently given a one-year contract extension to lead the Los Angeles Unified School District through June 2016. This will be Cortines' third tour of duty leading the school system. He

was interim superintendent from 1999-2000, then 2009-2011.

And in an effort to provide stability, sustain momentum and reward progress, the Cleveland school board recently voted to approve a new four-year contract for Chief Executive Officer Eric Gordon. He has led the school district since 2011 and during his tenure, graduation rates have increased and voters have approved a multi-million dollar school levy and a bond issue.

## Houston Leader Top Communicator

Superintendent Terry Grier of the Houston Independent School District has been selected to receive the National School Public Relations Association's 2015 Bob Grossman Leadership in School Communications Award, given annually to a top education leader for outstanding leadership in school public relations and communications.

"From the multi-channeled communication program that has been established in Houston ISD, to the commitment to authentic engagement, transparency and accountability at all levels, there is no question that Terry Grier leads by example and 'walks the walk' in supporting strategic communication as a management function," says NSPRA Executive Director Rich Bagin.



### Scholarships *continued from page 2*

In the fall, Guillory plans to attend Harvey Mudd College to become a biomedical engineer with career aspirations to design artificial limbs and organs. Kennedy has been accepted to Harvard University, where she hopes to pursue a degree in scientific research, particularly focused on untraditional uses for Botox.

With long-term aspirations of becoming a physician and researcher concentrating on communicable diseases in Africa, Kollie will attend the University of Pennsylvania in the fall. Pena will study engineering at Stanford University in hopes of becoming an inventor and entrepreneur

developing high-technology products.

"Technological advancements are making our world a better place every day, but in order to keep those achievements coming, we need creative and analytical minds in our workforce," says Dr. Harris, a physician turned astronaut and businessman. "By providing these scholarships, we are growing another generation of strategic thinkers who will foster diversity in ideas, applications and products."

Administration of the scholarship program, including the application process, pre-selection and presentation of awards, is provided by the Council. Dr. Harris makes the final selection of recipients.



## Anchorage Student's Hard Work Pays Off

Julie Vincek, an on-the-job training coordinator at Anchorage School District's King Career Center in Alaska, vividly remembers when 12th grader Preston Bolton came to her and expressed his desire to join the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) apprenticeship program. The program is highly coveted, with up to 300 people a year applying for the few available spots.

But Bolton knew that he wanted a career in construction electricity, so Vincek obtained an internship for him with a local company. After successfully completing the internship, Bolton underwent a rigorous interview process, and then received the good news that he had earned a spot into the IBEW apprenticeship program.

"We just kept seeing this guy who kept going after his dreams," said Vincek. "We didn't know, until long after he had been selected, his life story."

That story includes leaving Anchorage

with his family and then dropping out of high school in the 10th grade to work two jobs as his family's sole breadwinner. But Bolton soon realized that he couldn't get anywhere in life without finishing school.



Preston Bolton

He was able to contact a relative to care for his siblings, and a friend's family in Anchorage agreed to take him. So Bolton came back to Anchorage and caught up on all the work he missed in order to receive his diploma.

The Anchorage school district recently held a big signing event recognizing vocational students who obtained direct entry into a union. At the event, Bolton shared his story and, according to Vincek, there was not a dry eye in the room.

"He really wants to be an example," said Vincek. "He said 'I want other people to see me and know that they can achieve too, even if they have had hard times in their life.'"

## NYC Teen Mom Defies the Odds and Graduates Early with Honors

Janira Moore refused to let teen pregnancy statistics dictate her future. After becoming a mother at age 15, the ambitious scholar worked hard and graduated early and with honors from University Heights Secondary School in New York City.

Moore, 16, navigated the new demands of motherhood while maintaining a B+ average, participating in extracurricular

activities such as track and field and completing the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Program at New York's City College last year.

Her academic success also came with support. Moore has been part of New York Schools' Living for the Young Family through Education (LYFE) program,

*Teen Mom continued on page 12*

## Buffalo Sisters Find Success in America

Laxmi Acharya is the valedictorian of the 2015 graduating class at Burgard High School in Buffalo, N.Y., while her sister Sumitra is the salutatorian. But the two sisters' path to the top was not easy.

The sisters were born in Nepal in a refugee camp where they lived with their parents in a small hut. Despite their poverty, the sisters did well at the school in the refugee camp. Sumitra finished 10<sup>th</sup> grade but could not further her studies because the family did not have enough money, so she spent her time helping her younger sister Laxmi with her schoolwork.

Three years later, the sisters' life took a turn for the better when, in 2013, their family received an opportunity to come to America and resettle in Buffalo. The girls enrolled in English as a Second Language classes at Burgard High School, but difficulty with the language did not stop them from achieving academic success. Laxmi did so well she was able to skip her junior year and complete high school in just three years. And both of the sisters met all New York State examination requirements in just two years, even though it typically takes students four years.

"Either of the sisters on their own would be an amazing story, but to have done this together is unbelievable," said Burgard school counselor Brian Woods.

In the fall, Sumitra will attend Buffalo State College as a biomedical major, while Laxmi plans to study pre-med at the University of Buffalo.



Janira Moore and her son Joshua

## Student Admitted to All Ivy League Schools

Alexander Roman, a senior at Harding Senior High School in St. Paul, Minn., could not decide which Ivy League school he wanted to attend so he applied to all eight of them. And the 17-year-old received an acceptance letter from every one.

Roman is a full International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme candidate and is taking seven IB classes, including a special online business and management course from a college in England.

In addition, he serves on his school's transition program that welcomes freshmen and helps them get acquainted with high school. For three years, he played baseball and was the starting first baseman and he is also a youth leader at his church.

One of five children, Roman's father was born in Mexico and overcame many financial struggles and barriers to earn his U.S. citizenship.



Alexander Roman

"That drive for him to get citizenship has really helped me have a drive for academics and my future," said Roman, who was profiled on St. Paul school district's web site. Thinking about studying environmental engineering, he plans to be the first

person in his family to graduate from college.

Even though Roman was admitted to 20 colleges and universities, the acceptance letter that excited him the most was from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

He previously participated in a summer program at the college, which was called MITS (Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science) and credits his participation as helping him get accepted into MIT.

As a result, Roman will be headed to MIT in the fall.

### Achieves Dream *continued from page 1*

As a member of the university's CARE program, Turner will receive support from an academic advisor, financial aid specialist and college-life coach for the entire time he is a student.

Studies have found that only 2 to 9 percent of former foster care youths attain a bachelor's degree, and that campus support programs can increase postsecondary educational attainment for youths formerly in foster care.

At a recent celebration held by a local organization that advocates for foster care children, Turner received a surprise from Cullen—a special video message from FSU President John Thrasher welcoming him to the university.

The high school counselor is also making sure that Turner has a support system in college, arranging a laptop for him to learn keyboarding skills, making sure there will be clothing and school supplies, and

that there will be a plan for housing for Turner during breaks at FSU since he cannot return to his group home.

"James sees life through a glass half full, making him resilient to the many, many challenges he has faced in his life," wrote Cullen. "James is persistent, articulate and hardworking; he is a great candidate for success at the college level."

In his college essay for admittance to FSU, Turner explained that he doesn't want to use his history as a crutch, but instead as a stepping stone for children in similar situations.

"I have lived my whole life and worked through a state system that is flawed, but I have succeeded in spite of it," wrote Turner, who will major in business management at FSU. "I'm passionate and committed not only to succeeding personally, but also to helping kids who will go through the [foster care system]."

## Denver Student With Disability Thrives

Kaitlin Hooks, a student at Denver Online High School, has faced numerous obstacles in her life, but she has not let those obstacles stand in her way.

At 10 months old she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, which has affected her speech as well her physical capabilities. She has endured 13 surgeries and currently lives with severe acid reflux, requiring her to use a specialized pump to intake her body's nourishment.

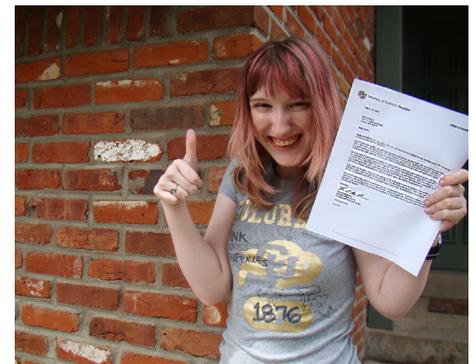
But Hooks hasn't let her health challenges slow her down. She was a member of a dance team and she was recently selected as a Children's Hospital Colorado volunteer, where she will volunteer three to four times every week.

Eager to attend college, she applied to 10 schools but was rejected by many of them, with one college in Florida denying her application because of her handicap.

But she recently received good news that she had been accepted at the University of Colorado Boulder. And not only did college officials want Hooks, but they offered her a scholarship.

At college, she will seek a major in biology or physiology. So what advice would Hooks, who was once told by doctors that she would never walk, give to others?

"Don't let people tell you what you can and can't be," said Hooks, whose story was featured on Denver Public Schools' web site profiling inspiring graduates. "Find out for yourself."



Kaitlin Hooks holds her college acceptance letter.

## Des Moines Teen Pursues STEM Career

Kwizera Imani, a senior at North High School in Des Moines, Iowa is such a big fan of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) that he was the keynote speaker at the 2015 Iowa STEM Summit, sponsored by the governor.

Imani will take his love of STEM with him to Iowa State University, where he plans to study aerospace engineering. But his journey to college began half-a-world away in Tanzania, where he lived the first 10 years of his life in a refugee camp with his family.

He experienced hardships, including the death of his mother and sister because of a lack of medication at the camp.

When Imani was in the fifth grade, his family was selected by the United Nations to settle in Des Moines. He had difficulty adjusting to his new environment because of his inability to speak English but, after only three years, he became fluent, and at the end of his junior year he had taken all the required classes a student needs to graduate.



JROTC squad commander Kwizera Imani

Imani was accepted into the aviation program at the Des Moines airport, which inspired him to pursue a career in the STEM field.

And in an effort to prepare himself for college, he took five Advanced Placement

courses as a senior.

He also excelled outside the classroom, playing on his school's football team and serving as commander of his school's JROTC squad, where during his junior and senior

year he participat-

ed in the Marine JROTC physical fitness national championship in San Diego.

Imani, who received a full scholarship to attend Iowa State, eventually plans to return to Africa and help develop communities and build schools.

"I want to somehow pull in some of those engineering classes that we have here in the United States to give those kids the same opportunities that I was able to get," said Imani in an interview with *One News Page*, a news web site.

## Albuquerque Valedictorians Earn Highest GPA



Eli Echt-Wilson and Albert Zuo

They earned a 5.0 grade-point average (GPA) and they were co-valedictorians of their senior class.

Albert Zuo and Eli Echt-Wilson have a lot in common: they attended La Cueva High School in Albuquerque, N.M., where they never received less than

an "A".

The students, who are also good friends, are only the second and third students in Albuquerque history to earn a 5.0 GPA.

In their junior year of high school, the duo began teaming up on science projects and competitions. Their partnership resulted in them winning a \$100,000 scholarship prize for placing first in the 2014 Siemens Competition in Math, Science and Technology.

Echt-Wilson will use his half of the prize money to help cover the cost of attending Stanford University to study computer science, while Zuo will attend Princeton University.

## Teacher Donates Kidney to Student

Many teachers in urban schools are dedicated to their students, but Nadirah Muhammad, a physical education and health teacher at Detroit's West Side Academy, stands out for recently donating a kidney to one of her students.

AJa Booth was a student in Muhammad's dance class when the teacher noticed a book that Booth had written, chronicling her journey of undergoing dialysis treatments and her need for a transplant. Muhammad immediately offered to help and, after doctors found they were the perfect match, underwent surgery in December to remove her kidney. She returned to school a few weeks later.

In May, Booth returned to school for her first full day of class, where she was reunited with Muhammad and her classmates during a "red carpet" welcome-back ceremony in the school's gymnasium.

"Words can't explain how I feel about what she did and how she did it," said a tearful Booth, during the ceremony. "... I really look at her as a second mom."

Booth graduated in June and plans to attend Oakland University and become a nurse.

Muhammad believes that what she did was not so unusual. "I just happened to help my student in this fashion, but I believe that teachers throughout DPS [Detroit Public Schools] do this every day for their students. I don't feel that I'm any different."



Detroit teacher Nadirah Muhammad, right, walks with student AJa Booth to attend a welcome-back ceremony in her honor.

## Council Names New Leadership For 2015-16



**Richard Carranza**

San Francisco Unified School District Superintendent Richard Carranza takes the reins as chair of the Council of the Great City Schools' Board of Directors for a one-year term, effective July 1.

He succeeds Jumoke Hinton Hodge, a board member with California's Oakland Unified School District, to lead the policymaking body of the national coalition representing 67 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. The Council's 134-member board is composed of the superintendent and a school board member from each of the districts represented.

"The Council of the Great City Schools is extremely fortunate to have as its next chair a person of Richard Carranza's caliber and expertise," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "His leadership will provide important direction to urban education nationally at a critical point in our reform and improvement efforts."

As part of the Council's leadership team for the 2015-16 academic year, Felton Williams, a board member with California's Long Beach Unified School District, becomes chair-elect, moving up from the secretary-treasurer post.



**Felton Williams**

Chancellor Kaya Henderson of the District of Columbia Public Schools has been elected the new secretary-treasurer.

## A Dallas Public School Tops Rankings Of 'Best High Schools' for Fourth Year

Dallas Independent School District's School for the Talented and Gifted recently topped *U.S. News & World Report's* "Best High Schools" national rankings for the fourth consecutive year.

The school ranked No. 1 of the more than 21,000 public high schools in 50 states and the District of Columbia that were awarded gold, silver or bronze medals "based on their performance on state assessments and how well they prepare students for college," said the newsmagazine.

Twelve big-city schools located in districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools ranked in the top 25 of the "Best High Schools" list.

In addition to the School for the Talented and Gifted, another Dallas school -- the School of Science and Engineering Magnet -- ranked No. 5. The other schools in Council districts ranked in the top 25 awarded gold medals are:

■ Carnegie Vanguard High School in Houston, No. 6;

■ Academic Magnet High School in North Charleston, S.C. No. 7;

■ The High School of American Studies at Lehman College in Bronx, N.Y., No. 11;

■ American Indian Public High School in Oakland, Calif., No. 12;

■ International Studies Charter High School in Miami-Dade, No. 13;

■ High School for Dual Language and Asian Studies in New York City, No. 14;

■ Northside College Preparatory High School in Chicago, No. 15;

■ Design & Architecture Senior High in Miami-Dade, No. 21;

■ Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Professions in Houston, No. 23; and

■ Queens High Schools for the Sciences at York College in Jamaica, N.Y., No. 25

A number of urban schools won medals in the 2015 *U.S. News* national rankings.

### L.A. Schools *continued from page 1*

championship in the last five years and 16 national titles won by a Los Angeles school.

The two-day competition was held this year in Garden Grove, Calif., with more than 450 students from 46 high schools nationwide competing. Each nine-member team can earn a possible 60,000 points, and the crowned champs scored 53,592.3 points. The competition's topic was Alternatives in Energy: Ingenuity & Innovation.

"Congratulations to the members of the Granada Hills Charter team for your exemplary performance," said Los Angeles Schools Superintendent Ramon Cortines

in a statement. "With your laser-like focus, team spirit and devotion, you proudly represented the LAUSD to the rest of the country."

The U.S. Academic Decathlon® is a rigorous ten-event scholastic competition for teams of high school students. Each high school enters a team of nine students: three "A" or honor students, three "B" or scholastic students and three "C or below" varsity students. The decathlon has come to be recognized as the most prestigious high school academic team competition in the United States.

## Urban Schools, Communities Honored For Working Together

When schools, families and communities work together, student success can follow.

That's the focus of the National Community Schools Awards of Excellence, recently given to seven communities and schools that have collaborated to bolster student achievement, improve outcomes for families, and unite neighborhoods.

Work in Baltimore, Chicago and Los Angeles are among the individual schools and multi-site community initiatives honored.

The Coalition for Community Schools recognized the winners as tackling some of today's most pressing issues that influence young people's development, such as poverty, safety and equitable access to opportunities.

"People are taking notice," says Martin Blank, director of the coalition and president of the Institute for Educational Leadership. "The community school movement continues to grow because folks are looking at their schools and realizing that the only way to get young people the opportunities they deserve is through partnership with the community. These winners represent the best of what can be done with teamwork and ingenuity in America's communities."

Four Baltimore schools and initiatives won the National Community Schools Award. Honored were the Family League of Baltimore, Benjamin Franklin High School at Masonville Cove, the Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School and the Wolfe Street Academy.

The other three awards were bestowed on the John Hancock College Preparatory High School in Chicago, the Social Justice Humanities Academy in Los Angeles and the United Way of Salt Lake County in Utah.

## Baltimore Schools Rise From City Unrest

At Gilmor Elementary School in Baltimore, the school year began with news that the school had won a grant to help fund an Earth Day celebration in the spring. All year long, the 350 pre-k to 5th-grade students at the school learned about environmental sustainability and good citizenship through hands-on activities.

On the day of the event, each class was to bring a decorated planter for the school playground, and games, food and prizes were also part of the planned celebration.

But this spring's unrest in Baltimore, which started about six blocks from the school, changed those plans. The Gilmor Elementary community reacted quickly, broadening the scope of their event to help support healing in the aftermath of the violence that had come so close to home.

"Our kids quickly saw what was missing and really stepped up to do the work that needed to be done...as a community," said event organizer and Gilmor art teacher Victoria Hoffman.

In the rubble strewn throughout their neighborhood, students found broken pieces of tile from a damaged building. Seeing the beauty in the tiles, the students, teachers, and community partners collected and repurposed the pieces, putting them together to create a mural on a wall near the school's playground.



Students at Baltimore's Gilmor Elementary create a mural from rubble.

Gilmor Elementary wasn't unique. Across Baltimore, school communities came together as neighborhood centers of support as schools and students responded positively to the unrest that made national headline news after a man died in police custody.

At Matthew A. Henson Elementary School, 4th-grade students discussed their feelings about the unrest and then wrote a song titled "Let Us Save Baltimore." The students performed the song for the NFL's Baltimore Ravens, when the team made a surprise visit to the school to help stock the school's food bank, which provided food and household supplies to families from the community.

## Chicago Expands Summer 'Safe Haven'

In an effort to keep students safe, active and engaged throughout the summer, the nation's third largest school district is expanding the number of Safe Haven summer program locations to 120.

The havens are the result of a partnership between Chicago Public Schools and Chicago's faith-based communities to provide neighborhood-friendly enrichment learning programs to families.

According to *CBS Chicago*, an additional 20 churches will be hosting students as part of the city's Safe Haven program. Since 2009, the program has kept children engaged in creative, meaningful activities

during winter, spring and summer breaks. This summer's program begins in early July and runs through mid-August and is open five days a week. All activities as well as meals are provided free for district students.

Students who participate in the Safe Haven program benefit from arts, cultural enrichment programs and social-emotional learning that aims to build self-esteem and improves conflict resolution skills. The program also bridges learning between grade levels as students participate in academic programs and receive mentoring from adults in their community.

## Houston Superintendent Surprises Student with \$10,000 Scholarship

Amid turbulent adversity at home, Alisa Hamilton, a graduating senior at Houston's Bellaire High School, constantly felt like school was the only place she could get relief. The standout student has grown to count on district administrators for emotional support, affectionately referring to her favorite counselors as "school parents."

But she wasn't expecting the support from Superintendent Terry Grier, who recently surprised Hamilton with a \$10,000 college scholarship.

Grier selected Hamilton as a scholarship recipient because of her drive to succeed academically, and be involved on campus despite significant personal challenges.

Hamilton, who is homeless, does not live with her parents and has worked two part-time jobs to make ends meet. She has done all of this while maintaining good grades and participating in Bellaire's student business club.

The scholarship was given to Grier last year to give to a student after win-

ning the nation's top urban education leadership award—the Green-Garner Award—at the Council of the Great City Schools' 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Conference in Milwaukee. The award is sponsored by the Council, ARAMARK Education and Voyager/Sopris Learning.

After hearing about her personal struggles, Grier knew Hamilton was the right student for the scholarship.

"She understands the realities of the world," said Grier, "and she does not let that hold her back. She knows she has to come to school and make good grades, so I'm honored to recognize her for her perseverance and hard work."

Hamilton will attend East Texas Baptist University, where she plans to study math with the ultimate goal of becoming a forensic accountant.

For others having a tough time, Hamilton has this advice. "No matter how hard or how tough the situation is, you can always overcome anything...I feel like if I tell my story, people will learn from it."



Houston Schools Superintendent Terry Grier gives a hug to student Alisa Hamilton, after presenting her with a \$10,000 college scholarship. Photo credit: Dave Einsel, Houston ISD



Ryan Anderson shows winning golf app on his smartphone called Stroke Keeper.

## Student Develops App Leading To Apple Scholarship

Seventeen-year-old Ryan Anderson plays golf at his high school in North Carolina's Guilford County, the state's third largest school district based in Greensboro.

He recently developed a golf app called Stroke Keeper, which allows golfers to track and maintain their scores on a database.

With his tech skills, Anderson received a scholarship to attend Apple's recent Worldwide Developers Conference in San Francisco. He was one of 350 students worldwide to win the Apple scholarship for developing an IOS application.

"I myself was ecstatic when I received word that I had won, because it is quite some feat to have been among the 350 selected students across the world selected by Apple for the scholarship," Anderson said in the *High Point Enterprise* in High Point, N.C.

"To be honest, I did not think I was going to get it because I created the app two hours before the deadline," he pointed out.

Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference, held in early June, gives scholarship winners an opportunity to meet company executives, attend lectures, work with Apple engineers and tour facilities.

Anderson will be a senior this fall at High Point Central High School with an eye on studying computer science in college. He reportedly hopes to work at Apple when he completes college.

## A Bill Too Far in Nevada

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

End-of-session legislating is often chaotic and ill-conceived. And what happened recently in the Nevada legislature is a superb case in point. In this situation, the State of Nevada enacted an expansive educational savings-account bill allowing parents to remove their children from Nevada's public schools and use the funds to pay for almost any alternative education services with the state dollars.

Even choice advocates had to be surprised at the scope of the measure. To be sure, the new state law is broader than the typical private-school voucher bill, because it allows a wide range of eligible services to be paid for from the state-funded accounts. The ultimate impact of the new law is unclear at this point, but the prospect for widespread fraud and abuse seems nearly certain.

Under the new Nevada law, parents of any student currently enrolled in the state's public schools can access up to \$5,000-plus per year in state education aid to attend a private school—or spend the funds on their own for private tutoring, online courses, textbooks, technology, or other educational services—with state approval. The funds are deposited in an education savings account by the Nevada Treasury Office and parents can withdraw the funds for allowable services.

Though the new law—on its face—would not allow funds for home schooling, any parent could apply to be a “participating entity” thereby qualifying for state funding of up to \$5,000-plus to educate each child. It appears that anyone could become a “participating entity” by submitting an application to the state and indicating that they are a parent, a private or parochial school, an accredited tutor, or other service provider. Nevada school districts are already getting calls from parents wanting to know how they can get “their money.” One could also arrange for Aunt Sally or Mother-In-Law Maggie to tutor his or her children and pay her with the education savings account funds. Other than random audits from the Nevada State Treasurer's Office, there is no accountability if Aunt Sally does a bad job and no consequences for academic failure.



In recent years, it has become politically acceptable to allow virtually anyone who can develop a business plan to open and run a “public charter” school with public tax dollars. Similarly, it appears that virtually anyone is permitted to use public dollars to teach school-age children in a home setting, private school, charter school, or to provide state-sanctioned private supplemental education services—i.e., tutoring—arguing that almost anything now constitutes public education. Nevada has taken this idea to a new level, and it won't be long before the U.S. Congress thinks this is a good idea for the nation as well.

The academic results from these alternative delivery systems are often mediocre at best and often no better or frequently inferior to traditional public school programs. Yet a parade of commentators, conservative and progressive alike, generate a steady flow of satisfaction surveys that purport to show that parents are happy with their options—a standard of evidence that choice proponents have historically ridiculed when it came to traditional public schools.

One might expect that these “education reforms” would constitute a substantial improvement over traditional schools, but these new approaches appear to survive on the basis of political, ideological, and financial support rather than academic results. And, it seems to take years of unproductive outcomes to get the federal government, state education agencies, or state legislatures to curb even the most egregious violations of the public trust.

Years ago a chief operating officer of a public school system not-so-jokingly characterized the fringe elements of the K-12 education sector as “missionaries, mercenaries, and kooks.” Under the new Nevada law, some portion of all of them will have a field day plying their snake oil—all well-funded with tax dollars from the state's residents.

Let's see how long it takes before Nevada's elected officials realize that they have passed a remarkably bad law.

## Former First Lady Laura Bush Recognizes Austin School Libraries

Former first lady Laura Bush recently visited an Austin, Tex., elementary school to discuss the importance of reading with students as her foundation awarded grants to six Austin schools.

The six schools received grants up to \$7,000 each as part of more than \$820,000 in grants being awarded to 123 schools in 35 states from the Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries

The former first lady visited one of the schools, Austin's Blackshear Elementary Fine Arts Academy, that received a grant. She had once been a librarian at Dawson Elementary School in Texas' capital city.

"This is a happy day for me to be here at AISD {Austin Independent School District}," Bush said. "This is where my girls went to high school. It's fun to be in the school district that means so much to me."



First Lady Laura Bush, center, visits Austin elementary school in recognizing the district's school libraries.

## Urban Teachers Receive \$25,000 Milken Awards

In Michelle Johnson's second-grade class at Seaton Elementary in Washington, D.C., 90 percent of her students finished out the year by moving up a proficiency level, or reaching proficient/advanced level. In addition, Johnson cut the number of students at "far below" grade level in half and improved student's reading at a faster pace than any other teacher in her building.

As a result of her dedication to teaching, Johnson was one of 37 educators to receive the \$25,000 Milken Educator Award.

The award recognizes early to mid-career education professionals for their outstanding achievements and for the promise of what they will accomplish in the future.

In addition to Johnson, five big-city educators received the award, including Shannon Ryan of Albuquerque Public Schools, Jenna White of Anchorage Public Schools, Allyson Vitato of Kentucky's Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Amy Stanislawski of Kansas' Wichita Public Schools and Jana Fukada of Hawaii

Schools.

Established in 1985, the Milken Educator Award program awards and inspires excellence in the world of education by honoring top educators with an unrestricted cash prize.

## Houston Technology Chief Honored

Lenny Schad, chief information officer for the Houston Independent School District, was recently presented with the Distinguished Service Award at the Council of the Great City Schools' Chief Information Officers Conference in Philadelphia.

Sponsored by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the award honors distinguished service in urban education.

Schad oversees the classroom technology funds for all district schools and is responsible for the development of the district's network security system.

## Council PSAs Air At Indy 500

More than 1.4 million fans viewed the Council of the Great City Schools' public service announcements on the Common Core State Standards at the recent Indianapolis 500, considered the highest attended sporting event in the world.

This is the second time this year that the Council's two 30-second spots aired multiple times on a jumbo-tron during two major automobile races. In February, the PSAs aired at the Daytona 500, NASCAR's most prestigious race. And in late July, the spots will be featured at NASCAR's Brickyard 400.

The Council in January launched its second PSA campaign to increase public awareness and engagement of the Common Core State Standards, especially around new assessments to help students prepare for college and career success.

The Common Core PSAs – one on English language arts and the other on mathematics – are also airing on television and radio in English and Spanish on broadcast and cable stations throughout the nation.



### Miami Students Ride the Ballet Bus

Educators in Miami-Dade County Public Schools are reaching into the community to provide arts education and access through a partnership with Miami City Ballet.

The district recently announced "Ballet Bus," a year-round dance scholarship program for 30 select students.

**Ballet Bus** continued on page 12



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Des Moines Controller Nicholas Lenhardt, center, is congratulated by, left, Des Moines Chief Financial Officer Thomas Harper and Council Director of Management Services Robert Carlson.

## Council Honors Des Moines Official

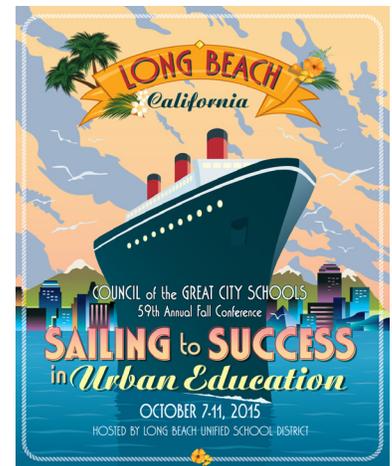
Nicholas Lenhardt, the controller for Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools, was recently presented with the "Certificate of Achievement" by the Council of the Great City Schools for successfully completing the Council's Urban School Executive Program. The program is designed for mid-level managers who have the attributes and aspire to assume senior manager positions as chief financial officers or business managers in large urban school districts.

## Council Fall Conference Registration Begins

The Council of the Great City Schools will hold its 59<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 7-11, in Long Beach, Calif.

Hosted by Long Beach Unified School District, the conference will feature more than 1,000 urban school superintendents and board members who will assemble at the Hyatt Regency Long Beach to discuss initiatives to improve the quality of education for children in big-city schools.

To register for the conference, access the Council's web site at: <http://www.cgcs.org>. Registration for the conference can only be conducted online.



### Teen Mom continued from page 4

which provides student-parents free childcare, supportive counseling, academic guidance, and advocacy services.

In recognition of her excellence in completing her high school education, Moore was awarded the LYFE Academic Achievement Award. Her story does not end there, as Moore was accepted into 11 colleges and will attend New York's Brooklyn College to study forensic accounting.

### Ballet Bus continued from page 11

The nine-month, 34-week program will target children ages 7-10. Selected students will be integrated into the Miami City Ballet student body, and each student will be evaluated annually with the opportunity to advance to the next level of study.

Participating students will receive a full scholarship for ballet training, transportation to and from their elementary school, dancewear and shoes in addition to other perks.