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Secretary Arne Duncan and Boston Superintendent Carol Johnson hear from parents.

Education Secretary Visits Parent Program At Boston School

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently visited John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Boston to learn more about the district's Parent University program, considered a model worth replicating in other school districts nationwide.

"We are honored Secretary Duncan came to Boston to learn how we are engaging parents in new and innovative ways," said Boston Mayor Thomas Menino in a press release. "Our schools can't be successful without moms, dads and grandparents taking an active role in the education of their child."

Duncan had the opportunity to witness a Parent University class in session and to talk with parents who have benefited from

Education Secretary *continued on page 4*

Turning Around Low-Achieving Schools Focus of Summit and New Report

Big-city school superintendents met with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and White House officials recently following a national School Turnaround Summit hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council of the Great City Schools.

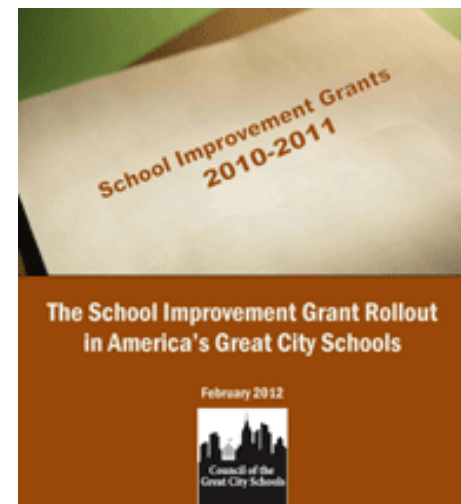
"We're completing a two-day conference on turning around schools across the country. We have 26 districts here, fantastic conversations, some major success stories, some places that are struggling," Secretary Duncan told the press in a media conference call.

Duncan and Council Executive Director Michael Casserly were on the call Feb. 10 at the White House to release a new report by the Great City Schools coalition, which finds that urban school districts mounted an unprecedented number of school turnaround efforts in the 2010-2011 school year with funds from the revamped federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program.

While the nation's big-city schools have seen significant academic gains in the past several years, there are still pockets of schools that are not responding to district-wide reforms and need special interven-


tion. Increasingly, urban school districts are utilizing SIG funds to turn around these schools, implementing some of the toughest reform models called for in SIG at higher rates than seen in other schools nationwide.

The report – *The School Improvement Grant Rollout in America's Great City Schools: School Improvement Grants 2010-*



2011 – indicates that the number of urban turnaround schools has increased significantly since the School Improvement Grant program underwent transformation and expansion as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and launched in 2010. Some 298 chronically low-achieving Tier I and II schools in urban districts were selected to receive grants and undergoing turnaround efforts in the first year of SIG—roughly as many schools as these districts tackled in the previous five years of reform (284 schools).

Turnaround *continued on page 4*



U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan to address urban educators March 18 at the Council of the Great City Schools' Legislative/Policy Conference.

Urban Teachers Receive \$25,000 Milken Awards

Cecilio Lamar Fowler has been teaching mathematics at Orlando’s Maynard Evans High School in Florida for only two years, and has found success with his students’ scores rising from 19 to 56 percent in fall and winter benchmark exam targets.

Shira Fishman began her career as an engineer but is now a mathematics teacher at McKinley Technology High School in Washington, D.C., where she is regularly paired with struggling students, who consistently gain one grade level or more.

These teachers are just six of the urban educators who have been selected as recipients of the 2011 Milken Educator Awards. Sponsored by the Milken Family Foundation, the awards honor exemplary teachers across the nation and present them with a \$25,000 cash prize.

Big-city teachers also receiving a Milken award were Meah King, an English teacher from East High School in Memphis; Mark Elfstrom, a math and science teacher from Romig Middle School in Anchorage; Steven Scoville, a biology teacher from Brashear High School in Pittsburgh; and Rafal Olechowski, an English and language teacher from Townsend Harris High School in New York City.



Students at McKinley Technology High School in Washington, D.C., congratulate teacher Shira Fishman, (center) for winning a \$25,000 Milken Educator Award. Photo Credit: Milken Family Foundation.

Up to 100 educators are recognized for the award without their knowledge by a blue-ribbon panel appointed by each state’s department of education. Recipients of the award are selected on the basis of such criteria as exceptional educational talent,

outstanding accomplishments and an inspiring presence that motivates students, coworkers and the community.

Hailed by *Teacher Magazine* as the “Oscars of Teaching,” the awards were

Milken Awards continued on page 3



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Anchorage Names Leader; Houston Chief's Tenure Extended



Jim Browder

After embarking on a national search, Alaska's Anchorage School District recently selected Jim Browder to take the reins of the 50,000-student school district.

Browder, the former superintendent of Florida's Lee County Public Schools, will succeed Carol Comeau, who plans to retire at the end of the school year after heading the district since December 2000.

Browder led the 82,000-student school district in Florida for seven years.

"Jim is a proven leader who has worked in a district larger than that of Anchorage, managed finances wisely through tough budget cuts and, most important, demonstrated the ability to deliver academic success," said Anchorage board President Gretchen Guess in a news statement.

Contract Extended

Terry Grier became the superintendent of the Houston Independent School District in 2009 and under his leadership, the district has increased the number of Advanced Placement courses, partnered with Harvard University to launch the Apollo 20 school turnaround program for



Milken Awards *continued from page 2*

created 25 years ago to focus attention on the need for excellent educators and encourage qualified individuals to enter the teaching profession. Since 1985, more than 2,500 teachers, principals and specialists have received more than \$63 million.

The awards are presented to educators who are early to mid-career and alternates yearly between elementary and secondary educators, with this year honoring secondary teachers.

low-performing schools and developed a new appraisal and development system for teachers.

As a result, the board of education recently extended Grier's contract through June 2014.



Terry Grier

In other developments, Louisiana's East Baton Rouge Parish School System has selected an interim superintendent to lead the district. Carlos Sam, the district's director of Innovative & Specialized Programs, will serve as interim superintendent, succeeding John Dilworth, who chose not to renew his contract with the district.

And after more than five years as superintendent of Florida's Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Ed Pratt-Dannals recently announced he will retire at the end of December.

Columbus Leader Chairs Ed. Commission



Gene Harris

Gene Harris, superintendent of Ohio's Columbus City Schools, was recently selected to serve as co-chair of the Commission on Standards and Performance Reporting, created by the new Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation.

The national commission will develop rigorous accreditation standards to improve the quality of teacher education. Also appointed to the commission is Andres Alonso, the CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools.

Seven Council Districts Join Social, Emotional Learning Collaborative

Alaska's Anchorage School District believes that social and emotional learning (SEL) for students is such an essential part of education that the district has integrated it into the core curriculum and has even created its own SEL department.

As a result, the district is one of seven big-city school districts in the nation that will participate in an initiative sponsored by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

In addition to Anchorage, the Collaborative Districts Initiative will support the emotional and social growth of students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Chicago Public Schools, Oakland Unified School District, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, Sacramento Unified School District and Austin Independent School District. A school district in Nevada was also selected.

Each school system will receive an initial grant of \$125,000 from the NoVo Foundation that will be used to develop a multi-year SEL implementation plan. Once plans are approved, a grant of \$250,000 a year for three years will be awarded, contingent on the district continuing to make significant progress toward implementation of high-quality SEL.

SEL is the process through which people learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships and avoid negative behaviors.

The Anchorage school system has been recognized as a national leader in social and emotional learning and works to help all students make measurable progress toward proficiency in SEL standards. The district has accomplished this by incorporating the essential SEL elements of positive school climate, direct instruction of skills and blending SEL into its curricula.

Radio Personality Becomes Principal At Birmingham School

The morning announcements at Phillips Academy, a kindergarten through eighth-grade school in Alabama's Birmingham City Schools, were made in a very different voice Jan. 26. But the voice was very familiar to many.

It was Steve Harvey, comic, author and radio and TV personality, who was Phillips' Principal for a Day.

Phillips Academy won the national Principal-for-a-Day contest sponsored by the General Mills Box Tops for Education program.

Education Secretary *continued from page 1*

the program. He also participated in a roundtable event where he heard directly from Parent University graduates, school leaders and district administrators on the strategies that have led to the program's success.

"We began Parent University as a way to better engage our parents and families, but the result has been so much more," stressed Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson. "This program has resulted in better communication among our internal departments and has been a key strategy in our turnaround work at our underperforming schools."

Launched in 2010, Parent University is an initiative of the Boston school system's Office of Family and Student Engagement. Throughout the academic year, the district offers free courses, in a variety of languages, to parents and family members of Boston public-school students.

Classes range from math and science to learning how to apply for college financial aid and nutrition advice courses. The majority of the sessions are held on the campus of Northeastern University, while some classes take place at schools such as JFK Elementary.

The program is funded through Title I federal funds.

Parent Angela Strozier entered the *Steve Harvey Morning Show's* recent Principal-for-a-Day essay contest and won the visit from Harvey and a \$10,000 prize.

Harvey met with Phillips Principal Mark Sullivan and put his own name plate in place of Sullivan's on the principal's desk. He made the morning announcements and then visited the eighth-grade classroom where Ms. Strozier's daughter was.

Then he headed to the YMCA Youth Center across the street, where all 700-plus students from Phillips had gathered. "This is one of the nicest schools I have been to in a long time," Harvey told the students. "The floors are clean and shiny. The classrooms are neat...The students are polite."

Harvey encouraged the students to strive to achieve their dreams. "I was once you," he said. "All I am is a dream come true...I don't care what your background is...You can be anything you want to be...The only reason you won't be is if you made some decisions that mess it up."



Mark Sullivan, principal of Birmingham's Phillips Academy, relinquishes his chair to comedian Steve Harvey, who served as the school's Principal for a Day.

Turnaround *continued from page 1*

The report offers a detailed picture of the specific strategies being pursued in urban schools across the country. Some 54 percent of the SIG schools in the urban districts implemented the transformation intervention model, which includes replacing the principal and instructional reforms; 36 percent of the urban schools used the turnaround model, which includes replacing the principal and at least half of the staff; 5 percent of the urban schools utilized the restart intervention model, which includes closing the school and re-opening as a charter school; and another 5 percent of the schools used the closure model, which involves closing the school and moving students to a nearby school with higher performance.

These findings indicate that the nation's urban school districts are using the turnaround and closure models at about twice the rate of the nation.

"The School Improvement Grant program provides an important and substantial new tool in the arsenal of many big-city school districts," says the Council's Caserly. "In addition to districtwide reforms, urban school systems are tailoring interventions to address the needs of specific schools that are struggling to achieve."

Prior to the expanded SIG program, school districts faced a number of challenges in their efforts to turn around low-achieving schools, such as removing ineffective teachers, securing turnaround funding and recruiting teachers to challenging schools. The report found that the urban school districts believed the revamped SIG program can help address some of these challenges.

Although it's too early to measure the impact of SIG on student achievement in the first year of the expanded program, the report points out that most big city schools responding to the survey were satisfied with how the grant gave them ample flexibility to implement turnaround measures. They also expressed optimism that the SIG program has a "strong chance of significantly improving student achievement in these persistently low-achieving schools."



Memphis Schools Superintendent Kriner Cash visits students at a district STEM lab. Photo Credit: Robert Jackson/Jackson Images

Memphis District Launches STEM Virtual High School

In launching a school focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), Memphis City Schools Superintendent Kriner Cash had in mind recent statistics he saw from a study released by the National Science Foundation.

In 2003, there were 1.3 million engineering and science jobs in the United States without trained professionals to fill them, according to information Cash received citing NSF.

“By 2020, our economy will require 15 million new engineering and technical jobs. By creating this innovative STEM Virtual experience, we are providing all students, including often underrepresented minorities and female students, the opportunity to compete for these jobs locally, nationally, and globally,” Superintendent Cash told the *Urban Educator*.

The district considered the need to engage students in a curriculum that is rooted in STEM objectives, giving students self-paced online assignments, on-site individual and group activities, and real-world applications.

As a result, Memphis City Schools in February launched the Memphis Virtual STEM Academy with the motto “Success...by design.”

“This was a huge, heavy lift,” Deputy Superintendent Irving Hamer said in the city’s major newspaper, *The Commercial Appeal*. “The hard part was getting people to accept that we have a student body and a parent body that wanted to do this.”

The first cohort of ninth-graders, more than 70 students, began the four-year program with the initial STEM course, “Principles to Engineering.” If they earn at least a “B” average, the students will be able to participate in lab studies and will be admitted to the STEM school.

All participating students maintain co-enrollment and will continue to study art, humanities, physical education and participate in competitive sports at their home schools while studying STEM content via the virtual school.

All Memphis STEM Virtual Academy students will be required to participate in

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Fresno Superintendent Wins Tech Savvy Award



Michael Hanson

Five years ago, a technology audit rated California’s Fresno Unified School District as among the worst in the state utilizing technology. The audit led Fresno Schools

Superintendent

Michael Hanson to institute a district-wide technology plan to transform how students and staff interact with classroom technology.

Today, the district boasts a top five ranking in statewide technology innovations and Hanson was recently awarded the 2012 “Tech-Savvy Superintendent Award” by the editors of *eSchool News*.

The award, in its 12th year, honors 10 senior school district executives who demonstrate outstanding leadership and vision in utilizing technology throughout their respective school districts to improve education.

Hanson has used technology to revamp district operations and student achievement. A new computer system has been created to improve lesson plans and curriculum. Hanson has also supported a digital portfolio project that has placed laptops in 350 classrooms, in addition to 2,000 interactive whiteboards, 16,000 netbooks and 3,000 video projectors.

The district’s five-year technology plan has set a number of goals, including having 45 percent of students involved in online learning, providing wireless laptops or tablets for all teachers and developing a system to provide teachers with real-time analysis of student performance.

Hanson was the only big-city superintendent to receive a Tech-Savvy Superintendent Award. Winners are nominated by people in the education field and then chosen by the editors of *eSchool News*.

Richmond Launches Middle School Renaissance Initiative

In an effort to improve its middle schools, Virginia's Richmond Public Schools has joined forces with the business community to develop the Middle School Renaissance Initiative.

The initiative is designed around four components: leadership training for principals, thematic middle schools, student mentoring and extended-day opportunities.

As part of the initiative, middle-school principals attend workshops and training conducted by local business executives and all middle schools have been provided with themed instructional programs such as visual arts, business, and public service.

A student mentoring program calls for businesses to recruit volunteers to serve as mentors providing tutorial assistance to 6th graders in mathematics and reading. Volunteers also work with middle-school students in the district's after-school program and participate in enrichment activities with students such as camping and taking students to tour local colleges.

Last year, Richmond Schools Superintendent Yvonne Brandon announced the Middle School Renaissance Initiative at her State of the Schools address and said the program would help strengthen the instructional bridge between elementary and high school.

"We are excited and are confident that this razor-sharp focus and our collaborations will not only produce more graduates but develop a cadre of future leaders who will impact this city, this nation and the world," said Brandon in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

The business community has strongly supported the initiative and since the program launched in October, more than 900 volunteers have worked with more than 700 students.

And in an attempt to help at least 100 11th- and 12th-graders realize their entrepreneurial dreams, the Richmond school system has entered into a new grant-funded partnership.

The district has received a \$500,000

workforce readiness grant that will fund two pilot career service centers at two high schools. The centers will offer students the opportunity to attend entrepreneurial

workshops, develop work-specific skills and provide paid and unpaid work-learning opportunities and enrichment activities.

Clark County District In Las Vegas Unveils New School Ranking System

Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas recently unveiled a new ranking system that gives elementary and middle schools one-to-five-star rankings based on a number of categories including academic performance and student engagement.

Under the School Performance Framework, schools are placed in one of five categories: "Five Stars" for highest performing schools; "Four Stars" for the well performing; "Three Stars" for schools that are meeting but not exceeding academic standards; "Two Stars" for schools close to meeting minimum standards; and "One Star" for low-performing schools.

Those schools that achieve "Five Star" status will be given more flexibility over their curriculum, budgets and day-to-day operations and less oversight. Currently, 37 elementary schools have been recognized as "Five Star" schools.

District officials believe the ranking system will enable the community to hold the district accountable for student performance, while raising the bar and improving education for every student. "The School Performance Framework is a game-changer," said Clark County Schools Superintendent Dwight Jones. "The system takes a transparent look at each school's academic achievement and makes all adults, from myself to our principals, classroom educators and parents, accountable for the success of each student."

The ranking system utilizes data from the Nevada Growth Model that was developed this year by the state Department of Education and the school system measuring how students improve in academic performance over time using various demographics, including ethnicity and achievement levels.

Lower ranking schools will receive additional resources and support from the district and rankings will not be used to evaluate school staff this school year. Schools can earn a higher ranking by improving the academic performance of their students.

The new ranking system was developed with the input of teachers, principals, parents and community members. A system to rank district high schools will be launched in April.



Kip Krzmarzick, left, principal of Clark County School District's Rogers Elementary School, and Academic Manager Tam Larned enjoy a ride on a zipline. The ride symbolizes the freedom they have earned to operate an autonomous school under the district's new ranking system. Photo credit: Michele Nelson

Council Announces Guest Speakers For Fall Conference

President and CEO of the National Urban League Marc Morial, *New York Times* columnist and author Thomas Friedman, and actress and humanitarian America Ferrera will address the nation's big-city school leaders at the Council of the Great City Schools' Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 17-21, in Indianapolis.

Morial has led the nation's largest civil rights organization since 2003 and under his leadership, the organization has created the Urban Youth Empowerment Program to assist young adults in securing sustainable jobs.



Marc Morial

The Urban League has also established Entrepreneurship Centers in five cities to help the growth of small businesses as well as the National Urban League Empowerment Fund, which has pumped almost \$200 million into urban impact businesses including minority businesses.

And from 1994-2002, Morial served as the mayor of New Orleans.

Friedman is the foreign affairs columnist for *The New York Times* and the author of five bestselling books. He is also a three-time recipient of the prestigious Pulitzer Prize.

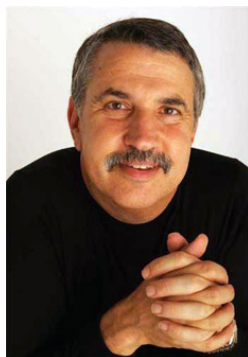
His most recent book, *That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back*, debuted at No. 2 on *The New York Times* bestsellers list.

His previous book, *Hot, Flat and*

Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution and How It Can Renew America, was a No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller and his book



on globalization, *The World is Flat*, has sold more than four million copies.



Thomas Friedman

His other bestsellers include *Longitudes and Attitudes: The World in the Age of Terrorism*, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* and *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, which serves as a basic text on the Middle

East in colleges and universities and won the National Book Award.

Friedman is a frequent guest on programs such as *Meet The Press*, *Morning Joe* and *Charlie Rose*.

Actress America Ferrera is best known for her portrayal of "Betty Suarez" on ABC television's hit comedy *Ugly Betty*, a role that earned her an Emmy, a Golden Globe and a Screen Actors Guild Award.



America Ferrera

She made her debut in the 2002 film *Real Women Have Curves*, which garnered her a Special Jury Award for acting as well as Independent Spirit Award and Young Artist Award nominations. Other acting credits include *The Dry Land*, which she also executive-produced; *Lords of Dogtown*; *How the Garcia Girls Spent Their Summer*; and *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* and its sequel.

A humanitarian, Ferrera has served as an artist ambassador for the organization Save the Children and recently raised more than \$44,000 to build a new elementary school in Mali.

In March 2011, she was named the 2011 national recipient of the Cesar E. Chavez Legacy Award for her commitment to helping lead underprivileged families and youths to a better life and education.

The Council's 56th Annual Fall Conference will be hosted by Indianapolis Public Schools.

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weekly labs, summer programs and internships. The academy also offers Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, important world languages in the field of engineering.

Participating students can access online courses anywhere with Internet service, including their homes, schools, libraries, or community centers. Online teachers will monitor their work.

A high-tech STEM lab is under construction at the former Career and Technical Education facility at the city's East High School.

Parents do not have to pay for their children to participate in the STEM Virtual High School. But there is an admission process based on student and parent interest, test scores, grade-point averages and interviews for students to be invited to enroll.

The state approved funding for the program, including the use of federal Race to the Top dollars.



First-grade students from Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School in Boston recite Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the White House for President Barack Obama. Photo Credit: Pete Souza, White House Photographer

First-Graders Recite 'Dream' Speech For President Obama

Some 18 first-graders at Orchard Gardens K-8 Pilot School in Boston lived out their dream of performing Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech before President Barack Obama.

The students performed the speech for the president during a recent visit to the White House.

According to the *Boston Herald*, it was during a trip to the State House to recite the historic speech for Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick that a student raised her hand to say her dream was to recite the speech for the president. Inspired in that moment, her teacher, Darlene White-Dot-tin, asked the governor if the pupils could recite it for President Obama and the governor made the arrangements.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for these kids," Gov. Patrick said in the *Herald*. "I am so proud of the educators and students at Orchard Gardens for the progress they have made academically."

Since being designated as a turnaround school in 2010, Orchard Gardens has hired more experienced teachers, adopted a more rigorous curriculum and extended school hours to improve student achievement. The school has also increased parental involvement and community partnerships.

Interactive Classroom Initiative Advances in San Diego District

President Barack Obama's administration would like to see every district in the nation provide digital textbooks to their students by 2017, and California's San Diego Unified School District is well on its way to achieving that goal.

The district has distributed nearly 78,000 digital textbooks and other mobile devices to teachers and students as part of its i21 Interactive Classroom Initiative (i21), designed to improve teaching and learning in each of the district's 7,000 classrooms.

According to district officials, within the next five years, approximately 20 percent of classrooms a year will receive new digital tools such as interactive whiteboards, net-book computers with Internet access and a wireless voice amplification system. Teachers will also be provided with extensive professional development.

The i21 initiative was recently recognized by Federal Communications Commission Chairman Julius Genachowski and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at the first-ever Digital Learning Day Town Hall in Washington, D.C. San Diego was highlighted for its efforts to move from traditional paper textbooks to digital learning environments.

The district is beginning the fourth year of its i21 initiative and officials say they are starting to see results.

"It's an opportunity to change the way we do things based on new tools, resources, and focusing on 21st-century skills that students need to be able to survive in today's world," said Barbara Allen, director of educational technology for the district, in an article in *eSchool News*.

District officials say the initiative has led to an increase in student engagement because students enjoy using the technology and teachers credit the technology with helping them manage their classrooms as well as helping students locate information and develop valuable workforce skills.

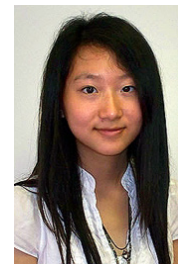
The i21 initiative is being funded

through Proposition S, a \$2.1-billion bond measure citizens passed in 2008. Funds from the bond measure do not pay for professional development training, which the district funds. Teachers receive approximately 30 hours of training, which consists of an introduction to the program and the technology. They also attend two in-depth training sessions and participate in a student engagement training component.

District administrators believe that its i21 initiative can be replicated in school systems across the nation.

"We would like to think that this is the right thing for us, and for districts anywhere," said San Diego Schools Superintendent Bill Kowba in *eSchool News*. "We want to share; we want to learn from others and meet in the middle."

AP Students Honored



Yue Sha

Yue Sha is a student at Louisiana's Baton Rouge Magnet High School where she has a grade-point average of 4.55, is a member of the National Honor Society, and tutors students in math.

Sha, who moved to America from China with her family in 2007, is one of several big-city students who were recently selected to receive the 2011 Siemens Awards for Advanced Placement (AP).

The students received the award, along with a \$2,000 college scholarship, for earning the highest scores in AP science and math courses. Sponsored by the Siemens Foundation, the awards are given to one male and one female student in each state.

Students from Anchorage, Little Rock, Miami, Louisville and Albuquerque also received awards. Both of the male and female winners in Alaska were from A J Diamond School in Anchorage.

Austin District Develops Program For Spanish-Speaking Parents

In Texas' Austin Independent School District, three out of five students are Hispanic and at least 24,000 students speak Spanish in their home.

As a result, the district has teamed with the Mexicans and Americans Thinking Together Foundation to enroll Spanish-speaking parents in a new program, *Maestro en casa* ("teacher at home").

The English-language immersion and immigrant integration program aims not only to help parents with basic English language vocabulary but help them better understand the district's education system.

Maestro en casa lessons focus on various aspects of adult American life, such as public education, healthcare, finance and citizenship. Integrating workbooks with audio

lessons, parents can participate at their own pace in their homes.

Once the parents complete the program and pass an exam, they will receive a recognition certificate at a graduation ceremony.

More than 1,700 parents have registered for the program. The school system set a goal of enrolling 1,000 parents, but within 48 hours of launching the program all the slots were filled. After more than 500 parents signed up to be included on a waiting list, the district almost doubled the number of participants.

"We are very excited to be able to offer this innovative integration program to our parents in Austin," said Alex Sánchez, director of the district's public relations and multicultural outreach.

School Board Chairman Named 'Unsung Hero' In Greensboro

After receiving "unsung hero" recognition, Alan Duncan, chairman of North Carolina's Guilford County Board of Education in Greensboro, plans to give a \$25,000 prize that came with the honor to his school district to benefit students.



Alan Duncan

He recently received the Unsung Hero Award from the Joseph M. Bryan Foundation, which recognizes those who may not always be in the headlines, but who are making a difference in the community.

The award came with a check for \$25,000, which Duncan can donate to a charity of his choice.

He decided to give the entire amount to Guilford County Schools, the third largest school system in North Carolina.

He reportedly would like to earmark about half of his contribution to the district's new STEM Early College at North Carolina A&T University, which is scheduled to open this coming fall. This would be the school district's ninth early/middle college. The programs have produced high student graduation rates.

He's also interested in donating some of his prize to support homeless students.

Duncan has served on the school board since 2000, chairing the policy body since 2002. In addition to a variety of community efforts, he finds time to read to elementary school classes, judge senior graduation projects and attend high school graduations, according to the district.

In presenting the Unsung Hero Award, Duncan's longtime friend and professional colleague, said, "Alan sets the gold standard for civic responsibility."



Des Moines Adds Corporate Jet to Aviation Program

The Aviation Engineering Technology Program operated by Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools is really taking off with the addition of a new aircraft. The district recently received a Learjet Model 35 that will be based at the program's lab, located at the Des Moines International Airport, and used as a teaching tool for high school students studying aviation technology and maintenance. The corporate jet is a surplus aircraft from Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi and was acquired at a cost of \$4,000. According to district officials, Des Moines' aviation program is one of only four high school aviation programs in the nation certified by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Council Opposes House Committee ESEA Reauthorization Bills

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

On February 28, the House Education and the Workforce Committee marked-up and reported two bills (H.R. 3989 and H.R. 3990) reauthorizing the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The committee action culminated nearly two months debating, drafting, negotiating, and revising. But, in the end, the Council of the Great City Schools found too many fundamental problems to support the measure.



The two committee bills reflected a major effort by the House majority to simplify and streamline the overly prescriptive *No Child Left Behind* program. In fact, the Council supported earlier committee action to reduce the number of small federal programs and concentrate available education funds into larger programs. But, the Council could not support paring down ESEA into three major titles (excluding Impact Aid) that rearranged a number of existing programs into reservations and set-asides. Moreover, the Council was deeply troubled by the bill's allowing funds reserved for migrant children, neglected and delinquent children, Indian children, and English Language Learners to be spent on other students. This crossed the line from flexibility into undermining protections for students who need dedicated aid.

In addition, the committee bill removed the current Title I provision requiring a specified level of poverty under the "schoolwide programs" before being able to spend funds on non-disadvantaged students. The new language would simply turn Title I into a general aid program with little targeting of effort on the neediest students.

Moreover, H.R. 3989 delegated the bulk of ESEA accountability and improvement responsibilities to state departments of education, despite many states having limited capacity and a history of inequitable treatment of school districts with high concentrations of poor and minority children. The bill also lacked a linkage between the academic performance of traditional student subgroups and accountability, intervention and improvement.

This disconnect increases the likelihood that achievement gaps could be ignored or unremedied. In fact, the initial round of state waiver applications from *No Child Left Behind* requirements underscored how easily some states will seek to evade accountability for critical student subgroups — low-income, racial and ethnic minorities, limited English proficient, and students with disabilities.

In addition, H.R. 3990 significantly reduced the proportion of funds allocated to states and school districts on the basis of student poverty, thereby diverting sizeable amounts of federal funds away from the neediest students, including those in central city school districts. H.R. 3989 also increased the state set-aside under section 1003 of the Title I program by 150 percent, further reducing local school district formula grants by over three-quarters of a billion dollars annually.

Furthermore, the Council could not support creating a \$2.6 billion block grant for state departments of education in H.R. 3990 that provided states with nearly unfettered discretion over how funds would be used or to which schools and districts funds would be allocated. Most importantly, both committee bills undercut the financial integrity of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by eliminating the "maintenance of effort" provisions of the Act, without which states would be allowed to lower their education expenditures and use ESEA funds as an offset, a situation that occurred in many states with portions of the 2009 Stimulus funds because "maintenance of effort" language was not included.

Finally, the bipartisan defeat of a committee amendment to revise the Title I funding formula and take funds away from large urban school districts, as well as the removal of private school voucher authority, were two positive outcomes of the Committee process. But, the potential adverse impact of other provisions necessitated Council opposition. Further action in the House and Senate on ESEA remains uncertain.

Newark, Detroit, Houston and D.C. Rated Top School-Breakfast Districts

Four urban school districts--New Jersey's Newark Public Schools, Detroit Public Schools, Houston Independent School District and the District of Columbia Public Schools in Washington, D.C.--have the highest percentage of students participating in school breakfast programs, according to a new report.

School Breakfast in America's Big Cities, published by the Food Research and Action Center, examined the performance of the School Breakfast Program in 26 urban school districts during the 2010-2011 school year. Newark tops the list with an 87.2 percent participation rate; followed by Detroit, with a participation rate of 86.8 percent; Houston, with a participation rate of 79.1 percent; and the District of Columbia, with a participation rate of 65.0 percent.

Participation rates were measured by comparing the number of children from economically disadvantaged families re-

ceiving school breakfast to the number of such children receiving free or reduced-price school lunch.

The top four school districts served breakfast to 65 percent or more of the students from economically disadvantaged families that received school lunch each day. The districts also have programs in which all students are offered breakfast at no charge, with most eating in the classroom at the beginning of the school day.

The report found that school districts that offer breakfast in the classroom free to all students have the highest participation rates and that offering free breakfast to students can result in higher attendance, lower absenteeism, better health, reduced behavior problems, reduced obesity and higher student achievement.

The report can be accessed at http://frac.org/pdf/urban_school_breakfast_report_2012.pdf.

Actress Goldie Hawn Forms Partnership With Miami-Dade County Schools

At a recent Miami-Dade County school board meeting, board members were joined by Academy Award-winning actress Goldie Hawn, who unveiled a partnership agreement that will benefit children at two Miami schools.

In 2005, the actress established The Hawn Foundation to promote children's academic success in school and in life through social and emotional learning. One of its initiatives is the MindUP program, which features lessons to improve behavior and learning for children.

The program is currently operating in two district schools: William Lehman Elementary and Coconut Palm K-8 Center. The MindUP Program's curriculum focuses on reducing stress, anxiety and peer-to-peer conflict, and even teaches students about how the brain functions.

"A lot of kids don't have any free time at all to create," Hawn said at the school board meeting in the *Miami-Herald*. "I think we need some dream time for kids."



Actress Goldie Hawn discusses her partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools at a school board meeting as Deputy Superintendent for Operations Freddie Woodson looks on. Photo Credit: M-DCPS

Labor-Management Pact in Providence Receives \$100,000

A partnership between Rhode Island's Providence Public School District and the Providence Teachers Union designed to improve student achievement at low-performing schools has received a \$100,000 grant from the Rhode Island Foundation.

The United Providence (UP!) labor-management partnership will become an education management organization and will lead intervention efforts at one elementary school, one middle school and one high school.

The grant will be used to hire a consultant and develop a strategic plan as well as a comprehensive three-year business plan addressing staff and budget.

District officials say the partnership is one of the first such efforts of its kind in the nation between labor and management and hope that it will be replicated.

The three schools will undergo intervention under a U.S. Department of Education "Restart" model, which requires that a school convert or close and re-open under a different operating model. UP! will function as a lead partner to the three schools, receiving management authority and flexibility in exchange for being held accountable for results.

Lead partners will sign a three- to five-year performance contract with the Providence School Board for student achievement that holds the lead partner accountable for improving achievement in the schools to which they are assigned.

"We are so pleased that the Rhode Island Foundation sees the vast potential and vision behind this work, and has decided to fund our start-up efforts," said Providence Interim Schools Superintendent Susan Lusi in a news statement. "This is a demanding, exciting, and promising process that we believe will yield great results in the education of our children."



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Three Guilford County Teachers Take Flight In Microgravity Research

Ferndale Middle School in Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C., is one of 14 NASA Explorer Schools recognized for its contributions to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. With this recognition, three Ferndale teachers were selected to participate in the Reduced Gravity Education Flight Program at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston.

Teachers Kim Forbes, Krista Hanna and Betsy Montgomery prepared for their flight by conducting science experiments on inertia, motion and density in their classrooms.

They recently joined more than 70 educators at NASA to experience exactly what it feels like to float in space.

While at NASA, the teachers flew aboard an aircraft that creates brief periods of weightlessness. After completing their flight, the teachers held a video conference with students to share their experience.

"STEM education is so important because we now live in a global economy and

we must ensure that our students are prepared for future employment," said Forbes, who has led the school in securing several NASA experiences for students and staff.

TV Show Generates \$100,000 Grants for Schools

Cheers and excitement overflowed at 12 urban schools after the Target Corporation announced they were winners of a \$100,000 grant. The schools were selected after viewers submitted their names to the *Ellen DeGeneres Show*, along with a compelling story about why the school should receive the grant.

Schools in Los Angeles, San Diego, Dallas, Albuquerque, Baltimore, Cleveland, Oakland, New York City, Washington, D.C., Santa Ana, Calif., and Florida's Broward County Public Schools were among the 50 schools awarded grants.