



- New Leader in Norfolk, p.3
- Scholarships Awarded, p.7
- LEGISLATIVE**
- District Race to the Top, p.10

Baton Rouge Student Overcomes Family Deaths to Graduate



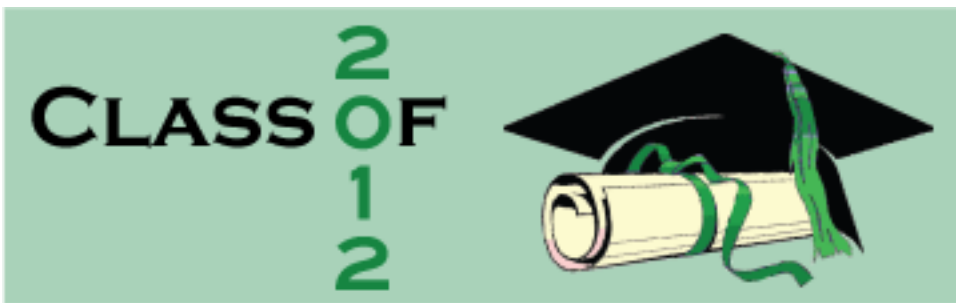
Shaela Nelson

Shaela Nelson, a 2012 graduate of Scotlandville Magnet High School in Baton Rouge, La., accomplished many things during her senior year. She had a 4.0 grade-point average, ranked 11th in her

senior class, served as president of her high school's student government association and received a full scholarship to attend the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where she will major in civil engineering.

And she achieved these things while dealing with back-to-back tragedies. In 2006, when she was 11 her mother died of a brain aneurysm. Ten months later her father died of pneumonia and Nelson went to live with her grandmother. Then two years ago, her grandmother died and her 20-year-old sister became her legal guardian.

Yet the challenges she has faced did not prevent her from excelling as a student in-



side as well as outside the classroom.

In addition to serving as student government president, she is a student ambassador for her school's Magnet Engineering Program, a mentor with the Girls for Engineering, Math and Science and a member of the National Society of Black Engineers and Team Spirit (a school anti-drug program). In an interview with Baton Rouge television station *WAFB*, Scotlandville High principal Howard Davis praised Nelson for her accomplishments.

"She did not let herself being placed in those kind of adverse situations hinder her at all, or use it as an excuse not to go out and seek great things and do great things," said Davis. "It didn't stop her for one day."

Nelson has not only impressed her prin-

icipal and the entire Scotlandville school community, but also the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which recently selected her as a 2012 Gates Millennium Scholar. The Gates Millennium Scholars Program awards full college scholarships to 1,000 outstanding minority students across the nation.

And last year, Nelson was presented with the Louisiana Young Heroes Award, given to students who excel in the classroom and the community and for their ability to overcome adversity and inspire others.

In February, *The Advocate* newspaper in Baton Rouge interviewed Nelson on her

Baton Rouge continued on page 4

Urban Schools Make the Grade in Rankings

Nine urban schools in districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools rank in the top 20 in the nation on the recently published *Washington Post* High School Challenge Index.

Two Dallas high schools – Science/Engineering Magnet and Talented and Gifted – ranked the highest among the nine -- Nos. 3 and 6, respectively.

No. 7 Stanton College Prep in Jacksonville, Fla., was the top-ranked high school in 1998, when the Challenge Index ratings of public high schools were created by *Post* education columnist Jay Mathews.

Formerly hosted by *Newsweek* magazine, the High School Challenge Index

Urban Schools continued on page 7

Graduation Class Earns Wings

Twenty-three students recently received diplomas and earned their wings in the first graduating class of the Andrews Aviation Academy in North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro.

Graduation Class continued on page 9

Superintendent in Tampa Gives \$10,000 Award to Teacher

Shelby Baldree, a kindergarten teacher at Hammond Elementary School in Florida's Hillsborough County School District in Tampa, has been nicknamed "The Tornado," because of her strong dedication to each of her students.

Her efforts have not gone unnoticed. Baldree was recently selected as the winner of the annual Superintendent's *We Deliver* award. Presented by Hillsborough Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia and the Hillsborough Education Foundation, the award is given to an employee of the school system for his or her extra efforts to help students or the community.

Along with the award, recipients receive a \$10,000 cash prize to spend on anything of their choice.

At the presentation ceremony, Superintendent Elia read aloud from some of the 15 nominations submitted by parents and fellow teachers detailing how Baldree goes the extra mile for all of her students. She was praised for her ability to motivate students with special educational needs, which included providing home tutoring sessions for a student with medical complications. Baldree was also lauded for at-



Hillsborough Education Foundation President Phil Jones applauds as Superintendent MaryEllen Elia, left, presents teacher Shelby Baldree with a \$10,000 oversized check as winner of the *We Deliver* superintendent award.

tending students' extracurricular activities and regularly updating parents on their children's progress.

She was also recognized for hosting classroom food drives in order to ship care packages to a military father who was stationed in Afghanistan during the

school year.

This is the sixth year the superintendent and the Education Foundation have presented the *We Deliver* award. This year, a total of 418 nominations for 188 school district employees were submitted online.



Council officers

Chair

Candy Olson
Board Member, Hillsborough County (Tampa)

Chair-elect

Eugene White
Superintendent, Indianapolis

Secretary-Treasurer

Eileen Cooper Reed
Board Member, Cincinnati

Executive Director
Michael Casserly

Editor
Henry Duvall
hduvall@cgcs.org

Associate Editor
Tonya Harris
tharris@cgcs.org

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

Albuquerque	Charlotte	East Baton Rouge	Los Angeles	Oakland	Sacramento
Anchorage	Chicago	Fort Worth	Louisville	Oklahoma City	San Diego
Atlanta	Cincinnati	Fresno	Memphis	Omaha	San Francisco
Austin	Clark Co.	Greensboro	Miami-Dade	Orange Co.	Santa Ana
Baltimore	Cleveland	Houston	Milwaukee	Palm Beach	Seattle
Birmingham	Columbus	Indianapolis	Minneapolis	Philadelphia	Shreveport
Boston	Dallas	Jackson	Nashville	Pittsburgh	St. Louis
Bridgeport	Dayton	Jacksonville	Newark	Portland	St. Paul
Broward Co.	Denver	Kansas City	New Orleans	Providence	Tampa
Buffalo	Des Moines	Little Rock	New York City	Richmond	Toledo
Charleston	Detroit	Long Beach	Norfolk	Rochester	Washington DC
					Wichita

All news items should be submitted to:
Urban Educator
Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Suite 702 • Washington, DC 20004
(202) 393-2427 • (202) 393-2400 (fax)

New Leaders Named In Norfolk, Buffalo; Incoming Omaha Chief Resigns



Samuel King

Virginia's Norfolk Public Schools recently selected a veteran educator to lead its school system. Samuel King, the superintendent of Rockdale County Public Schools in Georgia, will take

the reins, replacing interim superintendent Michael Spencer.

King, who was named Georgia's 2011 Superintendent of the Year, has led the Rockdale school district for six years.

And New York's Buffalo Public Schools



Pamela Brown

has selected Pamela Brown as its new leader, succeeding interim superintendent Amber Dixon.

Brown is the senior research and planning associate for the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology. She has also served as an assistant superintendent for the School District of Philadelphia.

Omaha Leader Resigns

Nancy Sebring, who was selected to lead Nebraska's Omaha Public Schools, recently handed in her resignation to the Omaha school board. Sebring, who was the superintendent of Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools, was scheduled to take the reins of the Omaha school system on July 1.

Omaha's current superintendent, John Mackiel, recently reached an agreement with the school board to lead the district until the end of August.

State Legislative Body Honors Memphis Superintendent



Kriner Cash

The Tennessee House of Representatives recently honored Memphis City Schools Superintendent Kriner Cash, proclaiming in a resolution, "Dr. Cash has provided dedicated leadership and astute guidance

to Memphis City Schools as the Superintendent of Schools since 2008."

The resolution, adopted April 27, commends Cash for his work in the state's largest school system, citing his efforts to win a multi-million-dollar grant to execute a teacher-effectiveness initiative and increase the school district's graduation rate to a historic high.

"Dr. Cash's work in Memphis has focused on addressing what he calls systemic fault lines that hold students back, such as pre-K literacy, retention and over-age

for grade, teacher effectiveness and college readiness..." the resolution points out.

"We hereby honor and commend Dr. Kriner Cash upon his exemplary tenure ..., salute his years of exceptional service to the children of Memphis and Tennessee, recognize his professional expertise and personal excellence, and wish him all the best in his future endeavors," said the resolution signed by the governor and speakers of the House and Senate.

In another development, a weekly publication recently published an article headlined "Making the Grade – Can Better Teachers Turn Memphis Around?"

"Many American cities want to revamp their schools. But Memphis stands out because of the multiple strong forces of reform aligning at once," says the article in *Forefront*, published by a nonprofit group called Next American City.

The article credits "a savvy school board and strong superintendent" for their efforts leading to more outside money flowing into the district to spur academic reforms.

New Leadership at Council



Candy Olson

Candy Olson, chair of Florida's Hillsborough County School Board in Tampa, takes the reins of the Council of the Great City Schools' Board of Directors, effective July 1.

She succeeds Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks, who is completing his one-year term leading the Council's policymaking body that is composed of the superintendent and a board member from each of the organization's 67 member big-city school districts.

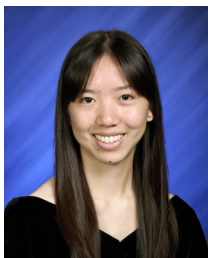
Olson steps up from chair-elect, while Indianapolis Public Schools Superintendent Eugene White moves into that post from secretary-treasurer.

Rounding out the Council's 2012-13 leadership team is Eileen Cooper Reed, a board member of the Cincinnati Public Schools, who has been elected secretary-treasurer.

Olson received the nation's highest honor for urban education leadership last year when the Council bestowed upon her the Richard R. Green Award, named in honor of the first African-American chancellor of the New York City school system who had also headed the Minneapolis Public Schools back in the 1980s.

"Candy Olson's leadership goes beyond Florida, as she has made significant contributions to improving education for urban schoolchildren nationwide," said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. She has headed the Council's Achievement Gaps Task Force among other posts within the national coalition.

Palm Beach Twins Share the Stage As Valedictorians



Felicia Yan



Crystal Yan

It's not that unusual for high school graduations to have co-valedictorians, but at Wellington High School in Florida's School District of Palm Beach County both valedictorians are twin sisters.

With a 5.3 grade-point average, Crystal and Felicia Yan both graduated at the top of their class.

The sisters, who were born five minutes apart, believe in cooperation not com-

petition.

"It's a symbiotic relationship," said Crystal in the *Palm Beach Post*. "We pushed each other to do better."

The Yan sisters made separate speeches at their recent graduation ceremony in front of their family and peers.

"We're very proud," said Joyce Zhang, the twin's mother, in the *Post*. "The graduation was fantastic. My girls are the best of friends and they help and support each other."

In the fall, the Yans will head to the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where Felicia will study molecular biology and Crystal will study biochemistry.

Baton Rouge continued from page 1

outlook and attitude for the new year.

"Some wonder, how do you remain positive or steadfast after losing both your parents," Nelson told the paper. "The best answer I have to that question is perseverance. Every day is a fight. The only question is do you want to come out victorious?"



Charlotte Student Continues Family Tradition Of Military Service

Kevin Allen Blash Jr. is a 2012 graduate of Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology in Charlotte, N.C., whose family members have served in the military as far back as the Civil War. Blash will continue the family tradition when he enters the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., in the fall.



Kevin Allen Blash Jr.

His journey to West Point began last year when Blash, who held several leadership roles in his school's JROTC program, was among 1,000 students who participated in the West Point Summer Leaders Seminar. More than 4,000 students applied to the program, which offers outstanding high school juniors the opportunity to participate in academic, leadership, athletic and military workshops.

Blash believes that attending the seminar spurred his desire to attend the mili-

tary academy. "For one week, the friendship, challenge and strict discipline helped me to see my future, and West Point was in it," said Blash.

He was nominated for the military academy by Rep. Mel Watt (D-N.C.), who called Blash during the Thanksgiving holiday to deliver the news that he had been eagerly waiting for: his

appointment to West Point.

After Blash graduates from the military academy, he will be a second lieutenant in the United States Army. He intends to become a career military man with an emphasis in artillery and/or robotic technology. He would also like to serve as a mentor to young people. "I hope to get involved with or start a program to help other youth to aim higher than they thought they could," said Blash.

Dayton Students Find Success in America

At Belmont High School in Dayton, Ohio, co-valedictorians Daniel Molina and Vanessa Ishimwe are breaking the mold.

For the first time in the district's history, the co-valedictorians are both foreign-born students.

Each graduate's journey began far from Belmont. Four years ago, Ishimwe and her family fled genocide in Togo, a West Afri-



Vanessa Ishimwe and Daniel Molina

Dayton Students continued on page 5

Minneapolis Student Triumphs Over Adversity

Eduardo Sanchez Beltran is a 2012 graduate of Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, who served as president of his school's National Honor Society, was a member of his school's newspaper and drama club and will be the first in his family to attend college.

But the journey to college has not been easy. Sanchez Beltran was born into extreme poverty in Mexico, and in search of a better life, he moved with his family to the United States when he was 6. In America, he and his three family members lived in one room in a dangerous neighborhood. His parents each worked two jobs and were rarely home. He was unable to speak

English and was teased by other students at school.

When he was 11, Sanchez Beltran was caught in the middle of a gang shootout while sitting in his father's truck and the bullets that hit the truck's windshield pierced his face and arms. He survived with minor injuries but the experience left him deeply traumatized.

Three years later, eight gang members shoved a gun in his stomach and held a knife to his neck. Sanchez Beltran escaped,



Eduardo Sanchez Beltran accepts a \$4,000 scholarship from the Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota at its "Beat the Odds" awards ceremony.

but developed post-traumatic stress disorder and experienced difficulty concentrating and socializing. Realizing that he needed help, the teen sought counseling at his school. He also found strength by participating in theater, with the Pillsbury House Theater, a professional theatre company, becoming his second home.

Sanchez Beltran recently graduated from Roosevelt High School with a 3.7 grade-point average and will attend North Central College to study journalism.

In April, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF)-Minnesota presented him with a \$4,000 "Beat the Odds" scholarship, presented annually to four local teens who have overcome extreme adversity to succeed in school and life.

"...I learned early on that I could choose my future and I chose to make the most of my experiences in school," said Sanchez Beltran upon receiving the award.

A video produced by the CDF documenting Sanchez Beltran's journey can be viewed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qd81h2_70X8&feature=relmfu.

Dayton Students *continued from page 4*

can country, and emigrated to the United States. Molina moved to Dayton from Mexico three years ago with his mother and brothers.

The students, who both share a love for math, knew no English when they arrived in the United States. But they credit Belmont's English as a Second Language (ESL) program with helping them not only learn English, but adjust to a new way of life.

The ESL population at Belmont High School has increased substantially and in

less than five years, the school went from having six ESL students to more than 90 students during the 2011-2012 school year. The school's ethnic makeup includes at least 13 countries outside of the United States, with more than 15 foreign languages being spoken.

At Belmont's recent graduation, Molina and Ishimwe presented their valedictorian speeches together, with portions done in their native languages: Spanish for Molina and French for Ishimwe.

Boston Students Beat Odds to Excel



Thao Nguyen

Thao Nguyen did not let being in a strange country and not knowing the language stop her from being a top-notch student nor did Steven Clifford let cancer prevent him from being a successful student. The two students were co-vice-presidents of the Class of 2012 at Boston's Excel High School.

When Nguyen immigrated to Boston from Vietnam when she was a sophomore, she recalled that she felt afraid and lost. And even though she had studied English in Vietnam, mastering the language was still a difficult feat for her.

"Handling these pages from the text book hasn't been easy for me, when at the beginning of the year, it took me eight hours...to finish reading one chapter," said Nguyen in an interview with NPR radio station *WBUR*.

The teen would often spend six hours a night studying for her three Advanced Placement classes, but the hard work paid off and in the fall she is headed to Northeastern University.



Steven Clifford

When Clifford was 11-years-old, he was diagnosed with bone cancer in his right leg and had to undergo multiple chemotherapy treatments and surgery to remove his right tibia. He missed two years of school, but he kept up with his schoolwork.

In his senior year at Excel, he was enrolled in three AP classes even though he had to undergo surgery to alleviate the shooting pains he experienced in his leg caused by aggravating a nerve from a previous surgery.

Boston Students continued on page 6



Soldier Surprises Sister at Graduation

When Lindsey Singleton recently walked across the stage to receive her high school diploma, her sister dressed in Army fatigues surprised her at the other end of the stage. Army Spec. Sara Singleton, 22, flew in from a tour in Afghanistan to witness her 18-year-old sister's graduation from Sickles High School in Tampa, Fla. The reunion of the two sisters drew thunderous applause and a standing ovation as they embraced on stage at the graduation ceremony.

Boston Students *continued from page 5*

Clifford has been in remission for five years but his experience battling cancer is the reason he wants to become a pediatric oncologist. In the fall, he will enter the University of California, San Diego.

"Experiences do turn out to shape who you are," Clifford said in an interview with *WBUR*. "I mean if I wasn't diagnosed with osteosarcoma when I was 11, then I wouldn't be on the same path I'm on now; I wouldn't want to become a pediatric oncologist and help people. It's weird; I'm not glad that I got it, but I'm glad I got the experience from having cancer."



Left to right: Miami Schools Superintendent of Schools Alberto M. Carvalho, Board Member Wilbert "Tee" Holloway and North Miami Principal Michael Lewis listen to North Miami Senior High School valedictorian Daniela Peláez deliver her commencement speech. Photo Credit: M-DCPS

Miami Student Wins Deportation Reprieve And Delivers Valedictorian Address

Daniela Peláez, a 2012 graduate from North Miami Senior High School with a 6.7 grade-point average, will head to Dartmouth College in the fall to study biology and history.

But the journey to Dartmouth almost didn't happen for Peláez, the valedictorian of her senior class.

In March, a federal immigration judge ordered the Miami teen to leave the country after her request for a green card was denied. Peláez came to the United States at the age of 4 with her family from Colombia on a tourist visa, which they overstayed.

Her plight made national headlines when more than 2,500 of her fellow classmates at North Miami Senior High, along with Miami Schools Superintendent Al-

berto Carvalho, held a rally outside the school protesting the judge's order.

Peléez soon received the news that she would be able to stay in the United States for two more years without the fear of being deported. Her lawyer hopes that she will eventually be allowed to stay in the country permanently.

Peléez recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to talk to members of Congress. And she has started a foundation to help get legislation passed that benefits undocumented children like her who want to stay in the United States.

"A couple of months ago, I was going to get deported," she said in the *Miami Herald*. "And look where I am today."

Council Awards Math and Science Scholarships

Four graduating high school seniors recently received 2012 ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships from the Council of the Great City Schools for their academic performance, leadership qualities and community involvement.

The nationwide scholarship program was created by former NASA astronaut Bernard Harris Jr., the first African American to walk in space, and the ExxonMobil Foundation to help underrepresented students pursue science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies and to increase diversity in the STEM workforce.

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

“These scholarships provide an enormous opportunity for talented urban students who have the academic promise and drive to succeed in STEM postsecondary studies and careers,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “The generous support of the ExxonMobil Foundation and Dr. Harris will truly give our young men and women a boost in their pursuits.”

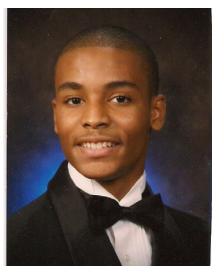
Each scholar receives \$5,000 for continued education in a STEM-related field. This year’s award winners are:

- Mark Ballard, Birmingham City Schools, who will attend Auburn University to study electrical engineering;
- Simone Biggers, Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C., who plans to major in biology at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill;
- Michael Castaño, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, who is going to Massachusetts Institute of Technology to pursue a career in engineering and law; and
- Fiorella Vargas, Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., who will study biomedical engineering at Harvard University.

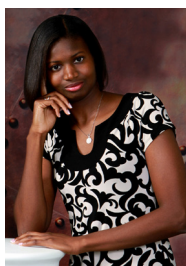
“These scholarships are one way of preparing promising youth for math and science achievement both inside and outside the classroom,” said Dr. Harris, who is also a physician, businessman and author. “With the help of the ExxonMobil Foundation, I am proud to support the development of innovative young minds and honor these students as they create a brighter future for themselves and our country.”



Astronaut Bernard Harris



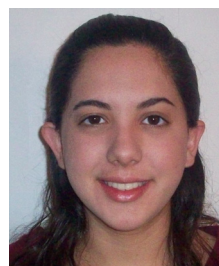
Mark Ballard



Simone Biggers



Michael Castaño



Fiorella Vargas

Urban Schools continued from page 1

ranks schools on the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Advanced International Certificate of Education tests given at a school each year and divided by the number of graduating seniors.

The 2012 High School Challenge ranks more than 1,800 schools, and for the first time, according to Mathews, includes private schools.

Other urban high schools in the Council ranked in the top 20 are:

- Young Women’s Prep in Miami-Dade County, No. 8;
- Carnegie Vanguard in Houston, No.10;
- American Indian Public Charter in Oakland; No. 11;
- Suncoast Community in Palm Beach County, No. 12;
- Paxon School for Advanced Studies in Jacksonville, Fla., No.16; and
- City Honors in Buffalo, No. 19.

A number of urban schools made the grade in the *Post* rankings. In addition to 10th-ranked Carnegie Vanguard, the Houston Independent School District had 21 schools on the High School Challenge list.

And for the first time, all 27 traditional high schools in Florida’s Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa made the list.

Council Presents Awards

Jerome Oberlton, the chief information officer for Baltimore City Public Schools, was recently presented with the Distinguished Service Award at the Council of the Great City Schools’ Chief Information Officers Conference in Minneapolis.

Council Presents continued on page 12

Albuquerque Students Team up With Local Police

High school students in New Mexico's Albuquerque Public Schools learn to fight crime with the Albuquerque Police Department as part of a unique internship experience.

This past semester, eight high school students participated in the internship course offered through the district's Career Enrichment Center. Internship candidates were interviewed and submitted to background checks as part of the program.

The program is structured to give students real-world experience working with field investigators and crime scene investigative officers. They go through police rotations to gain insight into all aspects of police work. Homework assignments include learning police "10-code" and phonetic alphabet both of which officers use to communicate on police scanner radios.

Albuquerque Students continued on page 9



Student intern Ashley Moseley and Sgt. Ferris Simmons from the Albuquerque Police Department.



A Shared Vision

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, second from left, joins national education leaders in signing a "shared vision" for the future of the teaching profession at a recent Labor-Management Conference in Cincinnati. Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, center, is among the national leaders who co-hosted the conference and signed on to the vision with the secretary. The shared vision focuses on three main goals – ensuring all students are challenged to meet a high bar; narrowing the opportunity and access gap between more and less privileged students; and preparing all students to be globally competitive.

Milwaukee Launches 'Summer Academies'

The summer season opens for the Milwaukee Public Schools with the launch of what it calls "Summer Academies" to enhance traditional summer school.

"Summer is a critical time for our students," says Superintendent Gregory Thornton in a press statement. "We want parents to read to children and make sure they're getting great nutrition. Summer Academies can be a great aid in that important effort."

In promoting the program, Milwaukee Public Schools emphasizes, "MPS Summer Academy – A world of opportunity awaits each student this summer."

"It's not really just a remedial program anymore," says Sandra Schroeder, director of extended learning opportunities for

Milwaukee Public Schools. "The focus is also on preparing students for success in the upcoming year."

The Summer Academies are open to all families in Milwaukee, and will give students a head start on the coursework that will be aligned this fall to the rigorous Common Core State Standards that have been adopted by the district and Wisconsin along with other states across the nation.

More than 2,500 students had already signed up for the district's summer programs by mid-June, according to the district.

Summer offerings include an elementary program, a grade 8 promotional program, a high school credit recovery option,

Summer Academies continued on page 10

Palm Beach County Student Recognized Nationally for Volunteerism

Samantha Kerker, a junior at a high school in Florida's School District of Palm Beach County, founded a student club with chapters in all 28 high schools in the county to promote monthly service projects benefiting poor people.

Now the 17-year-old is working to send 60 students on a poverty-focused mission to a Third World country.

For her efforts, Kerker was recently named among the nation's top 10 youth volunteers in the 17th Annual Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program. She is the only winner from an urban school district represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.



"We are proud of Samantha. Not only has she raised money and traveled to Nicaragua, but she has taught other students the importance of making a difference in the world," says Kelly

Bruce, a school guidance counselor at Kerker's Atlantic High School in Delray Beach, Fla.

The nation's 10 top youth volunteers were selected from more than 26,000 applicants nationwide. They received engraved gold medallions, \$5,000 personal awards and \$5,000 for charities of their choice from the Prudential Foundation among other prizes.

Graduation Class continued from page 1

Some of the newly minted graduates are heading to college to continue their aviation education, while others plan to take to the skies in the military or begin launching their aviation careers.

"The Aviation Academy just offers so many opportunities that wouldn't have been available to me," said Colin Guenwald in a news release, who plans to become a pilot.

The aviation academy opened in 2008 at Andrews High School in High Point, N.C., as a magnet program to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies. But it also was created to capitalize on the aviation industry's growth in the area.

HondaJet reportedly opened its first-ever manufacturing facility in Greensboro last year. FedEx is completing a large cargo hub in Guilford County at Piedmont Triad International Airport. And TIMCO Aviation Services is headquartered in the area, announcing earlier this year that Andrews Aviation Academy students will begin internships with the company this summer.

"We are very excited about Andrews Aviation Academy," said Kip Blakely, a TIMCO vice president, in a news statement, noting that aviation and advanced manufacturing companies in the area are having difficulty filling positions.

Students can pursue studies in one of three career tracks at the academy – piloting, mechanics avionics and engineering. And another track will be added this fall that focuses on customer service and other nontechnical areas.



Students Kevin Beugger and Carson Wofford earn pilot license.

Albuquerque Students continued from page 8

Additionally, student interns and their parents were invited to join in a simulation training where students act as officers and decide how to handle an interaction as it plays out on a training video.

"The purpose of the program is two-fold: first to introduce interested students to police work and second to build a better partnership with the Albuquerque community by having participants better understand what police do," said Lt. Scott Lopez.

Students have been enthusiastic about their participation as they explore this career path.

"...I deem this experience invaluable and extremely fun," said Diego Vigil, a student intern.

Albuquerque Graduation Rates Make News

With a new, tougher formula to calculate high-school graduation rates in New Mexico, the state's largest school district, Albuquerque Public Schools, expected a different outcome than a report it received recently.

Graduation rates for New Mexico schools overall and for several of the state's largest districts declined this year compared with last year. However, graduation rates increased at the majority of Albuquerque's public high schools.

This made local news that generated an *Albuquerque Journal* editorial headlined

Graduation Rates continued on page 11

The District Race to the Top Initiative And the Direction of Education Policy

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

The U.S. Department of Education has recently announced its modest \$400 million for District-level Race To The Top grants (D-RTTT) and has asked for comment on its plan. Most local school officials welcome this federal investment in local-level education reform, despite concerns over the program's many requirements and the limited prospect of getting one of only 20 expected grants.

Still, in the current federal policy environment, even small new initiatives provide a springboard for competing agendas and self-promotion. In particular, several prominent state-level organizations have objected to funding the local education reforms because they claim that they undermine state control and divert resources from state initiatives. After billions of dollars in state-level grants from the U.S. Department of Education and a state-oriented waiver initiative, D-RTTT represents to state groups a deviation from current federal state-centric policies. It is more than ironic that these claims of interference with state authority come on the heels of state efforts to skirt the Department's subgroup accountability and other waiver guidelines in the initial applications for waivers to *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB).

After a decade of backlash against overreaching federal NCLB requirements, states have emerged as the most obvious alternative to federal direction of education policy and they now seem reticent to support initiatives that are not under their direct control. In fact, the major Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bills pending in Congress reflect few new concepts or alternative approaches to federal education policy other than deferral to the states. This willingness by Congress to trade federal overregulation for state overregulation appears driven as much by hostility toward fed-



eral NCLB-type mandates as by any grand design.

With this emerging deference to state policy making and the erosion of federal formula grant funding under ESEA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Department of Education's role in education arguably is evolving in a troubling direction for urban schools. Historically, the foundation of federal aid has been grounded in supplemental services targeted to disadvantaged and minority school children. But the ground is now shifting towards greater state directives over an eroding federal funding base, coupled with smaller, competitive federal initiatives rooted in mixed evidence. The question has to be asked about whether this is a change for the better.

This latest dust-up around District-level Race To The Top is symptomatic of a policy environment that is more focused on who is in control rather than on what is being done. In commenting on D-RTTT, the states repeatedly emphasized consistency with state law; the lawfulness of planned local activities; state attorney general review and sign-off; state responsibility, authority, and roles; and nonalignment with state policies. Unfortunately, these are issues on which the U.S. Department of Education is too likely to defer.

It may be fortuitous that Congress has been unable to reauthorize the ESEA, since both House and Senate committee bills appear to articulate what legislators oppose rather than what they support on the national education agenda. A better course would be to put these unproductive squabbles on permanent hold, and focus on the obvious challenges of raising the quality of classroom instruction through implementation of the Common Core Standards and other forward-thinking and research-based initiatives. But don't hold your breath.

Chicago District Partners With PUSH

High school seniors in Chicago Public Schools are learning one last lesson in civics before they join the real world. The school system has partnered with Rev. Jesse Jackson's PUSH for Excellence, Inc. to ensure seniors are registered to vote in the November 2012 election.

The partnership aims to register all graduating seniors at on-campus voter reg-

istration sites, encouraging them to become actively engaged in the political process.

The youth vote, consisting of adults ages 18-34, is a traditionally underrepresented voting population during elections.

The voter registration and voter engagement drive will continue during the first three months of the 2012-2013 school year.

Summer Academies continued from page 8

leadership development programs and programs for students with special education needs. Many programs provide academics in the morning and academic enrichment and recreation in the afternoon.

Also, many of the Summer Academy sites offer breakfast, lunch and dinner, and free dental care will be offered to students at six Summer Academy sites.

Birmingham Culinary Arts Students Compete For First Golden Spoon Award

The competition was heated when teams from culinary arts programs at three high schools in the Birmingham City Schools hit the kitchen in May to vie for the first-ever Golden Spoon Award.

In a format similar to television shows like “Iron Chef,” the students were given a box of ingredients that included a surprise ingredient. That ingredient was quinoa, a grain-like seed that can be cooked and used like rice.

The teams, from Birmingham’s Wenonah, Parker and Jackson–Olin high schools, had two hours to prepare a starter, an entrée and a dessert.

The competition was held at the Culinard, the culinary institute of Virginia College, which sponsored the competition along with the



Members of the winning team.

Golden Corral restaurant chain. Plans call for emulating the competition in other areas that have Culinard locations and Golden Corral restaurants.

The Wenonah team of DeAndreanna Allen, Quadraline Hanks, Samantha Jones, DeMarcus Hall and Kenneth Myree won the competition with a menu of vegetable soup, apple-glazed chicken and strawberry parfait custard.

The winning team was offered scholarships to attend the Culinard.

Fort Worth School Partners with Hotel

Omni Fort Worth Hotel will open its doors to students at South Hills High School in Fort Worth, Texas, as part of a community partnership designed to introduce students to careers in the hospitality industry.

The partnership creates multiple opportunities for students to take part in the daily operations of a hotel. Students enrolled in culinary courses and AVID, a college readiness system, can participate in the program.

Opportunities for students include working with a hotel chef, job shadowing employees in departments such as sales and finance and working in seasonal positions during the summer. Full and part-time positions in the hotel will also be available for students and recent graduates.

In addition, two scholarships will be awarded to graduating seniors from the class of 2012, who plan to participate in a hospitality program at a university.

“These community partnerships are essential to the success of education,” said Fort Worth Schools Superintendent Walter Dansby. “We are grateful to the Omni Fort Worth Hotel for stepping up to offer opportunities that can help shape the future of our students.”

Tampa School Recognized For Character Education Program

Cimino Elementary School in Tampa, Fla., was recently named a 2012 National School of Character for its involvement in Project RESPECT, a character education grant implemented in several elementary schools throughout the district. The elementary school had twice earned the distinction of State School of Character during previous school years.

Cimino Elementary was one of 24 schools and one school district chosen for this national honor. Recognized by the Character Education Partnership, the recipients are schools and districts that

demonstrated through a rigorous evaluation process that their focus on character development has had a positive impact on academic achievement, student behavior, and school climate.

National Schools of Character serve as a recognized standard of excellence of what high-quality character education looks like in schools. They are expected to serve as models to other schools, helping them to achieve the same results. All recipients will receive a grant to assist in their outreach to others.

Graduation Rates *continued from page 9*

“Graduation Rates Show APS Is on Right Track,” making reference to Albuquerque Public Schools.

The editorial noted that the New Mexico Public Education Department changed to a new, tougher formula based on national standards that require students to complete high school in four years.

As a result, the newspaper’s commentary emphasized that “...the world didn’t end and the sky didn’t fall when the state used a tougher formula to calculate APS’ current graduation rates.

“And that bodes well for the path of improvement the district is on.”



Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 702
Washington DC 20004

PRESORT
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MERRIFIELD, VA
PERMIT NO. 2333

Council Presents *continued from page 7*

Sponsored by the Council and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the award honors business officials who exemplify leadership, innovation, commitment and professionalism in urban education.

Oberlton is responsible for the acquisition, development and support of technology tools and resources for the 84,212-student school district in Baltimore.

Bilingual Education Award

Also receiving an award was Eileen de los Reyes, the assistant superintendent for English Language Learners for Boston Public Schools. She was the recipient of the Award for Outstanding Contributions to English Language Learner Achievement, sponsored by the Council and McGraw-Hill Education.

She received the award at the Council's recent Bilingual, Immigrant and Refugee Education Directors Meeting in Seattle.

The award program recognizes an educator in a big-city school district who has made a significant difference in improving the academic achievement of English Lan-



Eileen de los Reyes is congratulated by Council manager of ELL policy and research Gabriela Uro and Stan Paz from McGraw-Hill Education. Photo Credit: Joe Dow

guage Learners (ELLs).

"Eileen's style of leadership and careful analysis of ELL achievement data is making important inroads to improving ELL access to rigorous instruction in Boston Public Schools," said Gabriela Uro, Council manager of ELL policy and research.

As the winner of the award, de los Reyes was presented with a \$1,000 cash prize.

Council Fall Conference Registration Begins

The Council of the Great City Schools will hold its 56th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 17-21, in Indianapolis.

Hosted by Indianapolis Public Schools, the conference will feature more than 800 urban school superintendents, board members, senior administrators and college deans of education who will assemble at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown to discuss initiatives to improve the quality of education for children in urban schools.

To register for the conference, access the Council's web site at: <http://www.cgcs.org/Fallconference>.

