



urban Educator

The Nation's Voice for Urban Education

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Cincinnati District Names New Leader

Cincinnati Public Schools didn't have to look far when they selected a superintendent. In fact, they chose a graduate of the district, Rosa Blackwell, to lead the 38,779-student school system.



Rosa Blackwell

Since January, Blackwell has served as the district's interim superintendent, succeeding Alton Frailey.

Blackwell joined the district as a teacher and served as a principal and supervisor of curriculum and instruction before advancing to the district's number two position as deputy superintendent.

"This is a very distinct honor to be asked to lead the district where I was educated and have educated others," said Blackwell in a news statement. "It will be my pleasure to direct our efforts to assure that the children receive all they are entitled to and need to succeed."

In Austin, Texas, the school board recently extended Superintendent Pat

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Julian Bond and Jonathan Kozol To Address Urban Educators



Julian Bond

Julian Bond, chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, will be the keynote speaker at the Council of the Great City Schools' 49th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 19-23, in Atlanta.

Bond returns to Georgia, where he had made a name for himself as a civil rights activist from his student days at Morehouse College through his long tenure in the state legislature.

As well as chairman of the NAACP, Bond is also a commentator on the syndicated television show *America's Black Forum*. He addresses urban school leaders at a luncheon on Oct. 21.

Award-winning author Jonathan Kozol will also speak at the conference, hosted by the Atlanta Public Schools, under the banner "Achieving the Dream: Great City Schools for All."

Kozol is no stranger to urban educators, as he has tackled the issue of educational inequality, especially in his books, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* and *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*.



Jonathan Kozol

NYC Student Wins Top Intel Science Prize

David Bauer is only 17, but the senior at New York City's Hunter College High School has developed a way to detect toxic agents affecting the nervous system that could potentially save thousands of lives.

For his creation, Bauer was recently selected the winner of the Intel Science Talent Search, the nation's oldest and most prestigious high school science competition.

As the first-place winner, he receives a \$100,000 scholarship.

Bauer designed a new method using "quantum dots" (florescent nanocrystals) for quickly detecting in-

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Urban Educator

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

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NYC Student....



David Bauer

dividual exposure to toxic biochemical agents such as nerve gas. This idea could save lives by enabling medical personnel, especially first-responders, to quickly assess and treat patients for exposure to a variety of neurotoxins.

"When I was younger, I couldn't imagine myself as a scientist," said Bauer, the son of a single mother, in a press release. "Somewhere along the line, though, I realized that maybe I could do some stuff."

In addition to serving as president of his school's science club, he is a founder of a nonprofit organization that works for social justice in Liberia.

After graduation, Bauer plans to attend the City University of New York Honors College where he will major in chemistry.

However, Bauer is not the only big-city student to receive a scholarship in the Intel Talent Science Search: four other students from urban schools placed in the top 10.

Kelley Harris, a student at C.K. McClatchy High School in Sacramento, Calif., placed third and won a \$50,000 scholarship for her research into Z-DNA binding proteins, which may play a role in cell responses to certain virus infections.



Kelley Harris

Harris ranks first in her high school

class of 533 and scored a perfect 1600 on the SAT.

"I have the confidence that she's one of those talented youngsters who will have an impact on the world," said McClatchy Principal Daisy Lee in *The Connection*, a school district newspaper.

In the fall, Harris will attend Harvard University where she plans to study biophysics.



Robert Cordwell

Robert Cordwell, a student at Albuquerque's Manzano High School, won fourth place and a \$25,000 college scholarship for his mathematics

projects in graph theory.

Cordwell, who ranks first in his high school class of 343, plans to double major in mathematics and computer science at the University of Chicago.

The fifth-place winner also hails from a big-city school district. Ryan Marques Harrison, a student at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, won a \$25,000 college scholarship for his bioinformatics and genomics project.



Marques Harrison

A published poet and trumpet player, Harrison hopes to study engineering and economics at John Hopkins University.

Created in 1942, the Intel Science Talent Search awards \$530,000 in college scholarships each year to 40 students based on their research ability and scientific originality.

Broad Prize Finalists Named

Every year since 2002, the Broad Foundation has awarded a prize of \$500,000 to the most outstanding urban school district in the nation. And this year four big-city school districts — Boston, New York City, Norfolk and San Francisco — are in the running for the award.

The school districts are among the five finalists, including Aldine, Tex., near Houston, for the 2005 Broad Prize for Urban Education, which honors an urban school district that is improving student academic performance while narrowing achievement gaps between students of different ethnic groups. The prize is the largest education award in the country given to a single school district

The winner of the award will receive \$500,000 in college scholarships while each of the four other finalists will receive \$125,000.

“We are encouraged that large urban districts – which often face the toughest challenges – are having success in improving the education of all children, regardless of their race or family income,” said Eli Broad, founder of the Broad Foundation. “This prize is designed to reward and showcase their successes so that other districts can learn from their best practices.”

More than 80 urban school districts across the country were eligible for the Broad Prize this year and the finalists were chosen based on a rigorous review of data.

Boston Public Schools is no stranger to the Broad Prize, having been selected as a finalist for the award four times. This is also the third year Norfolk has been chosen as a finalist.

“Being selected again for the third time is very exciting,” said Norfolk Schools Interim Superintendent Denise Schnitzer in a news statement.

This year marks the first time school districts in San Francisco and New York City have been chosen as a finalist for the Broad Prize.

San Francisco Schools Superintendent Arlene Ackerman said the district’s selection underscores the progress the district has been making in recent years. “...Our selection as a finalist will spotlight the well-deserved credit to the many accomplishments of our district, our administrators, our teachers, our parents and our scholars.”

The winning district will be selected by a group of educational researchers who conduct site visits to each of the finalist school districts.

Bush Honors National Teacher Of the Year

Jason Kamras has a bachelor’s degree from Princeton University and a master’s degree from Harvard University. He could have pursued a career in any number of fields, but chose to be a math teacher at a public middle school in Washington, D.C.

Kamras’ effort to help students succeed to the best of their ability has not gone unnoticed: he was recently honored as the National Teacher of the Year by President Bush.

A teacher for eight years at John Philip Sousa Middle School, he is the

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Urban Educator To Take Calif. Post

San Diego Leader Named

San Diego City Schools Superintendent Alan Bersin has been tapped by California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to become the state’s next education secretary.



Alan Bersin

Bersin is slated to take the reins in July from Richard Riordan, who announced last month that he was resigning from the post. Riordan is the former mayor of Los Angeles.

“Alan is a reformer and the perfect choice for secretary for education at this critical time for education in our state,” said Schwarzenegger in a news statement. “He is a great leader with the tremendous qualifications necessary to guide our efforts to make sure California’s kids get a quality education.”

The California secretary of education advises the governor and promotes education policies. But the state superintendent of education, Jack O’Connell, heads the education department.

The San Diego Board of Education recently struck a mutual agreement with Bersin to amend his contract, which opened the way for Bersin to leave the district in June. His contract was to have expired in June 2006.

Before taking the helm of the San Diego school district, he had been the U.S. attorney for the Southern region of California.

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Cincinnati District...

Forgione's contract by one year through 2009.

Board president Doyle Valdez praised Forgione's leadership in confronting the many challenges that are unique to an urban school district. "He tackles these challenges head-on, with creative, groundbreaking initiatives that engage the Austin community."



Pat Forgione

Forgione has been superintendent of the 80,000-student school system since August 1999. Under his tenure, students have made gains on state-mandated exams, and the district has embarked on an ambitious plan to redesign high schools for the 21st century.

While Austin has decided to keep its superintendent and provide the district with stable leadership, several big-city districts are losing their leaders.

Carlos Garcia, the superintendent of the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, recently announced his resignation from the 280,834-student school system he has been in charge of since 2000.

Walt Ruffles, the deputy superintendent of operations, and Augustin Orci, the deputy superintendent of instruction, have been selected by the district to serve as dual interim superintendents.

Garcia was the first Hispanic to lead the Clark County school system and under his leadership, the district implemented a successful math initiative requiring all students to take algebra

by the eighth grade.

He was recently selected as the 2005 Nevada Superintendent of the Year. Garcia is also the past chair of the Council of the Great City Schools.

"This has been a very difficult decision for me," said Garcia in a news statement. "My five-year tenure as superintendent of the Clark County School District has easily been one of the most challenging and rewarding periods in my professional career."

Garcia will leave the school district in July and take a position as vice president of urban markets with McGraw-Hill Companies.



Carlos Garcia

Also stepping down from the helm is James Pughsley, the superintendent of North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. He will be succeeded by interim superintendent Frances Haithcock, the district's associate superintendent for educational services.

Pughsley took the reins of the district in 2002 after serving as deputy superintendent and since that time, test scores have increased in reading and math for students in grades 3-8 and the achievement gap between black and white students has narrowed.

Last year, the district was named a finalist for the Broad Prize for Urban Education and in 2003 Pughsley was named Superintendent of the Year by the National Alliance of Black School Educators.

"During my nine-year tenure in CMS, we've seen tremendous gains in student achievement and watched the achievement gap narrow," said Pughs-

ley in a press release.

Pughsley will retire in June and join former Norfolk Schools Superintendent John Simpson at the Stupski Foundation, a non-profit organization that works to improve student achievement.

New Orleans Public Schools is losing its superintendent with the departure of Tony Amato, who resigns from the district June 30. Ora Watson, the current deputy superintendent, will serve as interim superintendent.

Amato joined the district in 2003 after serving as the leader of the public school system in Hartford, Conn., for two and a half years.

In another development, Nancy Snyder has been appointed superintendent of Florida's Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville for an interim period. She had been deputy superintendent under John Fryer, who recently stepped down from the leadership post.

San Diego City Schools has also named an interim superintendent, Leslie Fausset, to lead the 136,000-student school system.

Fausset, who currently serves as the district's deputy superintendent, will succeed Alan Bersin, who was recently selected by California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to become the state's secretary of education.

Further, Detroit Public Schools has selected an interim chief, William Coleman, to replace Kenneth Burnley.

Coleman, the district's chief operating officer, has extensive experience in urban education, having served as deputy budget director for the New York City school system and chief financial officer for San Francisco public schools.

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Bush Honors Teacher....

first teacher from the District of Columbia Public Schools to receive the distinguished award created in 1952.

Kamras has worked hard to raise the academic performance in mathematics of his students, the majority who receive free or reduced-price lunch. Under a pilot program he developed, the math curriculum was redesigned to emphasize the increasing use of tech-



National Teacher of the Year winner Jason Kamras speaks at a White House ceremony.

nology and apply instruction into a real-world context.

As a result, the percentage of students scoring below basic on the Stanford 9 test fell from approximately 80 percent to just 40 percent in one year. Also, his students have met the school district's math average yearly progress target every year since the *No Child Left Behind* Act was implemented. Kamras is currently working on expanding the pilot program to the entire school.

"My children simply want the opportunity to pursue their dreams," said Kamras in the *Washington Post* at a recognition ceremony at the White House. "...They inspire me every day with their intelligence, creativity, and humor."

Kamras' love of photography and his desire to expand his student's knowledge led him to create the EXPOSE Program in which Sousa students learn to use digital cameras to create autobiographical photo essays about their lives and their communities. Created in 1999, the program has received \$65,000 in grants from the D.C. government, Apple Computer and local foundations and businesses.

D.C. Schools Superintendent Clifford Janey applauds Kamras for helping create a climate in which students can thrive. "It is an honor to have a teacher like Jason in our school system because he not only serves to inspire students to academic excellence but he can be an inspiration for his colleagues in DCPS," said Janey in a news statement.

The National Teacher of the Year program is a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers and is sponsored by Scholastic, Inc.

Kamras was among four finalists who vied for the 2005 National Teacher of the Year, including Vicki Goldsmith, an English teacher at Roosevelt High School in Des Moines, Iowa.

Oklahoma City District Holds Program at Zoo

One usually goes to the zoo to view the animals, but last month in Oklahoma City more than 3,500 parents and students visited the local zoo for another reason: to learn about Oklahoma City Public Schools.

The district held its largest ever parent outreach event, Safari Celebra-

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Newsweek Ranks 100 Top Schools – 25 in Big Cities

Four big-city school districts in the Council of the Great City Schools ranked in the top 10 of *Newsweek* magazine's recent list of the top 100 high schools in America.

Florida's Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville saw Stanton College Prep rank No. 3, behind two all-International Baccalaureate (IB) schools in Michigan and Alabama. And the district's Paxon School for Advanced Studies placed 7th on the list.

Says Duval Schools Superintendent Nancy Snyder, "This success can be attributed to the fine students, dedicated faculty and high-quality programs we have in our schools."

Dallas' Science/Engineering Magnet ranked 6th, while Hillsborough High School in Tampa ranked 10th.

The *Newsweek* list ranks public schools based on the number of Advanced Placement or IB tests taken by all students at a school, divided by the number of graduating seniors.

"...Superintendents, principals and many teachers in districts that have increased their commitment to college-level courses say even with their shortcomings, AP and IB are the most effective ways to take a demanding curric-

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Urban School Honors

L.A. School Victorious In Academic Decathlon

For the second year in a row, the students of El Camino Real High School in Los Angeles took home the top prize in the 2005 United States Academic Decathlon.

The nine-member team competed against 40 other teams from across the nation and won the two-day competition held last month in Chicago. But winning is nothing new for the El Camino team, which not only won the title last year but also won in 2001 and 1998.

The Academic Decathlon is a team competition in which students are tested in 10 categories: art, economics, essay, interview, language and literature, mathematics, music, science, social science and speech.

Each high school enters a team composed of three "A" students, three "B" students and three "C" students.

"It was a tough competition with a lot of great teams," said Cliff Ker, coordinator of the Academic Decathlon for the Los Angeles school district. "But our team came out on top."

And not only did the team from El Camino win the national competition, but three team members were also among the top scorers in the competition, earning them scholarships.

College Board Bestows Award on Miami School

At Miami Senior High School, 48 percent of the students are recent immigrants, 30 percent speak English as a second language and almost three-quarters are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. Yet, 83 percent of the school's seniors are college-bound.

The high number of students the school sends to college is the reason why it was one of three schools nationwide recently chosen to receive a College Board 2004 Inspiration Award. The \$25,000 award is presented to schools that have provided students, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, access to post-secondary institutions.

"Despite unusually difficult socio-economic challenges, these schools set high standards and expectations for each and every student who walks through the doors," said College Board President Gaston Caperton in a news statement. "The students not only lived up to those expectations, they went beyond them."

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Urban Teachers Win NSF Award

Teachers from several big-city school districts were among the 95 educators across the nation who were recently named recipients of the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching for 2004.

Established in 1983 and administered by the National Science Foundation, the awards honor the

best of the nation's elementary and middle school mathematics and science teachers.



Urban teachers from Anchorage, Washington, D.C., Louisville, New Orleans, Boston, St. Paul, Omaha, Las Vegas, Austin and Jackson, Miss., were honored at a ceremony held in the nation's capital.

As recipients of the award, the teachers receive a \$10,000 educational grant for their schools.

Next year the awards will be presented to mathematics and science teachers in grades 7-12. For information on the 2005 Presidential Awards, visit www.paemst.org

Bush Salutes NYC Student

In Staten Island, N.Y., many birds are being displaced from their natural habitats due to new housing developments being constructed.

But James Rodrigues Quadrino, a student at Elias Bernstein School, a middle school on Staten Island, has developed a project to provide the birds with new homes.

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College Board....

At Miami Senior High School, many of the students work 20 to 40 hours a week to help their families make ends meet while still managing to take college-level and honors courses. In fact, all of the school's students are enrolled in a college-preparatory curriculum.

In addition, nearly 40 percent of the school's teachers are alumni and many are immigrants, who often serve as role models for the students.

Schools are eligible for the Inspiration Award based on their success in increasing the number of students from all school demographic groups being prepared for college. College preparedness gains were measured based on a variety of factors, including the percentage of students planning to attend post-secondary institutions and the number of students enrolled in college-preparatory courses.

Miami Senior High was not the only big-city school to receive an award from the College Board. James Benson Dudley Senior High School in Greensboro, N.C., was among five schools which received a \$1,000 College Board Inspiration Award Honorable Mention.



President Bush congratulates James Rodrigues Quadrino at a White House ceremony honoring the winners of the President's Environmental Youth Awards.

For his efforts, he was one of the recent recipients of the 2004 President's Environmental Youth Awards (PEYA), which are presented to young people from across the nation who have promoted environmental awareness.

Since 1971, the White House along with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has given awards to 10 winning projects selected each year from the EPA's 10 regional offices.

As a result of new construction, many trees on Staten Island are being cleared, causing the loss of natural tree cavities, where birds classified as "cavity-nesters" build their nests.

To alleviate this problem, Quadrino has constructed seven birdhouses, also known as nest boxes, at a park on Staten Island. The nest boxes are being used by several birds to lay their eggs.

Quadrino also serves as New York City's ambassador to the Birdhouse Network, a project sponsored by Cornell University to encourage people to build nest boxes for birds.

In this role, he monitors nest boxes and delivers presentations about birds to community groups.

Denver School Board Honored

Denver Public Schools places a strong emphasis on the arts by providing elementary students with instruction in all five art disciplines: vocal music, instrumental music, visual arts, dance and drama.

As a result, the district was recently selected as the recipient of the 17th annual Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network and National School Boards Association (NSBA) Award. Since 1989, the award has recognized 36 school boards in 23 states for their support and commitment to arts education in their districts.

Denver Public Schools has used \$6.5 million raised from a mill levy initiative approved by voters in 2003 to provide a high-quality arts education to students. Students from pre-K-12 receive standards-based arts instruction from art teachers in collaboration with classroom teachers, community arts organizations and volunteers.

The district also used the money from the bond initiative to create the Denver School for the Arts for students in grades 6-12.

"We have always been very proud of our arts education program, which has been evolving for many years," said board president Les Woodward in *School Board News*, NSBA's newspaper.

Denver Schools Superintendent Jerry Wartgow credits the citizens of Denver for restoring all arts programming in the district. "Thanks to voter support behind the 2003 mill levy initiative, schools today are sparking artistic imaginations among students and helping them develop a life-long appreciation for music, dance, visual art and theater."

Austin District No. 10 'Green Power' Purchaser in U.S., Says EPA

What does the Austin Independent School District in Texas have in common with the U.S. Air Force and the City of San Diego? They are among the largest purchasers in the nation of "green power," which is electricity that is generated from renewable energy sources such as solar, wind or geothermal power.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently released a list of the top 25 green power purchasers, with the Austin school district coming in tenth place. The 25 companies and organizations on the list have pledged to switch to green power for a portion of their electricity needs in return for EPA technical assistance and recognition.

Two years ago, the Austin school district purchased 45 million kilowatt-hours annually of green power, making it the largest purchaser of green power among all the nation's school districts.

This purchase accounts for 30 percent of all of the district's electricity – enough to power 3,570 homes year-round.

The district is proud to be among the nation's largest green power purchasers. "AISD believes in being good stewards of our resources," said Austin Schools Superintendent Pat Forgione in a news statement. "It is also important for our students that we set an example of respect and responsibility for the environment."

The top 10 green power purchasers are:

1. U.S. Air Force

2. Johnson & Johnson
3. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
4. The World Bank
5. U.S. General Services Administration
6. Whole Foods Market
7. City of San Diego, Calif.
8. New Jersey Consolidated Energy Savings Program
9. WhiteWave Foods
10. Austin Independent School District

Chicago to Expand AP Programs

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded the Chicago Public Schools a \$2.76 million grant to expand Advanced Placement and pre-AP programs, according to school district officials.

At a news conference, Chicago Schools CEO Arne Duncan said the funds will be targeted to 24 low-income neighborhood schools that serve 12,123 students.

The nation's third largest school system recently released a study of its graduates' college enrollment, showing that 79 percent of students who took two or more AP classes enrolled in college, compared to 47 percent of the general student body.

1.4 Million Books Read In Memphis

With the 2004-05 school year winding down, Memphis City Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson has reason to be proud: students have read more than a million books.

In August, Johnson introduced a literacy plan for the district at a faculty assembly, leading to the launch of the Memphis City Schools Reads campaign, which is designed to not only push Memphis students to read but the entire community.

Memphis students this school year have read 1,402,254 books, according to the district.

"I am so proud of our students and their teachers for reaching this amazing goal," she said in a press release. "Literacy truly is the key to academic achievement, and we are on the right track."

The campaign called for students to read at least two books a month to make 25 in a year. It challenged Memphis school district staff, board members, parents and community members to read 25 books as well.

Special events and awards were created to encourage reading during the inaugural year of the Memphis City Schools Reads campaign, which captured the attention of the community to the extent that it was recently celebrated at a Memphis minor league baseball game.

"...Literacy should be a lifelong passion of our students," stressed Superintendent Johnson. "So, I'm looking forward to an even better campaign next year."

Jackson District Reaches Out To Faith-Based, Non-Profit Communities

Some 200 people recently participated in a summit under the banner "Working Your Faith for School Success," hosted by Mississippi's Jackson Public Schools to forge stronger partnerships with the faith-based and non-profit communities.

Modeled after regional conferences sponsored by the White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, this was the school system's second such summit.

"Most people are not aware that only about 17 percent of a child's year is spent in school," said Superintendent Earl Watkins. "Because the other 83 percent is spent in the home and community, it is critical that Jackson's public schools and faith-based and non-profit organizations work together to assure the success of the city's 31,000 children."

Keynote speaker David Downey of the U.S. Department of Education Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives reportedly indicated that Jackson is the only school district that he's aware of that reaches out to the faith-based and non-profit communities through a summit.

It was hosted by Alta Woods United Methodist Church, a partner with nearby Lester Elementary School in Jackson.

Since the school system's first summit in 2003, Superintendent Watkins noted that:

- Ten additional faith-based and non-profit organizations have adopted schools;
- Two faith-based groups and two community groups received 21st Century Community Learning Center grants that serve Jackson

students while the district has also been awarded a 21st Century grant; and

- Many individuals from faith-based institutions and non-profits have volunteered for the Jackson Public

Schools Book Buddy program and the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program.

Wilbur Walters, principal of Walton Elementary School in inner-city Jackson, knows the value of partnerships between schools and community organizations.

An after-school program at his campus sponsored by the national Communities in the Schools Initiative gets some of the credit for his school's Level 4 (exemplary) state accreditation ranking.

"Without the program, we would not be at the level we are at now," Walters emphasized at the summit, thanking CIS and its 21st Century grant for enabling the school to have 15 staff members providing after-school services to 125 students five days a week.

Walton Elementary School has also leveraged those services by securing volunteer tutors from Tougaloo College and Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.

D.C. Teacher Inducted Into Hall of Fame

John Mahoney, a teacher at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School in Washington, D.C., was recently selected for induction into the National Teachers Hall of Fame.



John Mahoney

Mahoney was one of five teachers from across the nation selected for induction into the hall of fame, which honors exceptional preK-12 teachers and the teaching profession.

A mathematics teacher, Mahoney has been a classroom teacher for 33 years. He has received numerous awards and honors for his teaching, such as being named to *USA Today's* 2004 All-USA Teacher Team and receiving a presidential award for excellence in science and mathematics teaching in 1994.

Mahoney will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to give to a student in his school district who plans to pursue a degree in education. He will be honored in June at a ceremony in Emporia, Kan., where the hall of fame is located.

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Gary Anderson from Tougaloo College tutors students at Jackson's Walton Elementary in the 21st Century after-school program. (Photo by Jason Smith)

The *No Child Left Behind* Lawsuit

By Jeff Simering, Director of Legislation

The lawsuit challenging *No Child Left Behind* that was filed recently by the National Education Association, a number of its state and local affiliates, and nine small school districts from Michigan, Texas and Vermont has garnered considerable attention to the Act's funding and administrative burdens.

The suit specifically focuses on section 9527(a) of the Act—a provision that has actually been in the federal law since 1994—prohibiting the federal government from requiring states and school districts to spend their own funds or incur any costs that the feds do not pay for.

Whether one supports the suit or not, the NEA challenge captures the frustrations of many school officials—the Council of the Great City Schools' included—with the clumsy language of the Act's mandates, the restrictive operational policies adopted by the Department of Education, and the waning financial support that the Administration and Congress are giving to their own handiwork.

The federal government, of course, has a long history of passing laws that Congress promises to pay for later.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is exhibit A. The Elementary and Sec-

ondary Education Act (ESEA)—on which NCLB is built—is exhibit B.

But there are others, the Asbestos Abatement Act and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, to name a few. All were passed to address serious concerns about health, access, and opportunity, all deserve to be on the books, and few are fully paid for.

The new lawsuit seeks to prevent the Department of Education from requiring a state or local school district to spend its own money to implement the Act, citing such “unfunded mandates” as those requiring schools to implement standards, testing, and ac-

countability systems regardless of whether one receives NCLB funding; collect, manage and report student performance and teacher qualifications data; provide all students in low-performing schools the option of transferring to higher performing schools regardless of capacity; implement programs to attain universal proficiency by 2014; and restructure persistently low-performing schools by reconstituting staff, overhauling governance, implementing new curriculum, or closing a school.

The NEA is right to raise these issues.

But it is essential that the nation's urban schools, whose public support is fragile, be seen as focused primarily on raising our students' achievement and narrowing our racially identifiable performance gaps. It is clear from the data that our efforts to reform and improve are paying off.

The Council of the Great City Schools takes a back-seat to no one in its advocacy for adequate resources for urban schools. We have been a leader in the fight for more federal aid and against inequitable state funding systems for years. And we will continue to stand that ground.

But as therapeutic as it would be to join the hollering about NCLB, the Council will stay focused for the moment on improving the teaching of our urban kids. The Administration and Congress, for their parts, should not take our support for NCLB for granted.



LEGISLATIVE COLUMN

Great City Grads



Sid Gutierrez
Former Astronaut
First Hispanic to pilot and command the Space Shuttle
1969 graduate
Valley High School
Albuquerque Public Schools

Birmingham Students Learn Technology — Then Keep Computers *Dell TechKnow Program In Urban Schools Nationwide*

Fifty Birmingham City School System students were happy to stay after school during the spring semester because of what they earned for doing so.

The students – 25 each at Huffman Middle School and Wenonah High School – were the first in Alabama to participate in the Dell TechKnow Program. The TechKnow Program is an after-school program that teaches participants the basics about computer hardware, software and terminology. At the end of the program, each student who completed the program was given the computer he or she worked on.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for students who want to learn about technology to not only gain knowledge but to have something to show for it. Many of our students do not have computers in their homes, and this program changed that for some of them,” said Superintendent Wayman Shiver Jr.

“There are students who struggle to find their area of strength and interest who come alive educationally when they are exposed to the kind of technology instruction that this program provides.”

TechKnow provides students with 40 hours of instruction, starting with basic computer technology. Students will disassemble and assemble a computer, upgrade computer hardware, load and use software, identify and correct basic hardware problems and learn about the Internet.

Dell TechKnow, originating in the Denver Public Schools in 1998, went national in 2002 and today is operating in nearly 40 districts across the nation,

including Tucson, Denver, Miami, Chicago, New Orleans, Detroit, New York City, Rochester, Charlotte, Nashville, Ft. Worth and the District of Columbia.

Dell has committed to providing the program for 500 Birmingham students over a two-year period.

Career-technology teachers from the Birmingham system were trained to conduct the Dell TechKnow program.

Students who were selected had to maintain or improve their grades and have good attendance in order to complete the program and receive their computers.

Each student was assigned a refurbished desktop computer that is two

to three years old. In addition to taking their computers home in May, they received one year of America Online service at no charge.

“This is a unique program because it not only gives children access to technology but teaches them to do things that many adults would like to know.

At the same time, [they] had the incentive to do well in their classes, so they got to keep a computer,” Shiver said.



Huffman Middle School students participate in the Dell TechKnow program.

“Dell and the Birmingham City Schools share a commitment to making the most of what technology has to offer students, both during and after school,” said Karen Bruett, Dell’s director of education and community issues.

Longtime San Diego Official Wins Council Award

Bruce Husson, the former assistant superintendent for business services for the San Diego City Schools, was recently presented the Distinguished Service Award at the Council of the Great City Schools’ Chief Operating Officers conference in San Diego.

Distinguished Service Award winner Bruce Husson, third from right, congratulated by, left to right, David DeScenza of Chartwells/Thompson Hospitality, 2004 winner Walt Rulffes and Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.

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



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Oklahoma City....

tion, at the Oklahoma City Zoo to provide parents with information about the services and programs the school system offers.

School buses were provided to shuttle parents and their children from several schools to the event, and booths were set up that offered parents information on library services, career tech and higher education opportunities, the PTA Council and other school-based services.

Throughout the day, parents were also treated to student performances by several bands, choirs and dance troupes.

According to district officials, the Safari Celebration was the largest parental outreach event the district has experienced in more than 30 years. "I think the enthusiastic turnout truly marks a historical turning point for Oklahoma City Public Schools," said Superintendent Bob Moore.

The idea for the event began a year ago as district officials started looking for ways to develop and strengthen family involvement in schools.

"...The Safari Celebration was designed for the purpose of reaching out to our parents and guardians to educate them on what the district has to offer and to encourage them to become more involved in their children's education," said Moore.

The Safari Celebration was funded by the district as well as community supporters such as the Bank of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce.

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D.C. Teacher....

Founded in 1989, the National Teachers Hall of Fame honors exceptional teachers each year who have at least 20 years of teaching experience. Since the first induction ceremony was held in 1992, 60 teachers from 25 states have been inducted.

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Newsweek Ranks...

ulum to the widest range of students," says journalist Jay Mathews in *Newsweek*.

In an exclusive cover story on "America's Best High Schools," the *Newsweek* list shows one-quarter of the top 100 high schools are Great City schools.

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Miami-Dade County Schools both have four schools ranked among the top 100.

Florida's School District of Hillsborough County in Tampa has three schools, while the Dallas school system and Florida's Palm Beach County Schools both have two schools on the list.

Other Great City school districts with a school ranked on *Newsweek's* top 100 list, published in the newsmagazine's May 16 issue, are: Rochester, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, D.C., St. Louis, Greensboro, N.C., Oklahoma City and Denver.



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