



- Top Urban Educator, **p.2**
- Immigration Issues, **p. 3**
- Conference Pictorial, **p.9**
- Ballot Results, **p.10**

New President Focus of Town Hall Meeting

HOUSTON—Urban school leaders voiced their thoughts on “An Urban Education Agenda for the New President,” the topic of a national town hall meeting held in conjunction with the Council of the Great City Schools’ 52nd Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 22-26, in Texas’ largest city. ([View Town Hall Meeting](#))

A packed ballroom of educators heard from a panel that included education advisers of the two presidential candidates, who faced off in a lively 90-minute discussion moderated by noted journalist Dan Rather, global correspondent and managing editor of *Dan Rather Reports* on HDNet.

Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra of the Houston Independent School District,

hosting the Council conference, called for national standards to measure school performance. “We can’t have a federal accountability system without national standards,” he stressed.

Lisa Graham Keegan, senior education adviser to Sen. John McCain’s campaign, said that McCain does not believe in implementing mandatory national standards.

Jonathan Schnur, who represented then-Senator and now President-elect Barack Obama, noted that Obama wants more consistency around high standards, and wants to work with states and the federal government to create quality assessments, but without mandating national standards.

Town Hall continued on page 4



Letter to New President

HOUSTON—The Council of the Great City Schools issued an *Open Letter to the Next President of the United States* at its Fall Conference here. The letter, featured in its entirety on page 6, reaches out to President-elect Barack Obama to focus on the challenges facing urban schools.

Gates Foundation Gives Council \$3.7-Million Grant

The Council of the Great City Schools has received a grant of \$3.7 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The grant is aimed at improving student performance in reading, mathematics and science as part of the Council’s initiative to accelerate academic gains in the nation’s big-city schools.

The three-year project will assist urban school districts in their efforts to raise standards, improve academic performance, close racial and economic achievement gaps, increase graduation rates and im-

Gates Foundation continued on page 3



Moderator Dan Rather, left, listens as panelists Jonathan Schnur, Obama campaign adviser, Houston Schools Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra, Chicago Schools CEO Arne Duncan and Anchorage school board member Crystal Kennedy share their views at the Council of the Great City Schools’ town hall meeting.

Austin Superintendent Wins Top Council Award

HOUSTON—In 1999, Pascal Forgione was hired as the superintendent of Texas' Austin Independent School District. Under his nine years of leadership, the district has seen an upward trend in academic achievement, a return to fiscal stability, three successful bond elections, and improved community support for the district.

As a result, Forgione was presented with the Richard R. Green Award at the Council of the Great City Schools' 52nd Annual Fall Conference.

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

Upon accepting his award, Forgione recalled that when he worked for the Connecticut Department of Education he used to watch Richard Green and never forgot the leadership he displayed.

"Urban public schools are the foundation of our nation and public schools are the greatest invention of our nation," said Forgione. "Thank you, and I am humbled by it."

As the recipient of the award, Forgione receives a \$10,000 college scholarship, which he can present to a 2008 graduate of his choice in the Austin school system or from his high school alma mater.

Award Beneficiary

When Basheer Jones was a student in the Cleveland school system, he and his family lived in a homeless shelter for a while. Yet, he not only managed to graduate from high school and receive a degree from Morehouse College, but he currently hosts his own radio talk show at the age of 24.

Jones was able to attend Morehouse as a result of a scholarship he received from



Austin Superintendent Pascal Forgione holds his \$10,000 oversize check after winning the Richard R. Green Award and is congratulated by Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, ARAMARK's Dennis Maple and Voyager's Carolyn Gettridge.

Barbara Byrd-Bennett, who at the time was the superintendent of the Cleveland school district. Byrd-Bennett was named the recipient of the Green Award in 2001.

At the 2008 Richard R. Green ceremony, Jones expressed his appreciation with a heartfelt speech that received a

Austin Superintendent *continued on page 11*



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Gates Foundation continued from page 1

prove student preparation for college and employment.

Titled *Improving Standards and Data Use in the Great City Schools*, the project will analyze urban school achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, examining alignment between NAEP frameworks and relevant state standards in urban districts participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment of NAEP.

It will also investigate factors shaping NAEP results, such as family, school and economic variables, as well as instructional progress to determine why some urban districts show faster gains than others.

The second part of the research project will zero in on the use of data in instructional improvements. It will investigate best practices in how quarterly or benchmark assessment data are used to inform instruction and target resources, and it will lay the groundwork for better urban district tracking of secondary school student progress.

"We will explore two important levers for change: raising achievement in core subjects through a focus on standards and instruction, and using student data to identify student needs and target support where it's most needed," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

The Council will be assisted in the research project by the American Institutes for Research. The research that will be done follows efforts over the last several years by the Council to boost student achievement in the nation's urban schools, which have resulted in measurable academic gains.

"Thanks to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we can now expand our efforts to improve student outcomes dramatically, which are linked to the foundation's goal of ensuring that every student graduates from high school prepared for success in college, career and life," Casserly points out.

Why is the research significant? "No national effort to enhance the quality of public education can succeed without substantial progress in the nation's major urban school systems," he stresses. "Urban schools simply enroll too large a portion of the nation's children to ignore."



Dallas Superintendent Michael Hinojosa, Los Angeles school board member Yolie Flores Aguilar, San Francisco Superintendent Carlos Garcia, research associate Maria Castaneda and Seattle Schools board member Cheryl Chow discuss immigration issues at the Council of the Great City Schools' Fall Conference.

Urban School Leaders Discuss Immigration Issues

HOUSTON—In the United States, there are approximately five million children with at least one undocumented parent and a number of these children may attend schools in urban districts.

The question of what happens to these children if their parents are detained by immigration officials was the topic of a special session held at the Council of the Great City Schools' 52nd Annual Fall Conference and moderated by Maria Hinojosa, PBS senior correspondent.

According to Rose Maria Castaneda, a research associate at the Urban Institute, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office (ICE) has stepped up its immigration enforcement efforts through workplace raids.

She cited statistics that one out of every two people who are detained by ICE leave a child at home, with two-thirds of the children younger than 10 and one-third younger than 5. Also, children of immigrants who are arrested face being stranded in schools or day care centers or left to fend for themselves.

Castaneda said that immigration deportations create heavy burdens on schools and staff because children whose parent is taken away may experience emotional, social and health problems. These include ab-

sences from school, aggressive behavior, or changing sleep patterns and appetites because their attachments to caregivers have been broken.

Carlos Garcia, superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District, said that since 1989 San Francisco has been designated as a sanctuary city for immigrants. The school district has put in place a policy that forbids principals from allowing immigration officials to enter a school.

"Kids deserve an education and the best thing we can offer kids is an education," said Garcia, who stressed that he would go to jail to prevent ICE from entering one of his campuses.

Michael Hinojosa, the superintendent of Dallas Unified School District, said that in the absence of parents schools must take responsibility for children.

He said that superintendents know their school systems must take responsibility for children who are left behind, but the answer is not that simple. "If you just bring up the topic, automatic division occurs," said Hinojosa.

Yolie Flores Aguilar, a board member with the Los Angeles Unified School District, indicated that her district has a Latino student population of approximately 72

Immigration Issues continued on page 12

Town Hall continued from page 1

Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan of Chicago Public Schools noted during the town meeting that urban education is the defining issue of the nation and urban school districts must dramatically increase rates of improvement.

He noted that 85 percent of children in the Chicago school system live below the poverty line and that public education failed their parents. "What Barack gets is the sense of urgency that we have to do something now," said Duncan.

Crystal Kennedy, a board member with the Anchorage School District, expressed concern about implementing national standards and said the Association of Alaska School Boards is against it.

Eileen Cooper Reid, a board member with Cincinnati Public Schools, said that educators should grapple with the issue of national standards, but it "should not make a difference what state a child is born in to determine whether a child gets a quality education."

She said the nation has not developed the political will that providing a quality education is important and believes legislators cannot discuss the issue of accountability without providing the adequate resources. "Don't come to us about accountability without resources," she emphasized.

Rather asked the presidential campaign advisers to explain how the candidates' education plans would be carried out if the nation experienced a protracted recession.

Schnur said that if the nation invests in education, the dropout rate could be cut in half. "We are focused on the long term," said Schnur, noting that President-elect Obama advocates spending \$30 billion a year in education and targeting funding to support what works, including a \$10 billion increase in early childhood education.

Keegan noted that Sen. McCain's biggest priority would still be to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Saavedra said that in Houston, 90 percent of funding for the school district comes from the state and the city, so if there is a recession funding will be a big concern.



Sen. McCain adviser Lisa Graham Keegan makes a point as Jonathan Schnur, adviser to then-Sen. Barack Obama, and Houston Schools Superintendent Abe Saavedra look on.

Chicago's Duncan believes that it is morally irresponsible to not invest in education and it is an issue of social justice. "What are our aspirations?" he asked. "Are we happy being at the bottom half of the industrialized world?"

"We spend two or three times more money incarcerating juveniles than educating them," said Cincinnati's Cooper Reid. "It's about the nation deciding what its priorities are."

NYC District Lobbyist, Obama Aide Dies

Terence D. Tolbert, the chief lobbyist for the New York City school system, died Nov. 2 at the age of 44, reportedly of a heart attack.

Mr. Tolbert had taken leave from his post in August to head then-Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign in the State of Nevada. He passed away just days before he could have seen a Nevada victory for the Illinois senator.

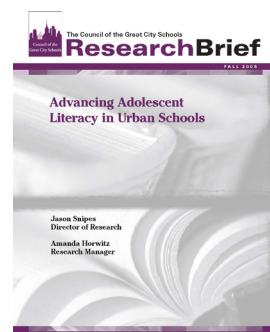
"He built an incredible list of accomplishments in life and in our campaign," President-elect Obama wrote in a letter read at the funeral.

Mr. Tolbert was a native of Harlem, where he lived with his wife. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg reportedly said at the funeral that Intermediate School 195 in Harlem, where Mr. Tolbert had attended, would be renamed the Terence D. Tolbert Education Complex.

New Council Research Brief Focuses on Adolescent Literacy

A major challenge facing the nation's public schools is trying to improve adolescent literacy, according to the Council of the Great City Schools' latest *Research Brief*.

The brief notes that research shows improvements in boosting the reading skills of elementary school students, but finds a challenge in maintaining support for adolescent literacy development.



As a result, the Council's fourth in a series of research briefs stresses, "The lack of sufficient literacy skills is a major factor contributing to poor performance in

high school and post-secondary education."

Titled *Advancing Adolescent Literacy in Urban Schools*, the brief provides a synthesis of the research on adolescent literacy, primarily focusing on policies and practices that can "support the development of language skills necessary to access high school content."

The brief defines adolescent readers as students in grades four through 12. It cites effective practices for improving adolescent literacy. "Explicit instruction in both vocabulary development and comprehension strategies should be a central component of instruction in grades 4-12," the brief emphasizes.

The other three briefs in the series center on transition to high school, teacher recruitment and retention, and educating English language learners.

The new adolescent literacy brief is available on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org.



Psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint

Psychiatrist, Teacher, Urban Sociologist Address Council

HOUSTON—Noted psychiatrist and child advocate Alvin Poussaint is a strong proponent of banning corporal punishment in schools and believes it is detrimental to children's health and well-being.

So he can't understand why 21 states in the nation allow children in schools to be paddled. Yet, 100 countries, ranging from Iraq to Iran, ban the practice.

"Paddling in schools is telling parents it's okay to beat their children," said Poussaint. "How can you tell kids not to be violent when you have paddling in schools?"

Poussaint posed this question to more than 850 big-city school superintendents, senior administrators, board members and deans of colleges of education assembled here for the Council of the Great City Schools' 52nd Annual Fall Conference under the banner "Pioneering the Educational Frontier."

He noted that the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was created in 1866, while the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was created in 1875.

Psychiatrist, Teacher continued on page 8

City Schools Compared With Schools in Other Countries

HOUSTON—Educators in 11 big-city school districts were able to discover how their students were performing academically compared to their international counterparts at a session held at the Council of the Great City Schools' 52nd Annual Fall Conference.

"Counting on the Future: International Benchmarking of Urban School Districts" revealed the results of a report from the American Institutes of Research (AIR) that compared the number of mathematically proficient students in grades 4 and 8 in 11 Council districts with their international peers.

The report was compiled by linking data from the 2007 trial urban National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to the 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

"This report compares information from the most recent NAEP to the most recent TIMSS to show how the United States compared to other countries," said Gary Phillips, chief scientist for AIR.

The 11 districts featured in the report were Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Cleveland, the District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Diego.

The study revealed that four districts at Grade 4 (Charlotte, Austin, San Diego and New York City) performed significantly better than the overall international average of 24 countries. And at Grade 8, three districts (Charlotte, Austin and Boston) performed above the international average of 44 countries.

The report also compared big-city school districts to the 10 nations that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Charlotte, Austin and San Diego performed above the OECD average in grade 4, while in grade 8, Charlotte and Austin performed similarly to the average of the 12 OECD nations that participated in the international study.



Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, Atlanta Superintendent Beverly Hall and Austin Superintendent Pascal Forgione discuss a new report comparing their students to peers internationally.

Austin Superintendent Pascal Forgione said there was great value seeing his school district perform in a larger context and that the findings were very encouraging. "What we see in Austin is that only four countries

in the world perform better than us in 8th grade math. I didn't know this."

Atlanta Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall noted that her district's performance in NAEP has tremendously validated the growth the district is seeing on its state assessments.

"We have validated our progress on our state test and we clearly understand the highest standards to which we must aspire," said Hall.

Boston School Superintendent Carol Johnson said her district has seen significant increases over three years. "We saw an increase in the number of students performing above proficiency and we saw improvements in lower income students."

At the session, Forgione pointed to his fellow superintendents Hall and Johnson and noted that the common thread among them was stability. "A relentless pursuit of excellence with constant leadership can make a difference," he said.

Open Letter to the Next President of the United States

October 22, 2008

We—the leaders of America's Great City Schools—envision a time in which the nation educates all our children, holds high expectations for them, appreciates their diversity, invests in their futures, and welcomes their participation in the American dream. We believe that you share the same vision, for it is one that is already being realized for many children. But for others—particularly those who are poor, African American, Latino, Native American, disabled or learning English—that vision is a cruel hoax.

Too many children attending our inner-city schools are likely to see a future marked by more second-rate jobs, jail cells, emergency rooms, and wasted ambitions than the country's abundant wealth can hide. A nation that cared for its children, expected the best of them, appreciated their diversity, invested in their futures, and welcomed their participation in the American dream would not have let this happen. But happen it did, and now the pledge to banish inequality with all deliberate speed and ensure the civil rights of all has dissolved into decades of empty promises.

As a result, the nation is more fractured and uncertain as it faces some of the most profound challenges than it has ever encountered: economic upheaval, dwindling energy supplies, environmental collapse, income inequality, inadequate health care, out-of-control entitlement spending, international competition and conflict, rising unemployment, eroding housing markets, and more.

Public education cannot fix these problems directly, but it is at the heart of our nation's capacity to do so. Yet, too often, our schools have reflected—even perpetuated—some of the problems that we face, rather than overcoming them and teaching all our children to the highest standards. Turning this situation around so that public schools are the engine of problem solving rather than being viewed as the problem itself is one of our highest priorities as urban school leaders. This priority, we believe, warrants the closest attention from the next President of the United States.

Urban schools, of course, are at the core of every national debate about the status and future of public education. There is no conversation about achievement gaps, accountability, teacher quality, school facilities, or parental choice that is not also

about urban education. In this arena, every educational challenge is more pronounced and every solution is more elusive.

Still, within this arena, there exists significant energy, commitment, and progress on which the next President can build. We are proud of the fact that school systems in America's Great Cities have seen steady academic improvement over the last several years. The proportion of our fourth-graders reading proficiently on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (popularly called "The Nation's Report Card") has improved nearly 30 percent since 2002, and the proportion of large central-city fourth-graders doing math proficiently has increased 40 percent since 2003, rates of gain that outpace those at both national and state levels. We have also strengthened our management and operations, improved transparency and accountability, and are working to regain the public's confidence and trust.

We would not contend, however, that our progress has been sufficient. The overall academic performance of our urban school systems is below state and national averages, and our racially identifiable achievement gaps remain wide, although they are not much wider than those of the nation at large. Our students and schools remain the major focus of state and federal accountability initiatives. Our high school dropout rates are unacceptable. We need to accelerate gains in student achievement; close our achievement gaps; recruit and retain thousands of effective teachers; repair our buildings; and stabilize our leadership. It is a huge challenge, but a challenge that is critical to America's future and the futures of millions of children.

We need a great deal from the next President of the United States in helping us meet these and other challenges, for we cannot meet them by ourselves. Here, specifically, is where we need your help.

First, we need a **positive tone** in the national discussion about urban education. The divisive and destructive rhetoric about urban public education—and the singling out of public schools in the cities—must come to an end. We deserve to be criticized when we fail and acknowledged when we improve. But the gratuitous denigration of urban education is neither motivating nor effective, and it sends destructive messages to the

community about issues of race and class that are inaccurate and counterproductive. We believe that the next President can help set the tone by framing educational reform as a national challenge.

Second, we need a more cohesive **national urban policy** with public education at its core. The nation has lacked an urban policy for many years, a void that needs to be filled. Big-city schools and big-city mayors have worked hard over the last several years to forge stronger relationships and more coherent strategies for revitalizing our communities. Federal policy lags far behind in its ability to tie school reform and urban renewal together and to use one to strengthen the other. We believe the next President should help build this new cohesive national urban policy.

Third, we need a set of **American education standards** that clearly articulate what the nation expects our children to know and be able to do. These standards should be competitive with those anywhere in the world and should lay out what is required of our graduates in order for them to take their rightful places in higher education and the increasingly globalized economy. The current 50-state system of standards is inadvertently lowering our expectations for student achievement and exacerbating our achievement gaps. It is time for the nation to move towards national standards in education, with state testing systems that are tethered to those standards.

Fourth, we need to substantially amend *No Child Left Behind* and focus its provisions on **raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps**. The Council of the Great City Schools supported *No Child Left Behind* because we thought it was important to pair the goal of universal access to education with universal proficiency. The great civil rights battles that many in our membership helped wage were not fought over access to mediocrity. These battles were fought over access to excellence and the resources to attain it. *No Child Left Behind* was an important effort in trying to bridge these goals, but it devolved into a poorly calibrated exercise in compliance with overly rigid and punitive measures that failed to take academic progress or growth into account and ultimately had little to do with raising achievement or narrowing achievement gaps. The next iteration of the

Open Letter continued on page 7

Open Letter *continued from page 6*

Elementary and Secondary Education Act should retain a focus on accountability and closing racial and language achievement gaps. But the next version of the law should move beyond labeling to provide more instructional emphasis, more technical assistance, better research on what works, and a higher level of financial support. The new administration should start by reviewing and suspending all regulations that go beyond the letter of the law.

Fifth, we need your help with **attracting, recruiting, and retaining qualified and effective teachers** and leaders to meet the challenges of our urban schools. *No Child Left Behind* mandates that we hire only qualified teachers, but does nothing to solve the obstacles that we face in finding these teachers. Urban schools cannot compete with wealthier school systems in pay or working conditions. Federal assistance—through methods such as alternative certification; induction programs; smaller class sizes; differential, performance, or incentive pay—is necessary to attract, recruit, and retain highly effective teachers and leaders for the nation's urban schools. We also need help in developing workable strategies in federal law so that our best teachers serve in schools with students who most need them.

Sixth, we need assistance in ensuring that our nation's youngest children have access to **early childhood education**. Many children from poor families enter school with substantial unmet medical, psychological, social, and academic needs. The research is quite clear that early childhood programs, if done with an emphasis on child development between birth and age four, can make a huge difference in the later success of students.

Seventh, we need a comprehensive approach to reforming our **lowest-performing high schools** and stemming our **dropout rates**. Countless studies have identified the schools and communities with high dropout rates, elevating the rhetoric around our nation's high schools and demonstrating the impact of these schools' failures to meet the needs of at-risk students. The next President can boost current efforts for high school reform even further by directing the federal government to devote more resources, conduct more extensive research, and disseminate new information on effective practices for turning around secondary schools.

Eighth, our facilities are crumbling and in serious need of **repair, renovation and replacement**. The average school building across the country is close to 50 years old, and public schools are using an estimated 300,000 portable classrooms. Urban schools have fared even worse, and have long suffered from overcrowding, inadequate repair, and deferred maintenance. The impact of deficient facilities can be seen in areas from student performance to teacher recruitment and retention. Moreover, while local bond efforts have helped to improve learning conditions in urban school districts, state contributions are negligible and federal resources are almost nonexistent. Research has shown that a clean, safe, and modern learning environment is vital to help schools meet high standards, improve student test scores, and keep teachers and other instructional staff members focused on the children that they teach.

Ninth, we need a sustained effort by the federal government to increase **funding for the education programs** that serve the nation's neediest students to reduce resource inequities across the country. Resource disparities undercut the ability of schools to teach all children to the same high standard. Despite educating greater numbers of poor students, English language learners, and children with disabilities, inner-city schools commonly have significantly less funding per child than the average suburban school. A slowing economy and the ensuing state and local budget cuts have exacerbated financial problems of cities. We encourage the next President to work with Congress to ensure that an ongoing increase in federal support is available for school districts to raise standards and implement and maintain successful instructional practices.

Tenth, we urge you to **celebrate the diversity** that is central to the mission of urban education, and is at the heart of the values of this proud democracy. The Great City Schools represent the America of the 21st century, enrolling some 32 percent of the nation's African American students, 26 percent of its Hispanic students, 29 percent of the nation's English language learners, and 24 percent of its poor children. We urge you to use us—the nation's urban schools—as a model of tolerance and inclusion and a **focal point for continuing the nation's dialogue on race and language**.

Finally, we ask that you give serious consideration to **appointments** in your administration, particularly those to the Department of Education, to ensure that they include people who have experience in the urban setting and who reflect the racial and language diversity of our communities. The pool of leaders, managers, administrators, and instructional talent within urban education is outstanding. We also urge you to meet regularly with urban school leaders once you assume office to ensure that our respective efforts are moving in the same direction.

The Great City Schools are on record in support of raising student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and being accountable for results. We will continue to support these priorities, even when the challenges appear immense and success seems out of reach. We do so because we have seen these schools make progress and know that more is possible. It is vital that we succeed, given that our fortunes are tied inextricably with those of the nation and our urban children.

We ask you, as the next President of the United States, to work with us to make urban public education the best in the world. Thank you and best wishes as you assume the mantle of leadership as the 44th President of the United States of America.

William Isler
Chair of the Board
Council of the Great City Schools
Pittsburgh School Board

Carol Johnson
Chair-Elect
Council of the Great City Schools
Boston Superintendent

Dilafruz Williams
Secretary-Treasurer
Council of the Great City Schools
Portland School Board

Carol Comeau
Immediate Past Chair
Council of the Great City Schools
Anchorage School Superintendent

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

Psychiatrist, Teacher *continued from page 5*

The Harvard professor of psychiatry also observed that violence against children as a discipline tool doesn't work. He cited statistics in Texas where there were approximately 50,000 cases of paddling in schools but only about 20,000 children were paddled. "This means they kept paddling the same children over and over again," said Poussaint.

The national co-director of the Lee Salk Center, where he promotes good parenting, Poussaint recalled a case where a woman beat her child on the legs with a heavy cord so when the child looked at his legs he would see the scars and remember to be good. But the violence resulted in the son becoming angry.

"Violence is destructive and hurtful," stressed Poussaint.

He said that kids who are abused often suffer post traumatic stress disorder and that allowing students to be paddled in school ultimately sends a message to children that violence is acceptable. "It sends a message to children that violence is okay," said Poussaint.

Giving Students Hope

Conferees also heard an inspiring address from teacher Erin Gruwell, whose story of how she helped her students succeed was turned into a film.

Gruwell recalled the first day she walked into her high school freshman class in Long Beach, Calif., and when she looked around her classroom she saw students who were uninterested and who served as funeral pallbearers weekend after weekend because of the violence that surrounded their lives.

One of her students was a black male named Darius, who had witnessed his best friend kill himself playing a game of Russian roulette with a gun they had purchased.

"Darius had never read a book from cover to cover and never intended to," said Gruwell. "All he cared about was making it home alive and not being a statistic."

Gruwell also noticed a Latina student named Maria, because she was wearing an



Teacher Erin Gruwell

ankle monitor around her leg. Maria was entrenched in gang warfare at the age of 11 and behind bars by the age of 12.

Despite the trauma that Darius, Maria and Gruwell's other students had experienced, she knew they could succeed. So she gave her students books to read written by children who experienced war, such as the *Diary of Anne Frank*. She wanted them to read about young people in similar situations as themselves who didn't pick up a gun, but instead picked up a pen.

"Every single one of my kids had some kind of odyssey and journey," said Gruwell. "I wanted them to pick up a book and to find themselves."

She helped her students document their lives on paper and those stories were eventually turned into a book called *The Freedom Writers Diary*, which made the *New York Times* bestseller list, and later turned into a movie.

According to Gruwell, many of her former students were the first in their family to graduate high school and attend college. One of those students was Maria.

"Every kid and every student has the same opportunity to have hope and a second opportunity to change their lives," Gruwell told conferees. "Utilize your power and encourage them that they are more than a statistic."

Holding Leaders Accountable

Also addressing the conference was Pedro Noguera, a professor at New York University, whose research focuses on the ways in which schools are influenced by social and economic conditions in the urban environment.

Noguera believes that "urban public

schools are the indispensable institutions in this country."

He noted that no other institution in the nation has to accept every person who walks through their doors and that public schools are the one place where students can be guaranteed a meal and receive health care.

"Our public schools are all that remain as a safety net for poor children," said Noguera.

The urban sociologist has visited schools across the nation and believes there is good news happening in urban school districts.

"We're making progress because focusing on outcomes does work," he stressed. He credits the *No Child Left Behind* law (NCLB) with helping big-city school districts take a step forward by forcing administrators to disaggregate the data for all students.



Professor Pedro Noguera

And while a supporter of NCLB, Noguera is against punitive measures taken against schools that don't score well.

"I see little evidence that pressure and humiliation succeeds as a strategy for improving schools," he stressed.

Noguera, whose newest book is *Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools*, said that the focus on narrowing the achievement gap by urban school districts has made a lie behind the notion that the reason kids don't achieve is because something is wrong in the culture.

He strongly believes it should be possible to create schools where children's race and socioeconomic factors do not predict how well they do, and blames not the students, but the way the adults treat kids.

"It's when we have leadership who hold people accountable, including themselves, that we see progress," said Noguera.

Pictorial of 52nd Annual Fall Conference



Jackson (Miss.) Schools Superintendent Lonnie Edwards, left, takes a moment to chat with Cleveland Schools Superintendent Eugene Sanders at a reception held at Houston's Downtown Aquarium.



Houston Schools Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra welcomes conferees to the 52nd Annual Fall Conference hosted by his district.



Seattle Schools Superintendent Maria Goodloe-Johnson listens intently at a conference session.



Journalist Dan Rather poses with Council Executive Director Michael Casserly after the Town Hall Meeting.



Fresno Superintendent Michael Hanson makes a point during his presentation on urban schools partnering to increase student achievement.



Portland (Ore.) school board member Dilafruz Williams presents information at a session on creating learning gardens in urban schools.

Photos by Clarence Tabb Jr.

Ballot Measures Pass In Several Urban School Districts

The nation is facing an economic downturn but financial troubles did not prevent voters in several cities from approving measures to provide funding for urban school districts.

Voters in Los Angeles approved a \$7-billion school repair bond to provide funds to renovate and repair more than 800 schools in the nation's second largest school system. Funds from the bond will be used to retrofit schools for earthquake safety standards and create smaller schools. Los Angeles

wasn't the only school district in California to receive good news on Election Day. Voters in San Diego approved a \$2.1-billion bond measure to repair and renovate school facilities in the district and voters in Long Beach approved a \$1.2-billion school construction and renovation bond measure for the school system.

Other Districts Pass Bonds

On Nov. 4, Denver voters passed the largest bond issue ever approved for the school district. The \$454-million bond issue will help the school system increase the size of early education classrooms, upgrade security and safety systems, replace deteriorating school playgrounds, and build two new schools to alleviate overcrowding.

Wichita Public Schools also received good news on Election Day, with the passage of a \$370-million bond that will result in six new schools being built in the district. Funds from the bond, the largest passed in the state of Kansas, will add 275 new classrooms, create 60 FEMA safe room storm shelters and provide \$61 million to improve athletic and fine arts facilities.

A \$278-million bond issue was overwhelmingly approved for Indianapolis Public Schools, receiving 78 percent of the vote. The bond will provide funds for construction projects at 26 schools, including upgrading technology, installing air-conditioning and enhancing security.

Minneapolis Public Schools will receive \$60 million a year for eight years, as a result of the passage of the Strong Schools Strong City referendum recently approved by 70 percent of the voters.

The funds will be used to help students develop early reading literacy, improve student math and science skills, purchase updated textbooks and technology and lower class sizes.

Voters in Toledo, Ohio, approved a renewal of a 10-year levy that will generate \$15.7 million annually for the school district. The district will use the money from the levy to support operational needs. In addition, citizens also gave their approval to a levy that will enable the district to access \$37 million. The levy will allow funds approved by voters in 2002, but never spent by the school system, to be used to make renovations at seven schools.

Last year, Dayton Public Schools was forced to make more than \$30 million in cuts, including eliminating several academic programs, when an operating levy was rejected by voters.

This year, voters gave their approval to a levy that will generate approximately \$9.3 million a year for the district. As a result, students will see the return of high school boys and girls track and field, baseball and other athletic programs that were eliminated. The district will also eliminate its 22 split classes, in which two grade levels in a classroom were taught by one teacher.

And teachers in Texas' Austin Independent School District will receive a raise with the passage of the district's Proposition 1 measure. Approximately 12,000 teachers as well as other employees will receive a 3 percent raise.



Council Director of Management Services Robert Carlson, left, presents the Bill Wise Award to Seattle Schools official Donald Kennedy.

Seattle Official Honored

Donald Kennedy, chief financial and operations officer for Seattle Public Schools, recently received the Bill Wise Award at the Council of the Great City Schools' Chief Financial Officers Annual Meeting in Baltimore.

The award recognizes and honors outstanding school business officials who have distinguished themselves through service to urban education.

Top Financial Award Given to Broward Schools

HOUSTON—The Council of the Great City Schools presented its first Award for Excellence in Financial Management to Superintendent James Notter of the Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., during the Council's Fall Conference here recently.

The school district's Board of Education, superintendent and administrative staff received recognition for supporting the highest standards in financial accountability and controls.

Broward County Public Schools earned the top financial award from the Council, which represents 66 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Other districts recognized for quality performance in financial management and accountability include New York's Buffalo Public Schools and Alaska's Anchorage School District.

Young Football Executive a Great City Grad

The youngest general manager of a National Football League team graduated from the Dayton Public Schools in Ohio, with his father's signature on the diploma.

It was 1987, and Rick Smith had only been at Meadowdale High School for a year and a half before graduating. He had moved to Ohio from Petersburg, Va., after his father became interim superintendent of the Dayton school district.

Smith is the 39-year-old general manager of the Houston Texans and his father, Franklin Smith, is a former superintendent of the Dayton and District of Columbia public schools.

The younger Smith's rise to the top of professional football management began on the gridiron – not in business or law.

As the Texans GM, he oversees all aspects of football operations, player salary cap management and budgeting. He works closely with the coaching and scouting staffs to build the club roster through free agency and is responsible for the annual college draft.

He received the 2008 Tank Younger Award for outstanding work in an NFL front office.

Little did Smith know that his beginning in Little League football, coached by his father, would lead to a career in the front office of a pro team.

Teaching Aspirations

Rick Smith played high school football and received a scholarship to Purdue University, where he was captain of the football team. He earned a degree in sociology, and wanted to become a college professor teaching sociology.

He began graduate studies in sociology as a graduate assistant coach. After the first semester, he realized, "Coaching was my calling," he said in an *Urban Educator* interview. "In a lot of respects, coaching is like teaching."

Subsequently, he started pursuing a master's degree in education administration with an emphasis on athletic administra-



Houston Texans General Manager Rick Smith

tion at Purdue. But before he could complete graduate studies, he was hired as a Purdue defensive backs coach, becoming the youngest position coach in the Big Ten Conference at the age of 24.

Following four years of football coaching at Purdue, Smith became defensive backs coach at Texas Christian University. However, he was only there for a month before the Denver Broncos made him an offer he couldn't refuse to be a coach in the National Football League.

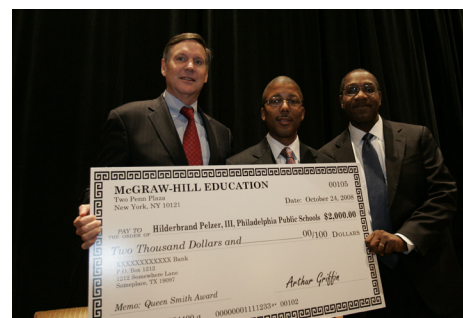
Smith was assistant defensive backs coach for four years with the Broncos and earned two Super Bowl rings while contributing to the team's 1998 and 1999 championships. He calls Broncos Head Coach Mike Shanahan his mentor, and credits Shanahan with exposing him to football operations.

In 2001, he became the Broncos director of pro personnel, and later elevated to assistant general manager. "I had a sincere thirst for the business side of football," he recalls, admitting that he took a nontraditional route to the front office.

After other NFL teams tried to recruit him, Smith assumed the general manager post with the Houston Texans in 2006, succeeding veteran Charley Casserly, who was the expansion team's first GM in 2002.

If he had to give advice to high school students today, Smith would say, "Find your passion." Then, he would tell students to exercise intelligence, diligence and integrity. "Work smart, work hard and do it the right way and you'll be destined for success."

Austin Superintendent continued from page 2



Hilderbrand Pelzer III, center, displays his oversize check for winning the Queen Smith Award as Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, left, and Arthur Griffin of Macmillan/McGraw-Hill look on.

standing ovation from the audience. "I don't know where I would've been if I didn't go to Morehouse College," said Jones. He also urged educators to not give up on children who may seem hopeless.

"I could've been placed in a special education class, but educators around me gave me the opportunity to be myself," he said.

Queen Smith Award

Hilderbrand Pelzer III, the assistant regional superintendent for alternative education for the School District of Philadelphia, was the recipient of the 11th annual Queen Smith Award for Commitment to Urban Education. The \$2,000 award is named in honor of the late vice president of urban programs for Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.

Urban Impact Award

The Council of the Great City Colleges of Education, an affiliate group of deans working with big-city school leaders, presented its 10th annual Urban Impact Award to the University of Dayton and Dayton Public Schools for their Dayton Early College Academy, the first early college high school in Ohio, which helps students make a seamless transition from high school to college.

The award honors an exemplary program between a university and urban school system that has had a positive and significant impact on teaching and learning, with each receiving \$1,000.

Immigration Issues *continued from page 3*

percent. She recalled a raid that occurred in September in Los Angeles in which 420 people were detained by ICE and 25 percent of the children of the people detained ended up in foster care.

When Aguilar talks to the parents of students in her district, she said their biggest fear is the plight of their children if they are detained by immigration officials.

"They feel school is the safest place for them," said Aguilar, and urged school administrators to provide affected students with social workers and psychologists and understanding teachers.

Cheryl Chow, a board member with Seattle Public Schools, noted that immigrants are very vulnerable and human trafficking and child labor is a huge issue that the nation is not equipped to handle. She said that immigrants must be protected and pointed out that human trafficking is the third biggest crime in the world.

Moderator Maria Hinojosa also discussed the challenges immigrants face in attaining an education, and recalled an interview she conducted with a student who was at the top of her class in high school but, because she was undocumented, she could not attend college. "Her dream just died," said Hinojosa.

Dallas Schools Superintendent Hino-

josa said he knew a student who graduated from a high school who wants to become a bilingual teacher but does not have legal status, so she must go back to Mexico and wait five years.

"We view language as a problem, not an asset," said San Francisco's Garcia. He said that he often hears superintendents who will say the biggest problem they have is all these languages students speak in their schools.

"There is a culture that is so divided around policies of race and language," said Aguilar.

When Hinojosa asked the audience of big-city educators "how many people have prepared for immigration raids?" very few people raised their hands.

Urban Institute's Castaneda urged educators at the local level to begin putting plans in place in case there was a raid in their community and to create alliances with religious leaders and social organizations.

She also encouraged school administrators to create a 1-800 number so parents can call for information, develop a list of resources available to parents and even create a plan for school bus riders. "Prepare in advance and leverage resources in the community," said Castaneda.

Managing for Results **Project Expanding**

The Council of the Great City Schools has published its third edition of *Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools*, a performance measurement and benchmarking project to help urban school systems improve business operations.

Launched for the first time last year, the series of reports gives urban school leaders the opportunity to gauge performance on a range of operational and business functions using first-time key performance indicators developed by the Council and modeled after those used in the private sector.

The latest report, published in October, gives more key performance indicators in the area of school district finance.

As an offshoot of *Managing for Results*, four case studies have been produced in the areas of procurement, maintenance and operations, food services and financial management.

Moreover, online access to the key performance indicators is being developed to make it easier for urban school districts to evaluate data relative to each other.

Managing for Results can be found on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org



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