



Urban Educator

The Nation's Voice for Urban Education

St. Louis and Fort Worth Name New School Superintendents

The St. Louis and Fort Worth school systems have chosen two big-city veteran educators to lead their school districts.



Creg Williams

Creg Williams, the deputy chief academic officer of the School District of Philadelphia, was recently named the superintendent of the St. Louis Public

Schools.

Williams has served as the deputy chief academic officer for the nation's eighth largest school system since 2002. He has been responsible for operating the district's 58 high schools.

"Dr. Williams demonstrates all of the qualities that we are looking for to lead our district toward accreditation and becoming the great school district we know that it can be," said St. Louis school



Melody Johnson

board member Ron Jackson in a news statement.

Williams replaces interim superintendent Pamela Randall Hughes.

Texas' Fort Worth Independent School District has selected Melody Johnson to be the district's next superintendent. Johnson has served for three years as the superintendent of Rhode Island's Providence school system.

She succeeds interim superintendent Joe Ross.

This will not be the first time Johnson has worked in a Texas school district. She has served as an area superintendent and associate superintendent for curriculum, instruction and student support in the San Antonio Independent School District.

Urban Educators Weigh In On Education Summit

Five urban education leaders participated in the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools recently held in Washington that saw governors of 13 states agree to form a coalition to reshape high schools in their states.

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Ed. Secretary Addresses City Educators

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings addresses the nation's urban school leaders March 13 at the Council of the Great City Schools Annual Legislative/Policy Conference in Washington.



Secretary Spellings

It has been customary over the years for the Council to be one of

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the first organizations visited by new education secretaries.

Spellings became the eighth secretary of education in January, after serving as senior domestic adviser to President Bush, and helped to draft the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Seeking to find out her views on urban education in America, the *Urban Educator* has posed a series of questions to the nation's top education official. She responds in an exclusive Q&A on pages 4 and 5.

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Urban Educator

A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 65 of the nation's largest urban public school districts

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Education Summit....

The participating states have committed to beefing up high school standards, requiring rigorous courses and measuring progress through testing to better prepare students for today's work world and college.

"To those of us at the local level, it's really important that governors are making this a priority," said San Francisco Schools Superintendent Arlene Ackerman in the *New York Times*. "High schools will, as a result, get more attention and resources."

Another urban educator, who had been a governor before taking the helm of the nation's second largest school system, appreciated the high school reform talks from a dual perspective.

Los Angeles Schools Superintendent Roy Romer, a former governor of Colorado, noted in a *Times* interview, "The success of a state economically and socially depends on the quality of the schools. So governors must take political responsibility for schools in their state," even if they don't have the legal responsibility.

Romer stressed the need to make large high schools into smaller schools, pointing out that Los Angeles had high schools with some 5,000 students, making it easy for students to get lost in schools that huge. With smaller schools, the environment is more conducive for students and faculty to get to know each other, he explained.

In Chicago, the nation's third largest school system, the district's chief executive, Arne Duncan, indicated that the Windy City has tried to improve high schools by just closing failing schools and moving students to higher-performing high schools.

To emphasize the urgency to re-shape American high schools, Ohio Gov. Bob Taft maintained at a pre-summit press conference that only 68 of every 100 ninth graders in the nation will graduate on time.

"Too many kids are falling through the cracks," stressed Virginia Gov. Mark Warner. "High school reform has been the tail on the education dog."

To improve high schools, the 13 participating states – Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Texas – have committed to the American Diploma Project, an initiative to prepare every high school student for college-level work regardless of the student's career plans.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, called the Diploma Project in the *Washington Times* "a promising development to get the high school agenda more front and center in the states."

However, he emphasized that "there has not been a sufficient conversation with local schools on how to translate this into action."

Alan Bersin, superintendent of the San Diego City Schools, also represented urban public schools at the Education Summit, sponsored by the National Governors Association and Achieve, Inc.

Moreover, the summit featured leaders from the business community, including Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft, who has helped redesign high schools through the foundation he co-founded. His foundation and five others will reportedly commit \$23 million to generate matching state funds that would help advance high school reform.

Clark County Supt. Tops in Nevada

In July 2000, Carlos Garcia became the superintendent of the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, the first Hispanic to lead the 280,834-student school system.

Five years later, he has achieved another milestone. The Nevada Association of School Administrators recently named Garcia the 2005 Nevada Superintendent of the Year.

Garcia said he was very honored to receive the award. "My number one priority has been, and will continue to be, student achievement," said Garcia



Carlos Garcia

in a news statement. "This award is a very positive sign that our district is moving in the right direction."

The Clark County school system also has another reason to celebrate. Two principals and one assistant principal are the only Nevada winners in this year's National Association of Secondary School Principals awards competition.

The competition, launched in 1993, recognizes outstanding middle level and high school principals in each state.

The award recipients are Monte Bay, principal of Coronado High School; Russ Ramirez, principal of Monaco Middle School; and Joe King, an assistant principal at Leavitt Middle School.

The Clark County school system is also one of the fastest growing districts in the nation.

Detroit's Population Decline Forces 34 Schools to Close

Facing a growing population decline, the City of Detroit and its school system are both grappling with large budget shortfalls.

As a result, Detroit Public Schools last month announced it would close 37 buildings – 34 schools and three administrative facilities – by the beginning of the next school year.

"We now have half as many students as we did in 1970 and nearly the same number of buildings," said Detroit Schools Chief Executive Officer Kenneth Burnley in the *Detroit Free Press*.

In an online statement to the public, Burnley noted, "The facts of the matter are unavoidable. Declining enrollment, rising health care costs, stagnant state revenues and state and national mandates have prompted DPS to analyze the facts and develop a new vision for this new reality."

"We now have half as many students as we did in 1970..." --Schools CEO Burnley

And with a fiscal crisis looming in the city itself, the mayor of the Motor City has announced that city jobs would be eliminated and services curtailed, according to news reports.

Although the Detroit school system is closing what is considered the largest number of schools ever at one time, its academic program is actually improving. Student test scores have increased on standardized exams.

A *Detroit News* column recently heralded Detroit's Renaissance High School with a headline emblazoned "Detroit School's Elite-Level English Program Cited as a World Leader."

Columnist Betty DeRamus described a letter the Renaissance principal, Deborah Harley, had received from the Advanced Placement Program. "Your school has been identified as having more African-American students succeed in English Literature and Composition than any school in the world.

"The work you are doing to prepare traditionally undeserved students for such success in AP English Literature and Composition deserves tremendous commendation."

DeRamus concluded in her commentary, "...I'd like to believe that we'll emerge from the current swirl of cuts and closings, shifts and downsizings with the spirit to rebuild.

"Having a school in our midst that leads the world in preparing African-American youngsters is a great place to start," the columnist stressed.

Q & A on Urban Education...

Urban Educator: *What would you most like to achieve in your tenure as Secretary of Education?*

Secretary Spellings: I want to stay the course with *No Child Left Behind*. In the last three years, we have seen test scores go up, and the achievement gap begin to close. Some of our most impressive gains have come in urban schools, and I want to thank the Council for helping us analyze those results in your “Beating the Odds” report. We need to continue to study assessment data, so we can see which students need extra help and where.

I am confident that these recent gains are only the beginning. We still have much more to do to achieve the full promise of this law. And I look forward to working with local leaders, teachers, and parents to make that promise a reality.

We also want to bring the benefits of *No Child Left Behind* to our high schools. Currently, only 68 percent of ninth graders will graduate high school on time. Our 15 year-olds lag behind their peers across the world in math. We need to make sure a high school diploma represents a ticket to success in the 21st century. We know almost 80 percent of the fastest growing jobs in the future will require some post-secondary education, so it is more important than ever that our children leave high school ready to confront the challenges of higher education.



Secretary Spellings

Urban Educator: *The Department of Education has devoted a great deal of time and energy to improving the capacity of states to implement No Child Left Behind. How do you see the Department extending the discussion to the local level?*

Secretary Spellings: It’s crucial that we continue to work closely with local leaders, teachers, and parents. I am mindful that children are not educated at the Department of Education. That work happens in classrooms in local communities across the country. We want local officials to have the flexibility to meet the specific needs of students in their districts.

For example, the President’s new High School Initiative would allow local districts to spend funds on a variety of programs ranging from vocational education to dropout prevention to college preparation in exchange for enhanced accountability for student achievement.

Urban Educator: *What direct assistance will the Department of Education provide to urban school districts on how to raise student achievement?*

Secretary Spellings: One key ingredient to raising student achievement is accountability for results. We need to regularly test students to see what they know and where they need extra help. We will continue to provide ur-

ban schools with the resources to assess students and develop accountability systems. The President’s 2006 budget increases Title I funding for disadvantaged students to a record \$13.3 billion.

The Department will also continue to help schools identify which teaching strategies actually improve student performance. For example, our Reading First program provides states, districts, and schools with the funding to develop reading programs based on scientifically based research. So far we have invested almost \$3 billion in the program. And as a result, over 91,000 Reading First teachers are helping more than 1.5 million schoolchildren become better readers.

Urban Educator: *Congress and the Department of Education have devoted considerable attention over the last several years to the needs of rural schools. What parallel outreach do you plan for the nation’s major urban schools?*

Secretary Spellings: We want to make sure urban schools have the best teachers in the country. Nothing helps a student learn as much as a highly qualified, experienced teacher. Too often, however, urban schools have trouble holding on to these teachers. So we have proposed a \$500 million Teacher Incentive Fund, which would encourage highly qualified teachers to work in urban schools. We must reward effective teachers who are willing to embrace the challenge of teaching in low-income communities. We need to make sure our best teachers are working in the most challenging jobs.

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...With Education Secretary Spellings

Urban Educator: *The nation's urban schools enroll about one third of the country's English Language Learners. What help can the Department provide us in raising their achievement?*

Secretary Spellings: We believe that all children, including those learning the English language, deserve a quality education. We know these children can learn if we provide them with high quality teachers and a well-designed curriculum.

At the same time, we realize that urban schools often face a unique challenge when so many of their students confront a language barrier in the classroom. The Department provides almost \$700 million in funding to help schools break down this barrier. Since such a large number of English language learners live in urban school districts, much of this funding goes to urban schools. In exchange for this investment, we ask for accountability for results, and we expect high achievement.

Urban Educator: *The prospect of limited increases in funding for No Child Left Behind is bound to cause new grumbling among school personnel charged with implementing the Act. How do you plan to handle their frustrations?*

Secretary Spellings: I would urge them to look at our budget carefully because the President has once again increased funding for *No Child Left Behind*. As I said earlier, under the President's budget proposal, funding for Title I grants (which serve as the major source of funding for *No Child Left Behind*) would increase to \$13.3 billion—or \$603 million more than last year. We have made sure that districts

and schools have the resources to implement this law, and we are also giving them unprecedented flexibility on how they spend these funds. We trust local officials to make decisions that make sense for students in their districts.

Urban Educator: *How will the President's "Preparing America's Future High School Initiative" help reform and improve the nation's urban high schools?*

Secretary Spellings: The President's \$1.5 billion High School Initia-

EXCLUSIVE Q & A

tive will introduce higher expectations and accountability to all high schools, including urban ones. Every student needs to leave high school with the skills to succeed in higher education or the workforce of the 21st century. By annually assessing student progress, we can see which students are at risk of falling behind and intervene before it is too late. This testing data will allow principals, teachers, and parents to work together to save students. As I like to say, "What gets measured gets done."

Our plan also gives local officials the flexibility to choose the course of action that serves the specific needs of students in local high schools. In the past, we would fund a lot of different programs. For example, some focused on college preparation, others on dropout prevention, and still others on vocational education. We realized it would

make far more sense if we just let local officials decide how to spend the money, so long as there is accountability.

We know this formula of accountability and higher expectations works in urban schools. We have seen the results in primary schools in cities across America. According to one of your own organization's recent reports, the percentage of fourth graders who are proficient in math increased by almost 7 percentage points in just the first year of *No Child Left Behind*. The report noted similar increases in reading and found evidence that the achievement gap is shrinking. This is real progress, and I expect the same results in our high schools.

Urban Educator: *What do you need to know about the nation's urban schools and school districts to be effective as Secretary of Education, and how can the Council of the Great City Schools help you succeed?*

Secretary Spellings: It's important that we continue to communicate and share information. If we want to close the achievement gap, we need to know which students are struggling and where. We need to constantly assess student progress, so we can confront problems before children fall behind.

I would hope the Council of the Great City Schools would continue to study and analyze student achievement. Your findings are important to us. They allow us to see what is working and what we can do better. Together, I am confident we can close the achievement gap and realize the full promise of this law.

Philly District Awarded \$4.3 Million To Train School Principals

An effort by the School District of Philadelphia to attract and train new principals recently received a big boost: a \$4.3 million grant.

The Broad Foundation has announced it will give the district a \$4.3 million grant toward the Academy for Leadership in Philadelphia Schools (ALPS), a program to train aspiring principals aimed at improving student achievement.

According to district officials, the grant is the largest private donation since the School Reform Commission was appointed in 2002 to oversee the 200,000-student school system.

The ALPS initiative was launched as a pilot program in 2003 to train a new corps of principals from within the school district, first-year principals in the district and top principals from outside Philadelphia.

Participants attend evening seminars and weekend training sessions on topics such as school climate, diversity and parent involvement. The program also provides participants an opportunity to get real-world experience by serving as full-time interns at a school site.

Of the 20 participants who completed the ALPS program in its inaugural year, 19 were selected as principals.

“Support from venture philanthropies like The Broad Foundation not only gives us the essential funds to continue improving our educational systems, but also recognizes the progress we have made in reforming our schools and improving the performance of our students,” said James Nevels, chairman of the School Reform Commission.

The Broad Foundation is a philanthropic organization which works to improve K-12 urban public education.

AP Achievement Honored

Seven big-city teachers and three students were among the winners of the 2004-05 Siemens Awards for Advanced Placement, which honors advanced placement program achievements in math and science courses.

Since 1998, the Siemens Awards for Advanced Placement program has granted scholarships each year to 24 students and cash awards to 18 teachers. In addition, 12 schools are also given cash awards for their commitment to students and the AP Program.

The selections for the awards are made by the College Board.

Xiaoyun Nong, a student at Miami's Palmetto Senior High School; Hannah Roeder, a student at Des Moines' Roosevelt High School/Central Academy; and Robert Cordwell from Albuquerque's Manzano High School were among the 24 students who received a \$3,000 college scholarship.

These students earned the highest

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Urban District Raises \$105,000 For Tsunami Relief

Schools across the country have raised funds to help the victims of December's tsunami disaster in South Asia and East Africa and big-city schools have eagerly joined the nationwide effort.

Nowhere has that been more evident than in the Guilford County School District in Greensboro, N.C. A district-wide effort, Operation H.O.P.E. (Helping Other People Everywhere), was created to raise money for tsunami relief. Each school was encouraged to conduct its own fundraiser for the American Red Cross or another relief organization.

The campaign recently ended and schools raised a total of \$105,114.08 to benefit tsunami relief efforts.

The School District of Philadelphia also raised a substantial amount of money for victims of the tsunami disaster. The district recently donated more than \$50,000 to the American Red Cross of Southeastern Pennsylvania (ARCSP). The effort was part of a joint program with the Philadelphia NAACP.

Approximately 90 schools raised funds, with donations ranging from \$12 to \$3,000. According to the ARCSP, the district's \$50,000 donation is the largest donation from children from any school district in the five-county Philadelphia region.

“What a terrific response from schoolchildren all over Philadelphia,” said Tom Foley, CEO of the ARCSP. “...It is a tribute to Philadelphia's great heart, and to the school leaders who encouraged these wonderful gifts.”

Council Grows To 65 Districts

The Kansas City school system in Missouri recently joined the Council of the Great City Schools, the fifth school district in a year.

As a result, the Council now represents 65 of the nation's largest urban school systems.

In addition to Kansas City, the new member districts are the Cincinnati Public Schools, the Christina School District in Delaware, Charleston County Public Schools in South Carolina and the Caddo Parish School District in Shreveport, La.

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NEW MEMBER

Council of the Great City Schools

Kansas City
Missouri
School District

Two Big-City School Districts Work Jointly in Literacy Project

A few of the nation's big-city school districts share the same market, such as Minneapolis-St. Paul, Los Angeles-Long Beach, San Francisco-Oakland – with each city school system operating independently of each other.

But two major city school systems in Florida this school year have operated jointly in a project that brings both communities together under the banner *One Picture Book, One Community*.

The Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale has joined hands with its sister district next door to the South, the Miami-Dade Public Schools, in a project that invites first graders and their families to collectively read a selected book.

Says Broward Schools Superintendent Frank Till, "The goal is to unite the entire South Florida community in acknowledging the importance of early childhood education and literacy. We also want to spread the word that Reading is Fun, Share it with Everyone!"

This is the second year of the *One Picture Book, One Community* project, which began as a Miami-Dade school district initiative, according to a Broward school system spokesman.

At the beginning of the school year, all first-grade teachers in both counties were given a free copy of this year's selected book, *No Dogs Allowed!* by Sonia Manzano, known as "Maria" from the *Sesame Street* children's television show. The teachers also received an activity guide to accompany the book, which was sent home with students to be shared as a family project.

Broward Superintendent Till and Miami-Schools Superintendent Rudy Crew launched the project in late September with a closed-circuit television broadcast in their respective district first-grade classrooms.

Then, in November, children's author Manzano participated in a teleconference to speak to first graders as part of the *One Picture Book/One Community* project.

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AP Honors....

scores on exams in seven AP courses: biology, calculus, chemistry, computer science, environmental science, physics and statistics.

Big-city teachers from Fresno, Long Beach, Las Vegas, Dallas and Columbus, Ohio, received a \$1,000 cash award for their exemplary teaching and dedication to the AP Program. Columbus had three winning teachers, the most of any other school district.

In addition, four urban schools in Los Angeles, Miami, New York and Milwaukee received a cash award of \$1,000 for their commitment to students and the AP program.

U.S. Education Department Honors Title I Schools

The Title I Distinguished School Awards were recently presented to 36 schools across the nation that have successfully used the Title I program to raise academic achievement and provide students from low-income families with a high-quality education.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Association of State Title I Directors, the awards recognize two schools in each state that receive Title I federal funding in the nation's largest federal aid program in K-12.

Schools receive an award based on one of two categories: exceptional student performance for two or more consecutive years or closing the achievement gap between student groups.

Big-city schools in Sacramento, Jacksonville, Baltimore, Boston, Las Vegas, New York City, Cleveland and Richmond were presented with awards.

Sacramento's Camellia Basic School received an award for outstanding student performance for two or more consecutive years. According to principal Don Ogden, the school's parent volunteer work requirement is a major building block for student success. He also credits his staff of teachers who meet every week to assess the academic performance of each student.

"We start looking at data and each student's test scores before the school year begins," said Ogden in the school district's newspaper, *The Connection*. "This is a real team approach where people are really working together."

Since 1996, the Title I Distinguished School Award program has rec-

ognized Title I schools that have increased opportunity for all students to meet proficient and advanced levels of performance, instituted strong professional development initiatives, and developed partnerships among schools, parents and communities.

\$2.12 Million Granted to Denver For Teacher Program

A program in Denver Public Schools that rewards teachers with salary increases for improved student academic achievement has received \$2.12 million in grants.

The Professional Compensation System for Teachers, known as ProComp, will receive a grant of \$1 million from the Rose Community Foundation, a grant of \$620,000 from The Broad Foundation and a \$500,000 grant from the Daniels Fund.

The money will help support the transition from the current compensation system, which rewards teachers based on years of service, to the ProComp system.

Under the program, teachers will be able to receive bonuses and salary increases for improving student performance, earning satisfactory professional evaluations and teaching in low-performing schools.

"This reform in how we pay teachers is a massive undertaking involving many people working together to invent a completely new way to compensate teachers," said Denver Schools Superintendent Jerry Wartgow.

Omaha District Nears Completion Of Facilities

Citizens in Omaha went to the polls in 1999 to approve a \$254-million bond issue to renovate and build new schools.

This summer, the Omaha school district will complete all of its construction projects. And not only will three new schools be built and 23 receive renovations, but the construction projects were completed three years ahead of schedule.

The district built two new elementary schools and one middle school to accommodate Omaha's burgeoning student population. In addition, 16 elementary schools, three middle schools and four high schools were renovated to replace existing structures.

District officials had estimated that all of the construction projects funded under the bond measure would be completed in 2008. But because of sound construction and fiscal management, the projects will be completed by the beginning of the 2005-06 school year.

Omaha Schools Superintendent John Mackiel credited the hard work and commitment of many individuals. "The Omaha Board of Education, staff and students are extremely proud of the energy expended to complete these projects under budget and ahead of schedule."

As a result of the early completion of its construction projects, the district has enough funding to renovate four additional school buildings that were not included in the original bond issue planning.

'Dream Schools' Grow in San Francisco

Arlene Ackerman, the superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District, believes that all children, regardless of what station in life they are born into, deserve a high-quality education.

This belief is the impetus behind the district's "Dream Schools" initiative. Dream Schools are low-performing schools that have been overhauled to provide students with a rigorous, pre-school to college program to boost students' academic potential.

In August, three Dream Schools opened their doors for the first time: the Charles Drew College Preparatory Academy serves children in preschool through 3rd grade; the Twenty-First Century College Preparatory Academy serves fourth through sixth graders; and the Gloria R. Davis College Preparatory Academy serves students in 7th and 8th grades.

The Dream Schools are based in part on a successful school model started at the Frederick Douglass Academy in Harlem, N.Y., which offers a structured learning environment and places an emphasis on each student meeting and exceeding standards on state examinations.

There are seven components that define a dream school:

- Academic achievement
- Instructional models and student support systems
- Varied learning experiences
- College Connections
- Career Opportunities

- Parent Empowerment
- Safe, Friendly Learning Environment

The San Francisco Dream Schools offer individualized academic plans, longer days, Saturday school, intensive professional development, smaller class sizes and art enrichment programs.

In addition, students at these schools must wear uniforms and parents are required to sign contracts pledging they will play an active role in their children's education.

One of the most controversial elements of the Dream Schools initiative is the requirement that teachers in these schools reapply for their positions. Staff who chose not to apply or were not selected were able to teach at other schools.

In a column Ackerman wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, she empathized with teachers' concerns but said students in low-performing schools must have exceptional teachers.

"I am convinced that if we don't intervene dramatically for these students, including taking steps to ensure that all of them are taught by outstanding teachers, we are undermining their future and perpetuating inequality in our schools," wrote Ackerman, in the *Chronicle*. "By providing students unequal education, we help create a permanent underclass. Avoiding this fate is the major civil rights challenge we face today."

Next school year, the district will open seven more Dream Schools and eventually hopes to create 15 Dream Schools throughout the district.



Comedian Bill Cosby visited the Charles Drew College Preparatory Academy along with, left to right, former San Francisco mayor Willie Brown and San Francisco Schools Superintendent Arlene Ackerman.

Christina District Launches After-School Program

Students in Delaware's Christina School District will be able to improve their reading skills in a new after-school learning initiative.

In April, the district is scheduled to open six After School Learning Academies for students in grades 1-6.

The academies are part of a national demonstration project to show that after-school programs can have a significant impact on student achievement in reading.

Each academy will serve approximately 75 students who will receive one-on-one tutoring in reading for a minimum of three times a week.

In addition to academic support in reading, students will receive recreational and enrichment activities and small group instruction in reading skills. Homework help will also be provided.

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Charlotte Schools Forge Ties With South African Counterparts

Charlotte, N.C., is about an 18-hour plane ride to South Africa. Yet, students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools are only a touch away from communicating with their counterparts in South Africa, as a result of a new digital technology program.

The YouthLinks Program is an Internet-based initiative in which students at Charlotte's Olympic High School converse with students at two high schools in South Africa via e-mail. The overall theme of the program is "Globalization and Economic Development."

The students recently discussed how the recent tsunami disaster had an impact on the world at large, as well as the United States and South Africa.

Since last October, Charlotte students have been e-mailing students at Hendrik Verwoerd High School in Pretoria, the capital of South Africa, and Molabosane High School, located in a small rural village.

The YouthLinks initiative is part of a partnership between the Charlotte school system and the U.S. State Department in which Charlotte students and educators are exchanging ideas and expertise with their counterparts in South Africa while fostering international goodwill and understanding.

"This partnership is an excellent example of the progress that can be made by a group of citizens working together," said Irene Marais, cultural program developer of the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria. "We are delighted to be partnering with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools on this important project."

In addition to YouthLink, students in Charlotte and South Africa will be reading each other's newspapers and magazines online so they can share their thoughts and ideas about current events. A project coordinator will oversee all participating schools and teachers will be able to supplement the curriculum with additional classroom assignments.

Administrators in Charlotte are also working through the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria to help South African administrators build corporate support for their schools and increase volunteerism. The Charlotte school system has been recognized as a leader in garnering community involvement, with 1,760 business and organizational partners and nearly 45,000 volunteers during the 2003-04 school year.

Great City Grads



Melvin Watt
U.S. Congressman
1963 graduate
York Road High School
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Rochester Principal Runs For Mayor

Tim Mains serves as the principal of Helen Barrett Montgomery School No. 50, an elementary school in Rochester, N.Y. He is also a member of the Rochester City Council.

And if all goes his way, he hopes to have one more job: mayor.

Mains, a principal of School 50 since 2002, recently announced his candidacy for the mayor of Rochester. The election will take place in November.

This is not the first time Mains has run for mayor; in 1993, he made an unsuccessful attempt for the post.

According to the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, Mains will use his experience to bolster economic development, fix the city's finances and improve the city's public school system.

"I guarantee you by making this announcement today I will automatically change the tenor of the debate," Mains said in the *Democrat and Chronicle*.

Rochester Schools Superintendent Manuel Rivera said Mains is aware that his first responsibility is to the students, families and staff of his school.

"Tim is a professional and will ensure the integrity of his leadership at his school and in the school district," said Rivera in a news statement.

"We wish him the best in this pursuit and know that he will raise the level of discourse about the importance of education in our city through his campaign."

Indianapolis School Leader Honored

Superintendent Duncan N.P. Pritchett Jr. of the Indianapolis Public Schools recently received the first annual Administrator Award for Distinguished Support of Music Education at the American Association of School Administrators' national conference.



Duncan N.P. Pritchett

Sponsored by the VH1 Save the Music Foundation and AASA, the new award was given to Pritchett for his commitment to saving district-wide music education in the 39,000-student Indianapolis school system.

With the support of the school board, the superintendent has worked to rebuild the district's instrumental music programs that had all but disappeared due to a financial crisis.

"Dr. Pritchett's contributions to restoring music education in IPS truly embody the intent of this award," said Paul Cothran, executive director of the VH1 Save the Music Foundation.

The new award for supporting music education will be presented each year at the AASA national convention to a superintendent or school CEO at the local level.

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Christina Launches....

According to district officials, the Christina school system will be the first in the nation to implement the After School Learning Academies model.

Houston Battling Childhood Obesity On School Playgrounds

In an effort to combat childhood obesity, the Houston Independent School District is investing \$10 million in playground and recreational upgrades, creating safe areas for student outdoor activity at 125 elementary schools throughout the sprawling city.

"A fun, inviting playground area definitely promotes physical activity in children," says Rose Haggerty, the Houston school system's director of health and physical education.

"Healthy kids make better students, and regular physical activity is incredibly important to the health and total development of the child," she emphasizes in a press release.

More than 35 percent of school-age children in Texas are overweight or obese, according to the Texas Department of Agriculture.

New equipment for elementary school playgrounds will comply with federal Consumer Product Safety Commission guidelines, according to the district.

The playground upgrades will also include impact-absorbing surfaces, sidewalks accessible to persons with disabilities and new drainage systems to keep rainwater from collecting in the play areas at the elementary schools.

The project is being funded through the \$808.6 million bond program approved by Houston voters in 2002.

Also as part of the project, shaded structures will be installed over existing concrete or asphalt outdoor surfaces at Houston's elementary school campuses.

"There are days in Houston when we have heat or ozone warnings. Kids playing outdoors can be exposed to UV rays and at risk for heat stroke," says Haggerty. "These covered areas provide large, outdoor areas where they can safely move around, get some physical activity and play."

Dallas Students Net \$214,000 In Seven Years

Move over United Way. There is another group helping to raise money for charity: Dallas public school students.

Students from the Dallas Independent School District recently donated \$58,000 to more than 31 local non-profit organizations. The money was raised by 50 schools as part of the *Common Cents* project, a district-wide coin collection initiative that helps encourage good citizenship and promote social responsibility.

Common Cents was introduced to the district in 1998 by a longtime Dallas philanthropist. The first year of the

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*Continued from page 7***Council Grows....**

School districts located in cities with populations more than 250,000 and student enrollments more than 35,000 are eligible for Council membership. In addition, school systems located in the largest city of any state are also eligible, regardless of their size.

Students Reach Space Station

A St. Paul elementary school last month hosted Minnesota's first-ever education downlink with the International Space Station Expedition 10 crew, who were more than 200 miles in space orbiting Earth.

NASA helped the school make the connection with the space station to allow students to communicate with the crew.

Some 700 students in grades 3-8 from four NASA Explorer Schools participated in the event.

*Continued from page 11***Dallas Students....**

program fewer than 10 schools participated and raised \$8,100. Word of the program soon grew and more schools began to take part. As a result, in seven years students have donated more than \$214,000 to approximately 129 nonprofit organizations.

Students who decide to participate in the *Common Cents* initiative attend an orientation that is held in the fall. At the orientation, students learn about the mission, objectives and responsibilities of the program and then the coin collection begins.

After the coins are collected, students then begin to count the money, which often consists of barrels of pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters. While the coins are being tallied, a request for proposals is issued to notify the nonprofit community about the available funds.

All students in schools which have raised at least \$1,000 review and discuss each proposal. Schools that collect less than a \$1,000 are partnered together in a joint roundtable discussion. All of the winning nonprofit organizations are selected through consensus and their representatives are invited to appear at a news conference where they are presented with a check.

This year, Promise House, a nonprofit agency working to raise the self-esteem of at-risk young people, received the most money, totaling \$6,482.02.

Dallas Schools Interim Superintendent Larry Groppe attended this year's *Common Cents* news conference. "School is not only a place where you receive an education, it is also where you learn to become a caring and responsible citizen," said Groppe.

"*Common Cents* provides our students the opportunity to make a difference in their communities, one penny at a time."

**Council of the Great City Schools**

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