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Voters Support Urban Schools at Ballot Box Despite Uncertain Economic Times

When New Mexico's Albuquerque Public Schools decided to ask voters to approve a \$616-million capital improvements package, the district knew it would be a tough sell in the midst of an economic downturn.

So the district partnered with a non-profit organization called Yes! For Our Children's Future to develop a grassroots campaign. Web sites were created with each individual project posted so citizens could see exactly what was planned for each school. School board members spoke at community meetings and volunteers, including students, knocked on 26,000 doors to get the message out.

The district also stressed to citizens the impact the capital-improvement funds would have on the local economy by putting people to work on construction projects.

As a result, voters went to the polls last month and overwhelmingly approved a \$391-million levy and \$225 million in bonds that will be used for construction and maintenance for classrooms and other educational facilities at 120 sites. The bond passed by 72 percent, while 68 percent of voters approved the levy.

Voter Support *continued on page 4*



Albuquerque Mayor Richard Berry, left, and Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks hold a news conference at an elementary school to announce the city's endorsement of a \$616-million capital improvements package the school system put before the voters in February. The package passed overwhelmingly.

Education Secretary To Address Council

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan addresses the nation's big-city public school leaders March 21 at the Council of the Great City Schools' Annual Legislative/Policy Conference in Washington.



Arne Duncan

Urban educators will converge at the landmark Mayflower Hotel to focus on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the *No Child Left Behind* law, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the federal budget and appropriations, Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants as well as other legislative issues.

In addition to Secretary Duncan's lunch address, urban school leaders will be able to hear from members of Congress and staff at the March 20-23 conference.

AP Schools Recognized

The Miami-Dade County school district has five schools that lead the nation in the number of Latino students succeeding in particular Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The schools were among the 15 included in the sixth annual *AP Report to the Nation*, which highlights schools with

AP Schools *continued on page 3*

Urban Teachers Receive \$25,000 Milken Awards

Jaime Enochs chairs the International Baccalaureate (IB) English department at San Diego High's School of International Studies. Approximately 100 percent of her seniors pass the California IB English language exam; the worldwide average is 60 percent.

She is one of more than 50 educators across the nation selected to receive the \$25,000 Milken Educator Award for exceptional teaching, sponsored by the Milken Family Foundation.

In addition to San Diego, teachers in Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Austin, Anchorage, Las Vegas, Charleston, Oklahoma City, Charlotte, Albuquerque, Louisville and Chicago were named 2009-10 Milken National Educator Award recipients. Two teachers from Las Vegas received the award.

Since first presented in 1987, the Milken Educator Awards, dubbed "the Oscars of teaching" by *Teacher Magazine*, is now the nation's largest teacher recognition program, having awarded more than 2,400 teachers with \$60 million in cash prizes.

The goal of the Milken Educator Awards is to honor and reward outstanding K-12 educators for the quality of their



Jaime Enochs, a teacher at San Diego's School of International Studies, reacts with surprise when her name is called to receive a \$25,000 Milken Educator Award. Enochs was presented with the award at a surprise assembly held in the school's gym. Photo Credit: Milken Family Foundation

teaching, their professional leadership, their engagement with families and the community, and to focus public attention on the importance of excellent educators.

Award recipients are selected by a blue-ribbon committee. Candidates for the Milken Educator Awards must meet

several factors, including exceptional educational talents as evidence by effective instructional practices and student learning results; exemplary educational accomplishments beyond the classroom; and an engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students.



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Birmingham, Milwaukee and Minneapolis Name New School Superintendents



Craig Witherspoon

Veteran educator Craig Witherspoon takes the reins of Alabama's Birmingham City Schools in March. He was recently chosen to lead the 27,525-student district, succeeding Barbara Allen, who retired from the school system after serving since 2008 as the district's interim superintendent.

AP Schools *continued from page 1*

the largest number of African American and/or Hispanic students from the class of 2009 experiencing success (a score of 3 or higher) on specific AP exams.

Published by the College Board, the report reveals that more students are achieving success in AP, with 15.9 percent of the class of 2009 earning an AP exam score of at least a 3 on one or more AP exams, up from 15.2 percent in 2008.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools had more schools listed in the report than any other school district with a total of five. "This achievement reflects the school board's commitment to providing our students with advanced academics," said Miami Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho. "It is giving our students a head start on their college careers."

Another big-city school, Cypress Bay High School in Florida's Broward County school district, was mentioned more times than any other school because it had the largest number of Hispanic students scoring a 3 or higher in several subjects: calculus, government and politics, macroeconomics, microeconomics, psychology, statistics and United States history.

Also mentioned in the report were schools in Detroit, Houston, Dallas, and Jacksonville, Fla.

Witherspoon was the superintendent of the Edgecombe County Public Schools in North Carolina, where he worked to decrease the dropout rate and implement a laptop program in the district's high schools.

In Milwaukee Public Schools, seasoned educator Gregory Thornton has been chosen to succeed William Andrekopoulos, who is retiring this summer. The Milwaukee school system is the largest in Wisconsin, serving more than 84,000 students.



Gregory Thornton

Thornton is the superintendent of Pennsylvania's Chester Upland Public Schools. And he is no stranger to working in a big-city school district, having served previously as chief academic officer of the School District of Philadelphia.

Thornton will begin serving as superintendent in Milwaukee on July 1.

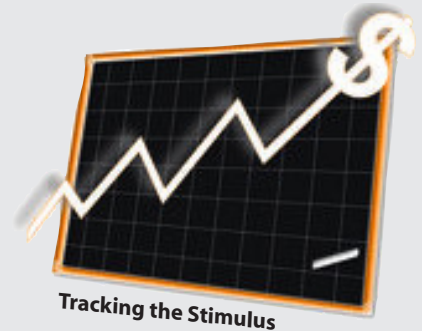
Minneapolis Elevates Deputy



Bernadeia Johnson

As the deputy superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools, Bernadeia Johnson has been instrumental in establishing programs to improve principal leadership and teacher quality and for developing strategies to improve under-performing schools. As a result, Johnson was recently selected to lead the 33,000-student school system. She succeeds Bill Green, who is retiring from the district in June.

Johnson has served as deputy superintendent since 2005.



Tracking the Stimulus

Urban Districts Use Stimulus Funds To Engage Parents

Studies have found that parental involvement is a critical factor in increasing student achievement, yet many urban school districts grapple with the best way to help parents support their children's education.

Two big-city school districts--Boston Public Schools and Milwaukee Public Schools--are using funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to fund parental involvement programs in their respective districts.

Boston Public Schools has created "Parent University," a year-long education and training program to help parents support their children's academic achievement.

The program includes three full-day Saturday learning sessions, with additional sessions offered throughout the year, and offers elective classes such as financial management, health and wellness, English as a second language and computer literacy. Parents who complete courses will attend a graduation ceremony in June.

Milwaukee Public Schools is spending \$4 million in federal stimulus money over two years to implement a parental involvement program at 40 low-performing schools.

Stimulus Funds *continued on page 4*

Voter Support *continued from page 1*

Approximately, \$50 million will be used to provide new computers for students and teachers, while one-third of classrooms will receive smart boards, which can be used for a variety of instructional purposes. In addition, \$40 million will go toward classroom and school construction at the district's charter schools.

In a message posted on the district's web site, Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks told citizens that he was thankful for their support and the funds will "transform our schools over the next four years as we make critical repairs to older buildings, upgrade technology and purchase equipment that will provide safe and healthy learning environments for our students."

Other Districts Gain Support

The economic downturn also did not prevent voters in Seattle, Portland, Ore., and Cincinnati from approving measures to provide funding to their respective school districts.

Seattle voters approved a \$442.7-million operations levy and a \$270 million, six-year capital levy. The operations levy passed by 74 percent and the capital levy passed by 73 percent.

The \$442.7-million operations levy funds nearly 25 percent of the district's day-to-day expenses and pays for important educational services, including teachers and instructional assistants, full-day kindergarten and a variety of student activities.

The \$270-million capital levy funds building projects, and will be used to make repairs to roofs, life safety and mechanical systems, science and computer facilities and to upgrade technology systems. The levy will also provide funds to make repairs to open five buildings to meet growing student enrollment and support the new neighborhood-based student assignment plan.

Voters in Portland, Ore., voted "yes" on two tax measures that will raise \$726 million for the state that will be used to maintain current funding for school districts in Oregon, including Portland Public Schools.

Measure 66 increases state income taxes on citizens in Oregon making more than \$125,000 and Measure 67 increases the state's minimum corporate income tax. The two taxes will raise \$726 million for the state over two years that will go toward schools and other state services.

According to Portland school officials, if the measures had failed, the school district would have lost approximately \$23 million in funding, the equivalent of 18 days of school for students, or 270 teaching positions.

In November, Cincinnati Public Schools also received good news when voters passed the renewal of an operating levy with more than 60 percent of the vote. The levy will bring the district approximately \$65 million.

Unsuccessful Measure

However, not all big-city school districts received favorable news at the ballot box. Voters rejected a measure that would have provided about \$60 million to help California's Long Beach Unified School District offset ongoing state budget cuts. The money would have been used to retain teachers, maintain smaller class sizes and to preserve arts, music and sports.

"The voters have spoken, and we respect their decision," said Long Beach Schools Superintendent Christopher J. Steinhauer. "We have some tough decisions ahead, but we'll find a way to balance our budget and give our students the best education possible."

Stimulus Funds *continued from page 3*

A program will also be created to bridge the parental involvement gap that occurs between middle and high school years.

Last month was the one-year anniversary of the ARRA and the Council of the Great City Schools issued a statement praising the law for providing nearly \$100 billion in critical resources to help schools maintain essential education operations.

"The ARRA has been a financial lifeline for the nation's urban schools," wrote Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

Portland Engages Latino Students With Radio Training

Hispanic students make up 15 percent of the student population in Oregon's Portland Public Schools, and is the ethnic group least likely to graduate.

According to district officials, fewer than half of Latino students in 2007 earned diplomas compared to about two-thirds of Portland students overall.

Hoping to change these statistics, Cynthia Harris, a principal at Portland's Jefferson High School, has partnered with La Gran D 1520 AM, a local Spanish radio station, to create a radio training program to help keep Latino students interested in school.

"Many Latino students don't feel like they are part of the system," said Luis Cardenas, a senior account executive with Bustos Media, the owner of La Gran D. "Our goal is to keep students in school and help them be successful."

The program started in the fall with 10 Hispanic students at Jefferson High School who received hands-on experience in commercial radio at the radio station.

"The first day they came back from the station, they were on the mountaintop -- they were so excited," said the principal. "How cool is that?"

The students were taught radio basics such as how to hold a microphone, develop

Radio Training *continued on page 5*

Portland student Antonio Villafuerte participates in a radio training program. Photo Credit: Matt Ferris-Smith

Council Supports First Lady's Initiative

Representing the nation's inner-city public schools, the Council of the Great City Schools welcomed First Lady Michelle Obama's childhood obesity initiative Feb. 9 at the White House.

She launched a nationwide campaign called "Let's Move," promoting healthier foods and increased physical activity for children while setting a national goal of solving the challenge of childhood obesity in a generation.

"The physical and emotional health of an entire generation and the economic health and security of our nation is at stake," the first lady stressed. "This is not the kind of problem that will be solved overnight, but with everyone working together, it can be solved. So, let's move."

She indicates that one in three children in the United States is overweight or obese, contributing to obesity-related health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

With some 70 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price school

Radio Training *continued from page 4*

their "radio voice" and operate the equipment.

They also learned about careers in radio and how to create on-air content, eventually composing 60-second radio spots about why it's important to stay in school. At the culmination of the program, the students produced a live, one-hour morning show last month.

"It went way beyond my expectations," said Cardenas. "They responded so well to all my instructions, it proved to me they were paying close attention to all they were taught during our previous six classes."

All of the students have expressed a desire to work in radio or other communication careers after they graduate from high school. As a result, Cardenas plans to expand the program to two more Portland schools.

lunch, the nation's urban school districts particularly recognize the importance of schoolchildren getting a healthy meal, being physically fit, and ready to learn.

"We are especially sensitive to disadvantaged inner-city students who come to school hungry or without a nutritious meal, distracting them from their lessons," said Council Executive Director Michael Caserly before participating in the campaign rollout at the White House.

"We applaud and support First Lady Michelle Obama's efforts to promote good nutrition and physical fitness to reduce childhood obesity leading to healthier lives for our students," he emphasized.

The Council plans a number of efforts to promote the first lady's childhood obesity initiative to reach its 7.5 million schoolchildren. They include:

- Setting a goal of having all urban public schools nationally meeting the gold standard set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Healthier US School Challenge within the next five years;
- Collecting school food-service data and key performance indicators to assess urban school progress on the initiative;
- Disseminating information from the initiative on ways to combat childhood obesity to urban superintendents, school board members, and staff;
- Collaborating with grassroots organizations that can help provide ground-level assistance to urban schools and students;
- Providing a link on the Council's web site to the first lady's initiative and the Healthier US School Challenge; and
- Offering opportunities for speakers and guests to address urban school leaders about the initiative.



Houston Schools Superintendent Terry Grier has breakfast with students to launch program.

Houston Plans Breakfast Program To Be Nation's Largest

When First Lady Michelle Obama last month kicked off an initiative to combat childhood obesity, the Houston Independent School District launched what it calls the "First Class Breakfast" program to expand classroom breakfast to its students.

The nation's seventh largest school system is now adding more elementary and middle schools to its free breakfast-in-the-classroom program every week, and by September expects more than 130,000 students at 220 Houston public schools will be eating breakfast in the classroom.

The Houston school system would then reportedly become the largest provider of classroom breakfasts in the United States.

Superintendent Terry Grier, drawing from his experience as the leader of the San Diego school district prior to taking the helm in Houston, points out, "Not only did the kids enjoy and eat the breakfast when we served it to them directly in the classroom, but their test scores improved and so did their behavior."

In Houston, school officials indicate that they've already seen improved test scores at nine schools where the break-

Breakfast Program *continued on page 12*

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'Sea Change' Declared in Seattle

By Henry Duvall

Seattle Public Schools Superintendent Maria Goodloe-Johnson recently won an award for advancing academic achievement -- but not in Seattle.

She shared an award with Superintendent Nancy McGinley of the Charleston County School District, who had been her chief academic officer when Goodloe-Johnson headed the South Carolina school system before taking the reins of Seattle schools in 2007.

Their combined leadership cemented the groundwork to build academic advancement today in Charleston, earning them jointly the Broad Center for the Management of School Systems' 2010 Achievement Award for outstanding leadership.

Now nearly three years later in Seattle, Goodloe-Johnson has spearheaded several major initiatives approved by the school board that represent what she describes as a "sea change" for Seattle Public Schools.

From district operations to instruction, the Seattle school system is changing the way it does business under its five-year *Excellence for All* strategic plan, creating waves aimed at washing away any obstacles leading to every school providing a quality education for every Seattle public-school student.

The school system has adopted a new student assignment plan and boundaries, revamped its facilities master plan, approved a new capacity management policy and received voter approval last month for both operations and capital levies at nearly 75 percent approval ratings -- among the highest in the nation for school ballot measures.

"This is the first time the district has attempted to integrate all of this important work," the superintendent says in a letter to school families and staff.



Superintendent Maria Goodloe-Johnson visits students at Thornton Creek Elementary last June during a ceremony recognizing the school for receiving the Washington State Imagination Award. The award honors a public school that develops students' imaginations and uses the arts as a catalyst so students can observe, question, and engage. Photo credit: Seattle Public Schools

"It means that in the future, the district won't be in the place we are today -- operating from boundaries that haven't been updated in 30 years, and needing to correct a way of doing business that resulted in a decades-old imbalance between where we have facilities and capacity and where our students live."

Supreme Court Ruling

When Goodloe-Johnson took the helm of Seattle Public Schools in July 2007, she faced an unfavorable U.S. Supreme Court decision. The high court had just struck down aspects of the student assignment plans in Louisville and Seattle designed to promote racial diversity in their respective public schools.

This past November, the Seattle school board approved the new student assignment plan and attendance boundaries as one of the major initiatives leading to a "sea change" in the 45,000-student district. Says the superintendent, "We now have a long-needed new student assignment plan that supports our goal of an excellent education for every student."

The Supreme Court ruling did not specifically spur the change, according to district officials, as the district had been wanting to move to a neighborhood-based system. By moving to a neighborhood attendance plan, the district will focus on ensuring every school is a quality school.

The new student assignment plan represents a significant change from the pre-

'Sea Change' continued on page 7

'Sea Change' continued from page 6

vious "choice" system, which led to over enrollment in some schools and significant under enrollment in others. Every student had to apply during the Open Enrollment period. When schools oversubscribed, a series of tie-breakers applied, creating a complex system struck down by the high court.

Seattle school officials believe the new student assignment plan is equitable, predictable, and easy for families to understand, as well as cost effective, in a diverse school district composed of a student pop-

CLOSE-UP

ulation of 44 percent white, 21 percent African American, 22 percent Asian and 11 percent Latino.

The new student assignment plan will be implemented in phases beginning with the 2010-11 school year. Most students entering kindergarten, sixth and ninth grades will be assigned to their attendance-area schools.

Also in the new student assignment plan, students can apply to "option schools," many of them offering specialized programs, within and outside their attendance areas.

To ensure delivery on the district's promise that all students living in an area can attend a quality attendance-area school, the district needs to add capacity. It plans to open five schools between 2010 and 2012 to meet increasing enrollment.

Council Helps

Leaving the top school post in Charleston, S.C., Goodloe-Johnson headed to the Pacific Northwest in the summer of 2007 to confront the challenges of Washington State's largest school system.

She elicited assistance from the Council of the Great City Schools, which conducts

"peer reviews" of member urban school districts under its Cities Building Cities program that provides technical assistance to help districts improve instruction and operations.

Subsequently, the Council assembled and dispatched teams of leaders in various fields in big-city school districts to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Seattle Public Schools.

In 2008, nine Council strategic support teams, as they are called, descended on the Emerald City in the areas of human resources, budget and finance, information technology, bilingual education, transportation, capital projects, maintenance and operations, procurement and food services.

Recommendations from the Council teams and other external organizations helped develop and refine the district's *Excellence for All* strategic plan that drives and integrates the school system's new initiatives.

Then last year, the district's strategic direction was recognized by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, the Boeing Company and the Stuart Foundation, committing \$9 million in grants to support the implementation of *Excellence for All*.

'A New Era'

When Superintendent Goodloe-Johnson visited Washington, D.C., for the inauguration of President Obama, she recalled him saying that it's time for "a new era of responsibility -- a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world..."

"I can't think of a better way to describe the work we are engaged in -- as teachers, families, and as a community united behind a common vision for this school district," she says in addressing the Alliance for Education, a local education advocacy group, at a community breakfast.

To fulfill the implementation of the "sea change," Goodloe-Johnson maintains that she will continue working with the community to "make good on the promise of an excellent education for each and every student -- in every neighborhood -- at every school."

Houston Ties Student Test Scores To Teacher Evaluations

In an effort to boost teaching and learning achievement, the Houston Board of Education in February approved a policy that links student test scores to teacher performance evaluations.

Beginning next year, the Houston Independent School District will implement a value-added measure in the evaluations of schoolteachers, utilizing the same data on student growth the nation's seventh-largest school system uses to identify and reward high-performing teachers.

Those teachers who fall short in the value-added system, measuring effectiveness based on expectations on student standardized tests, would be provided training and mentoring, according to Superintendent Terry Grier.

If these teachers don't improve over a period of time, the value-added scores can lead to non-renewal of contracts.

Conversely, the Houston school district awarded more than \$40 million in bonuses to its educators in January based on the student-growth, or value-added formula.

Top Magnet Schools Announced

Seven schools in the Hillsborough County school district in Tampa, Fla., are among the best magnet schools in the nation.

The schools were among 54 nationwide selected to receive the Magnet 2010 Schools of Excellence Award. Presented by Magnet Schools of America, the award recognizes magnet schools that show a commitment to high academic standards, curriculum innovation, successful desegregation/diversity efforts, specialized teaching staffs and parent and community involvement.

Magnet Schools continued on page 12

NEA Foundation Awards \$1.25 Million To Columbus Schools for Partnership

The foundation of the National Education Association recently awarded Columbus City Schools \$1.25 million to establish a partnership aimed at improving teaching and learning, parental engagement and closing student achievement gaps in underachieving schools in the Ohio city.

Columbus was one of three school districts, including Springfield, Mass., and Durham, N.C., selected for union-district partnerships among more than 14,000 school districts nationwide eligible for the \$3.75-million in grants targeting high-needs schools in the NEA Foundation's Closing the Achievement Gaps Initiative.

In Columbus, the school district will use the five-year grant to close achievement gaps in high-poverty elementary and middle schools that feed into two underachieving high schools.

"We want our high schools to work deeply with middle schools and elementary schools, to understand they are not individual little islands, that they must collaborate, and that these are our children all the way through the 12th grade and AP classes,"

"We want our high schools to work deeply with middle schools and elementary schools..."

—Columbus Superintendent Gene Harris

said Columbus Schools Superintendent Gene Harris in *Education Week*.

The grant will support teacher professional development, parent and community engagement, as well as establish a collaborative effort among the Columbus Education Association, the school district and United Way of Central Ohio to close student achievement gaps.

"Our plan includes programmatic interventions that target teaching quality; parent engagement and home visits; and student achievement data that can be used to drive instruction and determine school-level instructional priorities," the superintendent emphasized in a statement.



Columbus City Schools Superintendent Gene Harris talks with television reporter following partnership announcement at local school.

Austin District Teams With City to Launch Civic Education Program

Texas' Austin Independent School District has teamed with the city of Austin to launch a civic education and internship program for high school students.

Beginning this fall, the *AustinCorps* initiative will be offered as a year-long elective class to 50 high school seniors at two schools. Students in the program will meet twice a week with local policymakers to become familiar with city government. In the spring, the students will complete an internship with the city and work to develop and execute a community project.

Participants in *AustinCorps* will spend a total of 10,000 hours over nine months working at City Hall and in the community.

The program is the brainchild of Austin Mayor Lee Leffingwell, who proposed the internship program during his mayoral campaign last year as a way to encourage community engagement among Austin students. "Our most precious resource as a city is our young people," said Leffingwell. "If we can do more now to educate and engage Austin's students in local government and civic life, the entire community will ultimately reap the reward."

Newark, Nashville Districts Partner With Universities

In an effort to prepare and retain highly qualified teachers, New Jersey's Newark Public Schools and Tennessee's Metro Nashville Public Schools are partnering with local universities to create a teaching residency program.

Newark and Montclair State University are using a five-year, \$6.3-million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund the Newark-Montclair Teaching Residency Program (NMTRP), which focuses on rigorous research-based teacher preparation.

The program began in February with 11 students at Montclair State University serving as student teachers at three Newark schools, where they will be apprenticed to veteran teachers who will serve as their mentors. During the summer months, the student teachers will intern with community organizations.

Once the program is complete, students will receive a Master of Arts in Teaching and will be required to work in a Newark school for a minimum of three years. The program will serve 100 participants.

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is partnering with Vanderbilt University to create a program focused on improving teaching in its middle schools.

Open to recent college graduates, as well as new and existing teachers, the Master's in Teaching and Learning in Urban Schools program will focus on improving instruction and attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers to the district.

The program, which is tuition-free, will prepare students to teach in middle school with a focus on one of three areas: literacy, mathematics or science.

The first group of 24 students will begin this summer. In the fall, students will begin teaching in a district school and will complete 30 hours of rigorous coursework in two years.

New Scholarship Available to Students In Council Districts



Former astronaut Bernard Harris. Photo Credit: Don Kohlbauer Photography

A new scholarship is now available to African American and Hispanic students pursuing college degrees and careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in urban school districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.

Named for the first African American to walk in space, former astronaut Bernard Harris launched the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships to help satisfy the need for more STEM college graduates in the nation, especially among minority students.

Four \$5,000 scholarships for two males and two females each will be awarded to two African American and two Hispanic graduating seniors this year in the 66 school districts represented by the Council.

The scholarship program is a partnership among the Council, ExxonMobil and the Harris Foundation.

Through his foundation, Dr. Harris, a physician and businessman, reaches several thousand students each year with his various programs, including the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Summer Science Camp and The Dream Tour, both designed to encourage students to “reach for the stars.”

The scholarship application is available on the Council’s web site at www.cgcs.org.

Omaha District Earns EPA Indoor Air Quality Award

Omaha Public Schools has made a strong commitment toward improving the air quality in its school buildings and offices. As a result, the district was recently honored by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The district, along with two other school systems, received the EPA’s Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools National Model of Sustained Excellence Award for its progress in maintaining healthy educational facilities. Since the introduction of the award in 2005, only 15 other school districts have been honored.

Recipients of the award must have been winners of the IAQ Tools for Schools Na-

tional Excellence Award and are selected through a highly competitive process. School districts must demonstrate how they have sustained their IAQ practices, established IAQ management goals and tracked progress on IAQ management.

Omaha Public Schools was applauded for fostering a culture where all district employees seek opportunities to improve indoor air quality in their facilities. The district’s environmental quality team continually reviews building systems, occupant activities and custodial and maintenance procedures for any negative impacts on the indoor environment and make appropriate adjustments when necessary.

Journalist and Actor To Address Council At Fall Conference

Journalist and author Gwen Ifill and actor, scholar, mentor and author Hill Harper will address the nation’s urban school leaders at the Council of the Great City Schools’ Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 20-24, in Tampa, Fla.

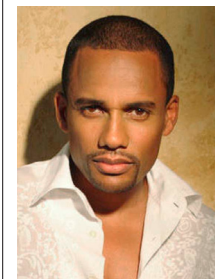


Gwen Ifill

Ifill is seen on PBS-TV as moderator and managing editor of *Washington Week* and senior correspondent for *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. She also appears as an occasional roundtable panelist

on NBC-TV’s Sunday-morning program *Meet the Press*.

And the award-winning journalist is the recent author of *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama*.



Hill Harper

As an actor, Hill Harper can be seen on the hit television drama series *CSI: NY*, earning him three NAACP Image Awards.

He has appeared in other TV programs as well and in several films, accomplishing critical acclaim in the HBO movie *Lackawanna Blues*.

Personal achievement is not enough for Harper to fulfill his success, as he has reached out to help others. He has been a volunteer and now the spokesman for Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

In 2006, Harper wrote the *New York Times* best-selling book *Letters to a Young Brother* to encourage and guide young African American men who are trying to find their way in life. Subsequently, he wrote another bestseller, *Letters to a Young Sister*, delivering a message of hope, education and commitment to young African American females.

Cutting Funds for Urban Schools

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

A number of academics, a handful of interest groups, and a spoonful of think tanks recently have promoted a series of reports and papers advocating changes in federal education funding formulas that would significantly reduce the level of financial aid to the nation's major urban school systems and the children they serve.

Issuing papers, analyzing data, and offering opinions is the stock in trade of Washington-based educational organizations, particularly those that do not have a membership, a constituency, or a responsibility for producing results in our schools. Much of this rhetorical bantering is harmless, but in this case the proposals that are being floated have the potential to cut millions of dollars in badly needed Title I funding to urban schools; negatively affect millions of inner-city children who rely on supplemental academic support from the teachers the program provides; and divert substantial sums to school districts with far less severe needs.

Admittedly, the funding formulas—four of them—that determine how federal Title I funds are distributed across the vast majority of school systems across the country are complicated and not terribly transparent, although they are relatively straightforward in comparison to state foundation-aid formulas. They have evolved over the 45-year history of the law and generally include two main components: the number of school-age poor students and state average per pupil expenditures. The first variable is a proxy for low academic achievement, and the second variable is designed to serve as a proxy for the cost of education state-to-state. The four tiers in the formula structure are basically designed to provide a floor of supplemental support first to any eligible child in the country regardless of how many there are in any locale. And the auxiliary formulas are designed to provide greater targeting of aid in places where poverty is most concentrated, an even stronger correlate of achievement than poverty per se.

The proxies are not precise, however, in distributing aid where it is most needed, but they do a good job across a very complicated country in sending federal resources where they



are most needed, despite anomalies and anecdotes to the contrary. And most Congressionally mandated studies over the years have demonstrated that the resources go where Congress most intended them to go.

It has been awhile since Congress has had a Title I formula fight and almost no one proposing changes has ever gone through one. But for those of us who have, three things are certain if the formulas are opened up. One, the outcome of the fight may be no more to the liking of the think tanks than the current formulas because, once opened, it is very hard to control what happens as members battle to get their “fair share.” Second, any hope of producing major reform in *No Child Left Behind* becomes secondary when money is on the table. The same advocacy groups pushing formula changes are also pushing other important reforms that are likely to fall by the wayside in the midst of a funding donnybrook. Three, attempts to reinvent the Title I funding formulas always dredge up old controversies that have been long settled or at least put to bed. Should states and communities that don't support education financially be rewarded by federal aid? How will state or local costs be addressed? How will the relative wealth or lack of it in any jurisdiction be considered?

Moreover, every formula fight pits one region against another, state against state, countywide districts against towns, big districts against small, urban against rural and suburban, and so on.

While not perfect, the existing Title I formulas have attempted to settle down these divisions. Now—when the economy is so bad and so many other reforms are more badly needed—is not the time to reopen them. Besides, behind all these papers and reports by folks who have never gone through this before are real kids, real teachers, real schools, and real communities that can be significantly harmed if the funding cuts to urban schools were adopted. Let's save the fights for something important.

New Data System Being Created in Louisville

In an effort to study school effectiveness, Louisville's Jefferson County Public Schools is developing a new data system.

The district is creating quality indicators in several areas, from attendance to school climate, to help officials track school improvement and assess the progress schools are making toward producing long-term increases in student achievement.

The quality indicators will act as a compass that will guide schools and the district in planning more effectively, identifying the progress that is being made and determining the impact programs and services are having on advancing student performance.

"The quality indicators will document schools' achievement growth in addition to helping us identify areas needing improvement," said Jefferson Schools Superintendent Sheldon Berman.

Columbus High School Opens Lunch Café

Students at Ohio's Columbus Downtown High School, who want to gain real-world experience in the food industry, don't have to leave their school to do so.

That's because the school recently opened its new Downtown Café, which is open to the public for lunch two days a week. The café is run by students in the school's culinary arts program, who are responsible for developing the menu, preparing food and serving patrons, maintaining the kitchen to industry standards and running the point-of-sale register system.

Meals at the café are \$5 for eat-in or carryout and menu offerings include appetizers, salads, soups, entrée specials, sandwiches, breads and pastries, all prepared from scratch in the high school's state-of-the-art kitchen facility.

Currently, 88 students participate in the school's culinary arts program.



Photo Credit: Tami A. Heilemann, Department of Interior

Interior Secretary Teaches D.C. Students

U.S. Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar recently served as a guest teacher for a group of fourth-grade students at Bruce Monroe at Parkview Elementary School in Washington, D.C. Salazar visited the school as part of Teach for America Week 2010. During his visit, the secretary discussed with students the importance of conservation and environmental stewardship.

Newark District Wins Budget Award

For the second year in a row, New Jersey's Newark Public Schools has been awarded the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) International Meritorious Budget Award.

The award promotes and recognizes excellence in school budget presentation and is ASBO's highest recognition for a school district's financial operations.

The criteria for winning the award includes clear budget presentation guidelines, and defines state-of-the-art budget practices, encourages short- and long-range budget goals, promotes sound fiscal management practices as well as effective use of educational resources.

"The Newark Public Schools District operates on a foundation of sound fiscal management practices and this second award is confirmation of these policies," said Newark Schools Superintendent Clifford Janey.

Siemens Recognizes AP Students and Teachers

Several big-city students were recently selected to receive the 2009 Siemens Awards for Advanced Placement (AP).

The students received the award, along with a \$2,000 college scholarship, for earning the highest score in several AP courses including, biology, calculus, chemistry, computer and environmental science.

Students from Little Rock, Anchorage and Louisville received awards.

In addition, the Siemens Foundation honors winning high school science and mathematics teachers with a \$1,000 grant to each teacher's high school to support science and math education. Teachers in Little Rock, Louisville, Las Vegas and Greensboro, N.C., were honored.

NBA All-Stars Help Repair Dallas School

Los Angeles Lakers' basketball star Kobe Bryant was recently welcomed to David Burnet Elementary School in Dallas by principal Shelly Vaughan and Dallas school board president Adam Medrano, pictured with him. Bryant was in Dallas for the NBA All-Star game and volunteered to repair and renovate the school as part of NBA Community Service Day. He was joined by other basketball players, including Cleveland Cavaliers' Shaquille O'Neal and Denver Nuggets' Carmelo Anthony.





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Breakfast Program *continued from page 5*

fast-in-the-classroom program has been in place for several years.

The Houston students in the new “First Class Breakfast” program not only receive a free breakfast but also a nutritious meal. They are served whole grain bakery items made from scratch at a 220,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility where sodium, preservatives and fats are kept to a minimum.

On the eve of the first lady’s announcement of her “Let’s Move” campaign to eliminate childhood obesity, representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Texas Department of Agriculture toured the Houston school system’s food service facility and ate breakfast in the classroom at Herrera Elementary School.

“Breakfast helps to jumpstart a student’s metabolism and will keep them going throughout the day and allow them not to become obese,” says USDA Section Chief Ellen Wahberg in a news release.

“Most of these kids would skip breakfast entirely if we didn’t serve it to them,” says Herrera Principal Christopher Carnes. “Now they’re getting a good, healthy start to the day.”

The costs of “First Class Breakfast” are covered by the USDA’s National School Breakfast Program and with a \$100,000 donation from the non-profit group Dairy-MAX.

“We’re hoping the nutritious choices students get in the classroom and the cafeteria will lead them and their parents to make healthier choices at home,” Superintendent Grier emphasizes, mirroring the first lady’s hopes.

Magnet Schools *continued from page 7*

Hillsborough County Public Schools was not the only urban school district with schools recognized. North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools had six schools on the list; followed by Las Vegas’ Clark County School District (4); Miami-Dade County Schools (3); Indianapolis Public Schools (3); Louisiana’s East Baton Rouge Parish School System (2); the School District of Palm Beach County (2); and Omaha Public Schools (2). In addition, the Dallas Independent School District and North Carolina’s Guilford County Schools each had one school on the list.

Charlotte Leader Wins Data Quality Award



Peter Gorman

Peter Gorman, superintendent of North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, recently won a national award for his leadership in incorporating data into the district’s instructional and policy decisions.

The 2009 District Data Leader award is presented by the Data Quality Campaign, a national collaborative that encourages the use of data in education.

Created in 2005 with 10 organizations that wanted to improve the use of high-quality education data, the campaign’s work now involves more than 50 organizations.

Coming Up

The April issue of the *Urban Educator* will feature a story on the National Conference on Next Generation Assessment Systems, cohosted by the Council of the Great City Schools, March 8-9, in Washington.