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## Houston Student Pursues Education Despite Odds

Ermias Emahazion, a 2010 graduate of Lee High School in Houston, has persevered more than most people to pursue an education.

A native of Ethiopia, Emahazion lost both of his parents in a car accident. He then moved to Kenya, where he struggled to learn the language and adapt to the culture. After a few years, he soon realized that he wanted to improve his life by coming to the United States, even if that meant moving to the country alone.

"I pleaded for asylum with an immigration judge," said Emahazion. "I shared my



Ermias Emahazion

**Houston Student** continued on page 4

## Newsweek Ranks Urban Schools Among the Best

*Newsweek* magazine recently selected "America's Best High Schools" -- choosing more than 1,600 public schools. And again this year, the Dallas school district's School for the Talented and Gifted ranked No. 1.

In the top 20 of the newsmagazine's annual rankings, eight schools in districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools made the list for 2010.

Behind Dallas' Talented and Gifted school, Council schools ranked:

- No. 3 -- Stanton College Prep in Jacksonville, Fla.;
- No. 4 -- School of Science and Engineering in Dallas;
- No. 8 -- Paxon School for Advance Studies in Jacksonville;
- No. 9 -- Suncoast Community in Florida's Palm Beach school system;

- No. 10 -- City Honors in Buffalo;
- No. 12 -- Academic Magnet in North Charleston, S.C.; and
- No. 16 -- Preuss UCSD charter high school in the San Diego Unified School District.

*Newsweek* ranks schools based on the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or Cambridge tests taken by all students at a school and divided by the number of graduating seniors.

In addition to the top 20 "Best High Schools," a number of schools in districts represented by the Council also made the *Newsweek* list. The Houston Independent School District, for example, set a record of 15 high schools on the list -- up from seven last year.

## Urban Schools Stand Behind Common Standards

In a massive show of support, 55 of the nation's urban school leaders recently endorsed the unveiling of common core state standards aimed at preparing students for success in college and careers.

Superintendents, chancellors and CEOs, from New York to Chicago and Miami to Seattle, signed an open letter to the public by the Council of the Great City Schools that coincided with the June 2 release of new common academic standards by the National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Baltimore City Schools Chief Executive Officer Andrés Alonso spoke on behalf of the 55 urban school leaders at an event in Suwanee, Ga., to roll out the nationwide standards, which must be adopted by individual states.

Leaders of the large city school districts believe the kindergarten to 12th-grade common core standards in English-lan-

**Common Standards** continued on page 3



Baltimore Schools CEO Andrés Alonso speaks on behalf of urban schools at standards rollout.

## Fort Worth Students Receive Inaugural Scholarships

Yulic Barrientos, Brianna Myers and Xavier O'Neal Harrison are students in Fort Worth, Texas, who have succeeded academically, participated in extracurricular activities at their respective high schools and are members of the graduating Class of 2010.

The students also have something else in common: they are the inaugural recipients of the Superintendent's Student Scholarships, awarded by Fort Worth Schools Superintendent Melody Johnson.

The scholarships were created by Johnson, who used a portion of her salary to help deserving students pay for college. The scholarship fund originally totaled \$5,000, but Johnson was so impressed with the three students that she decided to increase the fund to \$9,000. In addition, \$4,000 was donated by employees and members of the community for a total of \$13,000 in scholarships awarded.

A \$5,000 scholarship was presented to Barrientos, who is unsure of which college he will attend, although he was accepted at several. He is a member of his school's National Honor Society,

student council, football team and captain of the soccer team.

Myers, a JROTC battalion command sergeant major and member of her school's student council, is the recipient of a \$5,000 scholarship and will attend Howard University.

Harrison, who served as his school's cheerleading mascot, as well as on the dance team and school choir, received a \$3,000 scholarship. He will attend the University of Houston.

To be eligible for the scholarship, candidates had to have at least a grade-point average of 3.0, demonstrate a commitment to personal growth and services to others and have a financial need.



Fort Worth Schools Superintendent Melody Johnson congratulates, left, Xavier O'Neal Harrison and Yulic Barrientos, recipients of the Superintendent's Student Scholarships.

"It is truly an honor for me to award these scholarships to young people who are so deserving and who have worked so hard to better themselves," said the superintendent in a press release. "These are the young people who will pay-it-forward by contributing to others with the kind of aid and support they have themselves been given."



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## Tenure Extended for Superintendents In Buffalo and Oklahoma City



James Williams

Buffalo Public Schools Superintendent James Williams and Oklahoma City Public Schools Superintendent Karl Springer recently received board approval to extend their contracts by three years.

Williams has been at the helm of the Buffalo school system since 2005. With his tenure now extended through the 2013-2014 school year, he can carry out various school projects to

fruition. Engaged in a \$1.4-billion reconstruction project of all 48 schools, Williams says, "We have invested \$100 million in new technology." The project is scheduled for completion in 2013.

Under his leadership, Superintendent Williams has seen graduation rates rise, along with math and reading scores, although he indicates in a news release that the graduation rate is not what he would like it to be. But there's evidence that progress is being



Karl Springer

made. "Urban children can thrive in public schools," he stresses.

In Oklahoma's largest school district, the system is experiencing stability at the helm with Superintendent Springer. "This

district has had nine superintendents in the last 10 years and our students have suffered because of it," said Phil Horning, vice chair of the Oklahoma City school board.

Leading Oklahoma City schools since 2008, Springer in the past has signed one-year contracts. The board voted to extend his contract by three years through June 2013 to ensure stability at the helm.

Under his leadership, Springer has seen steady improvement in community and staff support as well as strategic moves to improve student growth and achievement. "I am excited about the opportunity to work with Oklahoma City community members, union representatives, district staff and business leaders in changing the perception of this district and increasing academic success," he says in a news statement.

## Big-City Students Show Gains In Reading

Average reading scores for students in large cities nationally increased in grades four and eight since 2003, narrowing the achievement gap to 10 points when compared to students nationally, according to the *Nation's Report Card: Trial Urban District Assessment Reading 2009*.

The report released in late May revealed that for 2009 the school districts in Austin, Boston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Louisville (Jefferson County) and Miami-Dade had higher scores in both fourth and eighth grades compared to the average score for large cities nationally on the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).



Additionally, New York City had higher average scores for 2009 in grade four compared to large cities nationally. Also, scores in Atlanta, Houston and San Diego were comparable to those large cities nationally at grades four and eight.

"We are pleased with the reading gains that students in America's big-city schools are making," says Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which initiated the urban NAEP test. "The narrowing of the overall achievement gap is evidence that urban students are making progress academically."

Eighteen big-city school districts volunteered for the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) in 2009, with seven of the districts participating for the first time. Newcomers were Baltimore, Detroit, Fresno, Jefferson County (Louisville), Miami-

**Reading Gains** continued on page 6

### Common Standards continued from page 1

guage arts and mathematics will help them advance reform efforts in their respective districts.

"Public education is supposed to promote a level playing field for our young people. Instead, the standards now in place do the opposite by institutionalizing uneven expectations and outcomes," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly and co-signers of the letter in calling for a change to the variety of state-by-state standards.

"The common core standards finally make real the promise of American public education to expect the best of all our schoolchildren," Casserly stresses, regardless of which state they come from. He also participated in the Georgia event.

The 55 big-city school leaders individually co-signed the letter, urging the states to "work with us on the adoption and implementation of the new standards" and the nation to support the grade-by-grade standards.

Access to the letter is on the Council's web site at [www.cgcs.org](http://www.cgcs.org).



## Milwaukee Student Shines



Carlos Marroquin

Carlos Marroquin has accomplished many goals in his life. He has a 3.98 grade-point average and is valedictorian of his senior class at Milwaukee's Pu-

laski High School.

And he is now on his way to achieving another goal: to be the first person in his family to graduate from college.

Marroquin received a full scholarship to attend Marquette University, where he will major in bioengineering with a minor in business.

Life has not been easy for the graduating senior. His father abandoned the family when he was born and his family struggled financially. Yet, he didn't let these circumstances deter him from succeeding.

"I always attempt to better myself and excel at everything I do no matter how hard it may seem at first," he said. "To me, the obstacles in life are meant to be conquered."

**Houston Student** *continued from page 1*

story and promised I would work hard and succeed in school. That would be my purpose."

The judge allowed Emahazion to resettle in Houston, where he lived with a local pastor. At Lee High School, he mastered English and did so well academically that he began taking several Advanced Placement courses.

According to David Johnston, Lee's college access coordinator, most times when a talented student does this, his or her grades drop as they try to adjust. But Emahazion's grades only got better. "This speaks highly of his discipline, study skills, and previous academic preparation, raw intelligence and passion to learn."

Emahazion's hard work has paid off and as a result, he will attend Syracuse University in the fall, where he plans to major in engineering.

## The Class of 2010



## Student Turns Grief Into Something Positive

Last year, Dominique Williams, a student in Kansas City, Mo., lost a classmate to gun violence. The death of a friend led her to want to mentor at-risk youths, and that desire has resulted in a \$100,000 college scholarship.

Williams is the recipient of the Alice Carson Tisdale Honors scholarship at Claflin University in South Carolina. The scholarship is awarded to high achieving students seeking careers in teaching.

In her application essay, Williams described how her friend was shot shortly after the prom and how the death attributed



Dominique Williams

to her changing her college major from pre-med to sociology and elementary education.

"If I can save just one life, I will have consummated my life's goal," Williams wrote in her essay. "My vision is that Kansas City can and will change; we have to take the initiative and begin to turn this around."

The valedictorian of her senior class, Williams is a member of the National Honor Society, a JROTC cadet and has amassed 300 hours of community service.

She is also the first person from Westport High School to receive a full college scholarship.

## Boston Graduate Beats Cancer

Many students who enter high school for the first time are worried about being able to adjust to a new environment. But Steven Rinaldi had bigger issues to deal with.

In the first few months of his freshman year at East Boston High School, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor behind his eye. The tumor caused him to miss weeks of school and spend months recovering from surgery and catching up on schoolwork.

Despite his ordeal, he never gave up his dream of gaining acceptance into a top university.

In addition to competing on both the swimming and baseball teams, he spent four hours each week in intensive SAT prep his junior year. He maintained stellar grades throughout his four years of high

school, including earning "A" grades in AP Chemistry, AP Calculus, and AP English literature his senior year.

Rinaldi's dream of receiving an acceptance letter from a major university has become a reality. He will attend Boston University next year on a full scholarship. And he plans to become a neurosurgeon in order to help other cancer victims.



Steven Rinaldi addresses his fellow classmates at his graduation ceremony.

## Long Beach Graduate Overcomes Obstacles

California's Long Beach Unified School District recently held a districtwide celebration in which each school selected its most inspirational student. For administrators at Robert A. Millikan High School, selecting graduating senior Geneva Smith from among more than 4,000 students was an easy choice.

"She has a unique and inspirational story," said co-principal Don Keller. "She proves that you can be successful no matter what obstacles you face or where you come from."

In the fall, Geneva will attend Columbia University in New York City on a full scholarship. Yet, the graduate from the Class of 2010 has faced many obstacles in her journey to being accepted at an Ivy League university—beginning at birth.

Geneva's biological mother was incarcerated during her pregnancy and was temporarily released for her birth. Geneva, who never knew her father, was then placed in foster care. She stayed in foster care for approximately a year and a half before she was sent to live with foster-care provider Stacey Smith.

Smith was able to offer Geneva a supportive and nurturing environment. "She always pushed me to do the best I absolutely can," said Geneva in an interview with the *Urban Educator*. When Geneva was 10 years old, Smith legally adopted her.

In addition to Smith's love and support, Geneva also underwent two years of therapy, which helped her tremendously. "Therapy helped me deal with what I've been through and helped me realize I'm stronger than I thought I was."

Geneva has a grade-point average of 3.96 and as a student at Millikan participated in QUEST, a gifted and talented education program in which students undergo a rigorous curriculum that includes accelerated, honors and Advanced Placement courses. In addition to excelling in academics, she was a member of the volleyball team, held three jobs and volunteered for the Special Olympics.



Geneva Smith

The graduating senior credits her teachers for inspiring her and guiding her along the path to success, particularly Tim Mulvehill, her former AP World History teacher, who she says has always supported her. She also credits her AP literature teacher, Katie Hickox, who helped her with the admission essay to Columbia. "It was the best essay I ever wrote in my life," said Geneva.

At Columbia, Geneva plans to major in environmental chemistry and history in hopes of pursuing a career as an environmental lobbyist. "I'm interested in working to decrease the harmful impact on the environment." She also has an interest in fashion and would one day like to obtain an internship in the industry. In fact, her interest in fashion is one of the reasons she applied to Columbia, because it's located in the fashion capital of the world.

While she will be many miles away from home, she is looking forward to leaving Long Beach for a new environment at Columbia. However, she will miss her teachers and friends as well as "the weather."

And what advice would the future Ivy Leaguer give to students who may have dealt with difficult circumstances in their lives, such as she has experienced?

"Don't let the past dictate where your future is going," said Geneva. "You can break down walls and succeed in life."

## Two Star Students In Charlotte

Metro School in Charlotte, N.C., serves students ranging in age from three to 22 with various medical, mental or physical disabilities who need specialized attention and assistance. The school recently had one of its biggest graduation classes in school history and among the 19 graduates were two standouts: Billy Witte and Denise Johnson.

During his seven-and-a-half years as a student at Metro, Billy learned self-sufficiency and job-training skills. He was a participant in the school's community-based



Denise Johnson and Billy Witte

training, which places students in local businesses. He worked at a deli and a hotel doing hospitality-related tasks.

An avid sports fan, Billy played on Metro's basketball team and participated in the school's recycling and gardening programs.

During her 11 years as a student at Metro, Denise also participated in many school activities, including being a member of Metro's community-based training program and recycling and garden programs.

She uses a wheelchair, but for the past three years, Denise has performed with the school's Allegro Dance Program, a dance club for students with special needs organized by local college students. A popular student, Denise was voted Metro's 2010 prom queen.

"Both of these graduates are inspirations as they have pursued personal and academic growth and achievements through their school years," said Metro principal Denise Comeaux.

## New Leadership at Council



Dilafruz Williams

Dilafruz Williams, a board member of Oregon's Portland Public Schools, will lead the Council of the Great City Schools' board of directors for the 2010-11 school year, effective July 1.

She succeeds Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson as chair of the policymaking board, composed of the superintendent and a school board member from each of the Council's 66 member big-city school districts.

Williams will preside for a one-year term, relinquishing her post as chair-elect to Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall, who has served as secretary-treasurer.

To round out the Council's leadership team, Candy Olson, a board member of Florida's Hillsborough County school district in Tampa, has been elected secretary-treasurer.

### Reading Gains *continued from page 3*

Dade, Milwaukee and Philadelphia. These districts joined Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cleveland, District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Diego.

### Grade Four Reading

The grade four reading data showed that 2009 scores for students in large cities nationally increased compared to 2003 and 2005. However, 2009 scores for fourth-graders in large cities show no significant difference compared to 2007.

For 2009, the percentages of students performing *at or above proficient* in grade four in Austin, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Jefferson County (Louisville), Miami-Dade, New York City and San Diego were higher than large cities nationally.

Seven school districts -- Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, District of Columbia, Los Angeles and New York City -- demonstrated an increase in 2009 scores for fourth-graders compared to 2003. The 2009 grade four report also revealed that 2009 scores for students in Boston, District of Columbia, Houston and New York City increased compared to 2007.

### Grade Eight Reading

The grade eight reading data showed

that 2009 scores for students in large cities nationally increased when compared to 2003, 2005 and 2007.

For 2009, the percentages of students performing *at or above proficient* in grade eight in Austin, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Jefferson County (Louisville) and Miami-Dade were higher than large cities nationally.

Four school districts -- Atlanta, Boston, Houston and Los Angeles -- demonstrated an increase in 2009 scores for eighth-graders compared to 2003. The new report also revealed that scores for eighth-grade students in Atlanta, District of Columbia and Los Angeles increased from 2007.

### Achievement Gaps

Compared to large cities nationally, Boston and Cleveland had significantly lower black-white gaps in grade four. And compared to students in large cities nationally, Cleveland and Miami-Dade had smaller Hispanic-white gaps in grade four, while Miami-Dade had smaller gaps in grade eight.

Although NAEP scores are increasing for large cities nationally and TUDA districts, the achievement gap between black and Hispanic students and their white peers continued to be significant.

## Partnerships Growing Between Schools and Colleges

Last year, Virginia's Richmond Public Schools teamed up with a local university to develop a program to recruit and prepare principals. And this year, Oklahoma City Public Schools, New Jersey's Newark Public Schools and Tennessee's Metro Nashville Public Schools are partnering with local universities in an effort to prepare and retain highly qualified teachers.

Partnerships between big-city school districts and post-secondary institutions are growing as urban educators turn to universities for their expertise and resources, particularly in the areas of teacher recruitment and professional development.

The latest big-city school districts to enter into partnerships with a university are the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and Rhode Island's Providence Public School District.

The Cleveland school system has teamed up with Cleveland State University to launch a K-12th-grade school. Scheduled to open its doors this fall, the Campus International School will incorporate programs from the International Baccalaureate, a rigorous educational program with an international curriculum.

The school will be housed in a church on the campus of Cleveland State and will serve 120 students in kindergarten, first and second grades, with plans to extend classes to the twelfth grade by 2015.

The new facility will not only benefit Cleveland students who attend, but also provide a hands-on learning experience for university students majoring in education. University students will be able to take what they have learned and practice it in a real classroom setting.

"This school will provide a unique educational experience that is currently unavailable throughout most of the region, and without the burden of tuition," said Cleveland Schools CEO Eugene Sanders.

### Partnerships Growing *continued on page 7*



## Nashville's 'Twilight Schools'

### An Alternative to Student Suspensions

In Nashville, Tenn., evidence is showing that a program is working to reduce the number of students facing out-of-school suspensions.

The school system's "Twilight Schools," designed to provide an alternative to suspension and keep students in a classroom, has kept 575 students on track, according to data at the end of this school year from the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.

#### Partnerships Growing *continued from page 6*

"This will set a new urban standard in education, while allowing us to attract some of the best teachers available."

The Providence school district is partnering with Roger Williams University to create a professional development program that will provide the opportunity for teachers to experience Egyptian and Middle Eastern/North Africa (MENA) culture.

Titled "Bridging Civilizations in the Classroom: Interactions of Space, Culture and Society in Egypt," the project will enable eight university faculty and four Providence high school teachers to travel to Egypt for four weeks. The educators will build a knowledge and understanding of Egyptian and MENA history, culture, economy, politics, international relations and language that they can bring back to their classrooms and incorporate into their curriculum.

The program is being funded with a one-year \$85,245 Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

"In our increasingly diverse world, and highly diverse city, it is imperative that educators embrace diversity and appreciate a range of historical and cultural perspectives," said Providence Schools Superintendent Thomas Brady in a news release. "The visit to explore the Middle East/North Africa region is a wonderful example of how that can be accomplished."

The teachers will travel to Egypt in the summer of 2011.

Launched last September, Twilight Schools operated in 18 middle and high schools this past school year. They are after-school programs that provide academic tutoring, as well as teach students coping skills and how to regulate behavior. School principals have an option to offer students the Twilight program in lieu of out-of-school suspension.

In the 2009-2010 school year, the district reports:

- A 10 percent reduction in out-of-school suspensions, and a 13 percent decline in the number of students suspended;
- An 18 percent decline in the number of middle-school students suspended as well as a 20 percent decrease in incidents; and
- Implementation of programs and support systems for students based on the school system's multi-year study on national suspension rates, socioeconomic status and race.

In its studies, the Nashville district has researched the reasons and causes for a disproportionate rate of out-of-school suspension among African-American males, which appears to be tied to socioeconomic status, according to the district.

"We've known this disparity exists for a number of years now," says Assistant Superintendent of Student Services Ralph Thompson in a news release, "and we have been working day in and day out to get to the root cause so we can help these young men."

Thompson notes that, through the district's programs and support systems, the school system "has seen incredible reductions in the past two years in the number of suspensions for this group."

The 76,000-student school system plans to continue Twilight Schools for the next school year.

## Obama Taps Atlanta Schools Chief For Education Board

President Obama recently announced his intention to nominate Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall to the National Board for Education Sciences, which advises the director of the Institute of Education Sciences on a variety of policies, research and other priorities.

**Atlanta Chief** *continued on page 8*



## Council Releases Stimulus Report

In New York City, Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, announces a report showing how big-city school districts saved thousands of jobs, upgraded programs, and increased capacity to advance educational reforms with an unprecedented infusion of aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). With New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, left, and New York Schools Chancellor Joel Klein looking on, Casserly was invited by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to join him at a Brooklyn school to unveil the Council's report -- *Investing Wisely and Quickly -- Use of ARRA Funds in America's Great City Schools* -- which also reveals major education job cuts looming for the upcoming school year. (Photo by Manish Naik)



## First Scholarship Winner

Frederick Matthews, a student at Virginia Commonwealth University, pictured with VCU Dean Beverly Warren, is the first recipient of the new Dr. Shirley Schwartz Urban Education Impact Award Scholarship, named for the Council of the Great City Schools' director of special projects who died last year. The \$2,000 scholarship is awarded jointly by Virginia's Richmond Public Schools and VCU's School of Education, which last fall won the Schwartz Urban Impact Award for outstanding partnership. Matthews is a graduate of the Richmond school system.

**Atlanta Chief** continued from page 7

The appointment to the board of 15 voting members requires Senate confirmation.

Leading the Atlanta school system since 1999, Superintendent Hall recently became the first K-12 school administrator to receive the American Educational Research Association's Distinguished Public Service Award. She was also the American Association of School Administrators' 2009 National Superintendent of the Year.

## Las Vegas School Named Top Magnet School In the Nation

The motto of C.V.T. Gilbert Magnet School for Communication and Creative Arts in Las Vegas is "Head and Shoulders Above the Rest." That motto proved to be true when the school was recently selected as the top magnet school in the nation.

The Magnet Schools of America (MSA) presented Gilbert Elementary with the Dr. Ronald P. Simpson Distinguished Merit Award along with a cash award of \$5,000. Gilbert was designated as the top magnet school in the nation based on its successful integration of the arts and communication into its core program.

"This award embodies the positive impact that our school has on this nation," said Gilbert principal Sherri Brewer. "On behalf of Gilbert students, faculty and par-

ents, I thank the Magnet Schools of America for this recognition, and I am filled with pride to share it with our community."

In March, Gilbert, along with 53 schools, were chosen to receive the Magnet 2010 Schools of Excellence Award, which recognized magnet schools that show a commitment to high academic standards, curriculum innovation, successful desegregation/diversity efforts and parent and community involvement.

Out of those 54 magnet schools, Gilbert was designated as the best.

The Distinguished Merit Award was named in memory of MSA founding member Ronald Simpson, who made a positive impact on Missouri magnet schools.

## Teacher Contract In D.C. Based On Student Results

After more than two years of intense negotiations, the Washington Teachers Union recently ratified a contract that will give District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee the ability to base teacher compensation on student performance.

The contract includes a five-year, double-digit pay hike for public-school teachers in the nation's capital.

"I am very pleased with the contract," says Rhee in the *Washington Post*. "It strikes a great balance between making teachers understand that we very much value and support the work they do every day and on the administrative side giving us the tools we need to staff the schools effectively."

The president of the teachers union, George Parker, called the contract "a great day for teachers and students."

## Charlotte Initiative Gaining Attention

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools two years ago launched an initiative called Strategic Staffing to turn around low-performing schools.

The district targeted seven schools -- six elementary and one middle school -- to be injected with new leadership.

The initiative has gained national attention.

In a *New York Times* editorial this past April headlined "When the System Works," the commentary noted that the nation's school administrators and the U.S. Department of Education should take notice of Charlotte's Strategic Staffing Initiative.

"Turning a school around is not supposed to be easy," said the editorial. "But by the end of just the first year, test scores in the first seven schools had risen significantly and the schools were visibly more orderly."

**Charlotte Initiative** continued on page 10



## 'Historic' Agreement Reached in Pittsburgh Between School District And Teachers Union

For the first time in the history of Pittsburgh Public Schools, the district and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (PFT) recently agreed to a five-year contract.

The new collective bargaining agreement aims to advance the teaching profession in producing higher achievement outcomes among Pittsburgh students.

The historic pact is aligned with the goals set in the school system's "Empowering Effective Teachers" plan, part of a \$40-million grant awarded to the district by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that seeks to change the way the district hires, supports, compensates and evaluates teachers.

"This agreement discredits the belief that school districts and teacher unions can't work together around education reform," says Pittsburgh Schools Superintendent Mark Roosevelt in a press statement.

Improving student achievement is the centerpiece of the five-year contract that

both the district and union rallied around in negotiations.

"This agreement is historic because of its collaborative approach that the district and PFT have taken," says School Board President Theresa Colaizzi. "Different than in the past, this negotiations process was based on our common belief that we can do more for our kids when we work as partners rather than adversaries."

Embedded in the contract are opportunities for collaboration and teacher engagement in school-district planning; for teachers to earn additional compensation based on student achievement gains; and for accelerated teacher earnings.

With the district and union working together, Pittsburgh school officials indicate that the five-year contract creates stability in teaching and learning to accelerate student achievement.

They also believe that the collaborative nature of the year-long negotiations pres-

ents an innovative approach to collective bargaining.

Praising the district for embracing the contract, Carey Harris, executive director of a city watchdog group, indicates in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* that the school board's decision "will surely position the city of Pittsburgh nationally as a model of professional collaboration, educational innovation and excellence through inspired teaching."

Superintendent Roosevelt commended the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and its president for an innovative approach to collective bargaining. "While this agreement includes benefits for both the district and the teachers, it is aligned with the steps we are taking to ensure that there is a highly effective teacher in every classroom, every day."

The Pittsburgh pact also includes "a new world for new teachers." Beginning this coming school year, new teachers will enter the district through its new Teacher Academy. They will have an opportunity to learn from a highly effective teacher to prepare them to meet the diverse needs of students and lead a Pittsburgh classroom.

## Presidential Scholars for 2010 Named

Some 10 students in urban schools represented by the Council of the Great City Schools have been named 2010 U.S. Presidential Scholars of 141 high school seniors from around the nation recognized by the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, appointed by the president.

"These student leaders and scholars show that setting high expectations and striving for excellence pays off," says U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

This year's scholars from Council member school districts hail from Albuquerque,

**Presidential Scholars** continued on page 11

## Military Surprise at Baton Rouge School

Aaron Sully, right, a student at Westdale Heights Academic Magnet School in Baton Rouge, La., was recently surprised at school with a hug from his mom, who just returned from serving in Afghanistan.

Lt. Commander Kerry Sully, a U.S. Navy nurse practitioner, has been at the Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan since December 2009. Upon returning to the United States, she went immediately to Westdale Heights school to surprise her son Aaron, as well as her daughter Ariel, below, a kindergartner.



## Education Jobs Bill Still in Limbo as School Jobs Disappear

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

As the nation's schools close for the summer, an estimated 300,000 educational staff are likely to receive "pink slips" that their jobs have been eliminated in the upcoming school year. In addition, thousands more teachers and support staff will be furloughed for multiple days during the upcoming school year. Yet, the Education Jobs bill pending in Congress has moved no closer to passage despite the efforts of key education leaders in the House and Senate—Appropriations Chairman David Obey (D-WI), Education Chairman George Miller (D-CA), and Education and Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)—to advocate for its approval.

A recent report from the Council of the Great City Schools, *Investing Wisely and Quickly -- Use of ARRA Funds in America's Great City Schools*, demonstrated how the 2009 stimulus funds have been effectively used, while highlighting that the economic recovery has not yet reached the urban schoolhouse door. Some 44,000 jobs are expected to be eliminated across the Great City Schools next year. The Council's study validates reports from think tanks, other education organizations, universities, and the White House that 250,000 to 300,000 education layoffs will occur in elementary and secondary schools without emergency funding from the federal government.



Unfortunately, a deficit frenzy has gripped Congress, which is now second-guessing itself in trying to steer the economy out of recession and aid the legion of unemployed. The original Jobs for Main Street bill, which included a \$23 billion Education Jobs initiative, has been split into smaller job promotion and financial-assistance packages with purportedly better chances of passage. However, the bulk of these emergency assistance initiatives, including extension of unemployment insurance, education jobs, and even tax-relief provisions, are hung up in Congress with demands from some legislators to find new revenue to pay for the emergency economic relief. Even the continued funding for the Middle East war effort has become ensnared in this stalemate.

Schoolchildren now face reduced school staffing, larger class sizes, shortened school calendars, intermittent teacher furloughs, loss of summer school, fewer elective and enrichment activities, and pared back extra-curricular and athletic programs. Such major reductions in school programs and staffing will slow the progress toward academic proficiency set out by Congress at the start of the millennium. The \$23 billion Education Jobs bill will not fix all the impending problems, but it will provide essential support for maintaining educational services as the nation struggles to emerge from the recession.

**Charlotte Initiative** continued from page 8

Under the Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI), the principal of each of the seven schools was replaced by a school leader with a highly successful track record. Each of the new principals could bring an assistant principal, a behavior management technician, and literacy/curriculum facilitators, as well as up to five highly effective teachers in reading and math. All new staff are committed to three years at the school.

Educators deciding to teach at SSI schools received a bonus for the first year and an additional bonus for the next two years. And the principals of these schools received a pay hike, and given flexibility and autonomy to implement their initiatives and policies.

Participation in Charlotte's Strategic Staffing Initiative has become "a badge of honor," according to the *Times*. "Principals are now clamoring to be chosen for the program, which has been expanded to a total of 20 schools so far," the editorial points out.

At the recent national Education Writers Association Conference in San Francisco, Charlotte SST principal Nancy Guzman participated on a panel on "Turning Around Failing Schools."

Setting high expectations for schoolchildren and their parents is important in high-poverty schools, she told education journalists.

One way the elementary school princi-

pal motivates her fourth-graders is taking them on a field trip to a local college. She emphasized that the visit inspires "hope," noting that students can lose interest in education in middle school if they don't have hope. The visit also helps the students have an idea of a profession.

Guzman also tells her teachers what to expect, and closely monitors their performance, as well as uses assessment data to track student performance. Moreover, she explained that she has Targeted Skills Instructional groups to help students who are having problems.

She's also a proponent for teachers going to professional development conferences. "They love this," she said of the educators.

## Boston Launches Volunteer Team Of Ambassadors

In a citywide call to action, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino and Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson recently launched "Team BPS," a volunteer corps of district alumni, parents and educators to serve as ambassadors in the community to encourage support of Boston schoolchildren and foster a more accurate perception of the city's public schools.

"Now, more than ever before, we need people to speak about their BPS experience," says Mayor Menino. "Too often the many good things happening in our city's schools get overlooked."

At a kick-off event in May, more than 100 citizens participated in the launch of the volunteer corps, or team, bearing the initials of Boston Public Schools.

"We've been overwhelmed by the tremendous response to this program," says Superintendent Johnson. "Our informal recruiting, before launching the program today, has already attracted more than 150 ambassadors, from every neighborhood in Boston, representing 80 percent of our 135 schools ...," she notes.

Ambassadors will be asked to volunteer for activities at least once every six months based on their schedules, abilities and interest levels.



A Boston parent registers to become a "Team BPS" ambassador.

## Survey Rates Top Music Education Programs

Four big-city school systems and one big-city school were recently honored for their commitment to provide children with quality music education programs.

Clark County School District in Las Vegas; Memphis City Schools; San Diego Unified School District; the School District of Hillsborough County in Tampa, Fla.; and Shaw Visual and Performing Arts Elementary in St. Louis were among 174 school districts and schools from across the nation to be featured in the 11<sup>th</sup> annual "Best Communities for Music Education."

Sponsored by the NAMM Foundation, a musical advocacy organization, the survey honors school districts for their support of music education and demonstrated commitment to providing music programs

for their students, particularly as tough economic challenges hinder the ability of states and local school districts to adequately fund music education.

The web-based survey was available to school systems nationwide. Districts were measured across curricular and programmatic criteria as well as public support for their music programs. Participants had to answer detailed questions on such issues as funding, graduation requirements, music class participation, instruction time and facilities.

Schools receiving the "Best Communities" designation scored in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher in the survey's grading process.

## Shreveport Student Nationally Recognized For Volunteerism



Charlton Boyd

Charlton Boyd, a student at Caddo Middle Magnet School in Shreveport, La., loves collecting and giving away books.

Over the past four years, the 14-year-old has collected thousands of books to give to hospitalized and underprivileged children. He also reads to children at a local YMCA, and raised \$5,000 to ship books to U.S. troops serving overseas.

For his efforts, Charlton was recently named among the nation's top 10 youth volunteers in the 15th Annual Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program. He's the only winner from an urban school district represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The nation's 10 top youth volunteers were selected from more than 21,000 applicants across the country. They received \$5,000 personal awards and \$5,000 for charities of their choice from the Prudential Foundation among other prizes.

**Presidential Scholars** *continued from page 9*

Anchorage, District of Columbia, Louisville, Orlando, Portland (Ore.), Salt Lake City and Saint Paul. The Albuquerque and Anchorage school systems had two presidential scholars.

Created in 1964, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program every year recognizes students across the nation who are considered distinguished graduating seniors academically and artistically.

Each presidential scholar is invited to bring his or her most inspiring and challenging teacher to travel to Washington, D.C., for recognition events.





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## Council Gives Bilingual Education Award

Elba Garcia, the director of the Office of Bilingual Education for the District of Columbia Public Schools, has received the Award for Outstanding Contributions to English Language Learner Achievement, sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools and McGraw-Hill Education.

Garcia was presented the \$1,000 award at the Council's Bilingual, Immigrant and Refugee Education Directors Meeting in May in Omaha. The award program was created last year to recognize an educator in a big-city school district who has made a significant difference in improving the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs).

As director of the Office of Bilingual Education, Garcia has spearheaded efforts to increase achievement in literacy and math, created professional development programs for ELL teachers, and has teamed with the district's human resources division to recruit highly qualified English-as-a-second language teachers as well as bilingual teachers for the seven dual lan-



Elba Garcia is congratulated by Council Executive Director Michael Casserly and Stan Paz from McGraw-Hill Education.

guage schools in the D.C. school system.

"Her high energy, creativity and commitment to the achievement of ELLs is clearly making a difference in the District of Columbia Public Schools," said Gabriela Uro, Council manager of ELL policy and research.

"It's important that the Council highlight the successes of its member districts in educating ELLs."

## St. Louis Helps Develop Teachers With Union Assistance

Twenty-four new St. Louis school-teachers recently completed the pilot year of *The St. Louis Plan*, a program designed to support and retain high-quality teachers in a collaborative effort between the school district and the American Federation of Teachers-St. Louis.

Established last year, *The St. Louis Plan* provides professional development to beginning teachers and evaluates their performance. It also provides intensive peer assistance to experienced teachers who are severely deficient in performance, so they can bring their work to acceptable standards.

Teachers enrolled in *The St. Louis Plan* are assigned a consultant teacher, or mentor teacher, for development and evaluation.

St. Louis Public Schools has hired 12 consultant teachers to serve 37 schools across the district.