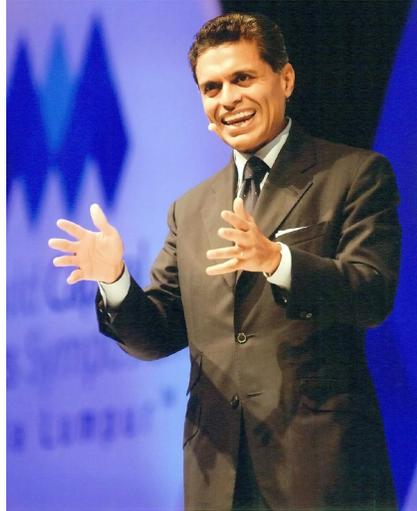




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Maria Hinojosa



Fareed Zakaria

Council Fall Conference to Feature CNN Host And Trailblazing Journalist

Fareed Zakaria, host of CNN's *Fareed Zakaria GPS* international affairs program, and Maria Hinojosa of public television's *America by the Numbers with Maria Hinojosa* will be featured at the Council of the Great City Schools' 59th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 7-11, in Long Beach, Calif.

Noted as a global thinker in delivering analysis and commentary on world affairs, Zakaria will be a keynote speaker at the conference. The award-winning journalist is also a contributing editor at *The Atlantic* and a *Washington Post* columnist in addition to hosting his CNN program.

Born in India and educated at Yale and Harvard, where he received his Ph.D., Zakaria also served as the youngest managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* at age 28, and was editor of *Newsweek International* from 2000 to 2010 and editor-at-large at *TIME* from 2010-2014.

He has written bestseller books, with his latest, *In Defense of a Liberal Education*, listed recently by the *New York Times*.

Hinojosa will moderate the Council's National Town Hall Meeting on an issue of the day in urban education, the pinnacle event of the Fall Conference.

An award-winning trailblazer in news and investigative journalism, Hinojosa has been reporting on critical issues and the changing culture of America for some 25 years.

Fall Conference continued on page 4

11 Council Schools Rank in Top 20 On National List

In the *Washington Post's* 2015 ranking of "America's Most Challenging High Schools," 11 of the top 20 schools are in districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.

Three schools in the Dallas Independent School District ranked in the top 20 of the more than 2,300 public high schools nationwide that made the national newspaper's "Challenge" list, released in April. Dallas' Talented and Gifted and Science/Engineering Magnet schools ranked No. 3 and 4, respectively.

Top Schools continued on page 4

Baltimore Takes Top Prize in Urban Debate

Nick Imperato and Jonas De La Huerta are juniors at Baltimore City College high school and have been members of the Baltimore Urban Debate League (BUDL) for three years. Since joining the league, they have won several awards for their debating skills.

They can now add one more: first place at the 8th Annual Urban Debate National Championship Tournament held recently at the University of California in Los Angeles. Hosted by the National Association for Urban Debate Leagues, the three-day tournament featured the top two teams from 19 urban debate leagues across the country competing against each other.

Urban Debate continued on page 4

Metropolitan Opera Taps Jacksonville School to Screen Live Performances

The Metropolitan Opera recently selected a school in Jacksonville, Fla., as one of only three in the nation to broadcast live Met performances on its campus.

The Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville joins schools in New York and Dallas in screening live performances from the Met as part of the company's national education program to support opera in education.

The Met's *HD Live in Schools* program partners with some 40 school districts nationwide, transmitting live opera performances to local movie theaters for students to view via field trips, allowing a few hundred students in a district to participate.

With support of community partners and donors, Jacksonville's Douglas Anderson School of the Arts' theater has been outfitted to broadcast the performances live in HD, which will allow for an estimated 3,000 students – 600 students/five shows – to participate and view the performances on campus. Students formerly visited local movie theaters for Met performances.

Starting this fall, students in Jacksonville will be able to watch the live stage



Riley Bragg, a student at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville, Fla., sings at the press conference to announce the screening of live performances from The Met.

performances from the Met in New York City at the Douglas Anderson School of the Arts.

“The Jacksonville community and Duval County Public Schools were chosen based on the district’s level of need for arts education support and their enthusiasm to incorporate opera into the classroom,” said

Marsha Drummond, director of education for the Metropolitan Opera, in a news release.

“We were immediately impressed by the motivation, eagerness, and enthusiasm of the school system’s administrators and teachers in addition to the Opera Jacksonville’s spirit of collabor-

The Met continued on page 3



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A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 67 of the nation's largest urban public school districts.

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Albuquerque and Palm Beach Districts Name New School Chiefs; Jackson Superintendent Given Contract Extension



Robert Avossa

Robert Avossa has been selected to lead Florida's School District of Palm Beach County, the state's fifth largest school district with 183,000 students.

Avossa is the superintendent of Georgia's Fulton County School System, with approximately 96,300 students.

He will succeed Wayne Gent, who is leaving the district to head Florida's St. Lucie County's public schools.

Avossa has led Fulton County Schools since 2011 and under his leadership, the district was organized into smaller "Learning Communities" to enable a decentralized approach to school management and provide schools the opportunity to work more closely together and align resources.

In addition, the district's graduation rate has increased more than 8 percentage points from 70.1 percent in 2011 to 78.7 percent in 2014, while the overall percentage of ninth-grade students on track for

graduation increased from 76 percent in 2011-2012 to 81 percent in 2012-2013.

Before coming to Fulton County, Avossa served as chief strategy and accountability officer for North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as well as chief of staff.

"...We welcome Dr. Avossa to Palm Beach County and look forward to working with him in ensuring that all of our students are provided a world-class education," said Board Chairman Chuck Shaw.

Avossa will begin his tenure with the district in June.

Albuquerque Leader



Luis Valentino

Luis Valentino was recently named the superintendent of New Mexico's Albuquerque Public Schools, the largest school district in the state with approximately 80,000 students. He will succeed Brad Winters,

who has served as the district's interim su-

perintendent since last August.

Valentino is no stranger to working in a large urban school district, having served as the associate superintendent of curriculum and chief academic officer for the San Francisco Unified School District since 2012. In this position, he developed a three-year strategic plan for the redesign of curriculum and instruction. And for five years, he served as director of school services for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

"The Board believes that Valentino has the right combination of professional experience, ability and vision to lead the Albuquerque Public Schools to even greater success than it has enjoyed in the past," said Albuquerque schools board president Don Duran.

Valentino will take the reins of the school district in July.

Contract Extended



Cedrick Gray

Mississippi's Jackson Public Schools has experienced a decrease in the number of schools labeled low-performing as well as a decrease in discipline incidents and an increase in graduation rates. The district has also embarked on

its first ever 1:1 digital initiative, in which high school students receive a laptop computer or personal computing device.

As a result, Cedrick Gray, who has led the district since 2012, was recently given a one-year contract extension that will extend his three-year contract to last throughout the 2015-2016 school year.

"There's been an increase in parent participation in parent-teacher student activities, and Dr. Gray has made a very positive impact on the culture of the district," said Board President Otha Burton.

The Met *continued from page 2*

ration," she added.

"It is truly an honor to welcome The Met: *HD Live in Schools* program to our district to serve our students," said Duval Schools Superintendent Nikolai Vitti, who also thanked the DuBow Family Foundation for its support of making the program possible. "Opportunities and partnerships such as these inspire students to develop critical thinking skills, become better citizens, and establish a lifelong appreciation for the arts."

A senior at the Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, Riley Bragg, shared

her operatic vocal talent at the Met press announcement in Jacksonville. She had viewed Met productions when she was in middle school.

"I've seen *Carmen* and *Madame Butterfly* and they were really good experiences for me just starting out young because I didn't know what I was going to do or how far I was going to go with the whole music thing," she said in a local radio news story.

She reportedly has her sights on post-secondary education at the Manhattan School of Music or Juilliard in New York City.

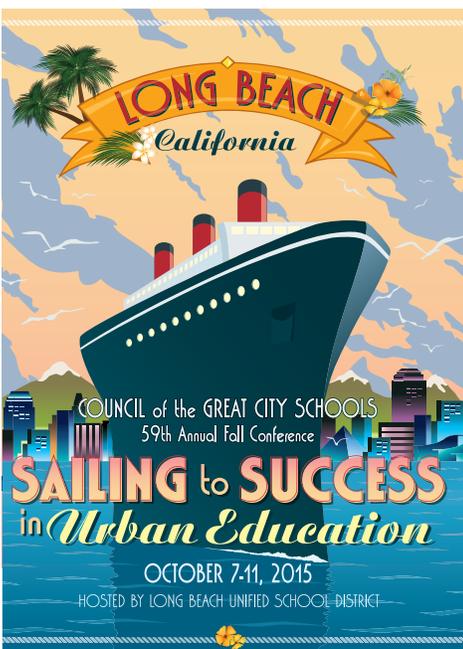
Fall Conference *continued from page 1*

Five years ago, she created a multimedia nonprofit production company based in Harlem to cover social and civic issues overlooked or ignored by mainstream media called Futuro Media Group. The company developed her public television show *America by the Numbers with Maria Hinojosa*, documenting demographic changes occurring in the United States.

Hinojosa also anchors and is the executive producer of NPR's long-running weekly program *Latino USA*. Earlier, she had served in other anchor, host and correspondent roles in public television and radio, and had spent eight years as CNN's urban affairs correspondent.

Born in Mexico City and raised in Chicago, Hinojosa has a weekly syndicated column for King Features/Hearst and is author of two books, including *Raising Raul: Adventures Raising Myself and My Son*.

In addition to Zakaria and Hinojosa, the Council's five-day Fall Conference, hosted by the Long Beach Unified School District, will also feature actor and director Levar Burton and former NASA astronaut José M. Hernandez. Both will address the nation's urban school leaders.

**Urban Debate** *continued from page 1*

“Because of our ability to travel nationally, we have become good friends with other members of different debate teams,” said De La Huerta. “It was an honor to compete against them.”

Urban debate teams debate in a style called policy debate, in which teams of two students debate one current event topic. This year's topic was on whether the United States federal government should significantly increase its non-military exploration of the earth's oceans.

BUDL was established in 1999 and more than 600 students have participated in its competitive afterschool debate program this year.

Recently, BUDL alums (current college students) were the organizers of the largest peaceful protest in Baltimore, rallying thousands of college- and high school-age students to march through the city, stopping in front of City Hall to

send a message to the mayor, city council and police officials that they are young people with huge potential and bright futures who are demanding opportunities, quality schools, access to jobs and just treatment under the law.

“Debate has taught them that their voices are powerful and they will not be silenced,” said BUDL chief executive officer Pam Block Brier.



Luke Hill, left, director of data systems and debate programs for the National Association for Urban Debate Leagues, presents the first-place trophy to Jonas De La Huerta and Nick Imparato for winning the 2015 Urban Debate competition.

Top Schools *continued from page 1*

The Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Fla., also had three schools, including Darnell-Cookman School of the Medical Arts and Stanton College Prep, ranked No. 7 and 8, respectively.

The *Washington Post* rankings, launched in 1998, are based on a formula called the Challenge Index, which ranks schools on the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Advanced International Certificate of Education tests given at a school each year and divided by the number of graduating seniors.

“The Challenge Index is designed to identify schools that have done the best job in persuading average students to take college-level courses and tests,” says *Post* columnist and blogger Jay Mathews. “It does not work with schools that have no, or almost no, average students. We put those schools on our Public Elites list.”

Other high schools in districts represented by the Council ranked in the top 20 are:

- Carnegie Vanguard in Houston, No. 9;
- Suncoast Community in Palm Beach County, Fla., No. 12;
- Paxon School for Advanced Studies in Jacksonville, Fla., No. 14;
- Rangel Young Women's Leadership School in Dallas, No. 15;
- Archimedean Upper Conservatory in Miami-Dade County, No. 16;
- Young Women's Prep in Miami-Dade County, No. 18; and
- Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders, Austin, Tex., No. 19

A number of other urban public schools also made the grade among the more than 2,300 high schools ranked as “America's Most Challenging High Schools.”

City Students Named U.S. Presidential Scholars



Celeste Runnels

Celeste Runnels began high school at a local private school in Baton Rouge, La., but transferred to Baton Rouge Magnet High School for its quality academic programs and clubs, as well as for its diverse student body and faculty.

“I was looking for something broader and more diverse than what I experienced in my freshman year in private school,” said Runnels.

The move paid off because the 18-year-old senior was recently selected as a U.S. Presidential Scholar for the state of Louisiana.

Runnels is one of 141 high school seniors from across the nation to join the 51st class of U.S. Presidential Scholars for their accomplishments in academics or the arts. Each year, the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, appointed by President Obama, selects students for this recognition, based on their academic success, essays, school evaluations and transcripts, as well as evidence of community service, leadership and demonstrated commitment to high ideals. The program is administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

Runnels, who will attend Georgia Tech on a full scholarship, is not the only student from a district represented by the Council of the Great City Schools to achieve this prestigious honor. Other recipients were Praneet Polineni from Stanton College Preparatory School in Jacksonville, Fla.; Yueqi Ren from Southwest High School in Minneapolis; Nhung Hoang from John Overton Comprehensive High School in Nashville; Alethia Tilford from Ronald Reagan College Preparatory High School in Milwaukee; and Shizhou Chen from Oakland Charter High School in Oakland, Calif.

Urban students selected as Presidential Scholars in the Arts were Daniela O’Neil from Alexander W Dreyfoos School of the Arts in West Palm Beach, Fla., and two students from New York City, Dominique Thorne from the Professional Performing Arts School and Javier Spivey from the Fiorello H. Laguardia High School of Music, Art, and Performing Arts.

This year’s U.S. Presidential Scholars were comprised of one female and one male student from each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Since 1964, the program has honored nearly 7,000 of the nation’s top-performing students with the prestigious award.

Houston and Fresno Districts Partner With Colleges to Produce Future Nurses

Big-city schools in Houston and Fresno, Calif., are equipping students with 21st century opportunities to excel in the high-demand career of nursing. Ensuring students are college and career ready, both districts have partnered with local colleges to give students a jumpstart on their future careers.

At Fresno’s Duncan Polytechnical High School, 20 students have been selected for the Future Nurses Program at Fresno City College. The program en-

Future Nurses *continued on page 12*



Students at Fresno’s Duncan Polytechnical High School participate in the Future Nurses Program at Fresno City College.

Dayton Student Named Scholar

For senior Ja’Laquan Mitchell, being first comes natural. He is first in his graduation class at Dunbar Early College High School in Dayton, Ohio. And most notably he is the first student in Ohio’s Dayton school district’s history to be named both a Gates Millennium Scholar and a Coca-Cola Scholar.



Ja’Laquan Mitchell

Mitchell is one of 1,000 high school seniors in the nation to be selected as a Gates Millennium Scholar. Now in its 16th year, the Gates Millennium Scholar program was established by Bill and Melinda Gates to provide outstanding minority students with the necessary financial resources to pursue a college education. As a recipient, Mitchell will be awarded full college tuition for both undergraduate and graduate studies.

Mitchell was also selected for the 2014-2015 class of Coca-Cola Scholars, which comes with a \$20,000 college scholarship.

The Class of 2015 valedictorian at Dunbar carries a 4.0 grade point average, and has earned 26 college credits through the school’s dual college enrollment program.

Last year, Mitchell became part of the redesigned school’s inaugural class eligible to take courses at both high school and college levels, providing credit for both. Starting with online classes at Sinclair Community College last year, he was able to complete courses at both Sinclair and the University of Dayton this school year.

In the fall, Mitchell will attend Dartmouth College, majoring in pre-med with a focus on anesthesiology. And his career choice is personal.

“My grandma, she had cancer, and she had to get her leg amputated,” said Mitchell. “When I went to see her and she was in pain, I just wished I could make the pain go away. Becoming an anesthesiologist touches on that.”

Council Wins Three Telly Awards

The Council of the Great City Schools has won three 2015 Telly Awards for its three-minute video explaining how the Common Core State Standards will help students achieve at high levels and help them learn what they need to know to get to graduation and beyond.

The video, called “Conversation” with a young student discussing the new academic standards with a teacher, won in the “education” and “use of animation” categories of the 36th Annual Telly Awards program.

The highly competitive awards program receives more than 13,000 entries a year from advertising agencies, video production companies,

TV stations, cable companies, interactive agencies and corporations worldwide.

This is the seventh Telly Award the Council has won. Last year, it won two Telly Awards – statuettes similar to the Oscars and Emmys, and made by the same company that produces these awards. It won the highest honor of the Telly Awards program – the silver award in both the “education” and “use of animation” categories -- for its three-minute Common Core video called “Staircase.”

In 2006, the Council won Telly Awards in two categories for its “Pop Quiz” public service announcement for outstanding television commercials.



Broward Leader Recognized by Latino Group



Robert Runcie

Robert Runcie, the superintendent of Florida’s Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, was recently named the 2015 Hispanic-Serving School District Superintendent of the Year by the Association for Latino Administrators and Superintendents.

Runcie, who has led the district since 2011, was recognized for setting high standards for instruction and student achievement and for engaging the Hispanic community through district initiatives such as *Mi Gente, Mi Escuela*, an effort by district and community leaders and organizations to work together to organize, recognize and support excellence in educating Hispanics throughout Broward County.

Council Develops Tool to Assess Quality Of Common-Core Instructional Materials

The Council of the Great City Schools recently released a new tool that it developed to help schools in their selection of instructional materials aimed at preparing students for college and career readiness.

The Council’s academic staff and a team of many of the nation’s foremost experts in reading and mathematics worked for more than a year designing and writing what’s called the “Grade-level Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool (GIMET).” The new tool is aligned with the Publisher’s Criteria and the Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool (IMET) developed by Student Achievement Partners.

“The unique feature of these new tools is that they allow districts, schools, and teachers to review commercial materials

on a grade-by-grade basis, and they permit educators at all levels to identify where supplemental materials might be needed,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

Together with the Publisher’s Criteria, the IMET tool, the Council’s English-language learner framework, and other resources, GIMET should provide school districts with all the tools they need to make informed decisions about which materials are compatible with the Common Core Standards.

The new tools provide selection criteria grade-by-grade in both English-language arts and mathematics and have been distributed to big-city school systems across the country. They are also available to others at no cost.

D.C.-Area Chief Remembered

Paul Vance, a former District of Columbia Public Schools superintendent, recently died at the age of 83.

He came out of retirement to lead the D.C. school system from 2000 to 2003 after serving as superintendent of Maryland’s Montgomery County Schools in the D.C. suburbs from 1991 to 1999.

“Paul Vance was the superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools for a short period, but it was a time of immense change in the district,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools. “He was known to his colleagues across the country as a thoughtful and experienced educator who knew what effective practice looked like and what it would take to implement it. He will be profoundly missed by urban school leaders nationally.”



Des Moines Students Stage Rally at Iowa Capitol

Russhaun Johnson (top left), a student at North High School in Des Moines, Iowa, is one of several students who visited the Iowa State Capitol last month to talk one-on-one with legislators in an effort to encourage them to increase education funding to schools in the state. While the Des Moines Schools superintendent and school board were on hand, it was the voices of students that were the strongest and clearest. In addition, students from Des Moines' Perkins, Hanawalt and Merrill Elementary schools (bottom) stood on the East steps of the capitol building greeting lawmakers at a rally for more aid to school districts.



Miami-Dade District Cuts Yearly Tests

The Council of the Great City Schools and the Council of Chief State School Officers last year embarked on a joint effort to evaluate and improve the quality and quantity of student assessments in public schools across the nation, amid a growing debate about whether students are being tested too much.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools recently entered the debate with its announcement that it would eliminate nearly all of the 300 end-of-course tests that students were scheduled to take this spring.

As a result, no elementary year-end exams will be given in the nation's fourth largest school district. In addition, only 10 middle/senior high school end-of-the-year exams will be given to a random selection of students as a field test.

The courses that have been identified in the field test include: physical science, world history and United States history.

The actions taken by the Miami school system come after Florida Gov. Rick Scott signed a bill last month that eliminates the state mandate for district-designated end-of-course exams to be given in all courses not measured by existing, standardized assessments. Exams related to the Common Core State Standards, which is known as "Florida Standards," will continue to be administered.

Under the previous state mandate, there had to be one standardized final exam for each course offered by Florida school districts, so school officials had to design standardized tests for classes as unique as photography, dance, or psychology. When the mandate was lifted by the governor, Miami district officials realized that they could spare teachers and students the huge burden that was imposed by it.

"Today's announcement should come as welcomed news to everyone who recognizes that too much testing deprives our students of valuable instruction time," said

Yearly Tests *continued on page 12*

St. Louis District Tackles Issue of Unused School Buildings

St. Louis Public Schools last month launched an initiative to promote the redevelopment of district-owned properties no longer in use as schools.

It created the Building Revitalization Collaborative and scheduled a series of public open houses at 28 of its closed schools, giving the public an opportunity to tour the buildings and provide feedback and ideas for reuse.

“My hope is that by opening the majority of these closed schools to the public – and inviting the public to share its ideas for repurposing these grand buildings -- we will come up with fresh ideas that will inform an action plan for each and every closed school,” says Walter Gaffney, the school district’s director of real estate, in a press release.

Declining student enrollment over the years has prompted St. Louis superintendents to close schools rather than have students in half-empty buildings that cost thousands of dollars to heat and maintain.

A week or so after the launch of the initiative, the school district sold its first vacant building, Windsor Elementary, to a business property group, reportedly for \$300,000.

Big-City Educators Win Magnet School Awards



William Daniel holds his Teacher of the Year Award

William Daniel, a financial literacy teacher, considers himself to have “arguably the best teaching job in the country.”

For more than 20 years, that job has entailed providing students hands on experience through the Academy of Finance at Boone High School in Orlando, Fla. Students at the Academy work with a local credit union located on the school’s campus and also help prepare tax returns on campus for community members.

For his efforts, Daniel was recently named the 2015 National Magnet School Teacher of the Year by Magnet Schools of America, the national association for magnet and theme-based schools. The award is presented annually to an outstanding magnet school teacher who is acknowledged by their peers, parents and students for their exemplary contributions made to their profession.

Daniel has received numerous awards for his teaching, including the 2014 Queen

Smith Award for Commitment to Urban Education, presented by the Council of Great City Schools.

Daniel wasn’t the only Florida educator to receive an award from Magnet Schools of America at its recent national conference.

Wendy Harrison, a principal at Muller Elementary Magnet School in Tampa, Fla., was selected as the 2015 National Magnet School Principal of the Year. Under her leadership, the school has woven arts and sciences into the curriculum on an ongoing basis and has facilitated schoolwide events that celebrate the diversity of students and staff.

And MaryEllen Elia, the former superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, was named the 2015 National Magnet School Superintendent of the Year. Elia is the first superintendent to receive this inaugural award for her leadership in supporting magnet schools.

Also receiving a new award was the Houston Independent School District, which was presented with the Donna Grady-Creer District Award for Sustainability. The award acknowledges a school district that exemplifies a commitment to equity, excellence, and diversity as well as a highly sustained support for magnet schools.

Miami-Dade First School District to Partner with Federal Safety Institute

In an effort to provide students with essential workplace safety and reduce occupational injuries, Miami-Dade County Public Schools is the first school district in the nation to partner with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

As part of the partnership, the NIOSH *Youth @ Work-Talking Safety* curriculum will be taught in 8th grade science courses in schools across the district to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to gain before entering the workforce.

These skills range from the ability to understand work-related risks to recognizing rights and responsibilities on the job



to communicating effectively when experiencing a work-related problem. Federal and district officials hope the knowledge and abilities students gain through the

partnership will help keep them safe and healthy in their current workplaces and throughout their professional careers.

According to NIOSH, by the time U.S. teens graduate from high school, 80 percent have held a job, with statistics showing that youth are twice as likely as adults to sustain work-related injuries.

In addition to providing the curriculum to students, NIOSH has trained more than 50 Miami middle-school science department heads and eighth-grade science teachers in the *Talking Safety* curriculum.

Initiative in Charlotte Aims to Build Model for School Turnaround

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has partnered with the University of Virginia to turn 14 struggling schools into successful, sustainable schools that graduate college- and career-ready students.

The school district has committed to working with the university's Partnership for Leaders in Education program for a three-year cohort to build a district-wide turnaround model called the Beacon Initiative.

Launched this current school year, the Beacon Initiative seeks to apply differentiation to address each of the 14 school's needs. Instead of a single template applied to all schools, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is working collaboratively with school and district leadership and nationally recognized experts to strategically plan a series of supports to meet individual needs.

"Every school is unique, just as every student is unique. What works at one school may not work at another," said Superintendent Ann Clark. "While the initiative will build on earlier district efforts to turn around struggling schools, it will take a different approach by personalizing the support structures for individual schools. We are excited by the opportunity to work with our lead partner, the University of Virginia, on this important and challenging issue," she added.

The initiative includes four elementary, four Pre-K-8, three middle and three high schools. The partnership with the University of Virginia is expected to cost about \$600,000 for each of the initiative's three years.

The Beacon Initiative focuses on providing job-embedded professional development to district and school leaders and differentiating support systems provided by the district to the turnaround schools.



Melissa Stormont helps to recruit candidates for Beacon schools at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Job Fair.

These interventions center on four key turnaround levers: leadership, instructional infrastructure, differentiated support and accountability, and talent management.

"The Beacon principals are telling us that the planning, the analysis and the leadership training just in this first year are already making a difference," said Nancy Brightwell, a district community superintendent who leads the initiative's implementation. "The school readiness assessments and the extensive work with the principals helped each school develop 90-day plans that are a starting point for the work."

The first year of the initiative is being used as a planning year. Participating schools have had a rigorous readiness assessment and principals at those schools took part in a leadership competency interview to determine each school leader's areas of strength and need.

Principals' Perspective

"I chose to be a principal at a school participating in the Beacon Initiative because the work is focused on empowering our school to create and implement intentional, school-based practices that will bring sustainable results," said Beth Thompson, lead

principal at Whitewater Academy & Whitewater Middle School. "It is my desire that this collaborative work will become embedded into the fabric of the school."

The Beacon Initiative will provide an opportunity to build partnerships with education professionals that will give support through collaboration and professional development based on individual school needs – and principals like the collaborative aspects.

"The Beacon Initiative will allow for a stronger collaboration between the district and schools that will provide the opportunity to support academic achievement for

all our students," said Tonya Faison, principal at James Martin Middle School, one of three middle schools in the initiative. "It gives principals the opportunity to meet and share information in order to provide support to each other. Some schools are facing some of the same challenges and this is an opportunity for us to work together and get it right."

In the second and third years of the plan, schools in the Beacon Initiative will focus on three critical areas: instructional culture, student culture and evidence-informed culture.

"By looking at schools' individual needs, we will be able to better meet those needs," Superintendent Clark stressed. "Beacon is extending the turnaround efforts that CMS {Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools} has in place now.

"The ultimate goal of Beacon is to create sustainable turnarounds – and the key to success is leadership training at the school level. Our long-term goal is to create a model that can be used to strengthen other high-need schools in CMS," she explained.

To learn more about the initiative, visit thebeaconinitiative.weebly.com or the CMS home page at <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/Pages/default.aspx>.

One More Step in the ESEA Reauthorization

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

In mid-April, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) unanimously approved the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and reported it to the full Senate for consideration. The 22-0 committee vote in support of the bill, now called “The Every Child Achieves Act” (S. 1177), stands as a testament to the bipartisan efforts undertaken by Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Ranking Senator Patty Murray (D-WA).

The measure continues to raise concerns from both the political left and the right -- and from the Great City Schools as well -- but it is clear that Committee leadership bent over backwards to accommodate widely diverse interests and to maintain broad support through the Committee markup stage of the legislative process.

Next up is Senate floor action on the bill. Debate, whenever it begins, is likely to reflect Chairman Alexander’s long-held philosophy that legislation should be considered under an open-amendment process, similar to the one he used at the Committee level. However, this open-amendment process could also erode support for the bill, as controversial amendments like “portabil-



ity,” private school vouchers, and Title I funding formula changes get considered. If changes on these and other fronts are approved on the floor, support for the bill could easily collapse. Each stage of the Senate process to date has resulted in significant expansions to federal requirements and authorized programs, and the floor amendment process is likely to be no different.

On the House side, floor action on “The Student Success Act” (H.R. 5) has not yet been rescheduled since it was abruptly pulled from the floor in late February. The pending House ESEA

reauthorization is very different from the draft Senate measure, and includes many of the controversial provisions that were modified or removed by the Senate.

Both House and Senate ESEA bills need to secure approving floor votes in their respective chambers to keep the legislative process on track. Speculation on how a conference committee between the two houses would handle the very different versions of the reauthorization is clearly premature, since floor action has yet to be finalized by either body.

Detroit Partners with Local University to Improve Business Operations

It was back to the classroom for 21 principals and teachers, 18 academic/curricular leaders, 24 additional educational support leaders as well as the entire Detroit Public Schools’ executive cabinet.

The educators recently traveled to the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan to attend two-and-a-half day leadership/organizational development training.

The training was conducted by international experts from the university and is part of a new partnership between the Detroit school system and the university to improve the way the district provides services to and supports schools and students over the course of the next year.

After the training, teams of district senior leaders, along with teachers, principals

and staff, will spend extended sessions at the Ross School. Follow-up visits will also be made by Ross faculty to Detroit schools, as part of a new tailored executive leadership program designed to re-engineer, synchronize and align all of the district’s performance-driven operations.

Michigan Ross faculty are offering the program for free.

District officials believe the school system is making progress academically, citing the recent release of improved graduation rates. “But we must re-engineer the services that the district provides to schools and families to focus on academic success, first and foremost, and to ensure that this progress not only continues, but accelerates,” said Detroit Public Schools Emergency Manager Darnell Earley.

As part of the training program, the Detroit leadership team is committed to:

- Creating a high-performance environment;
- Providing the tools, resources and technology to accomplish work activities;
- Utilizing comprehensive performance management in a clear and transparent decision process; and
- Recognizing and rewarding behaviors that reinforce a lean, agile performance-driven culture.

The Michigan Ross faculty members partnering with the district have a proven track record of successfully assisting leaders to achieve high levels of performance in such companies as Oracle and Bank of America.

San Diego Student Wins Fox-TV's Chef Contest

Nathan Odom, a 13-year-old San Diego student, recently prepared a three-course meal in a culinary East Coast-West Coast showdown with an 11-year-old student from Westford, N.J. to win the *MasterChef Junior* competition in Fox-TV's reality cooking show.

His victory earned him a \$100,000 grand prize and coveted trophy.

"There are so many incredibly talented junior home cooks we get to meet, but Nathan is truly exceptional," said the show's host/executive producer and judge Gordon Ramsay in a Fox press release. "He was an incredible competitor whose composure and flare for unique flavors and dish pairings in the kitchen was inspiring."

Odom, who was age 12 during the seven-week competition, beat out 19 competitors ages 8 to 12. And his sights were on learning and not winning the title.

"Winning *MasterChef Junior* is a really surreal experience for me, because I entered the competition without caring how far I made it, and was focused more on learning," he told Fox. "Then, to actually win the *MasterChef Junior* title was an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience."

He impressed the judges in the season finale episode with a restaurant-quality three-course meal featuring an appetizer of fennel gratin and French ham with a side of shaved fennel and grapefruit salad; an entrée of herb crusted lamb chop and fava beans and white asparagus puree; and an Earl Grey tea tart with Meyer lemon and blood orange coulis dessert.

Odom has been cooking since age 6, but it was during his participation in the culinary arts program at McKinley Elementary School in San Diego that his skills were honed.

Now a student at Roosevelt Middle School, Odom serves as president of the French Club and secretary of the Cesar Chavez club, bringing cooked items for the clubs to enjoy, according to the San Diego Unified School District.



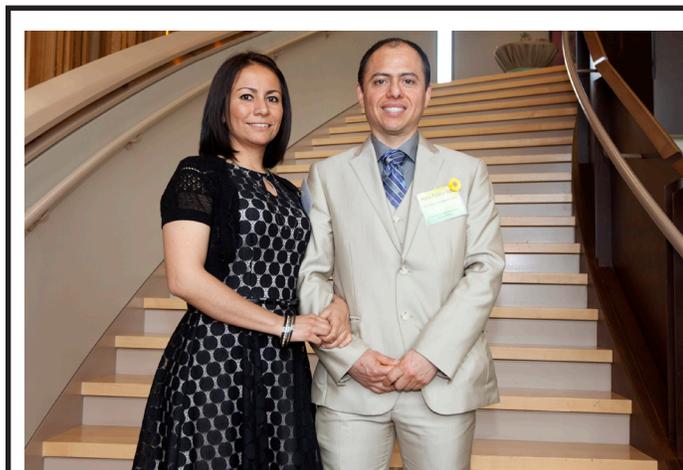
Urban Schools Win Green Ribbon Awards

Los Cerritos Elementary School in Long Beach, Calif., has a school garden called the Urban Farmyard, where students grow more than 35 types of fruits and vegetables and herbs. The school also has several programs focused on environmental awareness, including Cool the Earth, a sustainability after-school club; Roots & Shoots, a comprehensive recycling program; and an active Green Team, which organizes fitness activities such as Walk-to-School Wednesdays and Bike-Friendly Fridays.

As a result of the school's effort to improve the environment, it was recently one of 58 schools across the nation selected by the U.S. Department of Education as a Green Ribbon School. The award recognizes schools that have made exemplary efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, promote better health and provide effective environmental education.

In addition to Los Cerritos, other schools honored in districts represented by the Council of the Great Schools were Susan Miller Dorsey Senior High in Los Angeles, and two schools in Omaha, Neb. -- Edward Babe Gomez Heritage Elementary School and Wilson Focus School.

The winning schools were selected from their respective state selection committees and then reviewed by a team of several dozen experts.



Fort Worth Couple Share Title

"Hey, guess what?" Mario told his wife. "I'm teacher of the year." "Guess what, so am I!" Antoniett replied. Elementary-school teachers Mario Oscar Pureco Razo and Antoniett Ceron Ponce recently shared the title of Fort Worth Independent School District Campus Teachers of the Year at their respective schools. The Texas school district believes this is the first time a husband and wife have been named in the same year.



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Future Nurses *continued from page 5*

courages students to pursue careers as registered nurses by providing a foundation for challenging registered nurse coursework, as well as mentoring.

Selected students have priority registration for prerequisite courses for the registered nurse program at Fresno City College and they participate in group activities, tutorials and events.

At Houston's Jones Futures Academy, a new partnership with Prairie View A&M University will enable students in the allied health program to graduate high school with an associate's degree and certification as a licensed vocational nurse.

Through the district's partnership, all 90 students in the program will spend half their school day taking college-level courses that directly align with the university's nursing program.

Students will also participate in clinical rotations and receive mentoring, college advising, and work-based learning opportunities from Prairie View A&M University's College of Nursing.

Des Moines District Wins Fourth Energy Star

Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools was recently selected by the U.S. Department of Energy to receive both the 2015 Energy Star Partner of the Year Award for Sustained Excellence and Partner of the Year Award for Climate Communications. This is the fourth year in a row the school system has received a partner award.

Des Moines was one of only four school districts to receive the Sustained Excellence Award, which was given to 79 organizations for continuing to demonstrate exceptional leadership each year in the Energy Star Program while remaining dedi-

cated to environmental protection through superior energy efficiency.

The district has increased the number of buildings designated as ENERGY STAR certified from zero in 2008 to 46 in 2014, representing 69 percent of all district buildings.

The school district was also one of seven Climate Communications winners for raising awareness of the impact of climate change and energy efficiency.

Miami-Dade Official Wins Council Award

Jaime G. Torrens, chief facilities officer for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, was recently presented the Distinguished Service Award at the Council of the Great City Schools' Chief Operating Officers Conference in Las Vegas.

Sponsored by the Council and Chartwells/Thompson Hospitality, the award honors business officials who exemplify leadership, innovation, commitment and professionalism in urban education.

Yearly Tests *continued from page 7*

Miami Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho in a press release.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the state's largest school system, is not the only Florida school district eliminating final course exams as a result of the governor's action on school testing.