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President Obama Visits and Praises Nashville Schools



Student Body President Ronald Elliot introduces Obama.



President addresses Nashville school.

Two days after delivering the State of the Union address, President Obama visited a Nashville high school and praised the school district for its efforts to reform high schools and present a proposed plan to expand pre-kindergarten education.

He noted that it's time for more schools to rethink how they teach students in delivering an address on Jan. 30 at McGavock High School in Nashville.

"If you're a student here, your experience is a little different from students at other high schools," he said. "Starting in 10th grade, you get to choose from one of four 'academies' that allow you to focus on a specific subject area."

The president continued, "So students in the Academy of Business and Finance, they're operating their own credit union here at the school....If you choose Digital Design and Communication, you get to spend time in a TV studio....If you choose the Aviation and Transportation Academy, you get to learn how to operate a 3D printer, and work on your very own airplane. That's pretty cool."

"We've got to make sure that our high schools engage our children."

—President Obama

And Obama indicated that local businesses are doing their part to provide opportunities for students to align their classroom lessons with jobs that are available.

"We've got to make sure that our high schools engage our children," he stressed, noting that every child is not going to follow the same path, and at the same speed. "And the more we can link them to real hands-on experience, the more likely they are to be engaged."

President Obama singled out a recent McGavock High School graduate from Guatemala, who struggled in her freshman year at the Nashville school.

But when Sara Santiago took a broadcasting class, the teacher "helped her to discover this passion for filmmaking," Obama explained. "And pretty soon, Sara's grades started to improve. She won the school's 'best editing' award."

Santiago never imagined that the president of the United States would call on her.

President Obama continued on page 4

Harsh Winter Weather Challenges Urban Schools

One of the coldest Arctic outbreaks in two decades, known as the Polar Vortex, recently brought snow, below-average temperatures and record-breaking wind chill factors to the Midwest, East and Southern areas of the nation, severely affecting the operations of urban school districts in those regions.

Midwest Districts Hit Hard

School officials in the Midwest are used to snow and cold temperatures, but even this year has defied expectations with the Windy City recording more than 33 inches of snow in January, making it the third snowiest month on record in Chicago.

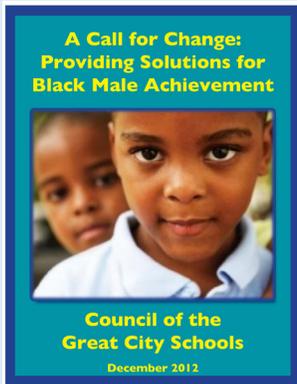
Winter Weather continued on page 8



A snow-covered school bus in Buffalo.

Obama's New Initiative for Young Men of Color Follows Council's 'Call for Change'

President Obama on Feb. 27 announced a new initiative called "My Brother's



Keeper" to empower boys and young men of color, which follows the Council of the Great City Schools' 2010

wake-up call in releasing an eye-opening report indicating that young black males in America are in a state of crisis.

The widely publicized report – *A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools* – led to Council testimony before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Children and Families.

The new White House initiative aims to bring public, private and non-profit sectors together to test a range of strate-

gies to break down barriers and clear the path for opportunities to support boys and young men of color.

Obama indicated in launching "My Brother's Keeper" that opportunities have lagged behind for African American and Hispanic boys and young men. "The statistics should break our hearts," he stressed. "And they should compel us to act."

"We applaud President Obama's initiative, and will continue our efforts to improve the social and academic conditions of our boys and young men of color," said Council Executive Director Michel Casserly.

The *Call for Change* study in 2010 actually called for a White House initiative, noting that the education, social and employment outcomes of African American males is equivalent to a "national catastrophe" that deserves coordinated nation-

al attention.

The Council formed an Initiative on Black Male Achievement and held a national town hall meeting to discuss the challenges facing black males.

Internal and external advisory groups have been formed by the Council, composed of urban-school, community and faith-based leaders among many others interested in improving outcomes for boys and young men of



color.

Through these groups, the Council has explored, identified and proposed a number of solutions, disseminating these ideas and strategies to urban schools and the nation at large.

New Initiative continued on page 9



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Baltimore Names New School Chief; Tenure Extended for Two Leaders



Gregory Thornton

Baltimore City Public Schools recently announced Gregory Thornton will become the new chief executive officer and take the helm of the 84,000-student school district.

Thornton, currently superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools, will succeed interim CEO Tisha Edwards.

Thornton has led the 80,000-student school district in Milwaukee since 2010. Under his leadership, the district has seen an increase in its graduation rates, an increase in the number of students attending college, improved school facilities and the development of business and community partnerships. The school system has also focused on developing new curricula aligned to the Common Core State Standards and implementing more professional development for the staff.

Before his move to Milwaukee, Thornton held leadership positions in several school districts, including the School District of Philadelphia, where he served as chief academic officer, and coordinating director of secondary schools in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

"Dr. Thornton is the right person at the right time for City Schools," said Baltimore City board chair Shanaysha Sauls in a press release.

"We have a solid foundation of progress, and we are now building on that progress through the implementation of long-term reform in areas where Dr. Thornton has deep experience and demonstrated expertise."

Contract Extensions

Kelvin Adams became the superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools in 2008 and during his tenure, the district has not only shown steady academic gains but

has improved its financial position as well, eliminating debt and operating with a balanced budget for the past three consecutive years.

As a result, the district's special administrative board recently extended Adams' contract through June 2016.



Kelvin Adams

As superintendent, Adams has ushered in several new academic initiatives. In addition to pilot schools, an African-centered curriculum school and greater school choice for district students, Adams has expanded the number of full-day seats for pre-school students by more than 50 percent.

In North Carolina's Guilford County Schools, Superintendent Maurice "Mo" Green will be able to lead the school system for at least another three years. He has

Tenure Extended *continued on page 4*

Superintendent in Austin to Lead Texas Council

Superintendent Meria Carstarphen of the Austin Independent School District has been elected the 2014 chair of the Texas Urban Council of Superintendents, a network of the state's largest urban school districts representing some 777,000 students and 50,000 teachers throughout Texas.

Educate Texas, a public-private initiative, established the network to strengthen leadership development in the critical role that school leaders play in the success of all schools.

The school districts represented in the Texas Urban Council of Superintendents include Aldine, Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, Lubbock, San Antonio and Ysleta.

"We value Dr. Carstarphen's leadership and commitment to Texas urban schools and are looking forward to her leading the council as it continues to work together to

Miami-Dade County Superintendent Named Top U.S. School Leader



Alberto Carvalho

Alberto Carvalho, superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, was recently named the 2014 National Superintendent of the Year by AASA, The School Superintendents Association.

Carvalho was recognized for his expertise in school reform and finance.

A \$10,000 college scholarship will be presented in Carvalho's name to a student attending the high school from which the superintendent graduated or a student attending a Miami-Dade high school.

Carvalho was among four finalists for the award, including Houston Schools Superintendent Terry Grier.

prepare our students for college and career success," says John Fitzpatrick, executive director of Educate Texas.

The council aims to increase the focus on urban education, provide support and resources, and to coordinate efforts among the superintendents who lead some of the largest school districts in the state and nation, according to a news release.

Superintendent Carstarphen, who has led Austin public schools since 2009, is also a member of the Council of the Great City Schools' Executive Committee, a key body of the organization's Board of Directors.



Meria Carstarphen

Tenure Extended *continued from page 3*



Maurice Green

been superintendent of the state's third largest school district since 2008.

The school board recently voted to extend Green's contract through June, 2017, and commended him for his leadership and vision

for Guilford County Schools. It noted in a press statement, "The superintendent has done an excellent job of managing the precious resources of the district, of building relationships in the community..., and has built collaborative relationships that benefit the children of Guilford County."

Just weeks earlier, Superintendent Green received the Distinguished Educator Award from the North Carolina Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development for his leadership in integrating character education and service-learning into the district's curriculum.

"From our teachers to administrators to our students and parents, this award is meaningful for all of Guilford County Schools," he said in a news release.

The school district has earned national recognition for helping its graduating

President Obama *continued from page 1*

Obama also applauded Metro Nashville Public Schools Director Jesse Register's plan for a locally funded universal pre-kindergarten that would give every 4-year-old in Nashville access to pre-K.

He pointed out that some 30 states have begun to raise funds for pre-kindergarten education. "And school districts like this one {Nashville} have plans to open dedicated pre-K centers with space for hundreds of young kids," he said.

The Nashville superintendent unveiled a plan that would open model pre-K centers in existing schools in key areas of the city – rather than adding in individual classrooms.

students to demonstrate high academic achievement, strength of character and service to others. The school district in 2013 was named North Carolina and National District of Character.

Since the start of the service-learning initiative in 2010, high-school students in Guilford County Schools have contributed more than 638,000 hours of service, an economic impact of approximately \$14 million, according to the district.

Superintendent Green also recently received honors from two community organizations – the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity and the Greensboro Regional Realtors Association.

Student Services Director Recognized

Brenda Elliott, executive director of student services and character development for North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, has received national recognition for her service-learning leadership.

She receives the 2014 G. Bernard Gill Urban Services-Learning Leadership Award from the National Youth Leadership Council. The award is named for a pioneer in service-learning and an advocate for using it to engage African-American males.

Under Elliott's leadership, North Carolina's third largest school district expanded its emphasis on service-learning with the establishment of a service-learning award and diploma for district graduates.

Guilford County Schools defines service-learning as "a way of teaching and learning that connects positive and meaningful action in the community with academic learning, 21st century skills, personal growth and civic responsibility."

Kelita Bak, CEO of the National Youth Leadership Council, says Elliott's "passion for service-learning as a strategy to achieve success for students and educators...has helped to push Guilford County Schools forward as a leader in education excellence."

Seattle Student Writes Op-ed In *Wall St. Journal*

As spring rolls around, many college-bound students in urban school districts are knee-deep in the process of taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses as well as SAT tests, but at what cost?

According to Benjamin Tonelli, a senior at Garfield High School in Seattle, the costs of this process can be extremely high for students and their parents.

In an op-ed in a recent issue of *The Wall Street Journal*, Tonelli wrote about the sticker shock he experienced taking AP courses and SAT tests.

The high school senior paid \$102 to take two SAT tests, \$114 for five subject tests and \$534 for six AP tests. Then to his surprise, he discovered that when he was ready to report his scores through the College Board web site to the 10 colleges he applied to, he incurred an additional \$11.25 fee for each electronic submission.

As Tonelli tallied up his own test-taking costs, he questioned how the nonprofit College Board, which had \$750 million in annual revenue for 2011-2012, could place such a burden on students and their families.

"Lowering the cost of the SAT would encourage more students whose parents make modest incomes to retake the test and compete against students from higher income households who often take the test upward of four times, aiming at higher scores." Tonelli took the SATs twice.

The high school senior suggested two ways the College Board can ease the financial burden for students. One is to allow colleges to review prospective students' test scores online and the other is to reduce the price of AP tests to encourage more high school students to take the exams, which grant college credit, resulting in lower tuition and less student debt.

"What better way to stay true to the College Board's belief in "investing in the future?" writes Tonelli.

Collaboration is Key to Pittsburgh Board Member's Success

In July 2002, three foundations in Pittsburgh made national news when they held a press conference to announce they were suspending funding to Pittsburgh Public Schools because a loss of confidence in the district's governance. They cited "an increasingly dysfunctional" relationship among school board members as well as between the school board and the superintendent.

But 20 months later, those same foundations held another press conference, joined by several school board members and the superintendent, where they announced



William Isler

plans to resume funding for the school system. And one of the factors leading to that decision was visible changes in the behavior of the school board led by new president William Isler.

Under Isler, the board moved away from engaging in rancorous public disputes and focused more on working together to make major policy decisions such as closing schools. After his selection as president in 2003, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* praised Isler in an editorial: "A former educator himself and a force for moderation on the board since he was elected in 1999, Mr. Isler has not allowed members to stray into incivility."

But in a recent interview with the *Urban Educator* Isler refused to take credit for the change in the board's behavior. "We had a group of board members that really wanted to improve the governing structure of the school board at that time," recalled Isler. "And we really worked as a team, everybody was committed."

The cooperation and collaboration the board displayed that helped win back the foundations' support is a hallmark of Isler's leadership style.

"I really believe in collaboration because you're never going to accomplish anything



alone," said Isler, who served as board president for five years and is the current first vice president. "Our board is nine people and you have to be able to work with the majority of that board and reach out and listen to them and talk about the needs of the district as a whole."

Before becoming a school board member, Isler taught fifth and sixth graders for two years and worked in the Pennsylvania Department of Education for eight years in a variety of roles, including senior program adviser for early childhood education. He is currently president of the Fred Rogers Company, the nonprofit founded by the late Fred Rogers to produce the popular television children's show *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. The company produces preschool programs for PBS as well as develops professional development and parent-ing programs.

Isler, who is 67 and married with an adult son, has spent the bulk of his professional life in early childhood education. Therefore, he counts as one of his biggest achievements as a school board member is helping to expand the district's early childhood program, including establishing free, full-day preschool for 4-year-olds.

"We built the strongest public education pre-K and kindergarten program in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania," said Isler. "Not just me, but the entire board supported that."

Challenges Ahead

The former teacher believes the biggest challenge facing the Pittsburgh school system is the lack of funding and notes that the financial situation currently facing the district is the worst he has seen since becoming a school board member.

Another challenge the school system is grappling with is implementing its teacher evaluation system. He praises the superintendent and district staff for working with the teacher's union, but acknowledges, "It's a process where there is a lot of give and take, a lot of cooperation and that can be difficult."

In his 15 years on the school board, he has seen the achievement of children in the Pittsburgh school system increase, including a higher graduation rate and more students attending postsecondary institutions.

So what does he say to the naysayers who don't believe urban education is improving?

"I really don't think they spend the time to delve in how successful American public urban education is," said Isler, who in 2008 served as the chair of the Council of the Great City Schools and is a longtime Executive Committee member.

"They need to investigate and find out how hard our professional staff is working to improve urban education and then they ought to find out how they can get involved and support."

And that support includes running for the school board, something he strongly encourages people to do.

In 1999, Isler ran for the school board because his son received a very good education in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

"We need really committed school board members, those individuals who deeply believe that the future of this country rests with our public school system," said Isler.

A friend of Fred Rogers, who was a product of public schools, Isler recalled that the most important thing he learned from the children's television host is that a person can never do enough for children.

"I have a quote from him on my wall that says 'Anybody who does anything to help a child in this life is a hero to me.'" said Isler. "It's what we all have to aspire to. We have to commit ourselves to helping children."

Graduation Rates Rising in Urban School Districts

In Albuquerque, N.M., “73.3%” is displayed all over town – on billboards, marquees, web sites, buttons and signs.

The percentage begins an op-ed article in the city’s major newspaper headlined “A number well worth celebrating.”

So, why all the buzz over a single number, and what does this 73.3 percent mean?

“73.3 is the percentage of students who graduated on time from Albuquerque Public Schools in 2013,” says Superintendent Winston Brooks in the *Albuquerque Journal*.

“Let’s put that number in perspective,” he explained. “When I started as the APS superintendent, the percentage of our students graduating with their classmates was 63.2. That number has jumped 16 percent in six years, an amazing gain that’s less about statistics and more about young people earning diplomas, and moving on to college and careers. Isn’t that what public education is all about?”

This is the third consecutive year that the Albuquerque school system has seen a rise in its four-year graduation rate that has now reached 73.3 percent, which is calculated and released by the New Mexico

Public Education Department. In 2008, the district had a 63.2 percent four-year graduation rate.

Rising graduation rates have been recently reported in a number of big-city public school systems nationwide, including Denver, Minneapolis, Providence, R.I., and Saint Paul, Minn. In Boston, the on-time graduation rate tied the record level the district set last year.

Minnesota’s Saint Paul Public Schools also saw an increase in graduation rates to 73 percent, and Superintendent Valeria Silva is especially pleased with the critical reductions in the disparities in graduation rates between white students and students of color.

“I believe this is fundamentally the result of a culture shift within Saint Paul Public Schools,” she said. “We are starting to see the results from the *Strong Schools, Strong Communities* strategic plan and our work to ensure educational equity for all students.”

Superintendent Silva, who also chairs the Council of the Great City Schools Board of Directors, added, “We are seeing that when you raise up the struggling students, all student performance rises.”

Des Moines Launches New Partnership

When President Obama sounded a national call for action, Iowa’s Des Moines education and business community received the push it needed to create local partnerships to increase access to college.

Through STEM Pathway, a newly launched initiative by Des Moines Public Schools, Drake University, Principal Financial Group (PFG) and the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, economically disadvantaged students will benefit from a partnership to create a pipeline to higher education and employment in high-demand occupations.

The initiative’s first year will pair as many as 20 high school students from the Des Moines school district with Drake University student mentors and professional mentors from PFG. Upon comple-

tion of high school, qualified students in the program will be admitted to Drake University. The students will be eligible for paid internships at PFG and considered for employment after obtaining their college degree.

The STEM Pathway initiative was featured at a White House summit in January hosted by President Obama focusing on increasing college opportunity.

“As Iowa’s largest school district, we have made providing greater access to STEM educational programs a priority across all grade levels,” said Des Moines Schools Superintendent Thomas Ahart. “The new STEM Pathway initiative provides another exciting and rewarding opportunity for students in Des Moines to see firsthand how the things they learn in school can translate to college and careers.”

Orlando Educator A Finalist For Teacher of the Year

Dorina Sackman, an 8th-grade teacher in Florida’s Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, has a lot to celebrate. She recently learned she is one of only four finalists in the running for the top spot of the National Teacher of the Year.

The award is sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers. The finalists for the top award were their state’s Teacher of the Year.

A teacher for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Sackman is a teaching veteran of more than 15 years. She speaks five languages and is a frequent presenter on staff development related to the Florida Standards and English language learners.

“My passion drives me,” Sackman said in a news statement. “I educate children to communicate in English while celebrating every single one of their cultures. As a result, they too have become fueled by knowledge and armed with a voice.”

Sackman has spent her school year as Florida’s Teacher of the Year and currently travels the state as an education advocate and ambassador who represents all teachers in Florida. The National Teacher of the Year will be announced in late April.



Orange County Public Schools Superintendent Barbara Jenkins, left, congratulates ESOL/Language Arts teacher Dorina Sackman for being named a finalist for the National Teacher of the Year.

Four Urban Districts Participate in Network To Reduce Discipline Disparities

The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools recently joined the nation's three largest school districts in an initiative aimed at examining racial and other disparities in school discipline and finding ways to move away from punitive, exclusionary approaches that contribute to student achievement gaps.

The 83,000-student school system in Tennessee is participating in PASSAGE (Positive and Safe Schools Advancing Greater Equity), a four-city program supported by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

In addition to Nashville, the participating cities include New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, and they are to share best practices and positive approaches in the PASSAGE network.

The work is intended to be achieved through partnerships between the school district and the community in each of the four cities, with further support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, a foundation to help people who have been unfairly disadvantaged.

Nationally, the student discipline issue particularly has a negative impact on Af-

rican-American and Latino students, who are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than white students, contributing to the academic achievement gap among groups of students.

"We talk a lot about the achievement gap, and we believe the discipline gap is related to it," said Nashville Director of Schools Jesse Register in a press release. "PASSAGE is a way for us to look closely at our own practices and the societal structures involved so we can find ways to improve."

PASSAGE is billed as an action and learning network. "This isn't a study or a committee that will give a list of recommendations to take action two or three years from now," Nashville Schools Chief Support Services Officer Tony Majors stressed. "This is a program of action, and the work to solve this issue has already started."

"We felt very confident that Nashville was the right city to put in the mix and to move forward because they were already on the move," said Alethea Frazier Raynor, principal associate at the Annenberg Institute, in *The Tennessean*.

Birmingham Offers Free ACT Camp

Alabama's Birmingham City Schools wants to see its students achieve their goal of being college and career ready. And the first step is preparation for college-entrance exams.

For the first time ever, all high school juniors in Alabama are required to take the ACT. To ensure their success, the district has teamed up with College Admissions Made Possible, a local nonprofit organization that provides intensive college admissions assistance to students.

Through the partnership, any Birmingham City student can attend Saturday classes that offer free Kaplan ACT Prep. The classes will be offered at each high school in the district.

Students will receive instruction from district teachers and Kaplan instructors through a co-teaching model. The district plans to encourage attendance by providing breakfast, lunch and transportation to participants as well as reward academic growth through funds that have been provided to each high school.

"With a focus on graduation rate, we want to provide as many opportunities that help our students see the end goal, and the possibilities that ensue," said Birmingham Schools Superintendent Craig Wither- spoon. "Efforts like this help our students not only realize the possibility of college, they begin to believe in the probability of college which is a great motivator for student achievement."



Houston Schools Superintendent Terry Grier delivers the 2014 State of the Schools address. Photo credit: Houston Independent School District

Houston Leader Announces New Initiatives

Superintendent Terry Grier of the Houston Independent School District recently announced the expansion of dual-language programs, a new diversity initiative and a program to address high student mobility rates.

In delivering his 2014 State of the Schools address, he unveiled a new program called *Home-Field Advantage* that will target areas in Houston that have high mobility rates and offer transportation to students, allowing them to make one school their home even when their families are forced to move often.

"Children need stability in their lives and that is exactly what this program is about," said Grier in a press release.

The superintendent also announced the launch of 14 new Spanish dual-language programs for next year, and is exploring the creation of an Arab dual-language program.

Further, he announced a new diversity program aimed at helping Houston school district administrators and central-office staff to understand how more diverse staffing across schools and departments will make Texas' largest public school system stronger.

Winter Weather *continued from page 1*

Snow, combined with wind-chill readings of -30 degrees, led Chicago Public Schools to close schools four times this year.

Ohio's Cleveland Metropolitan School District has closed schools seven times this year due to extreme weather, while Toledo Public Schools has closed a record 12 days.

In an effort to help students make up the lost days, the Toledo school system has implemented Blizzard Bags, online assignments for students to complete additional assignments to count toward the loss of instruction.

Missouri's St. Louis Public Schools has closed schools seven days this year due to severe cold weather, while Minnesota's St. Paul Public Schools and Minneapolis Public Schools each missed six days this year. One day it was so cold that the governor of Minnesota cancelled schools for the entire state, the first time all schools were closed since 1997.

In addition to adding two additional days to the school calendar and implementing Saturday school, the Minneapolis school system recently announced its first-ever Spring Break Academy.

The academy will emphasize core subjects such as reading and math as well as offer students preparation and tips for test-taking.

The East Coast has also taken a beating with snow in Boston this year about 25 inches above normal, causing Boston Public Schools to use four snow days thus far, while New York's Buffalo Public Schools has used five snow days.

And for students in the School District of Philadelphia, their spring break will be cut short. To make up for lost instructional days, schools will now be opened three days in April that were originally designated for Spring Recess.

Atlanta Makes Headlines

School systems in the South, where snow is a rare occurrence; have been hit particularly hard by this year's extreme winter weather.

Louisiana's East Baton Rouge Parish School System closed schools four days

this year and is making up those four days by converting a scheduled Mardi Gras holiday to a regular instructional day and converting a teacher-planning day to a day of instruction for students. The district also extended the school-class and administration-office day by 30 minutes for about six weeks.

In the wake of eight missed school days due to inclement weather, Virginia's Richmond Public Schools will be using two days that were originally scheduled as parent-teacher conference days.

North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro closed schools six days this year, while South Carolina's Charleston County School District closed school for four days. Alabama's Birmingham City Schools lost six instructional days, and as a result will extend this school year to June 2 from May 29. In addition, one day previously slated for a half day will become a full instructional day.

Atlanta Public Schools made national news when on Jan. 28, severe snow and ice resulted in hazardous travel conditions that led the district to call an emergency "shelter in place" for students and staff who remained in schools. Approximately 500 students had to stay overnight at 10 schools while about 50 students were stranded on buses and had to be rescued the following morning.

At a recent school board meeting, Atlanta Schools Superintendent Erroll Davis offered an apology to those students and parents negatively impacted by the storm.

"To every person who was personally and profoundly affected, I am committed to making sure this scenario never occurs again," said Davis.

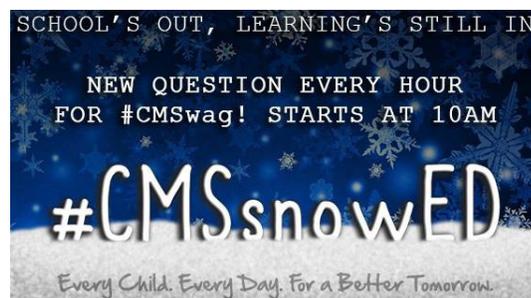
The district recently included an online questionnaire on its website for parents and students to fill out asking for their comments and recommendations on what the district can do better in the case of another

emergency.

Many urban school districts used social media to get the word out to parents and students about school closings or delays.

When severe winter weather occurred in Texas, the Fort Worth Independent School District announced on local television that school closings would be first announced on the district's mobile app. As a result, the number of people who downloaded the app during the two days schools were closed skyrocketed, with the district ultimately reaching its goal of getting 25,000 users to download its app.

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools used its Twitter hashtag



The Twitter hashtag Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools used to engage students when schools were closed.

#CMSsnowEd as a way to engage students through a trivia game. Every morning for the four days schools were closed, the district tweeted an educational question on different topics and the first person who tweeted back the

correct response was acknowledged by the district and received district memorabilia as a prize.

The Financial Impact

Many urban school officials have not calculated the monetary impact of the severe winter weather, but for many districts it's bound to be huge. For Minneapolis Public Schools, the impact of the closed days will probably be in the millions. "We still have to pay staff salaries, address increased building costs for snow removal and heating, and toss out thousands of meals," said Rachel Hicks, the district's director of media relations and public affairs. "Meanwhile, students lose this critical learning time."

And while snow and cold temperatures have wreaked havoc on many big-city school systems, Alaska's Anchorage School District has experienced relatively balmy

Winter Weather *continued on page 9*

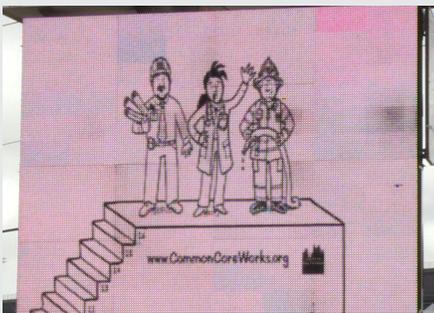


Council PSA Aired At Daytona 500

More than 1.2 million fans viewed the Council of the Great City Schools' public service announcement on the Common Core State Standards at the recent Daytona 500, NASCAR's most prestigious race.

The 30-second spot aired multiple times on a jumbo-tron during the Feb. 21-23 event at the Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla.

The PSA is intended to increase awareness of the Common Core State Standards, adopted in 45 states and the District of Columbia.



The Council's 30-second PSA on Common Core aired at the Daytona 500.

Winter Weather continued from page 8

weather, with temperatures at times in the 50s.

"Usually around this time, we're holding indoor recess because temperatures are dropping below negative 10 degrees, our threshold for holding outdoor recess," said Heidi Embley, the district's executive director of communications. "Instead, students are ditching their snow boots and heading to recess in their rain boots because all of the snow is melting."

Philadelphia to Open Three New High Schools

The School District of Philadelphia plans to open three new high schools this fall that are designed to be small and non-selective, and offering a personalized and high-quality learning environment with community support.

Approved recently by the School Reform Commission, the three schools intend to serve as many as 450 to 600 students, and will be open to all entering ninth graders. They will offer individualized supports to diverse learners, and utilize technology tools.

Students will be subjected to challenging competency-based learning, and must achieve proficiency to satisfy specific goals to advance. Community partnerships are planned to provide opportunities that supplement students' goals.

"These are small, highly personalized high schools," said Grace Cannon, executive director of the district's Office of New School Models, in the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*. "They are not small for small's sake, but they can embed deep

youth development and use technology to enable personalization and mastery."

Cannon's office received a design challenge grant from the Carnegie Corporation to support the design and development of two of the new schools, called The U School and The LINC.

At The U School, students will be prepared to become "urban designers" who use creative-problem solving to tackle real-world problems in their communities through research, planning, designing, as well as testing their ideas.

The LINC high schools will focus on global leadership, inquiry-based learning, and community engagement.

The Philadelphia school district's third new high school, called Building 21, is being developed through a partnership with a nonprofit organization by that name.

At Building 21, students will be able to create their own self-paced learning pathways, choosing from a variety of instructional opportunities.

New Initiative continued from page 2

In August, 2012, the Council co-sponsored the National Summit on Educational Excellence and Opportunity for African American Males at the U.S. Department of Education. Some 200 K-12 and university educators, business, community, state and federal leaders attended the historic event.

The Council commissioned 12 leading scholars to write "solution briefs" -- papers on solutions that have the potential to produce academic excellence for black males. The project has culminated in the development of an eBook titled *Solution Briefs – A Call for Change: Providing Solutions to Black Male Achievement*. The eBook can be found on Apples' iTunes, Barnes and Noble (Nook Books), and Amazon (Kindle Books).

And now this March, the Council will launch a webinar series that will give authors of the solution briefs and participants

the opportunity to engage and discuss specific topics and solutions for improving the outcomes of black males in urban public schools.

Other projects in the Council's Initiative on Black Male Achievement include:

- Student surveys to gain a perspective on how teenagers view issues related to their education;
- Urban school district surveys to determine the activities being pursued to improve the achievement of black males in the Council's 66 member public school systems; and
- Technical assistance to help urban-school leaders and others to take solutions to scale.

More information can be found on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org.

Obama Administration Proposes Priorities in FY 2015 Federal Budget

The Obama Administration released its FY 2015 federal budget proposal on March 4, a month later than the traditional February transmittal. The proposal calls for an additional \$1.3 billion in U.S. Department of Education discretionary-program funds or a 1.9 percent increase over the previous year. The \$1.3 billion in increased discretionary expenditures would fall within current budget restrictions established under the Bipartisan Budget Agreement (BBA) reached last December. Additionally, the Administration proposes a number of tax reforms and loophole-closing provisions to underwrite a \$56 billion Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative that would fund additional priorities (half in domestic programs and half in defense). This initiative would necessitate changes in a number of laws, as well as revisions in the recent Bipartisan Budget Agreement to increase current FY 2015 spending caps.



an additional \$170 million is coupled with existing funding to establish a new framework and network of STEM funding. A number of smaller education programs such as Investing in Innovation, State Longitudinal Data Systems, Promise Neighborhoods and others are proposed for small increases.

The Administration also proposes to spur college access, affordability, quality, and completion with two proposed mandatory funded programs: a new \$4 billion funding request over four years for a Higher Education Performance Fund and a new \$7 billion funding request over 10 years for College Opportunity Bonus grants. A modest increase to \$100 million in the First-In-The-World Fund also would support improved higher education outcomes, completion rates, and affordability through competitive grants. Additional job training investments would be funded by the Department of Labor.

The Administration's proposed budget once again prioritizes early learning, as the budget did last year. Over a 10-year period, the proposed budget lays out some \$75 billion in new mandatory funding for a Preschool-for-All program paid for by increasing tobacco taxes. The new federal-state partnership would involve cost-sharing with states to serve all 4-year-old children from low and moderate income families, incentives for full-day kindergartens and infants and toddler programs, as well as expansions for serving other moderate-income families. The Administration also proposes other preschool investments in the FY 2015 budget, including expanded funding for Preschool Development Grants (currently funded under Race-To-The-Top – Preschool at \$250 million) to \$500 million, and another \$250 million for this preschool program from the proposed Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative. Additional early learning investments would be funded through the Department of Health and Human Services.

The Administration again renews its proposed \$5 billion mandatory funding initiative, titled RESPECT, to award up to 1,000 state and district grants to support teachers and school leaders for improving preparation, providing early career assistance, assisting in transitioning to higher content standards, and facilitating collaborative practice.

In K-12 education, a variety of new priorities are proposed. A new \$300 million Race-To-The-Top – Equity and Opportunity program would provide competitive grants to integrate data on school-level resources, human resources, and achievement, as well as to attract effective teachers and school leaders to high-poverty schools and improve practice. A new \$200 million Connect Educators program would support professional development in creating and using digital learning resources to complement the upcoming ConnectED Initiative from the Federal Communications Commission to expand high-speed connectivity in schools and libraries. Another \$300 million for the Connect Educators program would be funded from the proposed Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative. A new \$150 million High School Redesign program is proposed, and

On the other hand, the Administration's proposed budget would freeze funds for most elementary and secondary education formula-grant programs at FY 2014 levels, including \$14.4 billion for Title I, \$723 million for Title III (ELLs), \$1.1 billion for Perkins Career and Tech Education, and \$564 million for Adult Education. A small increase of \$100 million is requested for the IDEA Part B formula grants, while a \$350 million decrease is targeted for Title II Teacher Quality formula grants (which would be revised and subjected to a 10 percent national set-aside for competitive grants and other activities). None of the key Education Department K-12 formula grants would be fully restored to their pre-sequestration levels under the FY 2015 Budget request. A handful of small programs are proposed for elimination, consolidation or reduction.

Based on the December 2013 Bipartisan Budget Agreement (BBA), there is little possibility of new sequestrations for the remainder of FY 2014 or for FY 2015. However, the Administration's funding requests – both within the current budget limitations and above the budget caps -- will require Congressional action and are likely to continue the never-ending battle over the federal budget.

Charlotte Program Teaches Students To Become Firefighters

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has taken career readiness to the next level as the district prepares students to serve their community as firefighters.

A pilot firefighter technology program has been launched at two Charlotte high schools, designed to introduce students to the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to become a firefighter. Upon completion of the extensive career and technical educational firefighter technology course, students can apply to be members of the fire department after graduation.

Students learn Firefighting 101 lessons such as how to use safety and protective equipment, fire behavior, how to properly rescue victims, basic medical skills and conduct reenactments of search and rescue missions. They train in a standard firefighter uniform wearing 50-60 pounds of equipment, with hand tools, air packs and protective gear.

The curriculum, supplies and equipment, including a fully functioning fire truck, are supplied by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Fire Department. The pilot program is a statewide partnership between the office of the state fire marshal, local fire departments and school districts.

Charlotte Program *continued on page 12*



Kelvin Brim, a captain with the Charlotte Fire Department, helps a student in the pilot firefighter technology program the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has launched at two high schools.



Council Honors 'Executive'

John Ford (center), director of financial operations for the Metro Nashville Public Schools, receives a certificate of achievement from the Council of the Great City Schools' Urban School Executives Program. The program is designed for mid-level managers who meet the highest professional standards and have the attributes to become senior executives in urban school districts. On hand for the recent certificate presentation were, left to right, Nashville school board chair Cheryl Mayes, Council director of management services Robert Carlson, the honoree, as well as Nashville school district chief financial officer Chris Henson and director of the school system Jesse Register.



El Paso District Joins Council

The El Paso Independent School District, the 10th largest school district in Texas, recently joined the Council of the Great City Schools, which now has a membership of 66 urban public school systems.

With more than 64,000 students, the El Paso school district is led by Su-

perintendent Juan Cabrera, who took the reins last September after working as a school law attorney and serving as general counsel for more than 20 Texas school districts.

The El Paso Independent School District is returning to the Council after it had last been a member in 2000.



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Cincinnati City and School Policymakers Create Partnership

Cincinnati Public Schools and the City of Cincinnati have joined forces to improve the district's schools as well the local community.

The Alliance for Community and Educational Success (ACES) is a new partnership that aims to align the city and school district's shared policy goals.

The district and city will work in collaboration to address five key areas: population growth, workforce development, safe and livable neighborhoods, wellness and access to technology.

To ensure operational success, a joint working group will convene monthly.

District and city leaders previously worked together to support the district's \$1 billion school facilities master plan, which officials credit with effectively rebuilding major aspects of the school system.

Charlotte Program *continued from page 11*

"I never thought I could prepare to fulfill my dream while still in high school," said Jeremy McIver, a Charlotte high school senior. "I wanted to be a firefighter since I was 5 years old."

Kelvin Brim, a Charlotte fire department captain with 16 years of experience and a certified teacher, provides student trainees with hands-on experience that will help them handle dangerous situations that can escalate rapidly.

"Recruit training is tough. It isn't meant to be easy, because a fire department wants the best of the best firefighters who can respond when they are needed, because lives are on the line," said Brim.

Currently, students are enrolled for a second semester, which combines Firefighter Technology I and Firefighter Technology II. According to Brim, it is important for the pilot program to expand.

"We want to see the program expand, not only for students, but so that we can have a viable pool of potential candidates," said Brim. "The Charlotte Fire Department wants to hire people who have a vested interest in the community."

Great City Grads



Photo Credit: Associated Press

Jeffrey Bezos

Founder of Amazon.com

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

1982 graduate

**Miami Palmetto Senior High School
(Valedictorian)**