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Journalist, Civil Rights Leader and Actress Zero in on Education

INDIANAPOLIS--Thomas Friedman is a best-selling author, three-time recipient of the prestigious Pulitzer Prize and the foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times*. And he believes that the top national security job in America is not secretary of state, but secretary of education.

"There is a lot at stake in what you are doing," said Friedman to more than 900 big-city school superintendents, board members, administrators and deans of colleges of education assembled at the Council of the Great City Schools' recent 56th Annual Fall Conference here.

"You are actually at the front line of American foreign policy."

The author, whose latest book *That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the* **Journalist, Actress** continued on page 6



Thomas Friedman shares his views.



Addressing the issue of student bullying are, left to right, San Francisco Schools Superintendent Richard Carranza, U.S. Department of Education official David Esquith, Memphis school board member Stephanie Gatewood, Indianapolis student Markell Pipkins and National School Safety Center director Ronald Stephens.

Bullying Prevention Focus of Town Meeting

INDIANAPOLIS--Stephanie Gatewood, a board member for Memphis Public Schools, remembers the exact day 13 months ago when she received a text message from her 14-year-old daughter who wrote she was going to commit suicide because she was being bullied.

"The hardest thing I had to do as a parent was to leave her in a [psychiatric] ward," said Gatewood. "...I vowed that this would never happen to another child or another parent."

The issue of student bullying is a personal one for Gatewood, but it is also a growing problem for school districts across the nation, which is the reason why the Council of the Great City Schools held

a 90-minute town hall meeting on *How to Prevent Student Bullying*. Moderated by Virginia Edwards, editor-in-chief of *Education Week*, the town hall was held in conjunction with the Council of the Great City Schools' 56th Annual Fall Conference here.

In addition to Gatewood, the panel featured Richard Carranza, superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District; David Esquith, director of the Office of Safe and Healthy Students at the U.S. Department of Education; Markell Pipkins, a 10th grade student leader in the Indianapolis Public Schools; and Ronald Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center.

Town Meeting continued on page 4



Boston Superintendent Wins Top Urban Education Award

INDIANAPOLIS-- Carol Johnson was a teacher in Minneapolis Public Schools when she was promoted to assistant principal and then principal by Richard Green, who was then serving as the Minneapolis schools superintendent.

So it was only fitting that Johnson, now superintendent of Boston Public Schools, was recently presented with the Richard R. Green Award, the nation's highest honor for urban education leadership at the Council of the Great City Schools' 56th Annual Fall Conference here.

Sponsored by the Council, ARAMARK Education and Cambium Learning Group/Voyager, the award is named in honor of Green, the first African-American chancellor of New York City schools after heading the Minneapolis school system in the 1980s.

Johnson is beginning her sixth year as superintendent of the Boston school system, and under her leadership, the district's graduation rate has risen to its highest level since records have been kept and the drop-out rate is at one of the lowest levels in 20 years.

In addition, she has spurred a major expansion of arts and athletic programs and



Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, left, holds a portrait of herself after winning the Richard R. Green Award. She is congratulated by Voyager's Carolyn Gettridge and ARAMARK's Dennis Maple.

implemented new programs for English language learners.

Upon accepting her award, Johnson recalled a book Green recommended for principals to read called *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. She believes the book is

more timely than ever as America is so often focused only on individualism and not the collective good.

"The work of teaching is about a collective energy, a commitment of a collec-

Green Award continued on page 8



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New School Leaders Take Helm in Chicago and Jacksonville; Superintendents to Stay in L.A., Minneapolis and Portland, Ore.



Barbara Byrd-Bennett

No stranger to urban education, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, who has served as a top school administrator in New York City, Cleveland and Detroit, took the reins of the Chicago Public Schools in mid-October following the end of a seven-day teachers strike in September that delayed the opening of schools in the Windy City.

“Barbara is a proven leader and educator with the breadth and depth of experience that make her uniquely qualified to serve Chicago’s students and lead Chicago’s schools...,” said Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who appointed her as the new chief executive officer of the nation’s third largest school district.

Byrd-Bennett has been elevated to CEO from her post as the chief education officer of Chicago Public Schools, succeeding Jean-Claude Brizard, who departed after leading the school system since May 2011.

She has more than 30 years of experience in urban education, many of her earlier years in the New York City school system as a teacher, principal and administrator before serving as chief executive officer of the Cleveland public schools from 1998 to 2006, and subsequently as chief academic and accountability auditor with the Detroit Public Schools.

In Florida, a leadership change recently occurred in the Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, where a Miami-Dade County school administrator has taken the superintendent post after being a part of the Miami district’s leadership team that recently won the Broad Prize in Urban Education.

Nikolai Vitti was assistant superintendent of the Education Transformation Of-

fice and served as chief academic officer for the Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

“I look forward to bringing the strategies and culture that contributed to winning the Broad Prize to Duval while integrating it with the good work that is



Nikolai Vitti

already happening now,” Vitti said in a press statement. “Duval County Public Schools will be a Broad Prize winner in the years to come.”

Vitti succeeds Ed Pratt-Dannals, who had been superintendent of the 125,387-student school district since 2007.

Tenure Extended

The Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education in October expressed a vote of confidence in approving a one-year contract extension for Superintendent John Deasy, increasing his current contract to three years.

“Under Dr. Deasy’s leadership, LAUSD is increasingly viewed as a leader in so many areas, from our academic achievement to our pilot teacher evaluation program to our efforts to graduate every student college- and-career-ready,” said Board President Monica Garcia in a press release. “Our students are benefiting from his innovative and visionary direction of LAUSD.”

Deasy has been at the helm of the nation’s second largest school district since 2010.

In Oregon, the school board voted unanimously to approve Superintendent Carole Smith’s contract for another three years based on the Portland Public Schools’ academic achievements among other accomplishments. She has led the 47,000-student school system since 2007 in the state’s largest city.

Minnesota’s Minneapolis Board of Education in late November renewed Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson’s contract, extending her tenure to 2016. She has held the reins of the 34,000-student district since 2010.

Urban School Leader Dies



Ben Canada

Dr. Benjamin Canada, a former superintendent of Portland, Ore., and Atlanta schools, died Nov. 6 at the age of 67.

He had served as the superintendent of Oregon’s Portland Public Schools from 1998 to 2001 after leading the Atlanta Public Schools from 1994 to 1998.

Within the last year, he retired from the Texas Association of School Boards, where he reportedly worked for some 10 years.

Memphis Honored For Reducing Truancy

Memphis City Schools has reduced truancy by 70 percent over four years. As a result, the district was recently presented with the Innovative Program Award from the International Association of Truancy and Dropout Prevention.

The school system credits its partnership with the local police department, social service agencies and the juvenile court system for its success as well as the creation of truancy assessment centers in each of the district’s four regions.

Town Meeting *continued from page 1*

What is the magnitude of the problem of student bullying? Edwards asked the panelists.

Esquith said that according to a survey the U.S. Department of Education conducted, close to 72 percent of students in schools indicated they have witnessed bullying at least once in the last 30 days at the time of the survey. “The Department of Education regards this as a serious problem,” said Esquith.

Superintendent Carranza said his district has trained staff on restorative approaches with the first response being not to suspend a student, but teach accused bullies what they did wrong. This year, all district administrators as well as 3,000 students saw the movie *Bully* and teachers worked with students to develop action plans. “It’s about shining the light of day on the issue and having conversations about what is bullying and what is not bullying,” said Carranza.

Student panelist Pipkins noted that there may be bystanders or witnesses that have seen bullying incidents but might be scared to speak up. He urged them to “step forward” and report any incidents.

School Safety Center’s Stephens recalled that after the deadly shooting incident at Colorado’s Columbine High School, he met with a group of students there and asked if they would report on another student who was involved in bullying. “Less than 40 percent of the hands that went up said they would even report an incident,” said Stephens. He believes it’s important to let students know why it’s in their self-interest to report bullying because a bully isn’t just a bully to a single victim but can terrorize an entire classroom, school or community.

Edwards asked the panelists to describe one or two things that make for effective bullying prevention programs.

Esquith advised school districts to go to the web site www.stopbullying.gov, which provides information on what bullying is, what cyberbullying is, who is at risk and how one can prevent and respond to bullying.



Virginia Edwards moderates the Town Hall meeting.

Carranza said empowering students and giving them support systems for being able to come forward when they see bullying is critically important. He said after the Columbine incident there was a lot of talk about how to secure schools such as using metal detectors and armed guards.

“The single greatest deterrent to that kind of violence is an informed and empowered student body,” said Carranza, so if students see bullying they know to report it to a trusted adult.

“If we just teach courtesy, we will do a good day’s work in bullying prevention,” stressed Stephens.

Addressing CyberBullying

Education Week’s Edwards also asked the panelists to discuss the issue of cyberbullying.

Gatewood, whose daughter was bullied in cyberspace, noted that students spend 16 hours a day on technology and believes parents must play a greater role in monitoring their children’s online activity.

“Parents and educators have to educate ourselves on the technology,” said Carranza “...because our kids are being hurt if we don’t.”

Stephens said that cyberbullying is a huge issue and it is vital school districts develop appropriate school policies on cyberbullying for incidents that are done off campus that get revisited inside the school.

Edwards asked the panelists for their opinion on how the nation can build the

He said that one of the most practical steps school districts can do is to create a school safety committee to promote dialogue and trust. “There’s an element of trust that has to be established.”

Carranza

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Edwards asked the panelists for their opinion on how the nation can build the

will for tackling the issue of bullying and make the kind of changes that need to happen.

Esquith said the “real key is getting into a preventive, rather than a reactive mode.” He said that positive behavior intervention supports, which are now in more than 17,000 schools, are showing success.

Pipkins believes that teaching students self-respect, self-pride and self-responsibility is an important factor.

“If they take pride in themselves and respect in themselves, that’s going to motivate them to go even further,” said the student leader.

Gatewood urges schools to integrate character education into lessons, ensuring that everyone knows what the classroom rules are.

And for her daughter who experienced bullying to the point where she wanted to commit suicide, there was a happy ending. She was recently selected by her fellow students to be on the homecoming court of her high school.

Two Urban Schools Receive Breakthrough Awards for Progress

Norview High School in Norfolk, Va., and Native American Community Academy in Albuquerque, N.M., were recently selected as 2013 Breakthrough School honorees for dramatically improving student achievement.

The two urban schools were among 10 middle schools and high schools nationwide honored by the 2013 MetLife Foundation–National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Breakthrough Schools program. The initiative highlights schools that serve large numbers of students living in poverty who are high achieving or showing major improvements in student achievement.

Schools must also have demonstrated collaborative leadership and access to rigorous coursework for all students.

Winning schools receive a \$5,000 grant and the opportunity to participate in the NASSP National Conference.

A Five-Time Finalist, Miami-Dade School District Wins Broad Prize for Urban Education

Miami-Dade County Public Schools has cause for celebration: it has won the 2012 Broad Prize for Urban Education after being a five-time finalist for the big annual award since 2006.

As the winner, the nation's fourth largest school district receives \$550,000 in college scholarships for its high school seniors.

The \$1-million Broad (rhymes with "road") Prize each year recognizes four of 75 large urban school districts in America that are making the greatest progress in the country in raising student achievement.

The other three finalists for the 2012 Broad Prize, which each receive \$150,000 in scholarships, are Florida's School District of Palm Beach County, California's Corona-Norco Unified School District and the Houston Independent School District, which won the inaugural Broad Prize in 2002.

"I commend the entire Miami-Dade community for establishing a district-wide culture of results that empowers teach-

ers and students, puts more resources into helping children in the lowest-performing schools, and is helping narrow the opportunity gap," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

"We've cracked the code of student achievement in Miami that can become America's solution," said Miami-Dade Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho in *Education Week*.

Before winning this year's Broad Prize, the Miami-Dade County school system also had been a finalist for the award in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2011. Its prize winnings now total \$1.2 million in college scholarships for its students.

"What is encouraging about Miami-Dade is its sustainable improvement over time," said Eli Broad, founder of The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation that awards the annual Broad Prize.

The 2012 finalists were selected by a prominent selection jury.



Miami-Dade County school board members and superintendent beam after receiving the Broad Prize. Pictured, left to right, Carlos Curbelo, Raquel Regalado, Lawrence Feldman, board chair Perla Tabares Hantman, Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, Wilbert "Tee" Holloway and Martin Karp.



Council Launches Common Core Web Site

The Council of the Great City Schools has launched a new web site aimed at helping big-city school districts implement the Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted in 46 states and the District of Columbia.

The site, www.CommonCoreWorks.org, offers an array of materials, information and resources that can help educators prepare for the shifts in instruction required by the new academic standards and help parents to be informed and take an active role in the effort.

Since last year, the Council has coordinated a major initiative to assist urban school districts in effectively implementing the kindergarten through 12th-grade Common Core standards with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The new standards in English-language arts and mathematics have been captured in two training videos that the Council has produced for urban educators. And parent "roadmaps" have been developed to guide parents in helping their children learn under the new teaching and learning standards. The roadmaps are being prepared in several languages.

The Council has also produced a three-minute video describing how the Common Core Standards work and benefit students.

Journalist, Actress continued from page 1

World It Invented and How We Can Come Back, believes that one of America's biggest challenges is the merger of globalization and the information technology revolution.

He recalled that in 2004 when he worked on his book *The World is Flat*, Facebook wasn't a household name and Twitter was a sound instead of a social media site. "Look how much has changed in just the last eight years," observed Friedman.

He said the world has gone from connected to hyperconnected, which has made "Boston and Bangalore [India] next door neighbors." But he also noted that a hyperconnected world enables companies to have access to more efficient software and cheap labor and that there is no such thing as a middle-skilled job anymore.

"Average is officially over," declared Friedman, who believes that the nation has two education challenges.

"We need to bring our bottom to average so much faster," said Friedman, "because there is nothing down there anymore for below average." And he believes that educators must move average standards to global heights and be measured against international benchmark standards.

The prize-winning columnist said that the big challenge for people today is to find their unique value and contributions and that it is not enough to say 'I'm a lawyer,' but that a person has to be a creative lawyer.

"Everyone has got to bring something extra; a unique contribution that enables them not to be automated, outsourced or digitalized," stressed Friedman.

The author offers four pieces of advice for people entering the workforce.

One is to think like an immigrant and find out what the biggest opportunities are and pursue them.

Two is to think like an artisan--a person in the Middle Ages who carved his initials into the items he made to demonstrate pride of work.

The third piece of advice is to think of oneself as a start-up company and always find ways to redesign yourself.

And the last piece of advice is to act like a waitress at Perkins, Friedman's favor-



Marc Morial

ite restaurant.

He recalled an incident when a waitress at the restaurant brought him extra fruit with his meal even though he didn't ask for it.

"Whatever you do, think entrepreneurially," urged Friedman. "Think where you can use your resources and bring a little extra fruit."

A Generation's Challenge

Also addressing the conference was Marc Morial, the CEO of the National Urban League.

The former mayor of New Orleans believes that leading a school district is one of the toughest places to serve anywhere in government and that politicians don't often realize how demanding the work of an urban school leader is.

With "11,000 schools and school buildings in your care, and responsibility for a large portion of the future of the nation's children and significant portion of children of color, your job is an awesome responsibility," Morial told big-city school leaders.

He recalled that in months leading up to the year 2000 the nation was obsessed about computer systems crashing but that Americans can now look back at how irrelevant and unfounded that obsession was.

He continued that in the 12-year period since 2000, the nation has undergone profound experiences in history, from the 2000 presidential election being contested in the U.S. Supreme Court, to terrorist attacks killing more than 3,000 people and to the economy experiencing a stunning downturn and loss of jobs.

Morial said that Americans, especially

young people, must be prepared and eager to embrace the challenges of today.

"This generation's biggest challenge is not whether it has the know-how or the resources, but whether it has the will," said Morial. "Can it muster up strength to put some differences aside and chart a course for the 21st century?"

The former mayor strongly believes that education is the very foundation of good citizenship, and doubtful that children can succeed in life if they are denied an opportunity to education.

"If you don't affirm education as a right, you want to repeal the 20th century," warned Morial. "This is not the nation we must build in the 21st century."

He said that although there is a great deal of discussion about education reform, money must be at the top of that discussion. "Money makes a difference when you don't have 38 children crammed into a classroom," observed Morial.

He noted that the country spends \$738 billion on the military a year but the real weapons of mass destruction are the high dropout rates experienced in some high schools. He said that the National Urban League has a program to provide services to children who have dropped out of school and that a disproportionate number of those children are boys of color.

Morial urged conferees to lend their voice to the discussion of what's needed to improve education because the nation cannot let the agenda be set by others.

"We cannot be silenced and intimidated," said Morial. "What is our priority?...A quality education for all is a civil right."

An Actress Finds Her Passion

Conferees also heard an inspirational address from award-winning actress America Ferrera. The youngest of six children born to a single mother from Honduras, Ferrera is incredibly grateful to her mother for pushing her to pursue an education.

"My mother never viewed education as a luxury, but an obligation," said Ferrera. [She knew] it was the only hope for a more prosperous future."

Journalist, Actress continued on page 7

Journalist, Actress continued from page 6

After graduating with honors from the Los Angeles Unified School District, Ferrera attended the University of Southern California, where she majored in international relations. During her freshman year, she considered quitting acting until a professor told her he was mentoring a young Latina girl, who asked him to watch Ferrera's movie *Real Women Have Curves*. The film is about a Mexican teenager struggling to fulfill her dreams to go to college.

After watching the movie, the professor was not only able to relate better to the girl he was mentoring, but talk to the girl's parents about attending college.



America Ferrera

"Your movie allowed me to have a conversation that neither I nor her parents could have had to change her life," the professor told Ferrera.

The experience was eye opening for the actress and helped her realize that her passion for acting could have a positive impact.

"I began transforming my goal of chasing a successful career, to a desire to pursue a meaningful career," said Ferrera.

She became an ambassador for the group Save the Children where she has been able to view firsthand the obstacles children face in getting an education.

As part of a PBS documentary, she traveled to India with *New York Times* columnist Nick Kristof to view the life of girl prostitutes. One of the girls who made a lasting impression on her was a 10-year old girl in Calcutta named Monisha, who was about to be forced into prostitution by her grandfather.

When she and Kristof came back to the United States, Kristof wrote a column about Monisha and Ferrera spread the

word about her plight in social media. As a result of all of the attention, the girl is now safe and attending school.

"There are millions of Monishas around the world and here in our backyard," observed Ferrera. "Talent is universal, but opportunity is not."

Remember Classroom Show and Tell?

INDIANAPOLIS -- Fondly recalling the "show and tell" classroom exercises of her youth, Candy Olson, chair of the Council of the Great City Schools' Board of Directors, took urban school leaders back to school recently.

When she delivered an address during the Council's Fall Conference here, she noted, "We know the importance of show and tell. It's why we require oral presentations and science projects.

"But I think we've forgotten the importance of it in the work we do. We need to pay far more attention to telling our story and showing people what we are accomplishing," she stressed.

Olson, who is also a member of the Hillsborough County school board in Tampa, Fla., aims to raise awareness of the value of public education in America, especially in the inner cities.

"When people hear 'public schools,' too many of them hear 'failing public schools,'" she told urban educators. "That's the result of our honesty about our challenges, combined with the repetitive rhetoric of many people who believe they have something to gain by tearing down what good people are building."

Noting that this perception is often the focus of media coverage, Olson counseled, "We can no longer let that rhetoric overshadow our story. And that is that our schools, challenged though they are, are far

Ferrera said she is indebted to educators for not only leveling the playing field but for bringing opportunity to underserved and underutilized talent.

"From Africa to India, to Latin America, to here in our backyard, I witnessed the radical change that education can create," said Ferrera.

from failing."

She commented that urban school teachers in particular teach *all* children – children with little or no food, or safety, or home life, or have physical and mental impairments, the nation's newcomers, as well as the average and the best and brightest students.

Explaining that the nation's big-city schools have shown significant gains in student reading and math achievement among other improvements, she said,

"The reality is that we are making tremendous strides."

Olson emphasized that all urban educators can engage in "show and tell." "Every one of us can tell the story of a child who shouldn't have made it who has gone on to college and career."

In her presentation, she pointed to pictures of urban school alumni who have achieved success in life, such as first lady Michelle Obama, U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and wealthy businessman Warren Buffett.

"We need to show what we are accomplishing, and tell the world what those successes mean for our kids," she concluded.

A copy of Olson's entire "Show and Tell" address can be found on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org under "What's New."



Candy Olson

Green Award continued from page 2

tive people,” she told her fellow educators. “You are not here for yourself, you are here for the next generation.”

Two other awards were also given at the Council’s conference.

Queen Smith Award

Bridget Williams, a regional superintendent for Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., was the recipient of the Queen Smith Award for Urban Education. The \$2,000 award is named in honor of the late vice president of urban programs for Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, left, and Arthur Griffin of McGraw-Hill congratulate Bridget Williams for winning the Queen Smith Award.

Urban Impact Award

The Council of the Great City Colleges of Education, an affiliate group of deans working with urban school leaders, presented the Dr. Shirley Schwartz Urban Impact Award to Chicago Public Schools and the University of Illinois-Chicago for their Ed.D Program in Urban Education Leadership that targets the skills leaders need to



Deborah Shanley, head of the Council’s Great City Colleges of Education, presents Steven Tozer, left, and Paul Zavitkovsky from the University of Illinois-Chicago with the Dr. Shirley Schwartz Urban Impact Award.

transform the cultures of underperforming schools. With the award, the Council gives a \$2,000 scholarship to a Chicago school graduate who will be attending the University of Illinois-Chicago to pursue a career in education.

Corporate Supporter Of Top Council Prize Dies



Edward Garner

In 1989, the Council of the Great City Schools presented its first Richard R. Green Award to a big-city school superintendent or board member as the nation’s top prize for urban education leadership.

Three years later, in 1992, a revitalized Green Award program received corporate sponsorship, enabling the urban educator of the year to receive a \$10,000 college scholarship that the winner could present to a deserving high school senior.

Playing an instrumental role in the development of the Green Award scholarship was Edward Garner, a former Denver school board member who served on the Council’s Executive Committee from 1985 to 1991 before becoming a corporate executive with the company known today as ARAMARK Education.

Mr. Garner died Nov. 4 at the age of 70, and for many years hosted the Richard R. Green Award banquet in conjunction with the Council’s annual Fall Conference.

“Thanks to Ed’s longtime support, he has made it possible for many students to receive college scholarships over the years through the recipients of our prestigious Richard R. Green Award,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

Urban Districts Make College Board’s AP Honor Roll

California’s Long Beach Unified School District has made a concentrated effort to boost participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Since 2003, the district has doubled the number of students who took one or more AP courses, while pass rates on AP exams have increased to 55 percent, up 5 percent from the prior year.

As a result of its efforts, the school district was one of eight big-city school systems recently named to the College Board’s 3rd Annual AP Honor Roll.

The list recognizes 539 school districts in the United States and Canada that have achieved increases in access to AP course work while also increasing the percentage of students earning scores of 3 or higher (out of 5) on AP exams.

In addition to Long Beach, Boston Public Schools and two districts that are part of New York City’s public school system were honored. And four school districts in Florida-- Broward County Public Schools (Fort Lauderdale), Hillsborough County Public Schools (Tampa), Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Orange County Public Schools (Orlando)--also made the honor roll.

Districts were selected for the honor roll based on the examination of three years of AP data from 2010 to 2012. Honor roll criteria included increasing AP participation by at least 4 percent in large districts, 6 percent in medium districts and 11 percent in small districts.

Districts also had to ensure that the percentage of African Americans, Hispanic and Native American students taking AP exams did not decrease by more than 5 percent for large and medium districts and by more than 10 percent for small districts.

“We applaud the extraordinary efforts of the devoted teachers and administrators in these 539 districts, who are fostering rigorous work worth doing,” said College Board President David Coleman.

Pictorial of 56th Annual Fall Conference



Marc Morial, CEO of the National Urban League, second from left, poses with the Council leadership, left to right, Chair Candy Olson, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, Secretary-Treasurer Eileen Cooper Reed, Past Chair Winston Brooks and Chair-elect Eugene White.



Buffalo Schools Superintendent Pamela Brown facilitates a session.



Houston school board members Rhonda Skillern-Jones and Harvin Moore listen intently during a conference session.



Baltimore City Schools CEO Andrés Alonso and Oakland Schools Superintendent Tony Smith present information at a session on ways to increase reading achievement in urban school districts.



Clark County (Las Vegas) Schools Superintendent Dwight Jones makes a point.



Portland (Oregon) Schools Superintendent Carole Smith participates in a session.

Photos by Clarence Tabb Jr.

New Revenue and Entitlement Reform Needed For a Balanced Solution to the Fiscal Cliff

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

Immediately following the November 6th elections, national attention turned to the looming “fiscal cliff” of pending federal-budget cuts and tax increases that will be triggered at the start of calendar year 2013. Without new legislation by December 31, 2012, \$1.2 trillion in budget cuts will automatically take effect. And a variety of tax breaks for everyone from investors and the affluent to the middle-class and low-income wage-earners will expire, including the Bush-era tax cuts and estate-tax reductions, the annual alternative-minimum tax adjustment, and the Obama-era 2 percent payroll tax cut. Also included in the expirations will be the end of the Medicare doctors’ fee adjustment (the “Doc fix”) and termination of Extended Unemployment Insurance payments. Nearly every sector of the economy and most budget functions will be affected by the convergence of these across-the-board budget cuts (sequestration) and the expiration of tax and other federal provisions.



Half of the \$1.2 trillion in automatic budget cuts will come from defense expenditures and the other half will come from domestic expenditures, while some budget savings will be generated by reducing debt-service payments. However, most of the largest federal entitlement programs are exempt from these cuts, including Social Security, Medicaid, and the bulk of the Medicare program, because of agreements reached by Congress during the negotiations in 2011 to raise the federal debt ceiling. Without reforming these major entitlement programs, domestic discretionary programs such as ESEA Title I and IDEA will absorb a greater share of the budget cuts – now estimated at 8.2 percent across-the-board reductions in each and every discretionary school program. Also, other areas of domestic discretionary spending will be subject to automatic cuts, including federal law enforcement agencies, environmental programs, disease and epidemic control, disaster aid, national parks and museums, and many others.

As it was, domestic discretionary spending was reduced by nearly \$40 billion during the 2011 Continuing Resolution, while defense discretionary spending was increased by some \$5 billion. In the process, 38 federal education programs were eliminated and 47 programs were cut. (All domestic discre-

tionary spending constitutes only 16 percent of the federal budget, and defense discretionary spending accounts for 19 percent of the federal budget.) By way of comparison, federal entitlement and mandatory spending constitutes 58 percent of the federal budget and has been increasing each year. In fact, the increasing costs and rapidly growing numbers of beneficiaries to federal entitlement programs are the most unsustainable areas of the federal spending. Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid alone account for 40 percent of the federal budget and are expanding exponentially.

While media attention has been focused on the political wrangling over raising revenue through tax increases on the wealthy, financial reform of the massive entitlement sector of the federal budget is also essential for a lasting solution to the national deficit/debt crisis and the fiscal cliff. Without a balanced resolution to the fiscal cliff, discretionary programs in education and other areas will be squeezed disproportionately and the structural federal budget deficit will continue well into the future. Therefore, the Council of the Great City Schools calls on our national leaders to design a fully balanced budget solution that includes both revenue and entitlement program reform.

Finally, to avoid the recessionary impact of going over the fiscal cliff, the nation’s leaders ultimately will have to determine what priorities to give to federal investments. In making those determinations, the Council urges that Congress maintain a strong investment in educational programs for disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with disabilities, as well as programs meant to enhance the professional skills of teachers. Council projections of the performance of U.S. students on the new Common Core Standards suggest that the competitiveness of the nation may be at risk for decades to come—creating our own “proficiency cliff”—unless investments are strengthened. The economic implications of this educational cliff are as serious as those presented by the fiscal cliff, and the nation’s leaders should address these with the same sense of urgency.

Voters Approve Money for Schools

November 6 was not only a big victory for President Barack Obama who won reelection but also a big victory for many urban school districts, as voters in several cities approved measures to boost funding.

California Districts Win Big

Voters in California approved Proposition 30, a statewide initiative to increase taxes and prevent nearly \$6 billion in cuts to education programs in the state's public schools.

As a result, the Los Angeles Unified School District recently restored five instructional days to the 2012-2013 calendar. It marks the first time since 2007-08 that the school district will implement a 180-day academic calendar.

San Diego Unified School District was a double winner when voters approved a \$2.8-billion facilities bond measure that will fund major school repairs and maintain the district's nationally recognized i21 classroom technology program.

And voters in Oakland approved a bond that will fund \$475 million in building and ground improvements for the district over the next five years, while voters in Sacramento approved two bond measures to upgrade and renovate local school facilities.

Measures Pass in Houston, Miami, Other Cities

A \$1.89-billion bond measure was approved for the Houston Independent School District to rebuild or renovate 38 campuses, including 28 of the district's high schools. Funds from the bond will also be used to make improvements in technology, athletic facilities and security.

In Miami, voters approved a \$1.2-billion bond referendum for Miami-Dade County Public Schools to modernize and construct schools, including technology upgrades at all schools.

Voters in Denver approved a \$49 million-levy override that will strengthen educational programs as well as a \$466-million

bond initiative that will fund school building maintenance, renovation, technology upgrades and construction projects.

Students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District will see the return of arts and music programs as a result of the passage of an operating levy that will generate \$67 million annually over four years for the school system. And a levy that will generate \$51.5 million for Cincinnati Public Schools to provide funding for classroom teachers, textbooks and transportation also passed. The measure renews a five-year emergency operating levy that expires in 2013.



Cincinnati Schools Superintendent Mary Ronan announces victory at campaign headquarters on Election Day when voters approved renewal of a tax levy for the district.

Saint Paul Public Schools received good news with the passage of a new property tax levy that will provide the district with \$39 million annually for the next eight years and continued funding for all-day kindergarten.

Levy Fails in Two Districts

And while several big-city school districts received good news on Election Day, two districts did not. A temporary tax increase that would have generated \$669 million for school renovation and construction in Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas failed. And voters in Toledo, Ohio, rejected a 10-year levy that would have generated \$13.3 million annually for Toledo Public Schools.

Council Houses New Web Resource

The Council of the Great City Schools recently introduced a new web site that provides communications resources to support effective teaching, especially for implementing new teacher development and evaluation systems.



The site, housed on the Council's homepage at www.cgcs.org, shares key communication lessons and resources that have been developed through a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-supported partnership to empower effective teaching.

Eleven partnership sites include five Council school districts – Atlanta, Denver, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Memphis and Pittsburgh.

The new web resource features communication lessons, examples and artifacts from the partnership school districts implementing new teacher development and evaluation systems.

NYC Meets Challenge Of Hurricane's Aftermath

Hurricane Sandy shut down New York City public schools for a week in late October – “the longest suspension of school in at least 30 years,” stressed an article in the *New York Times*.

On Nov. 20, New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott announced that his Department of Education will offer online courses to students who have been displaced. “Hurricane Sandy was one of the worst storms our city has seen, and

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Autistic 'Violinists' Perform at Thanksgiving Event in Birmingham, Ala.

Heather Rittscher, the orchestra teacher at Birmingham's Carver High School, is no stranger to working with special needs students. Last school year, hearing-impaired students signed along with the orchestra.

So it was a natural thing for her to suggest to Wanda Shorter, a teacher for autistic students at Carver, that an orchestra class for autistic students should be started. Music, after all, is considered good for all kinds of students.

Shorter and Principal Darrell Hudson agreed, and Hudson worked with the two teachers' schedules to make sure the class could happen. When school started in August, 10 autistic students began learning to play the violin.

Like any beginners, the students had to start by learning the parts of the violin and bow and which notes are on each string. They sometimes pluck the strings instead of using their bows but are playing with the bows as well.

When the class had its annual Thanksgiving luncheon Nov. 15, the students had a treat for their parents and others who attended.

Dressed all in black like members of a professional orchestra, the students entered single file and took their seats. Rittscher asked them to introduce themselves.

The audience watched closely as the students played "The Switch" and "The Adams Family." As an encore, they played rhythms in a drum circle.

"I am really proud of how much these students have learned," Principal Hudson said. "When you put innovative minds together, this is what you get."

Teacher Shorter, who tends to tear up when talking about her autistic students'

involvement in orchestra, said, "It has given the children a feeling of 'We can do it!' It is good when they feel that they can do what the general population can do."



Birmingham autistic students perform at a Thanksgiving luncheon.

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through great effort, we were able to open 96 percent of our schools just one week later and relocate the students and staff from damaged buildings," he said in a press release.

"Still some of our families have not been able to return to their homes, and the impact on students demands more resources

to ensure they get the education they need. These online courses will help keep our students on track for their academic success," he emphasized.

Students who do not have an Internet-connected computer can access the online courses at branches of the New York, Queens and Brooklyn Public Library systems throughout the nation's largest city.