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Fresno Homeless Teen Defies the Odds and Heads to College



Fresno student Nataly Romero Robledo attends her high school graduation ceremony. Photo credit: © Hector Amezcua/Sacramento Bee via ZUMA Wire

When Nataly Romero Robledo opened the letter to find out if she was accepted into the University of California at Berkeley, she was not at home surrounded by a supportive and loving family. Instead, she opened the letter at a shelter, where she had been living by herself because she was homeless.

UC Berkeley has accepted her into its freshman class of 2017 but the road to attend the prestigious university was a harrowing one for the 18-year-old who recently graduated from California's Fresno High School with a 4.0 grade-point average.

Fresno Teen continued on page 5

L.A. Schools Chief Named Superintendent Of the Year by Peers

Michelle King has been at the helm of the Los Angeles Unified School District for under two years, but her achievements as superintendent have been so impressive that she was recently named the 2017 National Superintendent of the Year.



Michelle King

The award is given by the National Association of School Superintendents (NASS) to those who have exemplified leadership

L. A. Chief continued on page 12

Austin Grads Register to Vote Before Stepping Into the Future

While waiting to cross the stage to receive their diplomas, graduating high-school seniors in Texas' Austin Independent School District utilized the idle time to register to vote.

During the district's recent graduation ceremonies, 365 seniors from 13 Austin schools registered to vote in an opportunity provided through a partnership between the district and the First Vote! Program, sponsored by the Travis County voter registration and election divisions and the Austin-area League of Women Voters.

"We are proud to offer our graduates an opportunity to continue engaging in our community after they graduate," said

Austin Grads continued on page 12



Austin students register to vote while waiting to graduate high school.

Council Recognizes Four Young Math and Science Scholars

Four graduating high-school seniors this spring received the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship from the Council of the Great City Schools.

They were chosen among several hundred applicants in big-city school districts across the nation for academic performance, leadership qualities and community involvement.

Now in its eighth year, the scholarship was created by former NASA astronaut Dr. Bernard Harris Jr., the first African American to walk in space, and ExxonMobil to encourage and assist promising students of diverse backgrounds who plan to pursue science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies after high school.

“ExxonMobil is helping to foster the next generation of STEM leaders,” said Ben Soraci, general manager of Public and Government Affairs for ExxonMobil. “These scholarships represent just one way we are encouraging students of diverse backgrounds to pursue STEM-related studies and careers.”



Paul Davis
Kansas City
Public Schools



Caleb Myers
Dallas Independent
School District



Diana Moreno
El Paso Independent
School District



Robin Ryce
Detroit Public
Schools Community
District

The awards are given annually to African-American and Hispanic seniors from high schools in the 68 urban school districts represented by the Council.

“We are indeed proud of the winners in this highly competitive national scholar-

ship program,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “These young men and women will become the leaders and innovators of tomorrow.”

Science Scholars *continued on page 3*



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New Leadership Named in Detroit, Oakland, Cincinnati, Jacksonville and Louisville



Nikolai Vitti

The Detroit Public Schools Community District recently selected veteran educator Nikolai Vitti to lead the 48,000-student school district, Michigan's largest.

Vitti has been superintendent of Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Fla., since 2012, and under his leadership, the nation's 20th largest school district increased its graduation rate from 67 percent in 2012 to 78.8 percent in 2016. The 130,000-student district also increased the use of technology, placed reading and math coaches in low-achieving schools and reduced the number of students expelled or suspended from schools.

A native of Michigan, Vitti said he is

grateful for the opportunity to return to his roots and work to move the district forward.

"I have no doubt that we can create high-demand, traditional public schools in every neighborhood as we work together to ensure a child-centric learning environment for all of our students," said Vitti in a news statement.

He succeeds interim superintendent Alycia Meriweather.



Patricia Willis

And Duval County Public Schools has chosen a familiar face to replace Vitti, with the selection of Patricia Willis as the district's new leader. Willis began her teaching career as an English teacher and in

her 35 years with the district has served in

several roles, including general director for professional development and deputy superintendent.

Also selecting a new superintendent recently was Cincinnati Public Schools, which named Laura Mitchell to lead the 35,000-student school system.

A graduate of the school system, Mitchell currently serves as the deputy superintendent and chief academic officer, where she has led the implementation of academic improvement strategies, such as the Elementary Initiative, which boosted academic achievement in the school system's 16 lowest performing elementary schools.

Mitchell will succeed Mary Ronan, who is retiring from the district in July after nine years at the helm.

California's Oakland Unified School District has named Kyla Johnson-Trammel as a finalist for the superintendent position. She is currently serving as the district's interim deputy superintendent.

A native of Oakland, Johnson-Trammel has held several positions in the district, including director of talent development, associate superintendent for leadership, curriculum, instruction and elementary, and network superintendent. She will succeed interim superintendent Devin Dillon.

Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Ky., has named Martin Pollio to serve as acting superintendent of the 100,000-student school district, the largest school system in Kentucky.

Pollio is currently principal of a district high school and is taking a leave of absence to serve as acting superintendent until a permanent leader is named. He succeeds Donna Hargens, who is leaving the district after serving at the helm for six years.

Science Scholars *continued from page 2*

row thanks to the support of ExxonMobil and the encouragement of Dr. Harris."

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

- Paul Davis, who attended Lincoln College Preparatory Academy in Kansas City, Mo.;
- Diana Moreno, who attended Maxine L. Silva Health Magnet High School in El Paso, Tex.;
- Caleb Myers, who attended Townview School of Science and Engineering in Dallas, Tex.; and
- Robin Ryce, who attended Renaissance High School in Detroit.

In the fall, Davis plans to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University to study aerospace engineering. Moreno will pursue a degree in biochemistry at University of Texas-El Paso. Myers plans to study chemical/biomedical engineering at Prairie View A&M University, and Ryce will study engineering at University of Michigan.

"I am consistently amazed and inspired by these students and their eagerness to succeed," said Dr. Harris, also a physician and president and founder of The Harris Foundation. "Each of them will be such an asset to the universities they attend and as future innovators in our workforce. It's an honor to help support them in their endeavors."

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

Educators Help Houston Student Achieve Dream

Yemile Bazaldua came to Houston from Mexico when she was 11 years old speaking no English. Her first day as a student at Hartman Middle School she cried because she didn't un-



Yemile Bazaldua

derstand what anybody was saying. But a teacher soon volunteered to tutor her in English after school and on Saturdays.

In her second year at Hartman, math teacher Vivian Bivens gave Bazaldua a test to see if she could qualify for her 7th grade pre-Advanced Placement class and she aced the test. She enrolled in advanced classes in math, as well as English.

When Bazaldua entered Chavez High School, she didn't think she was smart enough to be in Chavez Prep, an academic program for high-achieving students. And when she tried to quit, Chavez' dean of students, Roel Saldivar, encouraged her not to. "There are times when students don't want to push themselves to be great," said Saldivar in a video produced by the Houston school system profiling Bazaldua. "But I don't want them to settle for good, I want them to be great."

And Bazaldua has gone on to great success, graduating as valedictorian, ranking No. 1 out of 651 students. She was accepted into Harvard University, which she will attend in the fall with most of her expenses paid. Bazaldua's brother died when he was a baby so she is interested in becoming a pediatrician and will major in biomedical engineering.

"When she called and told me she got into [Harvard], the tears rolled down," recalled Saldivar. "Because when you start to be an educator, you dream of that moment when you can say 'I helped someone achieve a dream.'"



Indianapolis Students Push Each Other to Excel

Even though Justin Smith and Curtez Hudgins have been friends since they met in the seventh grade at Arlington Community High School in Indianapolis, there has always been a friendly competition between the two.

That competition has culminated in Smith becoming the valedictorian and Hudgins being the salutatorian of their 2017 graduating class at Arlington. Only a hundredth of a point separated the two, with Smith earning a 3.96 grade-point average and Hudgins earning a 3.95.

And while the two students have competed with each other, they also have supported and encouraged one another as they overcame obstacles they both have faced in life, including being homeless.

At the age of 4, Smith's mom died, and during his sophomore year his father had a

stroke and is currently in a nursing home. For about three months this year, he lived with a friend's cousin after he and his family were evicted from their home.

Smith received a full scholarship to attend Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis and plans to major in business and psychology.

In the fall, Hudgins will attend Indiana University–Bloomington to major in public health as part of the Group Scholars Program, which provides academic and financial support to students who are the first in their family to attend college.



Justin Smith



Curtez Hudgins

For about three years, he and his family, consisting of his mother, dad, sister and brother, lived in a one-room motel. But he didn't let financial hardships get

in his way, playing on his school's basketball team and excelling academically.

Valedictorian Aims to Become a Teacher



Madeline Schmitt

Madeline Schmitt graduated as the 2017 valedictorian at Florida's Orange County Public Schools' Winter Park High School, with a 4.0 grade-point average. There

are a number of professions she could have chosen to pursue, but she plans to become an elementary school teacher.

During her sophomore year of high school, she volunteered with YMCA READS!, an after-school program for elementary students struggling with reading

Valedictorian Aims continued on page 6

Minneapolis Twins Use Motivation To Graduate No. 1 and No. 2

Allie and Alexx Bryant-Hopkins were born identical twins, who have always encouraged and pushed each other to succeed as students at Minneapolis' North High School. That motivation has resulted in them graduating at the top of their senior class, with Allie being named valedictorian and Alexx being named salutatorian.

The twins credit their mother for always stressing the importance of education. They are also grateful they had the opportunity to attend North High School, which almost closed in 2010 due to low academic achievement and declining enrollment. The school, with an enrollment of approximately 370 students, provided the siblings a warm and nurturing environment.



Twins Alexx and Allie Bryant-Hopkins

And they hope that their story of success serves as an inspiration to others. "So many people think just because you're black, you're a woman, you have to be in the shadows," said Allie in an interview with television station *KARE 11*. "I just want to show people, be who you are. Be a nerd."

And Alexx, who was born a female, but now identifies as a male, wants to be a role model for the transgender community. "Don't try to hide the way you are for other people," he urges, "just be you."

In the fall, the twins will go their separate ways, with Allie attending the University of Minnesota, majoring in business, while Alexx attends Minnesota's St. Cloud State University to study psychology.

Fresno Teen continued from page 1

Robledo was born in Fresno but at the age of 3, her father was deported to Mexico, where he was later killed. She was soon removed from her mother's care because of neglect and for the next three years lived in six different foster homes.

At 6, she was taken to live with her grandmother, but she died only a few weeks later. Robledo then reunited with her mother but they struggled financially, sometimes sleeping in their car.

When she was 8, her mother moved her and her siblings to Mexico to live with her husband, who had recently been deported. Robledo was expected to contribute financially, and began working as a caregiver for the elderly at the age of 10.

The job made her even more determined to get an education, and at 15, using all of her savings, she flew to Fresno by herself and eventually enrolled in Fresno High

School as an unaccompanied youth. Many times she had no place to live, a situation that soon became evident to her teachers.

"As a teacher, you know some of your students experience hardships, but when I saw Nataly with her suitcase and pillow, there it was right in my face," said Fresno High School teacher Jeannine Der Manouel in an interview with the *Sacramento Bee*, which profiled Robledo.

In her senior year, Robledo went to live at a shelter, where she not only received straight A's but participated in soccer, volleyball and badminton.

At Berkeley, she will major in social work and wants to become a counselor for young adults, offering them the guidance that she never had growing up.

"I still haven't lived, but I've been surviving," she said in an interview with the *Bee*. "I'm alive, and I expect to live because I know I'm worth a lot."

Positive Attitude Pays Off For Hawaii Student

Life for Brandon Ragasa, who recently graduated from James Campbell High School in Hawaii, has not always been easy.

His father died in an accident when Ragasa was a baby and his mother, who had him when she was 15, became addicted to drugs. He shuttled among different family members before he went to live with his paternal grandparents, while in high school.

Yet Ragasa has a positive attitude and believes not having parents in his life wasn't a bad thing, but made him the person who he is today.

"I don't think your past should hold you back in any way," he said in an interview with the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. "To me, it holds no significance in what I do now and what I want to do."

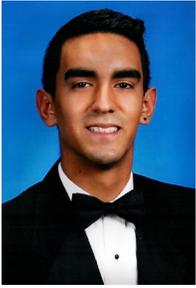
At Campbell, he was senior class president and one of 28 valedictorians, who earned higher than a 4.0 grade-point average. He was accepted to 10 colleges and received \$600,000 in scholarships offers, eventually deciding to attend the University of San Francisco on a full scholarship.

Ragasa will major in biology and is considering a career as a pharmacist. After graduation, he plans to return to his hometown and help his mother and people like her in the community who are dealing with issues of drug abuse and homelessness.



Brandon Ragasa

Student Doesn't Let Language Barrier Deter Him



Santiago Correa

Santiago Correa is a 2017 graduate of Westland Hialeah Senior High in Hialeah, Fla., who received not just a high school diploma, but an associate degree from Miami-Dade College.

He has now been accepted to Syracuse University on a full scholarship and will major in engineering with plans to one day start his own company.

Correa has accomplished all of this even though he came to the United States in 2014 as a 10th grader speaking no English. He was born in Colombia, and at the age of 5, his father was murdered. The death of his father caused his family to fall into poverty and seek a better life. They eventually moved to the United States, with just

enough money to pay his mother's residency and little else.

Yet, financial challenges and not being able to speak English did not deter Correa. While participating in his school's Early College Program, where he took dual enrollment courses at Miami-Dade College, he worked a part-time job and was president of the school's math club, spending hours tutoring his fellow students in math.

"It is quite a story, considering that he came in 10th grade," said Correa's college advisor Myrna Bromfield in an interview with *NBC 6*. "I sure hope other students look at his example and try to follow his footsteps."

And what is his advice for those students who want to follow in his footsteps?

"Set your goals clear so you know where you're heading," said Correa. "I've learned lessons in life that have taught me to be strong and determined, and I grabbed my dreams; I hold them tight."

Charlotte Student Learns Balancing Act

Emily Schild is an elite gymnast who trains 40 hours a week. And she is the first student in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools to graduate by completing all of her courses through the district's eLearning Academy, a full-time, virtual high school.

Schild often trains from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., in addition to traveling for training camps and competitions. She credits being able to communicate with her teachers via email, phone, text, Google Hangout or Skype with helping her keep up academically and graduate this year.

But she admits that balancing being a top notch gymnast and a high school student was not easy. "To be able to take online courses you have to be able to stay on task—you can't procrastinate," said Schild in a story that appeared on the district's website. "Gymnastics has taught me mental toughness. I bring that into my education."

Schild has been in gymnastics since the age of 2 and was one of only 14 competi-

tors to compete at the trials for a spot on Team USA in the 2016 Olympic Games, although she was not selected.

She looks forward to attending the University of Georgia on a full scholarship and participating in the university's gymnastic program.

Tracey Pickard, the principal of the district's eLearning Academy, said, "Emily's journey constantly reminds me how school innovation can help students fulfill their dreams and passions."



Elite gymnast Emily Schild competes on the balance beam. Photo credit: Christy Ann Linder

Las Vegas Student Overcomes Tragedy



Isaiah Morris

A 2017 graduate of Desert Pines High School in Las Vegas, Isaiah Morris doesn't let the adversity he has experienced prevent him from pursuing his dreams.

His father was killed before his first birthday, but he had his mom, who taught him to love school and sports and was his biggest fan, attending all his youth football and basketball games.

Sitting in class one day in middle school, Morris received devastating news that his mother had been killed by a truck while crossing a street. But he somehow found the strength to persevere, becoming a star running back in football, while maintaining a 3.765 grade-point average.

"In my 20 years of coaching, he's probably one of the most mentally tough kids," said Desert Hines' football coach Tico Rodriguez in an interview with the *Las Vegas Journal*. "The situation that he had to endure, I couldn't imagine. But he's just been a great leader. He's never used excuses in life. He's just an all-around great kid."

In the fall, Morris will take his mental toughness to the University of Nevada, Reno, where he will play football.

Valedictorian Aims *continued from page 4*

and writing. It was there that she discovered a great connection with each child she taught. She also credits the great teachers she's had for demonstrating the power a passionate teacher can possess.

At Vanderbilt University, where she will receive a full-tuition merit scholarship, she will major in elementary education.

"My ultimate goal is to make a positive difference in the lives of children, and I see education as one of the most powerful catalysts of social change," wrote Schmitt in an email to the *Urban Educator*.

Seattle Students Win World Robotics Championship

Students from the Viking Robotics Club at Seattle's Ballard High School can now call themselves world champions after winning the 26th annual FIRST Robotics Competition. Their customized robot was built in a six-week timeframe that propelled them to the finals in Houston, where they beat out nearly 400 other teams from more than 25 countries including Canada, China, and Mexico.

FIRST describes the competition as a "Sport for the Mind" developed to test students' engineering and teamwork skills by putting their designs through several challenges. These challenges include requiring competing robots to climb a rope, travel up to 13 miles per hour, and perform shoot and retrieve exercises.

Some of the challenges require the robots to be self-operated, while other challenges call for a student driver to remotely control the robots. Senior Morgan Thompson was the driver during the final match that won his team the championship. He piloted his robot to fuel a makeshift spacecraft with whiffle balls and rubber gears necessary for its takeoff.

"I was shaking with adrenaline when it was over," said Thompson in the *Seattle Times*.

The robotics club from Ballard High consisted of 27 students, ranging from freshmen to seniors. They joined a four-team alliance to help secure their top spot at the competition.

Students engineered their robot and practiced robotic drills after school with the guidance of parent volunteers and a teacher advisor. The robot was funded through outside grants and student fundraising.



Students from Seattle's Ballard High School celebrate winning the FIRST Robotics championship.

Female Students Empowered in D.C.

Hundreds of female students from District of Columbia Public Schools packed the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C., for a day focused on assisting females of color with self-confidence and leadership skills, all while building a sense of community the young girls can trust.

The conference was held as part of a new initiative to support young women of color in D.C. Public Schools called Reign: Empowering Young Women as Leaders. The initiative is an effort to ensure women of color are not left behind and is designed to provide the school district with more resources to tackle disparities in graduation

rates, test scores and student satisfaction.

The conference provided several workshops on issues such as entrepreneurship, how to apply for college, community advocacy, and increasing the number of girls participating in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math).

Group discussions focused on topics like cultural and gender identity, sexual health, interpersonal skills, with a key emphasis on improving self-worth.

Ashley Walker, an eighth-grade student at Truesdall Education Campus, said in an interview with *WAMU*, "I feel like girls

Students Empowered continued on page 8

New Leadership At Council to Begin



Darianne Driver

Superintendent Darianne Driver of the Milwaukee Public Schools takes the reins of the Council of the Great City Schools' Board of Directors for a year, beginning July 1.

She becomes the chair of the 136-member board, composed of the superintendent and a school board member from each of the 68-large city public school districts represented in the Council.

In stepping up from the position of chair-elect, Superintendent Driver will succeed Felton Williams, school board member of California's Long Beach Unified School District, who becomes immediate past chair.



Lawrence Feldman

The new chair-elect will be Lawrence Feldman, school board member of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, who has served as the policy-making board's secretary-treasurer.

Rounding out the Council's 2017-18 leadership team will be Chief Executive Officer Eric Gordon of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, who was elected to the secretary-treasurer post.



Eric Gordon

Council Executive Director Michael Casserly begins his 41st year with the nation's primary coalition of urban public schools, serving in his current post since 1992.

Council Opens Fall Conference Registration

CNN political commentator Van Jones and other keynote speakers will address urban-school leaders from around the nation at the Council of the Great City Schools' 61st Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 18-22, in Cleveland.

Under the banner "Advancing the State of Urban Education," the conference will give big-city school superintendents, board members, senior administrators and college deans of education

a forum to discuss issues and share information and best practices to improve teaching and learning.

Hosted by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, the five-day conference will be held at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown.

To register for the conference, access the Council's website at www.cgcs.org. Registration can only be conducted online.



Nominations Sought Soon for 2017 Top Urban Educator

Chief Executive Officer Eric Gordon of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District last October received the nation's top honor for urban-school leadership from his peers.

Who will win the prestigious recognition for 2017?

Nominations will be sought soon for the 28th Annual Green-Garner Award, named in memory of Richard Green, the first African-American chancellor of the New York City school system, and Edward Garner, former school board president for Denver Public Schools.

A school board member from a big-city school district is eligible to be nominated for 2017 Urban Educator of the Year.

Sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools, ARAMARK K-12 Education and Scholastic, Inc., the award is given in alternating years to an outstanding school board member and superintendent from 68 of the largest urban public-school systems in the nation represented by the Council.

The Green-Garner Award is scheduled to be presented at the Council's 61st Annual Fall Conference at a banquet on Oct. 19 in Cleveland.

Queen Smith Award

The Council is also seeking nominations for the 2017 Queen Smith Award for Commitment to Urban Education. Sponsored by McGraw-Hill Education, the award honors an urban-school teacher who has made significant contributions to education and the community. The deadline to apply is Aug. 11.

For further information on both awards, access the Council's website at www.cgcs.org.

Students Empowered *continued from page 7*

need help with their insecurity because most girls my age, they're mostly insecure."

Professional development workshops were also available at the conference. Teachers gained training on topics such as gender and racial equity, so that they have the proper knowledge to aid girls in the classroom.

"Next school year is just the beginning for Reign," said D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser. "And, in fitting with the goals of the initiative, we will continue to expand the program based on the feedback we receive from the young women in our schools."

Starting in the 2017-2018 school year, workshops on self-esteem and communication will be held on Saturdays.

Applications Available For Best Urban Schools

Applications are now available for big-city schools to be selected as one of America's Best Urban Schools for 2018.

The award is presented by the National Center for Urban School Transformation at San Diego State University to urban schools across the nation that demonstrate high levels of academic achievement and attendance rates, while narrowing the racial achievement gap.

In order to be eligible to receive the award, schools must serve predominantly economically disadvantaged communities. To apply, go to www.ncust.com.

Groundbreaking Chicago Graduation Initiative Approved by School Board

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel recently introduced what's considered a groundbreaking graduation initiative aimed at guiding postsecondary success for students by requiring them to develop plans for life after graduation.

The mayor along with Chicago Public Schools Chief Education Officer Janice K. Jackson rolled out the proposed initiative in early April to much media buzz. It would require all students, beginning with current freshmen, or the Class of 2020, to have a postsecondary plan to graduate.

With the Chicago Board of Education approving the initiative in late May, the nation's third largest school district is believed to be the country's first large urban public-school system to implement a requirement for students to develop a postsecondary plan to earn a diploma.

"Every time we raise the bar for Chicago's students, they succeed and exceed our greatest expectations," said Mayor Emanuel in a news release. "We have a responsibility to set our students up for continued success so that high school is a milestone and not a destination."

Called "Learn. Plan. Succeed.," the new graduation initiative is designed to help guide postsecondary success for students by requiring that they work with their schools to develop plans for life after graduation.

"Learn. Plan. Succeed." is the next step in our overarching mission of preparing students for a rewarding and impactful life," Chief Education Officer Jackson stressed in the April rollout of the proposal. "We all need to change how we think about what it means to be a high school graduate – a diploma alone isn't enough anymore."

Under the new initiative, students would be required to provide evidence of a postsecondary plan to graduate, including:

- College acceptance letter received
- Military acceptance/enlistment letter
- Acceptance into a job program
- Acceptance into a trade pre-apprenticeship/apprenticeship
- Current job or job offer letter

"Waivers will be developed to accommodate students with extenuating circumstances," according to the board approval in a news statement.

Superintendent and School District In Orlando Win Honors



Barbara Jenkins

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., has recently been the recipient of two prestigious awards.

Superintendent Barbara Jenkins was honored with The 2017 Elbert K. Fretwell Outstanding Educator Award presented by the Boy Scouts of America. The award is intended to recognize a teacher, support

staff, administrator, or education professional who instills scouting values in their students.

In addition, the district's Operations Division received the 2017 Governor's Sustained Excellence Award, presented by Florida Governor Rick Scott to organizations that are past Sterling Award winners that have continued to show success and pursue improvement.

The Operations Division has helped the district serve 14 percent more meals in 2016 than in 2012, reduced student arrests

Orlando Honors continued on page 11



Cahree Myrick, 12, holds championship chess trophy almost as tall as him.

7th-Grader Becomes Baltimore's First National Chess Champ

A Baltimore seventh-grader has captured the attention of the city's mayor and others in Maryland's major metropolis.

Cahree Myrick, a 12-year-old, recently received recognition for becoming the first-ever individual national youth chess champion in Baltimore.

The 7th-grader from Baltimore's Roland Park Middle School competed against 249 chess players from 28 states in his division to win the individual championship at the recent United States Chess Federation SuperNationals in Nashville.

A member of the Baltimore Kids Chess League, he scored a perfect 7-0 to win a national chess championship. The city's chess league has produced three national team championships, but Myrick is the first to be crowned as an individual national winner.

"The City of Baltimore wants you to know we are really proud of your accomplishments," Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh reportedly told Myrick before presenting a medal to him.

"This is a big deal," said Commissioner Steve Alpern of the Baltimore Kids Chess League in the *Baltimore Sun*. "To win it with a perfect score is pretty incredible.

Chess Champ continued on page 12

Federal Budget Proposal Raises Red Flags for Education

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

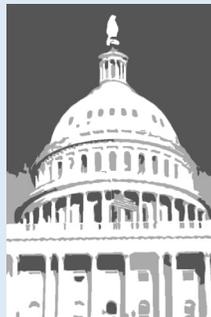
Less than a month after the enactment of the FY 2017 omnibus appropriations bill, President Trump issued his first federal budget request for U.S. government operations, a proposal that seeks to cut federal education appropriations by \$9 billion or 13 percent.

For the upcoming school year, Congress has already provided a mere 0.04 percent increase to implement the highly-touted, bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). And, the cornerstone Title I program for disadvantaged students and the IDEA program for students with disabilities each received less than a one percent increase, while the Title II program supporting teacher training and smaller class sizes was cut by 12.5 percent. The inadequate appropriations for next school year in combination with census population shifts and state-level set-asides under ESSA will result in a sizeable number of the nation's school districts receiving less funding for the upcoming school year than for the school year just completed.

If enacted, President Trump's FY 2018 budget would further cut federal funding for virtually every school district in the nation in the subsequent school year (SY2018-19). The budget proposes eliminating the remaining \$2 billion portion of the Title II program; eliminating the new \$400 million Title IV school enrichment and support program; and eliminating the \$1.2 billion 21st Century After School Program.

On top of that, there is a discrepancy between the Administration's Title I budget request—a \$578 million cut in Title I Part A formula grants to school districts -- and the Administration's stated intent to freeze (not cut) these formula grants. It appears that Title I formula grants are cut in order to fund a new Title I "portability" initiative at \$1 billion. Secretary DeVos, however, explained the discrepancy in her Appropriations Committee testimony by indicating that the FY 2018 budget was developed from FY 2017 continuing resolution funding levels rather than from final FY 2017 appropriations levels. Nevertheless, the regular Title I program is missing over half a billion dollars under the proposed budget.

In addition, the Title III program for English learners is basically frozen, while IDEA funding would be cut by nearly 1 percent and the Perkins CTE programs and Adult Education programs would be cut by 13 and 16 percent, respectively.



Unfortunately, limited details are available on the Administration's \$1 billion "portability" proposal--called FOCUS. Still, it appears to be more expansive than the Title I portability program proposed--but never adopted--during Senate ESSA deliberations in 2015. The FOCUS program would require an applicant school district to package their per capita state and local funding with their federal Title I FOCUS grant and allow the combined funds to follow a student to the public school of his or her parent's choice.

The program would require a local open enrollment system for school choice and would also require weighted per student allocations under the ESSA Title I, Part E flexibility provision. Congressional action would be required to launch this program, which, if enacted, would be the largest school choice initiative ever undertaken by the federal government.

Fortunately, there has been broad bipartisan dissatisfaction with President Trump's FY 2018 budget proposal. Beyond expected cuts to agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency, the budget proposes wide ranging cuts to medical research, agriculture subsidies, foreign aid, and rural airports. Moreover, the Administration's budget proposes major reductions to such federal entitlement programs as TANF (welfare), SNAP (food stamps), the SSDI (disability) program, and Medicaid.

The proposed \$610 billion in cuts to federal Medicaid funding over 10 years would be in addition to the \$840 billion in Medicaid cuts contained in the House-passed health care repeal and replacement bill (H.R. 1628) that is now pending in the Senate. For school districts, the federal Medicaid program provides over \$2 billion in annual federal funding, an amount exceeded only by the federal school meals program, Title I, and IDEA.

Even with widespread bipartisan repudiation of the President's Budget, the massive budget cuts will be difficult to avoid in their entirety. The remaining months of 2017 will entail unprecedented challenges to education and many other domestic programs. Educators and parents will have to argue effectively and persistently to ensure that these programs are retained on behalf of our children.

Boston Launches College Tuition-Free Program For Disadvantaged Students

A desire for many graduating urban high school students is to develop a plan to financially support the continuation of their education. For 2017 graduates of Boston Public Schools, that plan may include a new tuition-free program.

Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker and Boston Mayor Martin Walsh recently launched a new pilot program, The Boston Bridge. The program enables students from economically disadvantaged families the opportunity to earn a four-year bachelor's degree without paying for tuition or mandatory fees. The program comes at a time during rising tuition across the nation.

The Boston Bridge pilot is an expansion and joint effort of two current initiatives, the city's Tuition-Free Community College Plan and the state's Commonwealth Commitment.

Through the program, the tuition-free journey starts with students enrolling full-time into one of the allotted local community colleges, earning an associates degree from one of those community colleges, then transferring to a public Massachusetts state college or university, and finally graduating with a bachelor's degree within

four and a half years.

Costs of tuition and mandatory fees are first covered through Pell grants and discounts from the state, followed by the city and state splitting the cost of tuition from a four-year college or university. Applicants can only choose to study in one of the designated majors. These include 16 of the most common majors such as: business, chemistry, communications & media studies, mathematics, political science, and psychology.

Boston Schools Superintendent Tommy Chang is a strong advocate of the program. "By providing our most underserved students access to a debt-free college education, we are opening up doors that might have been closed to them due to the heavy financial burdens of getting a four-year degree," said Chang in a press release.

Broward District Earns National Business Honor

A level of consistency that has stretched over two decades for Florida's Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale has once again been achieved. For the 22nd consecutive year, the school district, which is the sixth largest in the nation and second largest in Florida, received the Meritorious Budget Award.

The award is given to school districts by the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) for excellence in budget presentation through the fiscal year. Districts must first pass strict criteria that represents a dedication to fiscal integrity and top financial reporting, coupled with an in-depth review by professional auditors.

Orlando Honors *continued from page 9*

by 38 percent and kept 55 million pounds of materials out of landfills through a proactive recycling program.

In addition, while operating the largest public transportation system in Central Florida, with 900 buses delivering more than 69,000 students daily, the school system has still managed to lower the cost of services each fiscal year since 2011.

Orange County Public Schools is the 10th largest school district in the nation, and the fourth largest in the state of Florida.



Milwaukee Opens Career Centers

Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Darienne Driver, center, was recently joined by Bill Berezowitz, the vice president of GE Healthcare, at the ribbon cutting for the district's new GE College & Career Center on the James Madison Academic Campus. The center is the first of six scheduled to open in the 2017-18 school year that will provide students in grades 6-12 with free college and career support. The six centers are being funded through a \$20-million grant from the GE Foundation.



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**San Antonio Independent
School District**

Chess Champ *continued from page 9*

With modesty, the young chess champ says about the victory, “I don’t brag about it as much as my relatives will,” says Myrick in the *Sun*. “I only talk about it if someone asks about it.”

Austin Grads *continued from page 1*

Austin Schools Superintendent Paul Cruz in a press statement. “Part of preparing students for college, career and life includes being active participants in our local community.”

The First Vote! Program teaches junior and senior high school students about the importance of voter registration and voting.

Travis County Voter Registrar Bruce Elfant emphasized that it’s critical to engage young people in the democratic process when they’re eligible to vote.

“High school diplomas and voter registration are rites of passage to adulthood,” he stressed. “Not only did students flock to our voter registration tables as they awaited their graduation ceremonies, but our volunteer deputy registrars were energized at meeting the future leaders of our city, county, state and country.”

L.A. Chief *continued from page 1*

skills, provided productive innovations, and acted as effective communicators in their respective school districts.

“She has a mindset in place to confront equity issues and the achievement gap and has a strategy in place to do what is best for all students,” said Sonny Da Marto, NASS’ chairman of the awards committee.

King was named superintendent of the nation’s second largest school district in January 2016 and has been dedicated to increasing graduation rates and community engagement. Under her tenure, graduation rates have risen, as she credits the hard work of staff, students, and parents.

In an effort to improve communication throughout the district, she has created interactive Listen and Learn Tours to connect with students, parents, and community leaders to find out what they loved about the district and what concerns they had.

“Education leaders must be student advocates and that work doesn’t end at 5:00,” said King, a graduate of the school system and former teacher. “We are advocates 24 hours a day and I enjoy that challenge.”