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Large City Schools Show Eight-Year Climb in Improvement

Average reading and mathematics scores for public school students in America's large cities increased in grades 4 and 8 on the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) between 2003 and 2011, according to the *Nation's Report Card: Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) Reading and Mathematics 2011*.

With the improvement, the academic achievement gap between the nation's large city public schools and the nation narrowed considerably in reading and math in both fourth and eighth grades.

Significant gains between 2009 and 2011 were also posted by the large cities in eighth-grade reading and in fourth- and eighth-grade math.

Twenty-one big-city school districts volunteered for the urban NAEP, or TUDA, in 2011, with three districts participating for the first time. Newcomers -- Albuquerque, Dallas, and Florida's Hillsbor-

ough County in Tampa -- joined Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore City, Boston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, District of Columbia, Fresno, Houston, Jefferson County (Louisville), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, New



York City, Philadelphia and San Diego for the largest group of participating districts in the program's history.

"The latest NAEP results show both short- and long-term progress by students in the nation's large-city schools and gains since 2003 that are significantly larger than the nation," says Michael Casserly, execu-

tive director of the Council of the Great City Schools. "We are catching up with the nation and putting urban schools in a stronger position as we begin implementing the new Common Core Standards."

Reading Progress

In 2011, grades 4 and 8 reading data show that average scores for students in large cities increased when compared with 2003. In addition, average scores significantly increased between 2009 and 2011 among eighth-grade students in large cities.

The new reading report also shows substantial progress by individual cities. Nine districts--Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, the District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York

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Baltimore Schools CEO Andres Alonso shares a laugh with journalist Carole Simpson, who moderated the Council's town hall meeting on labor-management relations.

Labor-Management Relations Discussed at Town Hall Meeting

BOSTON—Big-city school superintendents and their teacher union counterparts sat side-by-side to discuss the issue of labor-management relations in urban education at a 90-minute national town hall meeting here.

The meeting was held in conjunction with the Council of the Great City Schools' 55th Annual Fall Conference and was moderated by Carole Simpson, former anchor of the weekend editions of ABC News *World News Tonight*.

A graduate of the Chicago school system, it was in high school where Simpson was encouraged to join the staff of the high school newspaper and found her life's work.

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School Board Member in Tampa Wins Top Council Award

BOSTON—The red carpet was rolled out, literally, for six big-city school board members, who after giving on-camera interviews, walked down a red carpet into a packed ballroom at the Council of the Great City Schools' 55th Annual Fall Conference to hear who would be the recipient of the 2011 Richard R. Green Award.

The winner was Candy Olson, chair of the school board for the Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Fla. Olson has been on the school board since 1994, where she has been a staunch supporter of arts education programs.

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

Upon accepting the Green Award, Olson compared the work urban educators do to being a gardener. "Teachers don't get to choose where the seeds they sow fall," said Olson, "...but if you pull the weeds carefully, things can grow in the soil and that's what our teachers do everyday."

As the recipient of the award, Olson receives a \$10,000 college scholarship to

present to a 2012 graduate of her choice in the Hillsborough school system or from her high school alma mater.

Award Beneficiary

In 2008, John Casper, a student at Boston Public Schools, was the recipient of a \$10,000 Richard R. Green scholarship from Elizabeth Reilinger, a former member of the Boston School Committee.

Reilinger was the winner of the Richard R. Green Award in 2007.

Four years later, Casper will graduate from Boston College with a degree in political science and plans to attend law school. At the 2011 Richard R. Green Award ceremony, he expressed his appreciation at receiving the scholarship. "I've been able to pursue my dreams," said Casper.

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Candy Olson, school board member for Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, holds her \$10,000 oversized check and is congratulated by her brother Jim Sullivan and her daughter Katherine and husband Chris.



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Columbus and Tampa Superintendents Recognized



Gene Harris

Two urban school leaders recently received high honors in their respective states of Ohio and Florida.

The Buckeye Association of School Administrators in November named Columbus City Schools Superintendent Gene

Harris the 2012 Ohio Superintendent of the Year.

“Gene is long-deserving of this award,” said the association’s executive director, Kirk Hamilton, in a news release. “During her superintendency in Columbus City Schools, student achievement has increased dramatically, while at the same time, she has successfully led the district through many challenges.”

“This is one of the most special mo-

ments of my life,” stressed Superintendent Harris, noting that the honor reflects the consistent work of her district staff, parents and the community as well as the support of her family, friends and colleagues.

As Ohio’s 2012 Superintendent of the Year, Harris becomes a nominee for the American Association of School Administrators’ National Superintendent of the Year.

State Recognition

In a special awards ceremony in Florida’s state capital of Tallahassee, Florida Education Commissioner Gerard Robinson recently named Superintendent MaryEllen Elia of Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa the state’s 2011 District Data Leader of the Year.

She was selected from among five finalists for the award that recognize school leaders who support and encourage the use

of data to increase student achievement

“Data enable us to make informed instructional and academic decisions that lead to increased student achievement,” said Commissioner Robinson in a news statement.

“I commend Superintendent Elia for the outstanding job she has done in making data usage a priority in her district and using it to enhance the educational experience for all of the students and teachers under her care,” Robinson emphasized.



MaryEllen Elia

Tenures Extended for Superintendents In the Carolina’s Charleston and Greensboro



Nancy McGinley

Nancy McGinley, the superintendent of Charleston County School District in South Carolina, was recently given a one-year contract extension through 2014.

Under McGinley’s leadership, the district has increased its rating from “below average” to “excellent” on report cards released by the state. The district has also implemented literacy academies in the first, third and sixth grades, which are helping struggling readers improve their reading skills.

“My focus is on results. I work for students,” said McGinley in a news statement. “Our students and schools are making real progress.”

And in Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C., the school board re-



Maurice Green

cently approved a contract extension for Superintendent Maurice Green through June 2015.

In its review of Green, school board members lauded Green for promoting a vision of educational excellence and said his personal integrity sets the tone for the district. Green has declined a pay raise four times and has reduced his salary.

Since taking the reins as superintendent in 2008, the school system has made double-digit gains in student achievement in reading, math and science. The district has narrowed achievement gaps and lowered dropout rates by providing specialized academic programs to meet the needs of all students.

Language Arts, Literacy Focus Of Council Retreat

In preparing urban schools for the Common Core State Standards, the Council of the Great City Schools recently held its second retreat of instructional leaders and specialists in academic areas that will be instrumental in the implementation of the new standards.

More than 28 urban school districts from around the nation were represented at the retreat -- “Building Shared Understanding of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy” -- in Newark, N.J.

David Coleman, lead developer of the English language arts for the Common Core State Standards, addressed the urban educators at the Nov. 29-30 program, along with Lily Wong Fillmore, a professor emerita and linguist.

The participating districts developed action plans for implementing the English

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City and San Diego – posted significant increases in 2011 scores among fourth-grade students when compared with 2003. And five districts—Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and San Diego—showed increases in 2011 scores among eighth-grade students when compared with 2003.

Data also showed that in 2011 fourth-grade students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Hillsborough County (Tampa), and Jefferson County (Louisville) had higher average scores than students nationally and scores in Austin and Miami-Dade County were not different from the nation. In grade 8, students in Austin, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and Hillsborough County had scores that were not different from the nation.

Mathematics Progress

In 2011, grades 4 and 8 mathematics data show that average scores among students in large cities increased significantly compared with 2003. In addition, average scores significantly increased between 2009 and 2011 for both fourth- and eighth-grade students in large cities.

The new mathematics data also show that nine districts—Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and San Diego – had significantly higher 2011 scores for both fourth- and eighth-graders than in 2003. In addition, Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore City and Philadelphia increased average scores between 2009 and 2011 in grade 4; Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago, Detroit, the District of Columbia and Jefferson County (Louisville) increased average scores between 2009 and 2011 in grade 8.

Data show that in 2011 students in grade 4 in Austin, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, and Hillsborough County (Tampa) had higher average scores than students nationally and scores for San Diego were not different from the nation. In grade 8, students in Austin and Charlotte-Mecklenburg had higher average scores than students nationally and students in Boston and Hillsborough County had scores that were no different from the nation.

New Study Indicates Improvement Factors

A new study conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools and the American Institutes for Research verifies significant gains in large city schools and indicates possible factors behind the improvement.

The first of its kind analyses using National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data indicate that large city schools demonstrated larger gains than public schools nationally in both fourth- and eighth-grade reading and mathematics from 2003 to 2009.

Launched in 2007, the massive study – *Pieces of the Puzzle: Factors in the Improvement of Urban School Districts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress* -- analyzed trend data of large school systems and 11 big-city school districts participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) that year.

The research, which was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, sought to identify and analyze why some big-city school districts made more progress than others on NAEP.

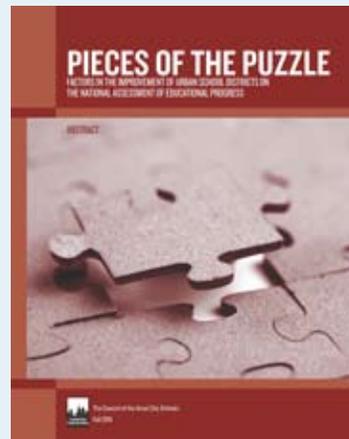
“We supported this research to see if gains in urban education over the years were indeed real, and to shed light on the factors leading to improvement,” says Vicki Phillips, the Gates Foundation’s director of education. “The results of this new report are an important step forward.”

In addition to determining whether the nation’s big-city schools are making significant gains on NAEP and how these gains compared to the nation, the study also sought to identify which TUDA districts were making significant and consistent gains on the national test and what reforms and conditions helped explain these gains.

Three of the 11 districts studied -- Atlanta, Boston, and Charlotte -- stood out for making large and consistent gains or for

showing high performance, and one district—Cleveland—served as a contrasting example of a school system without substantial progress on NAEP over the study period. All four systems were placed under the microscope for intense study.

“The study provides a much deeper and richer analysis of NAEP data from TUDA districts than has been done before,” stresses Jessica Heppen, principal research scientist at the American Institutes for Research. “The results show that academic progress in urban school systems is complex but is happening -- both on average, when taking student background characteristics into account, and importantly, among historically underserved student groups.”



Possible Factors of Progress

Case studies of Atlanta, Boston and Charlotte showed that their instructional practices differed substantially from Cleveland, which showed lower performance and weaker gains, in a number of important and concrete ways:

- **Leadership and Reform Vision** -- stable leadership and staff that was consistently focused on improving teaching and learning, and that unified the districts around a shared vision of instructional reforms.
- **Goal-setting and Accountability** -- clear, measurable goals districtwide that often exceeded state and federal educational targets, and mechanisms for holding school and district staff accountable for achieving goals.

New Study *continued on page 5*

Challenges Face Hispanic Student Achievement

Many of the nation's Hispanic school-aged children face circumstances that challenge their potential to learn and school systems' ability to provide a quality education to this growing population.

This is the picture painted in a new report by the Council of the Great City Schools called *Today's Promise, Tomorrow's Future: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to*



the Outcomes of Hispanics in Urban Schools. The report tells a story of hope and optimism and a tale of caution and uncertainty.

Hispanics represent some 23 percent of school-aged children in the United States, with 37 percent enrolled in the nation's big-city schools. Since 2000,

approximately 90 percent of Hispanic children under the age of 18 were born within the United States, the report reveals.

Although the structure of Hispanic families is considered stable compared with other groups, a large number of Hispanic parents face social and economic circumstances that hinder the education of their children. Such conditions as poverty, lack of health insurance and language barriers, to name a few, compound the problem.

"Hispanic young people are a growing part of the American landscape and promise to shape the cultural and demographic flavor of the United States for the foreseeable future," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

"Yet, many Hispanic students are not doing well in our Great City Schools and our schools, in turn, are not doing well by them."

Study Findings

The groundbreaking study focuses on the lives of Hispanic students in big-city schools from early childhood to adulthood, and analyzes distinctions between Hispanic and Latino English-language learners (ELL). Highlights of the report's findings show:

- **In readiness to learn**, 33 percent of Hispanic children in 2008 lived in families where no parent had full-time employment compared with 21 percent of white children. And in 2007, 27 percent of Hispanic children lived in poverty compared with 10 percent of white children.
- **In Hispanic and English-language learner (ELL) achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)**, the percentage of Hispanic students in large cities performing at or above *Proficient* levels in reading from 2003 to 2009 was at least 26 percentage points lower than white students in public schools nationally at grade four and 24 points lower at grade

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- **Curriculum and Instruction** -- a common, high-quality curriculum that created a coherent instructional program throughout the district that paved the way for what students were expected to learn at each grade level.
- **Professional Development and Teaching Quality** -- quality instruction and professional development and supports to help principals and teachers meet instructional priorities.
- **Support for Implementation and Monitoring of Progress** -- support and oversight of districtwide reforms, refining them as needed over time, rather than constantly changing direction and practice.
- **Use of Data and Assessments** -- data systems for consistently monitoring instructional programs and identifying and targeting resources and interventions when needed, and arming principals and teachers with data tools to pinpoint student needs.

Lessons Learned

The three-year *Pieces of the Puzzle* research produced several lessons for urban school leaders to consider in advancing academic achievement.

"Many educators -- and the public in general -- assume that putting into place more demanding standards alone will result in better student achievement," says Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, referring to the new Common Core State Standards. "But this study suggests that the higher rigor embedded in the new standards is likely to be squandered, with little effect on student achievement, if the curriculum content, instructional materials, professional development and classroom instruction are not high quality and well-integrated."

The study also indicates that structural reforms of a big-city school system are not likely to improve student achievement unless they are directly tied to the instructional program. An important lesson for urban school leaders is that governance, funding, choice, and other initiatives that often attract public and media attention are sometimes distractions if they are not put into direct service of higher achievement.

The three-volume analysis can be accessed on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org.

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“Everything I have I owe to Chicago Public Schools,” said the three-time Emmy Award-winning journalist, who is currently the leader-in-residence in the School of Communications at Emerson College in Boston.

Simpson asked the panelists to explain how their districts and teacher unions collaborated with each other.

MaryEllen Elia, superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Fla., noted that the district and the teachers union have a long history of collaboration and they work hard to maintain that relationship. “We discuss issues and try to make sure we stay at the table,” said Elia.

Stephanie Baxter-Jenkins, executive director of the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association, agrees and says the key is to keep the lines of communication open.

“I don’t go [several] hours without talking to the deputy superintendent or superintendent about something,” said Baxter-Jenkins. “We know we are all in it for the kids and we are seeing the improvement in public education.”

Wilson Wilson is the senior staff representative of New Mexico’s Albuquerque Teachers Federation and said he feels that his relationship with district officials is very strong. “We have an open line of communications with administrators,” said Wilson. “...Our motivation is to help kids.”

According to Winston Brooks, superintendent of New Mexico’s Albuquerque Public Schools, the biggest criticism of unions is that all they care about is the adults. “I don’t see that,” said Brooks, who meets with teacher union officials regularly. He believes that public education is under attack and it is vital that educators stand up and talk about the good things they are accomplishing. “We ought to try and work

together,” said Brooks, because there are a lot of people trying to do harm to public education.

Andres Alonso, CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools, recalled that when he first arrived at the school district in 2007 the relationship he had with the teachers union was so rocky that they picketed one of his board meetings. “There was huge mistrust,” said Alonso, who believes part of what he and the union had to learn was to get

to a place where they could talk respectfully about what needed to happen in the schools.



Wilson Wilson from the Albuquerque Teachers Federation.



Indianapolis Schools Superintendent Eugene White.

Simpson noted that there has been criticism from the public that teachers unions only want to protect ineffective school teachers and asked the panelists if they understand the public’s skepticism on this issue.

“I understand,” said Ann Wilkins, president of the Indianapolis Education Association. “There are some ineffective teachers in our district, and I won’t deny that.” But she said the district has an effective evaluation system.

“When you have poor teachers in the classroom, [the public] blames unions but I blame administrators,” said Eugene White, superintendent of the Indianapolis Public Schools. “Quality instruction is the number one problem we have.”

He says that he and Wilkins have the same objective and that is providing students with good teachers and says his district has reduced the time it takes to remove

a failing teacher.

Wilson said that in Albuquerque there is a peer review program for teachers and if someone is failing, there are systems in place to help them improve, and if that doesn’t work, then remove them.

According to Hillsborough’s Baxter-Jenkins, no one wants bad teachers and that teachers can improve dramatically if they are given support in terms of professional development and mentors. “It’s making a huge difference,” said Baxter-Jenkins. “It’s a tough job; you have to make it so people can grow as professionals.”

Elia said her district has developed new teacher evaluation systems in collaboration with the unions, but she said part of the issue school systems grapple with is how to provide a rewarding experience for good teachers. “We have not in this nation addressed the issue of professionalism that needs to be associated with teachers.”

“Would higher pay attract more qualified people to the profession?” Simpson asked the panelists.

“We all give a lot of lip service to how important it is to teach,” said Brooks. “But we don’t pay them.”

“We know that people don’t go into teaching for the money,” said White.

Alonso said that teachers should not be thought of as saints and that he has tried to raise salaries for people who are effective.



Stephanie Baxter-Jenkins of the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association.

Simpson asked the panelists if public education in the country was going in the right or wrong direction. And despite the numerous challenges, the superintendents indicated it was headed in the right direction, while union leaders were more unsure. “There are too many politicians telling our educators how to educate,” said Wilkins of the Indianapolis teachers union.

Attorney, Educator, Environmentalist, Author and Actor Address Council

BOSTON—The late U.S. senator Edward Kennedy was a strong supporter of urban education and as the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, he helped author the landmark *No Child Left Behind* legislation.

So it was fitting that his wife, attorney and health advocate Victoria Reggie Kennedy, recently welcomed some 1,000 big-city school superintendents, board members, administrators and deans of colleges of education assembled in Boston for the Council of the Great City Schools' 55th Annual Fall Conference.

Kennedy addressed conferees at a reception held at The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

She recalled that her husband had remarked that if the nation could put a man on the moon, the equivalent can be done in urban education. And while she recognizes that there is much work to do, she believes that progress has been made and urged big-city educators to continue their work. "Keep a true compass," she said. "I have faith you will get there."

Defying Stereotypes

In delivering the opening conference address, Council Chair Winston Brooks, superintendent of New Mexico's Albuquerque Public Schools, lamented what he considers a stereotype that public education falls short in educating students.



Winston Brooks

"I think we all know the truth is far different," he emphasized. "I think we know that urban schools are asking our children to do much more than was their task even a decade ago. I think we know our employees



Victoria Reggie Kennedy

are more dedicated, better educated, more driven, more committed than ever before.

"Are we failing? No! Do we need to improve? Yes!"

Encouraged by student improvement in reading and math over the past several years, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly said "the state of urban public education in this nation ... is on the right track and heading in the right direction."

The five-day conference featured more than 70 sessions, focusing on such topics as preparing students for college and the workplace through common core standards, new teacher evaluation models, as well as how urban schools are coping with economic uncertainties.



Robert Kennedy Jr.

The Council also released several reports at the conference, including *Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools: A Report of the Performance Measurement and Benchmarking Project*.

Victoria Reggie Kennedy was not the only Kennedy to address the Council. Conferees also heard from Robert Kennedy Jr., who has been an environmental advocate for more than 20 years.

He said that many people believe the

nation must choose between economic prosperity and environmental protection. "This is a false choice," said Kennedy. "Good environment policy is identical to good economic prosperity."

He said that the nation's addiction to oil is costing the country billions of dollars and fueling the war on terror, while coal power plants have led to an increase in children with asthma.

The environmental attorney believes that the United States can become environmentally friendly. "We have the greatest wind resources in the world," said Kennedy.

He believes the nation now has the opportunity to employ tens of thousands people in jobs improving the environment such as building wind turbines and retrofitting roofs.

Helping Youth

Also addressing the conference was Wes Moore, youth advocate and author of the book *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*, which contrasts his life with another man named Wes Moore who was convicted of murder.

Moore recalled how he received a letter from a teen in a South Carolina juvenile detention center who told him that his book was the first book he had read cover to cover and for the first time he was thinking about what kind of man he wants to become.

The author believes his book is about much more than two young males; it's about the choices people make and the



Wes Moore

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Tony Plana

societal consequences. “There are Wes Moores that exist in every community, and we can never have a genuine conversation about the future of this country when only a sliver of population is even being thought about in that conversation.”

An Army combat veteran, Moore grew up fatherless and at the age of 8 was skipping school and was arrested at 11. His mother sent him to military school, where he began to realize that he was accountable for his actions and started to improve academically.

He continued to excel and around the time he was selected to receive a Rhodes scholarship to study in England, the *Baltimore Sun* wrote a series of articles about four young males who robbed a jewelry store and killed an off-duty police officer. One of the people sentenced for the crime had the same name.

Intrigued, Moore wrote the young man in prison who wrote him back and the dozens of letters turned into dozens of visits. Moore soon realized that in addition to having the same name, the two men lived in the same neighborhood, were raised by single mothers and had experienced academic and discipline problems.

Moore said his book ultimately documents the experiences of two kids looking for help, and at crucial moments in their lives one kid received it and one didn't.

“His story could've been mine,” said Moore. “The tragedy is that my story could've been his.”

Embracing the Arts

Conferees also heard from actor and education advocate Tony Plana, who has cre-

ated a program which uses the performing arts to teach literacy skills to students.

Plana said that there are a lot of talented children in urban schools but that they are not given the necessary resources to succeed.

“You see the potential walking around every day,” said Plana. “They could blossom in the arts but they are not given the chance.”

Plana's parents were poor immigrants from Cuba who did not speak English but he had an advantage because his mother finished high school and his father had three years of college.

A *magna cum laude* graduate in literature and theater arts from Loyola-Marymount University, the actor strongly believes that the nation must change the paradigm of how it teaches students and that teaching through the performing arts can be effective across all disciplines.

“If Rip Van Winkle came back today, the place where he would be most comfortable would be the classroom,” stressed Plana, “because nothing has changed.”

As co-founder of the East L.A. Classic Theatre, Plana created a program called Beyond Borders: Literacy through Performing Arts, which is designed to enable students to expand their educational horizons and academic achievements by moving beyond their personal, cultural and vocational borders.

The program uses the performing arts to improve literacy skills in academically at-risk students, and has proven so successful in accelerating student achievement of district and state literacy standards that it is being implemented in five school districts in California.

As part of the program, students write in journals and eventually progress to writing five-to 10-minute plays performed in front of their peers. The program also works directly with language arts teachers and has developed a curriculum for teachers. “You can train teachers to do what actors do,” said Plana, “because a lot of teachers are actors waiting to be born.”

Plana believes there is nothing more effective or better than teaching through the performing arts. “It's so sad that in many underperforming schools the first thing they take away is the arts.”

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John Casper expresses his appreciation for winning the Richard R. Green Scholarship.

Queen Smith Award

Other awards were also given. Ann Clark, chief academic officer for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, 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.



Arthur Griffin of McGraw-Hill congratulates Ann Clark 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 big-city school leaders, presented the Dr. Shirley Schwartz Urban Impact Award to the Cleveland Metropolitan



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, right, presents Cleveland Schools CEO Eric Gordon with the Dr. Shirley Schwartz Urban Impact Award.

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Pictorial of the 55th Annual Fall Conference



Victoria Reggie Kennedy poses with Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly and Council Chair Winston Brooks.



Boston Mayor Thomas Menino welcomes conferees to Boston for the 55th Annual Fall Conference.



Saint Paul Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva presents information at a session.



Atlanta school board member Cecily Harshe-Kinnae and Pittsburgh school board member William Isler listen intently at a conference session.



Memphis Superintendent Kriner Cash makes a point during his presentation.



Virginia's Richmond Schools Superintendent Yvonne Brandon shares information with conferees at a session.

Photos by Clarence Tabb Jr.

Senate Committee ESEA Reauthorization Action

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

On October 19 and 20, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) marked up and reported out an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bill on a bipartisan 15 to 7 vote. In our continuing efforts to encourage workable legislative approaches to rewriting the decade-old *No Child Left Behind* Act (NCLB), the Council of the Great City Schools supported the Committee bill despite a number of specific reservations.

Whether the Senate committee action has breathed new life into the long-dormant ESEA reauthorization process remains questionable, however. Opposition to the bill from a variety of advocacy, reform, and civil rights groups has been extremely vocal, and the Obama Administration has not said much publicly about the committee's work product. Coupled with the majority of Republican committee members voting against the bill, it appears that substantial revisions might be required to move the legislation further in the Senate. Moreover, the House Education and the Workforce Committee has reported out a series of small, specialty bills—a program-elimination bill repealing dozens of mostly small competitive programs, a charter-schools bill reauthorizing Part B of ESEA Title V, and a flexibility bill reauthorizing Part A of ESEA Title VI—but has yet to take up the bulk of ESEA programs or the General Provisions.

The Senate reauthorization bill eliminated some of the most widely criticized provisions of NCLB, including the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) system and the multi-tiered “school improvement” sanctions system. In doing so, the Senate committee also eliminated the NCLB-mandated 20 percent spending requirement for “supplemental educational services” (SES) and the “choice-related transportation” provision. The committee bill included many major proposals made by panel members and contained in the Education Department’s “Blueprint.” The committee bill delegates most new accountability requirements to the states and establishes criteria for identifying the 5 percent lowest-achieving schools in a state, which would be required to implement one of seven “model reform strategies.” Another 5 percent of schools in each state with the most significant achievement gaps would be required to implement unspecified interven-



tions. In addition, the legislation requires the states to identify another unspecified set of low-performing schools or schools with low-performing subgroups for unspecified interventions and supports.

The Senate committee bill also requires states to adopt and implement college and career-ready standards and assessment systems that would continue to disaggregate subgroup performance. Growth models and multiple measures would be allowed as well. The teacher quality and professional development provisions under Title II remain largely unchanged, but some currently allowable uses of funds are limited. The Title III English language-learner programs also remain largely unchanged except that the current system of annual objectives would be removed in favor of program evaluations. The bill includes a number of new competitive-grant programs, including a secondary-school reform “pathways” program, a new literacy program, a new STEM program, and multiple new requirements to the Title IV Safe Schools program. These requirements would encompass multiple physical education and conditions-of-learning mandates. Finally, the committee bill provides a permanent authority for Race-To-The-Top state and local grants and Investing in Innovation (I3) grants.

The Council has called attention to a number of provisions in the Committee bill that need additional work. In particular, the bill requires districts to put into place interventions and supports for low-performing non-Title I schools without federal money and changes the Title I “comparability” requirements in a way that would be nearly impossible to implement and would throw thousands of schools into non-compliance. If enacted, the provision would trigger major staffing realignments in thousands of school districts or would require the substantial redeployment of state and local funding from school to school.

However, any action by the Senate HELP Committee is notable because of the lack of movement over the last five years on the reauthorization. But, further action by either the full Senate or the House remains uncertain in the waning months of the 112th Congress.

Atlanta Leaders Discuss Lessons Learned from Crisis

BOSTON—In July 2011, the state of Georgia issued a report that found widespread cheating had occurred in Atlanta Public Schools on state standardized tests.

How the school system dealt with the aftermath was the focus of a session at the Council of the Great City Schools' 55th Annual Fall Conference titled "The Atlanta Cheating Scandal: What Next?," featuring school board chair Brenda Muhammad and Superintendent Erroll Davis Jr.

"What happened in Atlanta could be defined as a category five hurricane," said Muhammad. Infighting among board members led an accreditation agency to place the school system's high schools on probation. The board had embarked on a search to replace retiring superintendent Beverly Hall, but the search was halted and an interim leader was selected instead. "We needed someone independent who was going to clean up the mess and do what was absolutely necessary," said Muhammed. "And we found that leader in Erroll Davis."

Changing the Culture

"This has been a very interesting four months of my life," said Davis, who had just retired from serving as chancellor of the University System of Georgia. "I retired on Tuesday and then started at [Atlanta Public Schools] on Friday."

He fired those teachers who were accused of transgressions and ultimately removed 178 educators from their jobs. Davis also took the view that even if a principal had not been found cheating, they failed in their jobs if cheating took place at their school, so the district had to hire 43 new principals.

"We are trying to change the culture," said Davis. "If you don't attack the culture, it makes no difference what strategy you put in place." As a result, ethics training for employees is now mandatory.

Davis, who began as superintendent with a one-year contract, said that one of the lessons the district has learned is that

it is fine to make changes, but it has to be done within an ethical space defined by values.

"In the past, that space was not defined and state investigators said people cheated because incredible pressure was put on them to perform," said Davis. "The system set out to change a lot of things without managing the risks inherent in any change."

Muhammed said the board is learning how to effectively work together and as a result, the school district's high schools were recently taken off probation. "We understand that being able to trust each other

Lessons Learned continued on page 12

Hispanic Achievement continued from page 5

eight. In mathematics during those same years, the percentage of Hispanic students performing at or above *Proficient* levels was at least 29 percentage points lower than white students at grade four and 26 points lower at grade eight.

The report also shows that average scores for fourth- and eighth-grade formerly English-language learner Hispanic students in large cities were significantly higher than ELL Hispanic students in large cities in both reading and mathematics.

■ **In Hispanic and ELL Hispanic achievement on NAEP in selected big-city school districts**, reading and math scores among Hispanic and ELL students in the big-city school districts participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) were generally lower than their respective Hispanic counterparts in public schools nationally at grades four and eight. Moreover, at least 50 percent of fourth- and eighth-grade Hispanic and ELL students in most TUDA districts scored below *Basic* levels.

■ **In college and career readiness**, Hispanic students in 2008 were two-and-a-



Atlanta school board member Brenda Muhammed and Atlanta Schools Superintendent Erroll Davis Jr. discuss the cheating scandal in a session at the Fall Conference.

half times more likely to drop out of high school as white students and almost twice as likely as black students. And in 2010, fewer than two of 10 Hispanic students took an Advanced Placement exam compared with six of 10 white students.

■ **In school experience**, Hispanic high school students were less likely to participate in academic clubs, more likely to be suspended from school, and more likely to be retained in grade than their white peers.

■ **In postsecondary experience**, the unemployment rate of the Hispanic population ages 20 and older in early 2011 was 12 percent compared with 8 percent of the white population. In 2009, some 13 percent of Hispanic students ages 18 and older had earned a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 33 percent of white students. And the Hispanic population ages 18 and over in 2008 accounted for 12 percent of the college population and 16 percent of the nation's prison population.

The Council plans to convene a panel of esteemed leaders to provide advice and guidance on improving the education of Hispanic students in the nation's urban schools.



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Council Retreat *continued from page 3*

language arts, or ELA, component of the common core standards. Districts shared sample lesson plans, and the two presenters provided feedback.

“Participants learned the process of developing text-dependent questions, the components of a high achievement ELA program for all students, and how to draw students into instructional conversations,” says Robin Hall, the Council’s new director of language arts and literacy.

In September, the Council held a retreat in Albany, N.Y., on the implementation of the new common core standards in mathematics.

Council Award *continued from page 8*

School District and Cleveland State University for their Master of Urban Secondary Teaching program, which has placed more than 300 teachers in Cleveland schools. With the award, the Council gives a \$2,000 scholarship to a Cleveland school graduate who will be attending Cleveland State University to pursue an education career.



Seattle Student Honored

Seattle Public Schools senior Meron Kasahun and Teri Hein, founder of the program 826 Seattle, received the 2011 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award from First Lady Michelle Obama. The program was recognized for engaging young people in the written word.

Lessons Learned *continued from page 11*

is significant,” said Muhammed.

Since the cheating scandal, security measures have been put in place, including forbidding teachers to administer tests to their own classes and installing cameras in classrooms.

According to Davis, test scores have improved and student enrollment is steady.

Urban School Principals Recognized

Deirdra Gardner, a principal from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, and Jack Spatola, a principal from New York City public schools, were among seven recipients of the Terrel H. Bell Award for School Leadership.

Presented by the U.S. Department of Education, the award is given to outstanding principals of Blue Ribbon Schools who are academically superior and have demonstrated dramatic student achievement gains among disadvantaged students.

Created in 1999, the award is named after a former secretary of education.

However, he admits that teacher morale is not where he wants it to be, but the district is working to improve it.

“I don’t think we turned the corner, but we didn’t need to turn,” said Davis, who noted that the district has not overhauled any of its instructional programs. “I was called in to do difficult things. And if I do it correctly, this will be a job superintendent applicants will flock to.”