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CNN journalist Soledad O'Brien moderates the Council's town hall meeting featuring, left to right, U.S. Department of Education official Thelma Melendez, San Francisco Schools Superintendent Carlos Garcia, Portland school board member Dilafruz Williams, New York school administrator Maria Santos and Portland student Sergio Amador-Garcia. Denver school board president Theresa Peña also participated.

English Language Learners Focus Of National Town Hall Meeting

PORTLAND, Ore.—Last year, Sergio Amador-Garcia immigrated from Cuba and entered Portland Public Schools as an 11th-grader speaking no English. A year later, he is fluent in English and would like to become a firefighter after he graduates from high school.

“Learning a second language is more than a chance; it’s a gift,” he stressed.

Amador-Garcia made these heartfelt remarks at a recent 90-minute town hall meeting on “Urban Schools Turn Challenge to Opportunity in Teaching English Language Learners.”

Moderated by CNN anchor and correspondent Soledad O'Brien, the national town meeting was held in conjunction with the Council of the Great City Schools' 53rd Annual Fall Conference here.

In addition to Amador-Garcia, the panel also featured Thelma Melendez, U.S. assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education; Carlos Garcia, superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District; Dilafruz Williams, board member for Portland Public Schools; Theresa Peña, board president for Denver Public Schools;

Town Hall continued on page 6

Big-City Schools Make Gains In Math

Public school fourth- and eighth-graders in the nation's large cities have made progress in mathematics achievement on the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The recently released *Nation's Report Card: Trial Urban District Assessment Mathematics 2009* shows that in comparison to 2007, 2005 and 2003, average mathematics scores for students in large cities increased nationally in both grades 4 and 8.

The new report reveals that for 2009 Austin, Boston, Charlotte, Houston and



San Diego had higher scores in both fourth and eighth grades compared to the average score for large cities nationally. Additionally, Miami-Dade and New York City had higher average scores for 2009 in grade 4 compared to large cities nationally.

Since 2007, overall district scores were higher in 2009 for Boston and the District of Columbia at grade 4 and for Austin and San Diego at grade 8.

In addition, no big-city school district showed a decline in scores from 2007 to 2009 at either grade, which is very significant, according to Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which originated the idea

Mathematics Gains continued on page 4

Atlanta School Board Member Wins Top Leadership Award

PORTLAND, Ore.—Emmett Johnson is a 12-year veteran of the Atlanta Board of Education and has played a major role in strengthening communication channels between the board and the superintendent, helping turn the school district into one of the fastest improving urban school systems in the nation.

As a result, Johnson was recently named the 2009 recipient of the Richard R. Green Award for outstanding leadership in urban education at the Council of the Great City Schools' 53rd Annual Fall Conference.

The award is sponsored by the Council, ARAMARK Education and Voyager Expanded Learning and is given each year to the nation's top urban educator in memory of Green, who led the Minneapolis and New York City public school systems.

As the recipient of the award, Johnson receives a \$10,000 college scholarship to present to a graduate of his choice in Atlanta Public Schools or from his high school alma mater.

"Richard Green is a symbol of justice, leadership and hope and I'm humbled to



Atlanta school board member Emmett Johnson receives applause after being announced the winner of the Richard R. Green Award.

be holding an award in his distinguished name," said Johnson upon accepting the award. "My children inspired my work because they deserve the best education and so do the children of Atlanta Public Schools, so I respectfully accept this award in tribute to APS."

Queen Smith Award

Helen Fox, liaison for New Mexico's Albuquerque Public Schools Title I Homeless Project, was the recipient of the 12th annual Queen Smith Award for Commitment to Urban Education.

Award continued on page 9



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Executive Director

Michael Casserly

Editor

Henry Duvall
hduvall@cgcs.org

Associate Editor

Tonya Harris
tharris@cgcs.org

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Saint Paul District Chooses New Leader

The Saint Paul school board recently chose its chief academic officer, Valeria Silva, to be the superintendent of Minnesota's second largest public school system.



Valeria Silva

For some 20 years, Silva has worked her way up the career ladder in the school district - from schoolteacher to principal to director of English Language Learner Programs and currently academic leader.

A native of Chile, Silva is nationally noted for her work in teaching English language learners.

She succeeds Meria Carstarphen, who now heads the Austin school system in Texas.

Pittsburgh Leader Stays

In Pittsburgh, the school board recently re-appointed Superintendent Mark Roosevelt, entering into a new five-year agreement with him that runs through 2014. He began leading the school district in 2005.

"Keeping the superintendent here five more years will provide us the leadership stability that is so important to continuing the progress we are making...", said Theresa Colaizzi, board president.

Interim in San Diego

The San Diego Unified School District now operates with an interim superintendent Bill Kowba, following the departure of Terry Grier, who now heads the Houston school system.

A retired U.S. Navy admiral, he joined the San Diego school district in 2006 as chief financial officer and has held other top district posts.

School Districts in Tampa, Memphis, Pittsburgh To Benefit from Gates Teacher Grants

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation recently announced that it will invest \$290 million in three big-city school districts and a charter school coalition as well as an additional \$45 million in research aimed at improving teacher effectiveness.

Grants will support the effective teaching plans of Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, awarded \$100 million; Memphis City Schools (\$90 million); Pittsburgh Public Schools (\$40 million); and The College-Ready Promise, a coalition of public charter school organizations in Los Angeles (\$60 million).

"We are convinced that in order to dramatically improve education in America, we must first ensure that every student has an effective teacher in every subject, every school year," said Melinda French Gates, co-chair of the foundation.

The Gates Foundation solicited grant proposals for the \$500 million it plans to invest in trying to figure out what makes for a quality schoolteacher to improve student achievement. The four winners of the \$290 million in grants were among five finalists in the competition. The other finalist, Omaha Public Schools, decided to pull out, citing financial constraints to meet the matching requirement of the grant.

In creating the grant proposal in Tampa, the school district worked closely with the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association, conducting a series of surveys and focus groups with teachers, principals, parents and citizens. Hillsborough Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia said, "We believe that supporting teachers is the best way to increase student achievement, and now we are in a position to create a model for the nation."

Vicki Phillips, director of the Gates Foundation's College-Ready education program, said of the grants, "Today's investments will help these districts and school networks -- and in time, all districts -- develop better systems to identify and reward great teachers..."

Memphis Schools Superintendent Krimer Cash called the grant from the Gates Foundation "a great catalyst" for his school system to "grow and support effective teachers for every single classroom in our city."



Carol Johnson

Food For Thought

PORTLAND, Ore.—Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, chair of the Council of the Great City Schools, opened the Council's Fall Conference with a passionate, thought-provoking breakfast address to urban school leaders.

"You are our nation's best hope for accelerating student performance, transforming lives and creating effective schools for this and the next generation of learners," she stressed.

"We have a better view of the future than any of those who would criticize us and we better understand the complexity of the task before us.

"We still educate the majority of our nation's urban students and enroll more of the special needs students, more of the diverse cultures and more of our nation's new arriving students," she continued, noting that it takes the "courage to act" in transforming urban schools to educate all and not some students.

A copy of the entire speech can be found on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org.

Mathematics Gains *continued from page 1*

for big-city participation in the national NAEP.

“These results show that urban school districts are implementing the necessary reforms to help their students academically, and as a result, we are seeing progress,” Casserly pointed out.

Eighteen big-city school districts volunteered for the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) in 2009, with seven of the districts participating for the first time. Newcomers are Baltimore, Detroit, Fresno, Jefferson County (Louisville, K.Y.), Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee and Philadelphia. They join Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cleveland, District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Diego.

Math Gains in Grade 4

The new NAEP data show that scores for large cities increased when compared to 2003, 2005 and 2007. Data also show that from 2007 to 2009 scores increased for fourth-graders in large cities and were flat for the nation.

For 2009, Charlotte was also the only big-city school district to score higher than the national average for fourth-grade public school students. Average scores for Boston and D.C. increased when compared to 2007.

Eight districts -- Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Diego -- demonstrated an increase in the percentage of fourth-graders scoring at or above *Proficient* in 2009 when compared to 2003.

The new report also reveals that scores in 2009 were higher in Austin, Boston, Charlotte, Houston, Miami, New York City and San Diego compared to the average score for large cities nationally.

Math Progress in 8th Grade

On *The Nation's Report Card: Trial Urban District Assessment Mathematics 2009*, average mathematics scores for eighth-graders were higher in 2009 than in 2003, 2005 and 2007 in large cities nationally.

Scores for eighth-grade students in San Diego and Austin increased from 2007 and Austin was the only big-city school district to score higher than the national average for public school students in the nation. Austin and Charlotte also had the largest percentage of students to score at or above the *Basic* level.

When compared to the average scores for large cities nationally, scores were higher in Austin, Boston, Charlotte, Houston and San Diego.

Minority, Poor Students Advance

Minority students made progress in the large cities, with Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, District of Columbia and New York City showing a higher average score for black students on NAEP in grades 4 and 8 compared to 2003. Boston, Chicago, District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles and San Diego had a higher average score for Hispanic students in grades 4 and 8 compared to 2003.

Scores from students eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch in some districts were comparable to the nation. In Austin, Boston, Charlotte, Houston, Miami-Dade and New York City, scores for eligible fourth-grade students were higher than the scores for those students nationally. In Austin, Boston, Houston and New York City, scores for eighth-grade students eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch were higher than the scores for lower-income students nationally.

Urban NAEP Expands

Three school districts -- Albuquerque, Dallas and Hillsborough County in Tampa, Fla. -- will join 18 other urban school systems that volunteered to have their academic performance measured by the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for NAEP, approved the additions to the Trial Urban District Assessment. Starting in 2011, the three new districts will bring the total of participating urban school districts to 21.

Stimulus Funds Saving Jobs in City Schools

Some 75,000 to 90,000 jobs have been paid by federal stimulus dollars in the nation's big-city school districts, according to the Council of the Great City Schools.

Data collected by the Council was recently cited in a U.S. Department of Education report on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The Council has been monitoring and aiding urban school districts on the use of the unprecedented infusion of federal stimulus dollars since President Obama signed the recovery act into law back in February. Large urban public schools are expected to receive a substantial amount of the new education aid.

“Big-city school systems are using the stimulus money to pay for education jobs, fill gaping budget gaps, meet unmet needs and pursue short-term reforms with long-term payoffs,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

In Boston, Superintendent Carol Johnson says, “The additional federal dollars have enabled us to restore teaching positions and other jobs that were in grave danger of being cut in this enormously challenging economic environment.”

She also explains that “the ARRA grants also allow us to make investments today that will strengthen our infrastructure and develop human capital for long-term gains as well.”

Superintendent Michael Hinojosa of the Dallas school system notes that the stimulus funds will support several academic initiatives. “We expect to address a number of critical needs, including hiring additional instructional coaches at the campuses to support teaching and learning.”

In Philadelphia, Superintendent Arlene Ackerman emphasizes, “The stimulus funds will enable our district to begin to implement our new *Imagine 2014* strategic plan, providing smaller class sizes, targeted interventions, and dramatic changes in the operation and management of our schools

Stimulus Funds *continued on page 12*

Hip Hop Intellectual, CNN Journalist, Gates Foundation Official Address Urban School Leaders

PORTLAND, Ore. --- Marc Lamont Hill is an associate professor of education at Columbia University and considered a hip hop intellectual who visits schools across the nation.

His experience in education has made him realize that there is no way to support urban schools, teachers and administrators without money. "Moneyless reform is like an eggless omelette," declared Hill in his inspiring keynote address to nearly 850 school superintendents, administrators, board members and deans of colleges of education assembled in Portland for the Council of the Great City Schools' 53rd Annual Fall Conference.

Hill, who provides regular commentary for media outlets such as *NPR*, *Washington Post* and the Fox News Channel, believes that in addition to focusing on the achievement gap between whites and students of color, attention must be given to the funding gap that exists in public education.

He observed that it is a national crisis that the nation has first-class jails and second-class schools and too many students of color go through a school-to-prison pipeline.

Trained as an anthropologist in education, he believes that one of the most difficult challenges educators face is wrestling with youth culture.

According to Hill, the notion of what it means to be young has changed and educators have to respond to that. He said that teens now cannot imagine life without the Internet and a gap exists between how students understand the world compared to their teachers.

In 2001, he started a literacy project that uses hip-hop culture to increase school engagement and reading skills among high school students.

The professor recalled an experience when he visited a classroom and the teacher asked students what profession they wanted to pursue and a 9-year-old black



Marc Lamont Hill

girl said she wanted to be an anesthesiologist. The teacher told the girl to choose an easier profession such as a nurse's aide.

"When I heard that, something in me died," said Hill, "because we live in a world where people don't believe in the fundamental ability of children to learn."

He urged conferees that it is their mission to create another kind of world "where when students say they are going to state, they mean Penn State [not the state pen], and instead of seeing a pregnant teen, people will see a future anesthesiologist."

The Power of Mentoring

Soledad O'Brien, a special correspondent for CNN, also delivered an address focusing on the importance of mentoring.

O'Brien believes mentoring is critically important, but a big misconception exists that it is too time-consuming.

She said that mentoring can be as simple as serving as a role model for someone. "Some of my best mentee relationships are online," said O'Brien.

The award-winning journalist told conferees that as a mentor she is always thinking of how problems can be solved in different ways.

She recalled an interview she did with Roland Fryer, the youngest tenured African American professor at Harvard University. Fryer has developed a program that pays students for receiving good grades, but has received criticism.

O'Brien met a boy in the program named Jamal, who gets paid \$2.00 for every book he reads. Jamal has read 38 books so far, even though he's only getting paid for 20 and told O'Brien that he reads for the "love of learning." Jamal also told O'Brien he reads a lot because he doesn't want his friends to read more books than him.

"Is this a way to motivate someone?" O'Brien asked conferees. "Fryer is thinking differently about a problem and having success."



Soledad O'Brien

their lives. Her mom is black and Cuban and her dad is white and Australian and their relationship was viewed very negatively by society.

"Their life story was about navigating obstacles and that you didn't have to internalize everyone's opinion," said O'Brien.

She believes that powerful mentoring can teach someone not to internalize what others say about them and to urge them to succeed. "That message can change their lives," she emphasized.

Improving Teaching

Urban educators also heard from Vicki Phillips, the director of the Bill & Melinda

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Town Hall *continued from page 1*

and Maria Santos, ELL executive director of the New York City Department of Education.

O'Brien asked the panelists what they view as the biggest challenge facing them in terms of educating English Language Learner students.

Melendez said that it's important for ELL students to have access to quality, successful programs that provide high standards for students.

San Francisco Superintendent Garcia said the nation's economic downturn is a big challenge, noting that school districts in California are being required to cut 20 percent of their budgets just to stay afloat. At the same time, his San Francisco district is showing tremendous growth in the number of students of color, including English learners.

Williams in Portland said that one of her district's biggest challenges is having enough qualified staff that can speak another language.

Denver's Peña said that Colorado passed an anti-immigration measure that has forced families to go underground, which makes it harder for ELL students to attain the services they need. She said that her district, which was under a federal court order to provide services to students with limited or no English language skills, needs to focus more on the instructional needs of ELL students.

New York's Santos said that her district must do a better job in educating the population of students who are not succeeding, such as those with interrupted schooling. She believes it is important for teachers to have the necessary skill sets to work with ELL students and that this requires a major investment in professional development.

O'Brien asked the panelists to explain how the immigration debate has figured into what's happening in their schools.

San Francisco Superintendent Garcia, who could not speak English when he began school, recalled that when he was in kindergarten he was called Charlie until his father went to the school and told administrators that his name was Carlos.



Denver school board member Theresa Peña and New York administrator Maria Santos listen as Portland student Sergio Amador-Garcia describes his educational experiences.

"We want people to learn English but we want people to be proud of who they are and not lose their culture," said Garcia. "We cannot strip people of who they are and we cannot strip them of their dignity."

Denver's Peña said that school administrators have to do a better job of educating parents. "These parents want to learn to speak English and teach their kids English."

Portland's Williams said that the debate should be turned on its head and that if all children learn at least one other language, it would be a huge asset because Americans live in a global world.

"We should say they speak another language and they are learning English," said Williams.

Is there any silver lining to the economic conditions when it comes to educating ELL students? O'Brien asked the panelists.

U.S. Education Department's Melendez said that educators should always remember that in terms of cuts, they have to do what's right for kids and remember that kids are primary.

"The more we focus on ensuring our immigrant population is successful, the more we are investing in the future of America," Melendez emphasized.

"We are a society of immigrants," said New York's Santos, "and if we don't educate our children now, we are going to see a major divide in this country."

She said that ELL students require a significant investment, but when school districts invest in quality programs, they get incredible results. "They become valedictorians of our high schools," said Santos.

O'Brien asked the panelists to explain

how they were preparing for the next wave of ELL students entering their districts.

San Francisco's Garcia said that his school district has much better ELL programs than in the past and that all ELL teachers must have the proper training and certification to work in a classroom.

He also noted a positive development in that there are waiting lists for the district's language immersion programs.

"There is nothing better than to see an African-American student giving an address in Mandarin," said Garcia.

Williams said that in her seven years on the Portland school board she has noticed a sea of progress, including materials being translated into different languages and an increase in the number of immersion programs in which ELL students are learning language alongside native speakers. "We have made an effort to be a district of inclusion."

Denver's Peña said that her district has clearly failed its ELL students and with 40 percent of the student population Hispanic, the district will never close the achievement gap until it helps its ELL students succeed.

She said that the district recently implemented a pre-school program that holds great promise and is enrolling a large number of students, many from households where English is not spoken.

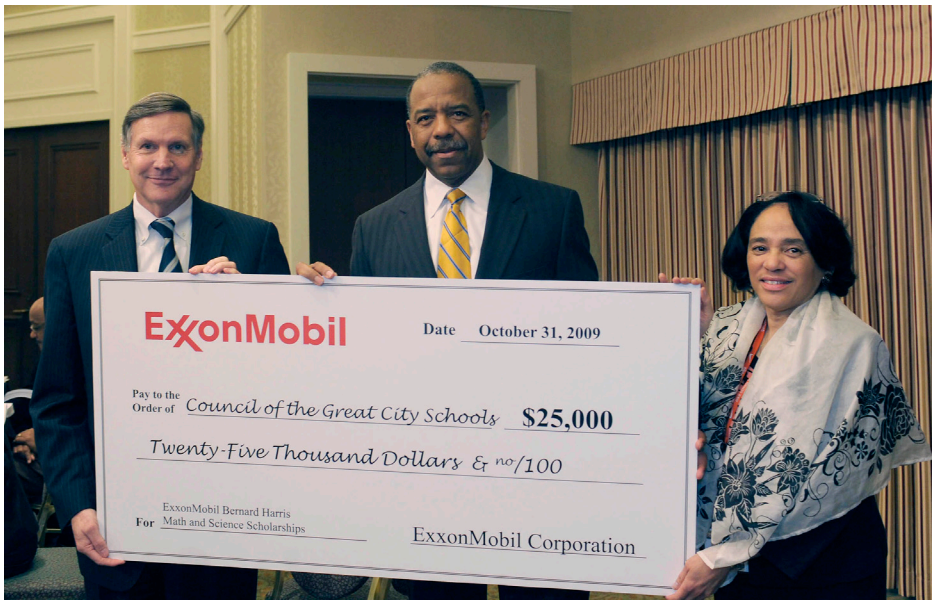
Education in Cuba

O'Brien asked 12th-grade student Amador-Garcia to describe his educational experiences in Cuba. He said that in Cuba education was taken seriously and teachers encouraged students to push forward often using humor, which he believes is lacking in American schools.

Amador-Garcia noted that because of his strong educational background, he was able to understand his math and science classes in Portland and only worried about learning English.

But he expressed concern for those students who had to learn English, but also struggled in other subjects.

"You have to find ways to help them out and provide them with support so they can succeed," said Amador-Garcia.



Bernard Harris, center, is joined by Council Executive Director Michael Casserly and Council Chair Carol Johnson as they display the \$25,000 oversized check that will fund the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math and Science scholarships.

Former Astronaut Launches Scholarship Program

PORTLAND, Ore.—The first African American to walk in space, former astronaut Bernard Harris, launched a scholarship program at the recent meeting here of the board of directors of the Council of the Great City Schools.

He announced the establishment of the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships to encourage minority students to pursue college degrees and careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

The scholarships will be awarded to two male and two female students in the 66 urban school districts represented by the Council. Four students, two African American and two Hispanic, will each receive a \$5,000 scholarship to continue their education in science or mathematics studies.

“I am honored to announce these scholarships that will serve as one more way for ExxonMobil and The Harris Foundation to reach America’s minority students and encourage them to achieve their dreams,” said Dr. Harris, a physician and businessman as well as a former NASA astronaut who walked in space during his second Space Shuttle mission in February 1995.

“The scholarships will be a launching pad for our students to advance their skills and talents in math and science,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

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

Chicago School Board President Dies

Michael Scott, president of the Chicago Board of Education, was found dead in the early morning of Nov. 16 on the banks of the Chicago River.

The medical examiner’s office ruled the death a suicide from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, noted, “Michael Scott served on the Chicago school board for all the right reasons in putting the interest of schoolchildren first. We will miss him.”

Chicago Schools CEO Unveils Program To Stem Violence

PORTLAND, Ore.—In September, 16-year-old Chicago honor student Derri-on Albert was beaten by a group of youths after leaving school and his death made national headlines.

More than 30 students in Chicago were killed last year and in an effort to stem youth violence, Chicago Public Schools has created a program that will provide mentors to more than 1,000 at-risk high school students. Ron Huberman, CEO of Chicago Schools, discussed the program at the Council’s 53rd Annual Fall Conference.

District administrators found that students who were perpetrators and victims of violence were more likely to be placed in special education classes, have difficult reading and were more likely to be homeless.

In addition to mentors, the anti-violence program will provide counseling staff and overhaul disciplinary procedures at 38 schools.

The program is also working with community leaders and local police to help provide safe passage lanes so students will be able to travel back and forth from school without being harmed.

The \$30-million initiative is being funded with federal stimulus dollars and Huberman believes that intervening in the lives of 1,200 students “will make every student in the school system safer.”



Chicago Schools CEO Ron Huberman discusses his district’s anti-violence program.

Pictorial of 53rd Annual Fall Conference



Long Beach school board member Felton Williams, left, and Long Beach Schools Superintendent Christopher Steinhauser share information at a session.



Portland Schools Superintendent Carole Smith welcomes conferes to the 53rd Annual Fall Conference hosted by her district.



Hillsborough County (Tampa) Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia, left, and Anchorage Schools Superintendent Carol Comeau present information at a session on how urban school districts are using federal stimulus funding.



East Baton Rouge Schools Superintendent John Dilworth facilitates a session.



Columbus Schools Superintendent Gene Harris listens intently at a session.

Photos by Clarence Tabb Jr.



San Francisco school board member Jill Wynns asks a question at the Town Hall Meeting.



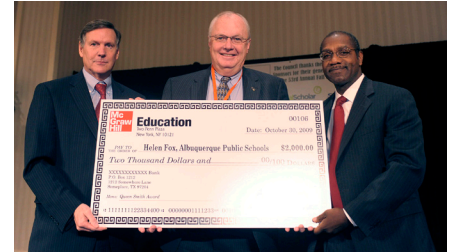
Baltimore Schools Superintendent Andrés Alonso makes a point during his presentation.



Vicki Phillips, director of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation college-ready program, talks with Denver Schools Superintendent Tom Boasberg and Atlanta Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall.

Award continued from page 2

The \$2,000 award is named in honor of the late vice president of urban programs for Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.



Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks, center, accepts the Queen Smith Award on behalf of Helen Fox as Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, left, and Arthur Griffin of Macmillan/McGraw-Hill look on.

Urban Impact Award

The Council of the Great City Colleges of Education, an affiliate group of deans working with urban school leaders, presented the first annual Dr. Shirley S. Schwartz Urban Education Impact Award.

The award honors an outstanding partnership between a university and an urban school district and is named in honor of the Council’s director of special projects who died in March.

“Shirley was deeply committed to the work of the Council,” said Joe Schwartz, her husband. “My family is profoundly grateful to you for naming this award in her honor.”

The recipients of the award were Virginia Commonwealth University and Richmond Public Schools for their Metropolitan Educational Training Alliance, which identifies opportunities for collaborative professional development activities.



Left to right, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, Beverly Warren from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Schools Superintendent Yvonne Brandon, Joe Schwartz and Deborah Shanley, chair of the Great City Colleges of Education.

Education Department Issues Funding Requirements For \$7.5 Billion in Reform Grants

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

The U.S. Department of Education has issued a Notice of Final Requirements for the \$4 billion Race to the Top grants and the \$3.5 billion School Improvement grants, as well as final requirements for the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Only the requirements for the Investing In Innovation Fund remain to be finalized from the education stimulus package.



The Department has aligned its focus, definitions, and requirements across each of the three program notices. The primary emphasis of the Department in its Race to the Top grants and School Improvement grants will be on “persistently lowest-achieving schools.” These schools will also be the focus of reporting under the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. The definition of “persistently lowest-achieving schools” across all three programs is: 1) any Title I-participating school in improvement, corrective action or restructuring that is among the 5 percent lowest-achieving Title I schools or is a Title I-participating high school identified for improvement with a graduation rate of less than 60 percent; or is 2) a secondary school that is eligible for but not receiving Title I funds and is among the lowest-achieving 5 percent of such secondary schools or is a Title I-eligible high school with less than a 60 percent graduation rate. The states will designate the lowest-achieving schools taking into account the proficiency of the “all students” subgroups in reading and math and the school’s lack of progress over a number of years among the “all students” subgroup.

The persistently lowest-achieving schools that are identified under Title I for improvement measures and Title I high schools with less than a 60 percent graduation rates are referred to as “Tier I” schools. Secondary schools that are eligible for but not participating in Title I and are among the lowest-achieving 5 percent of such secondary schools in a state and Title I-eligible high schools with a graduation rate less than 60 percent are referred to as “Tier II” schools. All other Title I-participating schools identified for improvement are “Tier III” schools. The designation of Tier II schools represents the Department’s efforts to address so-called “dropout factories” and their feeder middle schools (i.e., the nearly 2,000 high schools with graduation rates of less than 60 percent). Tier I and Tier II schools will be prioritized for Race to the Top and School Improvement grant funding.

The final notices from the Department also mandate that one of four Intervention Models must be used in Tier I and Tier II schools

to qualify for Race to the Top and School Improvement grant funding. The “turnaround” model requires replacing the principal and 50 percent of staff, adopting a new governance structure, providing staff incentives and professional development, and using data to identify and implement a research-based instructional program and differentiated instruction. The “restart” model requires a school district to convert a school or to close and reopen a school as a charter school or a privately-managed school.

The “school closure” model requires closing a school and transferring the students to a higher-achieving school in reasonable proximity to the closed school. And, the “transformational” model requires replacing the principal, using a rigorous teacher evaluation system with student growth as a significant factor, rewarding staff based on student achievement and removing staff that have not improved professional practice, implementing comprehensive instructional reform strategies, including using data to identify and implement a research-based instructional program and differentiated instruction, increasing learning time, and an array of other mandated and optional activities.

The transformational model does not require replacing 50 percent of the school staff and is viewed as the most flexible of the four prescribed models, but has been expressly limited in the final requirements to being used in only half of the persistently lowest-achieving schools in school districts with 10 or more Tier I and Tier II schools. Many large urban districts, comprised of dozens if not hundreds of schools, will be subject to this limitation on transformational models, once their states identify Tier I and Tier II schools.

The Council of the Great City Schools submitted extensive comments seeking to improve the ultimate operation and implementation of these federal requirements. While many of the Council’s comments were adopted by the Department, the Council’s call for more flexibility in the selection and implementation of intervention models and the addition of a “Scale Up” model to expand successful local school interventions were not adopted. The first round of the \$4 billion Race to the Top grants, and the \$3.5 billion in School Improvement grants are expected to be awarded to states before the end of the school year, but it is uncertain when they will reach the school-district level.

New Houston Superintendent Aims To Cut Dropout Rate, Increase School Completion

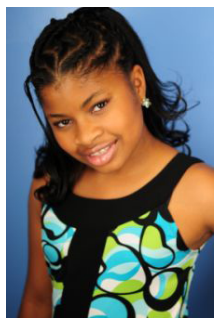
When the new superintendent of the Houston Independent School District recently took the helm, he targeted the student dropout rate as one of his first priorities to advance student achievement in the nation's seventh largest school system.

Memphis Student Wins 'Kid Reporter' Contest At NBC Today Show

A middle school student in Memphis recently won NBC *Today* show's "Kid Reporter" contest of more than 40,000 children nationwide who competed.

To win, Deidra Shores had to beat out three other finalists in covering the unveiling of the world's largest children's book in New York City. The book reportedly will raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Since being named "kid reporter" for the NBC morning show, the seventh-grader has been featured in *People* magazine and has received numerous accolades, including an honor from the Shelby County Commission in Memphis.



Deidra Shores

She credits Memphis City Schools for part of her success. "MCS is amazing. I did some radio spots and some TV things with them. Memphis is really behind me," she said in a WMC-TV story in the city.

Deidra's initial contest submission was a parody of *Today* co-host Matt Lauer's "Where in the World is Matt Lauer" special feature. The video had her searching for Lauer throughout Memphis, subsequently landing her an exclusive interview.

Superintendent Terry Grier aims to reduce the four-year dropout rate by at least 3 percentage points -- to 15 percent from about 18.7 percent in 2009 -- before the class of 2010 graduates next spring.

His goal also includes increasing the school completion rate by 3 percentage points in 2010 to 83.6 percent from 80.6 percent in 2009. By the class of 2011, he hopes to have a completion rate of 88 percent and dropout rate down to at least 10 percent.

Grier, who took the Houston reins this fall after heading San Diego city schools, has launched an academic credit-recovery program that will allow students who have failed courses to take them online.



Terry Grier

The initiative also includes hiring "graduation coaches" for 27 high schools to identify students at risk and get them the academic help they need to prevent failure.

Under what's called the Credit Recovery/Graduation Coach Initiative, each high school will have a new state-of-the-art computer lab that can be used for online credit recovery. The graduation coaches would oversee the labs, where struggling students will spend time redoing classes they failed. The coaches would work closely with counselors and teachers to provide academic, social and emotional support to at-risk students.

"This will transform education," Grier said in the *Houston Chronicle*, noting that he expects the new software in the labs to eventually be used for other academic exercises, such as for advanced classes, summer

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Vicki Phillips

Gates Foundation College-Ready education program.

Phillips recalled that as a student in Kentucky, she was not pushed very hard but in high school she met someone who encouraged her to go to college.

"What about the thousands of students out there who don't get pushed to go to college?" she asked. "One thing we have to take out of the equation is luck and instead help students succeed by design."

She visited a school in North Carolina with Bill and Melinda Gates that used to be low-performing. But since new supports were put in place, it's a new school with high academic achievement and where the students are "powered up."

"We have to power up education," said Phillips. "It's the best way to close the achievement gap and break the cycle of poverty."

The former superintendent of Oregon's Portland Public Schools said that the Gates Foundation is focusing on ensuring at least 80 percent of students graduate from high school college-ready.

Phillips believes that there is nothing more effective than a good teacher and "we can close the achievement gap in just three years if students could get a good teacher."

The Gates Foundation is embarking on a project in which they are going to videotape 4,000 teachers and create partnerships for effective teaching in districts such as Memphis.

"We [the Gates Foundation] are making the single largest private investment in teaching," declared Phillips. "If you believe, and we do, that every student can learn, it is our responsibility to provide teachers the tools so every student can."



Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
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that need the most improvement and dramatic change.”

The Council has developed a web site for urban districts to post their plans and query each other on the use of stimulus funds. It's also publishing a guide and providing advice and counsel to the school systems as it continues to compile detailed information on how urban school districts are using their stimulus dollars.

Urban Educator To Begin Feature on Stimulus

In early 2010, *Urban Educator* will introduce a new feature in the newsletter that periodically highlights the use of federal stimulus funds in the nation's big-city school districts.

The Council of the Great City Schools is monitoring the use of the additional federal dollars and providing assistance to urban public school systems to ensure that the funds are spent effectively, productively and transparently.

U.S. Ed. Department Honors Three Urban Principals

In 2006, Eleanor Matthews, the principal of Western High School in Baltimore, redesigned the school's Advanced Placement program to increase the number of students taking AP courses and exams. As

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school, test preparation and tutoring.

He explained that the online credit-recovery system will provide flexibility for students to learn in a comfortable environment and help those students who dropped out for attendance or personal reasons.

Grier is drawing from his experiences as the previous superintendent of two urban school districts -- San Diego and Guilford County Public Schools in Greensboro, N.C. -- where he spearheaded similar credit-recovery programs.

In San Diego, students reportedly recovered more than 4,500 credits in one year. They earned an average "B" grade in 81 days, Grier indicated.

The Houston online credit-recovery system is estimated to cost more than \$1 million.

a result, in 2009-10, more than 200 students are taking AP classes, compared with 144 in 2008-09 and 120 in 2007-08.

For her efforts, Matthews was recently one of eight principals across the nation to be presented with the Terrel H. Bell Award for School Leadership. Presented by the U.S. Department of Education, the award is given to outstanding principals of Blue Ribbon Schools that are academically superior and/or have demonstrated dramatic student achievement gains among disadvantaged students.

In addition to Matthews, Sheila Holas, principal of Oakwood Elementary School in Norfolk, Va., and Wayne Ryan, principal of Crosby S. Noyes Education Campus in Washington, D.C., were also recipients of the award, created in 1999 for Terrel H. Bell, a former U.S. secretary of education.

"To have one of our school leaders be chosen for the Terrel H. Bell Award is a tremendous honor—for her and for the Western High School community of course, but also for all of our schools and our entire city," said Baltimore Schools CEO Andrés Alonso.