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Council Plans To Release Report On Black Males

Much attention and work over the years have been directed at narrowing and closing the nation's black-white achievement gap.

But there has been no concerted national effort that specifically addresses the education and social outcomes of African-American males, according to a new study to be released soon by the Council of the Great City Schools.

"Black males continue to perform lower than their peers throughout the country on almost every indicator," the report reveals.

The groundbreaking study presents stark data on the differences between black and white achievement in the nation, describing "comprehensive challenges" facing African-American males.

"This is a national catastrophe, and it deserves coordinated national attention," the report suggests.

Although the report presents dismal data on the achievement of African-American males in general, it also profiles black males who are succeeding in urban public schools and in their career pursuits.

Town Hall Meeting to Focus On Black Male Achievement

African-American male achievement will be the focus of the Council of the Great City Schools' National Town Hall Meeting in conjunction with its 54th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 20-24, in Tampa, Fla.

Moderated by CBS News chief national and *60 Minutes* correspondent Byron Pitts,

the town meeting will coincide with a study the Council has conducted on the education and social outcomes of African-American males in the nation.

Pitts is an African-American male who has faced challenges to achievement in his own life. Raised by a single mother in Baltimore, he was illiterate until age 12 and had a persistent stutter. Yet, he overcame impediments to eventually launch a career in broadcast journalism, winning numerous awards for his TV news reporting.

He tells his story in *Step Out on Nothing: How Family and Faith Helped Me Conquer Life's Challenges*, a memoir published in 2009. Says *CBS Evening News* anchor Katie Couric, "No wonder he is such an inspired storyteller -- his own story is inspiring."

The 90-minute town hall meeting on Oct. 22 will feature a panel discussing black male achievement and will include:

- President and CEO John Jackson of the Schott Foundation for Public Education, which recently released a study showing that half of the states have graduation rates of black male students below the national average;



Newsman Byron Pitts



New Minneapolis Superintendent Follows In Mentor's Footsteps

Carol Johnson is the superintendent of Boston Public Schools and Bernadeia Johnson is the leader of Minneapolis Public Schools. The two superintendents, no relation, not only share the same last name

and the same profession, but a decade-long friendship.

Their relationship was the focus of a recent story that appeared in the *Minneapolis*

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Blue Ribbon Schools Named

Students who attend the School Without Walls Senior High School in Washington, D.C., can enroll at a local university for free and receive upwards of \$500 to pay for textbooks. The high school offers a rigorous college-preparatory and early college program to a diverse student population, with 100 percent of its graduates receiving acceptance to four-year colleges and universities.

The School Without Walls is just one of several big-city schools nationwide to receive the U.S. Department of Education's 2010 National Blue Ribbon Award.

The program recognized 304 public and private elementary, middle and high schools whose students achieve at very high levels or have made significant progress and helped narrow the achievement gap, especially among disadvantaged and minority students.

Schools were selected for the Blue Ribbon award program based on one of two criteria:

- Schools ranked among their state's highest performing schools as measured by their performance on state assessments and



U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is presented with a jacket from the School Without Walls Senior High School in Washington, D.C. Duncan announced the 2010 Blue Ribbon Schools at the school.

- Schools with at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that improve student academic performance to a high level on state or nationally normed tests.

Big-city schools in Sacramento, San Diego, Oakland, Los Angeles, Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, Chicago, Baton Rouge, Boston, Las Vegas, New York City, Rochester,

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

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Palm Beach District Launches Task Force On Black Males

In an effort to improve education outcomes of black male students, The School District of Palm Beach County in Florida has launched what it calls the African American Male Task Force.

The new task force aims to study and implement solutions for the low graduation rate, high dropout rate and high suspension rate of African-American males in the Palm Beach school system.

"We have known for some time that our African American students overall are not achieving and graduating at rates that we know they can achieve..." says Superintendent Art Johnson in a press statement.

"The work of the task force will help us identify specifically what is working in Palm Beach County and nationwide and speed up the implementation of those proven strategies," he explains.

He has appointed veteran educator Gloria Crutchfield, who has a proven track record of raising student achievement at the elementary and secondary school levels in the district, to head the task force.

"Many of our schools are achieving extraordinary results with our African American males," she says. "We will focus on the implementation of strategies in schools that are research-based, data-driven, and proven highly effective when working with particular student subgroups."

The task force, composed of students, parents, teachers, administrators as well as community and business leaders, plans to convene a public symposium in mid-October to zero in on how to improve the graduation rate in Palm Beach County, particularly focusing on African American males.

Crutchfield, who is also the district's director of secondary curriculum development and school improvement, will participate in the Council of the Great City Schools' National Town Hall Meeting on black male achievement scheduled for Oct. 22 in Tampa.

Memphis District Offers Online Courses Leading to Graduation Requirement Next Year



Kriner Cash

Memphis City Schools opens a new school year offering online courses to students, who will be required to take at least one online course to graduate in the 2011-2012 school year.

The school system is making distance-learning technology available to students by offering 31 online courses for grades 8-12 and 12 courses for grades 6-8.

Memphis Schools Superintendent Kriner Cash plans to advance the method of teaching and learning to new heights over the next several years.

"The delivery model goes back to the post-industrial 19th century," he says in Memphis' *Commercial Appeal* newspaper, noting that schools haven't changed that much since the late 1800s -- with teachers talking to students sitting in chairs.

"With technological innovations that we have today, we can deliver the courses online, facilitated by top-flight teachers," he emphasized.

In the current school year, students will get a chance to become familiar with the online classes before being required to take at least one online course to graduate, beginning next school year.

The Memphis school system is offering online classes such as economics, biology, physics, world geography and U.S. history.

Students can register for online classes on the Memphis City Schools web site, and can access the courses from home. The sign-in system allows the students to take tests online, access their scores and interact with their teacher.

"We're using online sources to get children oriented to college and workforce life, where a whole bunch of training and learning is happening online," said Deputy Superintendent Irving Hamer in the *Commercial Appeal*.

Blue Ribbon continued from page 1

N.Y., Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Houston, Miami, Memphis, Dallas, and Richmond, Va., were named Blue Ribbon Schools. Sacramento, Boston, Los Angeles, New York City, Cincinnati, Philadelphia and Dallas each had two schools recognized, while Houston had five schools honored.

"Schools honored with the Blue Ribbon Schools award are committed to achievement and to ensuring that students learn and succeed," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "Their work reflects the conviction that every child has promise and must receive a quality education."

In November, the 304 National Blue Ribbon Schools will be honored at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. Each school will receive a plaque and a flag to signify their Blue Ribbon School status.

Since 1982, the U.S. Department of Education has honored schools where students attain and maintain high academic goals, including those that beat the odds.

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- Buffalo Public Schools Superintendent James Williams;
- Palm Beach County school system administrator Gloria Crutchfield, who heads a new African American Male Task Force in the Florida district; and
- Tampa 12th-grader Tevin Sutton, an honor student and captain of his high school football team.

Wichita Leader Appointed to Serve On Nat'l Commission

John Allison, the superintendent of Kansas' Wichita Public Schools, has been named to serve on the Education Commission of the States.



John Allison

Appointed by Kansas Gov. Mark Parkinson, Allison is one of the few school superintendents in the nation and the only superintendent from a district represented by the Council of the Great City Schools to serve on the commission.

The Education Commission of the States enables K-12 and college education representatives and political leaders the opportunity to collaborate and promote national education policies and reforms to allow the nation to be more competitive and successful in the global economy.

"It's an honor to be appointed by Governor Parkinson to represent the state of Kansas and to be part of an organization that has had an impact on educational policy," said Superintendent Allison in a news release.

Detroit Launches Teen Courts

In collaboration with the local prosecutor's office, Detroit Public Schools recently established DPS Teen Courts in two high schools to confront youth offenders and create a pilot program called the Safe Schools Project to address school-violence issues.

The teen courts are set up for students ages 11 to 16 who have become involved in minor law violations but have no previous juvenile record. They appear before a jury

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Teacher Unions in Baltimore, Seattle, Newark Collaborate with Districts to Improve Schools

Across the nation, teacher unions are partnering with big-city school districts to boost student academic achievement. Recently, teacher unions in Baltimore, Seattle, and Newark, N.J., made headlines when they reached landmark agreements with their respective school districts in an effort to improve schools and create effective teachers.

Baltimore

The Baltimore Teachers Union recently reached a tentative agreement with Baltimore City Public Schools that will link teacher pay to student performance.

According to the *Baltimore Sun*, the contract calls for teachers to receive an automatic 2 percent pay increase in the first year of the contract as well as a one-time \$1,500 stipend. Starting salaries for teachers will also increase.

In the second and third year, teachers could receive a 1 percent increase and a 1.5 percent raise based on student performance and teacher evaluations.

By the third year, effective teachers who become leaders in their schools could earn as much as \$100,000.

The contract also calls for teachers to be able to provide input on working conditions in their schools.

"This agreement would put instructional effectiveness at the core of everything, which is where it should be," said Baltimore Schools CEO Andres Alonso. "I congratulate our teachers and our school communities for what is a landmark moment for us all—especially our kids."

Once the teachers union ratifies the contract, a joint committee composed of representatives from the school system and the union will oversee its implementation, according to the *Sun*.

Seattle

A landmark agreement between Seattle Public Schools and the Seattle Education Association will provide new teachers with

more mentoring, training and assistance and additional compensation to the district's most effective teachers.

A contract was recently approved by teachers that will implement an evaluation system that is linked to student growth measures.

The Professional Growth & Evaluation system (PG&E) will be phased in over three years and evaluates teachers on a four-level scale: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient and innovative. Scores from multiple tests will be compiled and averaged for each teacher and those who are struggling will receive intervention and support, including up to \$500 for training.

Teachers who are performing well will have the opportunity to receive stipends of \$2,500 to \$5,200 a year by serving as mentors and master teachers and sharing their best practices with their colleagues. Additional stipends will also go toward teachers who work in low-performing schools.

In an effort to improve the retention rate, new teachers will receive three years of mentoring instead of the current one.

District officials estimate the new contract will cost \$19 million over three years. The district is seeking to fund the contract with federal Teacher Incentive Fund grants as well as a Supplemental Levy that will appear on the ballot in November.

Newark

As a result of a new memoranda of understanding signed between the Newark Teachers Union and Newark Public Schools, more than \$20 million in federal School Improvement Grants will go toward supporting low-performing schools.

As part of the agreement, students at these schools will receive extended learning time and teachers will be given extensive professional development focused on improved student learning, including support for those who pursue a nationally recognized certification.

Urban School Leader of the Year To Be Announced



Richard R. Green

Who will receive the nation's top urban education prize in leadership for 2010 -- the Richard R. Green Award? Will it be superintendent:

- Ronald Blocker of Orange County Public Schools in Orlando;
 - Arlene Ackerman of the School District of Philadelphia; or
 - Mark Roosevelt of Pittsburgh Public Schools
- The envelope, please. And the winner is
- It won't be revealed until Oct. 21 at the 21st Annual Richard R. Green Award Banquet in Tampa.
- Sponsored by the Council, ARAMARK Education and Cambium Learning Group, the Green Award honors the first African-American chancellor of the New York City school system and superintendent of the Minneapolis school district.
- The nation's top prize for urban education leadership is awarded to a superintendent and board member in alternate years. The winner receives a \$10,000 scholarship to present to a student.
- Winston Brooks of Albuquerque Public Schools;
 - Andres Alonso of Baltimore City Schools;
 - Melody Johnson of Fort Worth Public Schools;
 - MaryEllen Elia of Hillsborough County Public Schools;
 - Christopher Steinhauser of Long Beach Unified School District;
 - Ramon Cortines of Los Angeles Unified School District;

Several New Reports To Be Presented At Council Conference

A study to identify urban school districts that are making academic progress, analyzing factors propelling their upward trend, will be released along with other new reports by the Council of the Great City Schools at its annual Fall Conference, Oct. 20-24, in Tampa, Fla.

With the American Institutes for Research, the Council examined the progress of the 11 big-city school districts participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA), a federal program that allows their academic achievement to be measured using the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The study also analyzes the instructional and organizational practices that contribute to changes in NAEP scores in the participating school districts.

On the business side of urban school systems, the Council will release an analysis of key performance indicators that show the city school districts that are consistently performing at high levels by various business and operational functions.

The seventh survey and report of urban school superintendents will be released, giving information and data on characteristics, tenure and salary.

Also at the conference, two reports of the Council's Senior Urban Education Research Fellowship program will be presented. A study by Dr. Robert Meyer of the University of Wisconsin-Madison produced new work in the area of early warning systems for identifying students at risk for adverse high school outcomes. He conducted his research with the Milwaukee Public Schools.

The second report focuses on the use of data in the District of Columbia Public Schools. Dr. Becky Smerdon of the Academy for Educational Development received the Council fellowship to lead the study.

Atlanta Student Receives Richard Green Scholarship



Atlanta school board member Emmett Johnson, right, congratulates Joshua White for winning the \$10,000 Richard Green college scholarship. White received the scholarship from Johnson, who was the winner of the Richard R. Green Award at the Council of the Great City Schools' 2009 Fall Conference in Portland, Ore. White is currently a student at Fort Valley State University majoring in physical education.

Mentor's Footsteps continued from page 1

Star Tribune.

The two Johnsons first crossed paths in 1999 when Carol was the superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools. Bernadeia was serving as an assistant principal in neighboring St. Paul when she was asked by Carol to serve as principal of Elizabeth Hall Community School in Minneapolis.



Carol Johnson

In 2003, when Carol was selected as superintendent of Memphis City Schools, the largest school system in the state of Tennessee, she asked Bernadeia to join her

and serve as her deputy superintendent of academics. Bernadeia agreed and went to Memphis where she was responsible for the creation of a team that included representatives from academic departments to focus on the clear alignment of academically focused work.

In 2005, Bernadeia moved back to Minneapolis to serve as deputy superintendent and a year later Carol departed Memphis to head the school system in Boston.

Though they were no longer working together, the two maintained their friendship, with Carol continuing to serve as a mentor. So it was no surprise that when Bernadeia was offered the reins of the 34,750-student school district in Minneapolis this past July, she asked Carol for guidance.

According to the *Star Tribune*, Carol's advice to the new superintendent consisted of five words: set goals and spell them out.

Bernadeia took that advice to heart and during her meetings with the community during the superintendent search process, she emphasized the importance of accountability and high expectations.

Her quest for accountability led Minneapolis school board members to recently amend her contract to include specific goals such as preparing more students for college, narrowing the district's achievement gap between white and minority students,

and creating more partnerships with community organizations.

When it comes to holding herself accountable, Bernadeia is simply following in the footsteps of her mentor.

In Boston, accountability and achieving specific goals are part of Carol's contract. The district's web site even enables users to track progress made on her goals.

In addition to working to narrow the achievement gap, Bernadeia is beginning the 2010-2011 school year by placing renewed focus on improving the reading skills of kindergartners and ensuring that they will be college-bound when they graduate from high school.

She has also launched a new program called "Homeroom with Superintendent Johnson," in which she visits schools each week to better connect with teachers and students.



Bernadeia Johnson

Carol recalls first recruiting Bernadeia as a principal and says it has been wonderful to watch and learn from her as she transformed learning at the school level, connected and engaged diverse families and communities and challenged the status quo as she pushed all who work with her to close persistent access and achievement gaps.

"Minneapolis is fortunate to have a leader with an unwavering commitment to always put students first," said Carol in an e-mail to the *Urban Educator*. "I am certainly proud to call Bernadeia both a friend and a valued colleague."

"Minneapolis is fortunate to have a leader with an unwavering commitment to always put students first," said Carol in an e-mail to the *Urban Educator*. "I am certainly proud to call Bernadeia both a friend and a valued colleague."

And the feeling is mutual for Bernadeia, who says she has been inspired throughout the years by Carol's ability to make courageous decisions in the best interest of students, even if the decision was not welcome or popular.

"Carol is the true meaning of an authentic, servant leader and I am deeply grateful for her friendship and invaluable mentoring," Bernadeia told the *Urban Educator*.

Incentive Program In Houston To Include Parents

In recent years, programs have been created in some urban school districts that give monetary rewards to students for achieving good grades. But the Houston Independent School District has taken it one step further by not only rewarding students, but also their parents.

Its school board recently approved an incentive program at 25 elementary schools, in which each fifth-grade student and his or her parents will have an opportunity to earn money over the school year.

The program will center on students mastering 200 fifth-grade math objectives aligned to the Texas math curriculum. Students can earn \$2 for every math objective they master and parents will also receive \$2 for every math concept completed. Parents will also receive \$20 for every parent meeting they attend.

Under the program, students can earn a maximum of \$440 and parents can earn up to \$580.

The program and its results will be part of a research partnership with Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard University and Dr. Roland Fryer, who has created monetary reward programs for students at other schools. The EdLabs teams will conduct research around the relationship between student and parent incentives and student academic gains.

Houston Schools Superintendent Terry Grier says research has shown that incentives for performance can work. "Charter schools widely use this strategy and many parents reward their children when they get good grades, but it certainly is not a one size fits all approach," he says. "We will be taking great care in how we implement this new program and how we measure the results."

The 25 schools for the program will be selected based on grade-level performance on the state's math exam, TAKS, from 2009-10.

Chicago School Wins Top Intel Award in Math, Science; New York City and Baton Rouge Schools Also Honored

Walter Payton College Preparatory High School in Chicago has a 98 percent graduation rate, more than a quarter of students take five or more math courses before graduation, and more than 99 percent of its students meet or exceed state math standards.

As a result, the school was recently presented with the Star Innovator Award, the top award in the Intel Schools of Distinction competition. The 2010 Intel Schools of Distinction Award program honors schools that demonstrate excellence in math and science education through innovative teaching and learning environments.

Sponsored by the Intel Corporation, the program honors six schools--two elementary, two middle and two high schools--that have developed an environment and curricula that meet or exceed benchmarks put forth by national mathematics and science content standards.

At Walter Payton, teachers collaborate on rigorous, cross-curricular lessons to ensure that students grasp math concepts, and technology is woven throughout the curriculum. Teachers continually evaluate student data and assess techniques to improve instruction.

In addition to Walter Payton, two other big-city schools were named 2010 Intel Schools of Distinction. Westdale Heights Academic Magnet School in Baton Rouge, La., was recognized for its effort to narrow the achievement gap in science by having teachers undergo extensive professional development related to effective science instruction.

And the Laboratory School of Finance and Technology in New York City's South Bronx was honored for providing excellent mathematics instruction and providing hands-on, real-world learning opportunities in technology and personal finance.

As winners of the Intel Schools of Distinction, each school will receive an estimated \$160,000 in a combination of cash grants and an award package including



Left to right, Glenn McGee, president of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, which was the 2009 Star Innovator, presents the 2010 Star Innovator award to Robert Runcie, Paul Karafiol and Ellen Estrada of Chicago's Walter Payton College Preparatory High School.

curriculum materials, professional development resources and hardware and software. As winner of the Star Innovator Award, Walter Payton will receive an additional \$15,000.

The six winning Intel Schools of Distinction were selected from 18 finalists. The Intel awards program is open to K-12 public and private schools.

Richmond Schools 100 Percent Accredited

Virginia's Richmond Public Schools recently accomplished something it has never done before. Under the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) testing program, all of the district's schools earned full accreditation based on achievement standards in English, mathematics, history and science.

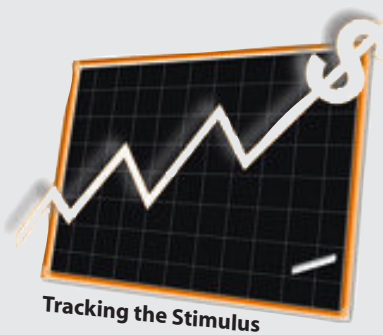
Eight years ago, only 19 percent of district schools were fully accredited.

"Without question, our latest SOL scores demonstrate that Richmond Public Schools has delivered on its promise to provide a world-class education for all students," said Richmond Schools Superintendent Yvonne Brandon. "The report is

truly a testament to the district's outstanding teachers, hard-working students and dedicated parents. It's a shared accomplishment of which we can all be proud."

To be fully accredited, middle and high schools must have a pass rate of at least 70 percent in all four subject areas.

Elementary schools must achieve a combined pass rate of at least 75 percent on English tests for students in grades 3-5; a pass rate of at least 70 percent in math, fifth-grade science and history; and a pass rate of at least 50 percent in third-grade science and history to be fully accredited.



Miami-Dade Uses Funds to Boost Early Education

Miami-Dade Public Schools is using \$5 million in stimulus funds from the U.S. Department of Education to develop a program to train early-childhood education teachers.

The district has joined forces with the University of Florida and The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation to create a master's and specialist degree program for 100 early-childhood teachers in 25 high-need elementary schools.

Early-childhood specialists from the university's College of Education will teach the degree program, which blends on-site and online coursework enabling teachers to remain in their own classrooms during their graduate studies.

Participants will create professional learning communities and organize special training opportunities for their colleagues at school. Learning communities will also be created for principals to help them lead school improvement efforts.

The four-year program is free and officials estimate that the training in early-childhood learning will benefit 1,125 teachers and 30,000 schoolchildren.

In addition to the \$5-million federal grant, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation contributed \$1 million in matching funds for a total of \$6 million to help support the master's teacher program.

Museum Program Launched in D.C. Schools

The District of Columbia Public Schools is teaming with a local museum to launch a new partnership aimed at improving student academic achievement through the visual arts.

The Phillips Collection, the nation's first museum of modern art, is working with four D.C. schools to create the "Art Links to Learning—Museum-in-Residence," a program that weaves together the visual arts with other core standards to improve student performance and enhance learning skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving.

The program will provide teachers with extensive professional development, in-classroom workshops and museum visits for students, student exhibitions at the Phillips and online and family participation opportunities.

One of the first projects under the program is the *Teach with Jacob Lawrence: Nationwide Curriculum*, the result of a three-year research project developed by the Phillips to study arts integration. The curriculum is based on the Migration Series, Lawrence's visual narrative of the migration of more than one million African

Americans from the rural south to the urban north between the world wars.

Featuring nine best-practice teaching units developed by teachers across the nation as well as museum teaching lessons, *Teach with Jacob Lawrence* includes step-by-step lesson plans, samples of student work, student assessment rubrics and teacher impact statements. The curriculum will be tailored to meet specific school district standards at each grade level.

For example, students in a third-grade classroom will discuss three paintings from Lawrence's Migration Series and complete an assignment about the elements of a story, which is directly tied to language arts standards for narrative sequencing.

Teach with Jacob Lawrence has also published, for the first time, the results of a study that revealed participating teachers who integrated the Migration Series into their curricula saw greater participation in schoolwork by their students. In addition, the study found that by incorporating art into language arts and social studies curricula, students were more creative and developed critical-thinking, social and motivation skills.



Laura Bush Rolls Out Initiative in Dallas

Dallas Independent School District Superintendent Michael Hinojosa recently welcomed former first lady Laura Bush at a local high school for the George W. Bush Institute to launch an initiative aimed at recruiting school principals from outside of schools. Bush announced the institute's Alliance to Reform Education Leadership, a collaborative that plans to train principal candidates in pilot programs in Dallas, Fort Worth, Denver, St. Louis, Indianapolis and other sites nationwide.

National Program At Johns Hopkins U. Expands to Detroit

Two preK-8 schools in Detroit are joining forces with Johns Hopkins University and other nonprofit organizations to implement a national initiative designed to keep children in school and on a path toward graduation and college.

Warren E. Bow Elementary School and Emerson Elementary School will implement the Diplomas Now program, a partnership of Johns Hopkins University's Talent Development Program; City Year, an AmeriCorps program; and Communities in Schools, a dropout prevention organization.

The program is a school turnaround model targeting at-risk students, which focuses on improving academic achievement and teacher professional development and enhancing the role of community in schools and tutoring. The program has been shown to increase academic performance and decrease truancy and negative behaviors in national trials in urban school districts.

At Bow and Emerson, the Diplomas Now Program will use the early-warning indicators, known as "ABC's"--Attendance, Behavior and Class Performance--in math and English to predict as early as sixth grade which students will not graduate from high school without intervention.

"We selected Bow and Emerson because both schools were slated for a transition from grades K-5 to grades K-8, which can be difficult, and we wanted a vehicle to keep the middle-schoolers on track toward graduation," said Barbara Byrd-Bennett, the chief academic and accountability auditor for Detroit Public Schools.

In addition, a team of 10 Americorps members from City Year will be in each school offering year-long, in-class tutoring, mentoring and after-school programming. The members have received training prior to the start of school to improve their lit-

National Program *continued from page 10*



Alaska State Rep. Berta Gardner (left) and students and staff at Anchorage's Polaris K-12 School look on as Alaska Gov. Sean Parnell signs a bill into law officially making the Alaskan malamute the state dog.

Anchorage Students Spearhead Effort Leading to Alaska Designating State Dog

Some three years ago, a kindergarten class at a school in Anchorage thought it would be a good idea for Alaska to have an official state dog.

No, not a huskie, which many people equate to a team of huskies in Alaska dog-sledding folklore.

Youngsters from Polaris K-12 School in Anchorage conducted research, made phone calls, lobbied and testified before the state legislature to have the Alaskan malamute, which resembles a Siberian husky, to be designated the official state dog.

In their research, the students found that the Alaskan malamute has a long history and tradition as a hard-working dog in the Arctic's harsh environment.

Their idea turned into a three-year schoolwide project, generating a legislative bill that Alaska Gov. Sean Parnell this past spring signed into law.

Alaska now reportedly becomes the nation's 11th state to have a designated state dog.

A dog-sledding expedition -- the 2011 Arctic Expedition -- is paying tribute to the Alaskan malamute, and is dedicated to the Polaris School students who spearheaded the drive for the state's largest Arctic sled dog to be designated top canine.



Alaska's state dog.

The Missing Link in the Federal Education Reform Agenda

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

Despite more than 20 years of mandates and programs in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, billions of dollars in school improvement grants, and a cottage industry of “experts” in school reform, one critical piece that is often overlooked in the federal education reform puzzle is the school district. Instead, the federal agenda is typically defined around individual low-performing schools, but often misses the need for systemwide reform and capacity building.

In fact, districtwide improvement is largely an afterthought in *No Child Left Behind* except for its repeating the same range of activities and sanctions under both the district- and school-level sections of the federal act. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education’s “Blueprint for Reform” makes only passing reference to systemwide reform in comparison to its school-level turnaround policies. And school-by-school reform receives the overwhelming attention on the national reform agenda.

Historically, school systems have been plagued by incoherent programs, curriculum, materials, strategies, and methods and been encouraged to let “a thousand flowers bloom.” But many schools have withered rather than blossomed in this eclectic environment. Ironically, low-performing schools often have the same academic decision-making autonomy as high-performing schools. And, different schools—and even different classrooms in the same school—sometimes implement entirely different reading programs under the umbrella of a single school system. A highly mo-



bile student population in a high-poverty school district can be in and out of multiple reading programs during the same academic year and show little improvement in achievement as a result.

The uneven capacity and performance of individual schools beg for more effective and efficient systemwide action, support, and accountability. In fact, positive change in teaching and learning often can best be accomplished in multiple low-achieving schools with convincing districtwide instructional strategies and interventions.

For more than a decade, many of the most successful urban school districts have aggressively pursued systemic reforms in curriculum and instruction, and have seen notable achievement gains on state tests and the National Assessment of Education Program (NAEP) -- often outpacing statewide and national progress.

The federal government has devoted considerable time, energy and money on building state-level capacity for school reform. Race to the Top is only the most recent example. But, building school district capacity, particularly in the nation’s largest cities, is rarely mentioned. If Congress and the Administration are really determined to producing gains at scale, they would incorporate school systems into their portfolio of approaches in the reform and improvement of public education. They might be able to reach more schools in the process.

National Program *continued from page 9*

eracy and math tutoring skills and behavior coaching.

A full-time social worker provided by Communities and Schools will be at each school to provide counseling for students and extra services such as after-school programs. And teachers will receive professional development and academic coaching

from the Johns Hopkins/Talent Development Program.

Diplomas Now is currently operating in school districts in 10 cities, including Philadelphia, Chicago, Seattle, Washington, D.C., Miami and Los Angeles. The program has been shown to increase academic performance and decrease truancy

and negative behaviors in schools where it has been implemented.

The program was recently awarded a \$30-million grant from the U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation Fund.

Engineering Academy Launched in Oklahoma City

An engineering program has been launched in the Oklahoma City Public Schools to improve student skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics as well as increase the number of minority students entering the engineering field.

The new Academy of Engineering program is housed in the Oklahoma City school system's Northeast Academy for Health Sciences.

"We anticipate that this will be the most effective program in the state of Oklahoma to address the need for more minorities in engineering as well as increase science, math and technology skills for students," says Superintendent Karl Springer in a news release.

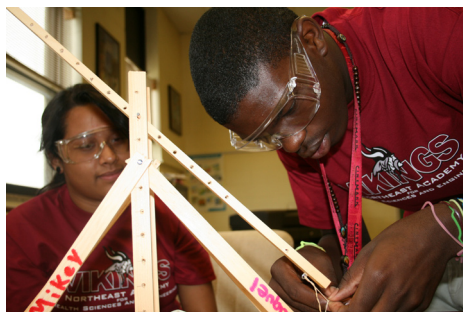
The school system has established the engineering program in collaboration with three groups, including the National Academy Foundation, which is a national network of career-themed academies.

Starting in the 6th grade, the Academy of Engineering will introduce students to pre-engineering career fields and activities by offering classes such as Introduction to Engineering Design, Computer Integrated Manufacturing and Aerospace Engineering.

"The student population at Northeast Academy for Health Sciences and Engineering is 95 percent minority, which makes this a great place to develop future minority engineers," says Northeast Academy principal Verna Martin.

While students in grades 6-8 can take prerequisite courses to prepare them for the Engineering Academy, ninth graders are accepted into the full program leading to 12th-grade graduation.

An entire wing of the Northeast Academy will be occupied by the new Academy of Engineering. And an advisory board has been developed that includes higher education institutions, local and national businesses as well as the National Society of Black Engineers to help provide mentoring and internship opportunities to students in the program.



Oklahoma City students work on a project in a pre-engineering class, which prepares them for the new engineering program.

Portland Expands Russian Program

A new federal grant will enable Portland Public Schools in Oregon to expand its Russian language program.

The nearly \$1.5-million grant was awarded to the district through the Foreign Language Assistance Program, designed to improve language training in schools, specifically for languages such as Russian, that are deemed critical.

The district launched its Russian immersion program in 2007 with a kindergarten class at Kelly Elementary School. This fall, the program will serve K-3 students and a grade will be added each year through high school, with the option for students to continue study through Portland State University's Russian Flagship Partner Program.

According to school system officials, more than 700 Russian-speaking students attend the district's schools and the city of Portland has one of the nation's largest populations of Russian speakers.

"This is a critical step to engaging those communities," said Natalia Gunther, a Russian curriculum specialist in the district. "My goal is that this program helps build pride in Russian-speaking students, so they can say, 'Here is something I'm good at and proud of.' It will help them achieve in every subject."

Houston CFO Wins Top Award

Melinda Garrett, the chief financial officer for the Houston Independent School District, received the Bill Wise Award recently at the Council of the Great City Schools' Chief Financial Officers Conference in Houston.

Sponsored by Chartwells Dining Services, the award is presented to a school business official who distinguishes himself or herself through service to urban education.

As chief financial officer, Garrett is responsible for all financial operations of the school system and provides oversight for all financial services. A former elementary teacher, Garrett is in her 26th year in the Houston school system's finance office.

"I have worked with many very talented school finance officers in my time, but Melinda tops them all," said Houston schools superintendent Terry Grier. "I am pleased she is getting the national recognition she deserves, from her peers."

The Bill Wise Award was established in 2000 and is named for an outstanding financial leader in urban education for the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.

This is the second time a Houston financial officer has won the award. In 2001, Leonard Sturm, former deputy superintendent for finance and business services, won the award.



Houston's Chief Financial Officer Melinda Garrett displays her Bill Wise Award as Houston Schools Superintendent Terry Grier looks on. Photo Credit: Neil Zobler



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A Former Leader In St. Louis Dies

Cleveland Hammonds, a former superintendent of St. Louis Public Schools, died on Sept. 7.

He led the St. Louis school system from 1996 to 2003.

During his tenure, Dr. Hammonds was credited with improving the system's financial status, reorganizing the district's central office administration and improving graduation rates.

He was also instrumental in passing a \$40-million bond issue to build a state-of-the-art high school.

After retiring from the district, Hammonds taught part-time at Southern Illinois University.

Current St. Louis Superintendent Kelvin Adams praised Hammonds for being a great leader.

"He placed the needs of our students as the top priority for our school district, and will be remembered for his commitment to the teaching and learning of the district's students."

Teen Courts *continued from page 4*

of high school peers at Denby and Southeastern High Schools, where classrooms at both schools have been transformed to resemble real courtrooms.

"The teen courts also offer an excellent opportunity for our students to gain experience in the legal system as they deliberate on real cases, while encouraging them to take an active role in their community," says Robert Bobb, emergency financial manager of the Detroit school system.

The juvenile diversion program is a component of the Safe Schools Project, which the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office will help Detroit Public Schools provide a safety net for its schools.

Five assistant prosecutors are assigned to work collaboratively at Detroit and other high schools to address issues of safety, truancy and school violence.

The prosecuting attorneys will encourage schools to establish and monitor hotlines to report instances of bullying and to prevent other crimes from occurring in providing various safety assistance to schools.

Great City Grads



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Supreme Court of the United States

Elena Kagan

U.S. Supreme Court Justice

1977 graduate

Hunter College High School

New York City Public Schools