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## Council Releasing New Reports

In an effort to improve the quality of instruction for English Language Learners and immigrant children, the Council of the Great City Schools will release a report titled *Succeeding with English Language Learners: Lessons Learned from Urban School Districts* at its 53rd Annual Fall Conference in Portland, Ore.

The report examines the experiences of districts with differing levels of success at raising academic achievement of English language learners. With the release of this report, the Council looks to shed light on potential strategies for improving English proficiency and the academic performance of English language learners throughout the Council's 66 member districts.

**New Reports** continued on page 4

## English Language Learners Focus of Town Meeting



Soledad O'Brien

CNN anchor and correspondent Soledad O'Brien will moderate discussion on "Urban Schools Turn Challenge to Opportunity in Teaching English Language Learners" — the topic of a national town hall meeting to be held by

**Town Meeting** continued on page 5



Omaha Superintendent John Mackiel takes time from his day to read to students at Pawnee Elementary.

## Omaha Superintendent Begins 12th Year; Several Other Leaders Reaching 10-Year Mark

Urban school superintendents may have one of the toughest jobs in the nation. In addition to having to make visible and rapid improvements in the academic achievement of thousands of students, superintendents must also contend with financial challenges, teacher shortages, contentious boards, highly politicized environments and the need to actively engage the public.

So, it is not surprising that the average tenure of a big-city school superintendent is 3.5 years, according to a 2008 report by the Council of the Great City Schools.

Yet, several urban school superintendents have managed to not only survive

but thrive in their respective school districts. One of those superintendents is John Mackiel, who has led Nebraska's Omaha Public Schools for 12 years—longer than any other big-city school superintendent working today.

Mackiel has led the 49,000-student school system, the largest in Nebraska, since 1997. Approximately 62 percent of students in the school system are eligible for free/reduced priced meals, yet during Mackiel's leadership student achievement has steadily increased. On the California Achievement Test, 83 percent of the

**Omaha Supt.** continued on page 3

## NYC School Wins Intel Math Award

At the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science, an ethnically diverse, college preparatory school in New York City's South Bronx, 82 percent of students scored at or above grade level in mathematics.

As a result, the school was one of six in the nation to be selected as 2009 Intel Schools of Distinction. The award honors six schools—two elementary, two middle and two high schools—that have implemented innovative and creative programs that inspire their students to excel in the areas of math or science.

The Urban Assembly School was the winner of the middle-school mathematics division for its rich math curriculum incorporating hands-on, investigative experiences that encourage student achievement. Opened in 2004 as part of New York City's Small Schools Initiative, it serves 512 students and offers them extended 90-minute lessons along with after-school and tutoring programs. The school also hosts an annual middle-school interactive math tournament.

"We're thrilled to be at the table," said Principal Ken Baum in the *New York Daily News*. "We're just a regular public school in the South Bronx, but we can



Left to right, Bryan Saunders, partnership coordinator for the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science, principal Ken Baum and students join New York Gov. David Patterson in Albany to celebrate the school's selection as an Intel Schools of Distinction award finalist.

play with the big boys."

As a winner of the Intel Schools of Distinction, the school will receive a grant for \$10,000 from Intel and a technology package valued at more than \$100,000.

The Intel awards program is open to K-12 public and private schools. Eligible schools must develop curricula that meet

or exceed benchmarks put forth by national mathematics and science content standards.

Eighteen schools are selected as finalists in two categories—math and science—and from those 18 finalists, six winners are named as Schools of Distinction.



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**Omaha Supt.** *continued from page 1*

district's students have performed within or above the national average range of achievement at all grade levels tested over the past nine years. And a majority of students in the district were recently rated proficient on state learning standards.

The community has also expressed confidence in Mackiel's leadership when in 1999, voters passed a \$250-million bond issue to build and renovate schools.

And last year, he was a candidate for the Richard R. Green Award, the nation's top prize for urban school leadership.

Mackiel began his teaching career in the Omaha school district in 1972 and rose through the ranks, serving as chief financial officer before becoming superintendent.

When asked to describe some of the difficulties he has experienced on the job, Mackiel responded in an e-mail to the *Urban Educator* "that any difficulties have been far surpassed by daily opportunities to be part of student/staff/community successes."

But it's fair to say that one of his most challenging experiences occurred in 2005 when the district took action to implement a state law in which all schools in the city of Omaha would be under the direction and control of the Omaha school system in a plan known as "One City, One School District."

The plan was an effort to ensure all students in the community had access to resources and programs. However, the plan was opposed by many surrounding suburban school districts and Mackiel was on the front end of verbal and written assaults and even received death threats.

The district then made national headlines when in 2006, a Nebraska law was passed to divide the school system into three separate districts—each serving predominantly African American, white and Hispanic students.

A judge eventually blocked the law from going into effect. Last year, a new law was passed that will benefit Omaha public schools by providing significant new resources specifically directed at programs for students in poverty or students who are English-language learners.

"John led the challenge with the school board that all children deserve an equitable education in an integrated environment for every child in public school in the metropolitan area," said Omaha school board president Sandra Jensen. "Dr. John Mackiel is committed to the welfare and education of all children."

And what advice does Mackiel give to other superintendents? "Never stop trying to become qualified for the job!" he says.

### Superintendent Stability



Beverly Hall

While Mackiel is the longest serving big-city superintendent, several leaders are not far behind.

Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall recently celebrated her 10th year leading the 49,000-student school system. During Hall's tenure, the district has closed the achievement gap with the state of Georgia. In 2006, she received the Richard R. Green Award.



Ronald Blocker

Since July 2000, Ronald Blocker has been at the helm of the Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla. Under his leadership, the nation's 10th largest school district received an "A" grade from the Florida Department of Education this year.



Carol Comeau

Another long-serving superintendent is Carol Comeau, who has led Alaska's Anchorage School District since December 2000.



Arthur Johnson

And Arthur Johnson, superintendent of the School District of Palm Beach County in Florida, has led the nation's 11th largest public school system since 2001.



Columbus student Marquise Lovejoy is sworn in as Ohio "governor" by Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas Moyer.

## Columbus Student Elected Ohio 'Governor'

Marquise Lovejoy is a senior at Beechcroft High School in Columbus, Ohio, and in addition to applying to colleges and preparing to graduate, he will have another responsibility during his senior year: governing the state of Ohio.

Lovejoy was elected the governor of Ohio as part of the American Legion Ohio Buckeye Boys State, a nine-day event held this summer on the campus of Bowling Green State University. Founded in 1936, the event gave more than 1,100 boys from across Ohio hands-on experience in the operation of the democratic form of government and the organization of political parties.

Elections were held for several political offices, including attorney general and governor, the highest office in the program. Lovejoy, who campaigned as the National Party candidate, beat out 34 other young men. The debate between him and the Federalist candidate was observed by Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland, who said that he was glad none of the candidates was old enough to be able to run for governor, according to the *Toledo Blade*.

"When I was their age, ... I could not have done what these young people did today," said Strickland in the *Blade*.

The Buckeye Boys State is the largest Boys State program in the nation and is sponsored by the Ohio American Legion, the largest veterans organization in Ohio.

## U.S. Education Department Announces 2009 Blue Ribbon Schools

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced the winners of its 2009 National Blue Ribbon Schools and for the fourth year in a row a school in Louisiana's East Baton Rouge Parish School System has been named.

Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet School is one of 314 schools across the nation that have been designated as a Blue

Ribbon School. The award honors public and private K-12 schools that are either academically superior or have made dramatic gains in student achievement and have helped closed gaps in achievement among minority and disadvantaged students.

In order to be eligible for the award, schools must meet one of two criteria:

- Schools with at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student performance to high levels on state tests; and
- Schools whose students, regardless of background, achieve in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests, or in the case of private schools in the top 10 percent of the nation on nationally normed tests.

### New Reports *continued from page 1*

*Succeeding with English Language Learners* will be one of four new reports to be released at the gathering of the nation's urban school leaders, Oct. 28-Nov. 1.

School board members play an important role in the education of the nation's big-city schoolchildren and in the fall of 2008, the Council surveyed board members in 42 urban school districts. The results will appear in *Urban School Board Survey*, the Council's second report on the characteristics of school boards and board members in the nation's urban schools.

Respondents were asked to provide information on a range of topics, including board governance, structure, demographics, race/ethnicity and gender.

The report reveals that 86 percent of big-city school boards are elected, while 14 percent are appointed and that a majority of urban school board members, 54 percent, are women. The report also found that 51 percent of school board members are white, 33 percent are African American, 9 percent are Latino and 7 percent are Asian or from other backgrounds.

And in an effort to help urban school systems improve their business operations, the Council is releasing its fourth edition of *Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools*.

First released in 2007, the series of reports gives urban school leaders the opportunity to gauge performance on a range of operational functions in business, finance, human resources and technology using performance indicators developed by the

Council and modeled after those used in the private sector.

School boards and superintendents in big-city school districts will be able to use these indicators and the data gathered on them to assess their own operations; to measure progress on reforms in these areas; and to demonstrate greater transparency to the public. In addition, they will be able to use the highest performing districts to identify best practices.

A fourth report to be released at the conference serves as a guide for urban school administrators and board members to develop an internal communications component to complement effective community outreach and media relations programs.

*Building Public Confidence in Urban Schools: It Begins Inside the District* emphasizes the need to improve internal communications as a way to heighten public support of urban school districts. "If employees don't buy into the school system, how do you expect the public to embrace it?" the report points out.

"With the most credible sources of information about schools coming from teachers, parents, students and other school staff members, it is CRITICAL that school districts develop, fund, implement and evaluate internal communications programs," stresses the guide.

Communications directors in big-city school districts contributed to the development of the guide, a Council Public Relations Executives Network Project.

In addition, under the *No Child Left Behind* Act, public schools must meet Adequate Yearly Progress in reading (language arts) and mathematics.

Since 1982, the U.S. Department of Education has selected more than 6,150 schools to receive the prestigious Blue Ribbon designation.

"This is absolutely fantastic," said Sherwood principal Phyllis Crawford about her school being designated as a Blue Ribbon school. "...Our parents support us in everything we do, and it all meshes together to make one Blue Ribbon school. We feel the public's money couldn't buy a better education than this school."

In addition to Sherwood, big-city schools in Fresno, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Miami, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, Indianapolis, New Orleans, Baltimore, St. Louis, Omaha, Las Vegas, New York City, Newark, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Nashville, Houston, Dallas, Salt Lake City, and Norfolk were named Blue Ribbon Schools.

A school in Florida's School District of Palm Beach County and three in Florida's Broward County Public Schools were also designated. Fresno, San Diego, Miami, Broward County and New York City each had three schools recognized, while Dallas



**Blue Ribbon** *continued on page 5*

**Town Meeting** *continued from page 1*

the Council of the Great City Schools on Oct. 30 in Portland, Ore.

She recently reported on Latinos in America, taking an in-depth look at today's Latino experience on CNN.

O'Brien will lead the 90-minute town meeting being held in conjunction with the Council's 53rd Annual Fall Conference. The panel will include:

- U.S. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Thelma Melendez;
- San Francisco Unified School District Superintendent Carlos Garcia;
- Portland Public Schools board member Dilafruz Williams;
- Denver Public Schools board member Theresa Pena;
- ELL Executive Director Maria Santos of the New York Department of Education; and
- Portland Public Schools 12th-grader Sergio Amador-Garcia.

**Blue Ribbon** *continued from page 4*

and Houston had four schools honored. Los Angeles had five schools recognized.

"These Blue Ribbon Schools have shown that all children can learn with appropriate supports," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at the announcement of the Blue Ribbon Schools. "...They are places where improved teaching and learning benefits every student, and where students are challenged to meet high expectations with the active support of teachers, parents and the community."

## Who Will Receive Urban Education's Top Award?



Richard Green

The envelope, please!

And the winner is... one of 10 school board members nominated for the 20th Annual Richard R. Green Award.

The moment everyone has been waiting for unfolds at a banquet on Oct. 29 as part of the Council of the Great City Schools' Fall Conference in Portland, Ore.

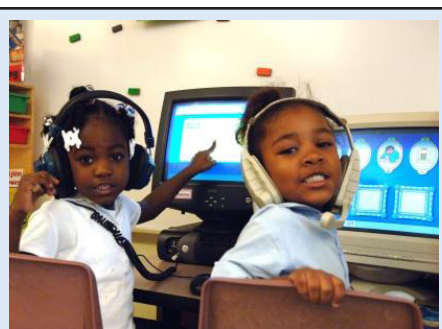
Who will win the nation's top prize for urban school leadership? Will it be school board member:

- Mary Busch of Indianapolis Public Schools;
- Joie Cadle of Orange County Public Schools in Orlando;
- Eileen Cooper Reed of Cincinnati Public Schools;
- Alan Duncan of Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C.;
- Emmett Johnson of Atlanta Public Schools;
- Mary McClure of Providence Public School District;
- Sheila Moulton of Clark County School District;
- Lynn Rogers of Wichita Public Schools;
- Elona Street-Steward of St. Paul Public Schools; or
- Felton Williams of Long Beach Unified School District?

The winner of the award -- named in honor of the first African-American chancellor of the New York City school system and superintendent of Minneapolis school district -- receives a \$10,000 scholarship to give to a student.

Sponsored by the Council, ARAMARK and Voyager Expanded Learning, the leadership prize is presented to an urban school board member and superintendent in alternate years.

In 2008, then-Superintendent Pascal Forgione Jr. of the Austin Independent School District won the prestigious honor.



Students at Adams Elementary in St. Louis use the computer to practice literacy skills as part of the Early Reading First curriculum.

### St. Louis Literacy Program Showing Gains

In 2006, St. Louis Public Schools was awarded a grant through the federal Early Reading First Program to improve early language, literacy and pre-reading development of preschool-age children.

An evaluation of the program during the 2008-2009 school year found that the literacy skills of more than 1,200 prekindergartners improved.

The U.S. Department of Education has established standard measures for evaluating the effectiveness of the program, and St. Louis school students in

**St. Louis** *continued on page 9*



## Duncan, Sharpton, Gingrich Launch Tour In Philadelphia

Eleventh-grader Erica Hall addresses Superintendent Arlene Ackerman of the School District of Philadelphia as, left to right, civil rights leader Al Sharpton, former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-Pa.) look on. Duncan kicked off a four-city education tour with Sharpton and Gingrich in Philadelphia Sept. 29, visiting schools and participating in a roundtable discussion hosted by Ackerman. “Our ongoing reforms in Philadelphia have a shared focus with President Obama’s urgent call for rebuilding the nation’s system of public schools,” said Ackerman. (Photo by Mel Epps)

## Albuquerque Officials Win Council Awards

Helen Fox is the liaison for New Mexico’s Albuquerque Public Schools Title I Homeless Project, where she provides homeless students the tools they need to be successful, ranging from books, clothes and meals to links to health services.

For her efforts, she was recently announced the winner of the 2009 Queen Smith Award. Sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools and Macmillan/McGraw Hill, the award is presented to an urban educator who has made significant contributions to education.

“This prestigious national award couldn’t have gone to a more deserving person,” said Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks. “Helen has spent nearly two decades making sure homeless students not only have the same educational opportunities as other children, but that they are supported in all aspects of their lives.”

Fox will receive her award and a \$2,000 check at the Council’s Annual Fall Conference in Portland, Ore., on Oct. 30.

Fox is not the only Albuquerque official to receive an award from the Council. Tom Ryan, the district’s chief information officer, was presented The Distinguished Service Award at the Council’s Chief Information Officers Conference in Cleveland this past summer.

## Denver, Wichita, Anchorage Enrollments Rise Dramatically

In an effort to provide students with a head start, Denver Public Schools is providing half and full-day preschool and full-day kindergarten programs to more than 80 schools for the 2009-2010 school year. As a result, the school system has posted its largest increase in enrollment since 1962.

According to the *Denver Post*, the district’s enrollment has increased by 2,419 students, the third year the district’s population has increased. Denver school enrollment is now the biggest it has been in 35

years with more than 75,000 students.

In addition to the expansion of preschool programs and full-day kindergarten classes, district officials also attribute the enrollment increase to the opening of several new schools, such as a K-12 creative arts academy.

“The new schools that opened this year are drawing very, very well,” said Denver Public Schools Superintendent Tom Boasberg in the *Post*.

In addition to Denver, Wichita Public

Schools in Kansas has also shown an increase in the number of students enrolled.

The district’s enrollment is 50,042 students, an increase of nearly 900 students more than last year’s enrollment of 49,146. This is the second year in a row the school system has seen a significant increase in its enrollment.

This year’s student population is the highest number of students served in the district in 34 years, with the greatest

**Enrollment Rises** continued on page 7

## Council Contributing To Proposed National Standards

Behind the scenes of the development of national education standards, one would find urban school leaders giving input to the standards development team and standing ready to volunteer to have urban school districts serve as test sites.

Most of the attention on the development of common core state standards has focused on the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, spearheading the drive toward national education standards.

But quietly, the Council of the Great City Schools is contributing to the development of college- and career-readiness standards in English-language arts and mathematics as part of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, led by the state governors and chief state school officers.

"The development of national standards presents our city school districts with an excellent opportunity to raise expectations and improve instruction for our inner-city kids," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

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### **Enrollment Rises** *continued from page 6*

growth occurring in the district's elementary schools. Since 2005, enrollment in elementary schools has increased by more than 1,200 students.

"This is great news and of great importance to the Wichita Public Schools," said Wichita Schools Superintendent John Allison in a news statement. "This demonstrates confidence the community has in public education and the quality education and programs that our district offers."

Denver and Wichita are not the only big-city school districts that have seen a jump in enrollment for the 2009-2010 school year. Alaska's Anchorage School District has also seen its enrollment rise to 49,243 students, an increase of 695 students over last year.

"Urban educators believe that the best way to counter challenges posed by poverty or limited English proficiency is not to lower expectations, but to raise them," he explains. "That is one of the reasons why the Council called for the development of national education standards a few years ago."

The Council was the first group of education officials nationally to endorse common education standards. It had indicated to the states that if they didn't develop national standards, then the Council would.

### **A Panel Formed**

A panel of urban educators, called the National Education Standards Review Committee of the Council of the Great City Schools, gave initial input to the draft core state standards and will continue efforts to fine-tune them.

"Every one of our students deserves the opportunity to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary for college and career success," says Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, who chairs the panel.

"These national standards help raise the bar for schools, educators and students alike, moving us closer to our ultimate goal of closing achievement gaps and putting all of our children on the path to a bright future," she adds.

Casserly also makes the case for national education standards from a global perspective. "The nation cannot expect to raise student performance and remain economically competitive when each state sets its own standards, its own definitions of proficiency and measurement criteria."

(At the Council's Fall Conference in Portland, Ore., it will hold a special common core standards session titled "National Standards: What is the Status and Next Steps for Urban Schools?" on Oct. 29 from 9:15 to 10:30 a.m.)

## National Education Standards Review Committee of the Council of the Great City Schools

**Superintendent Carol Johnson, Chair**  
Boston Public Schools

**Superintendent Carol Comeau**  
Anchorage School District

**Superintendent Beverly Hall**  
Atlanta Public Schools

**Superintendent Tom Boasberg**  
Denver Public Schools

**Superintendent William Andrekopoulos**  
Milwaukee Public School

**Superintendent Yvonne Brandon**  
Richmond (Va.) Public Schools

**Superintendent Carlos Garcia**  
San Francisco Unified School District

**Superintendent Maria Goodloe-Johnson**  
Seattle Public Schools

**Chief Academic Officer Denise Collier**  
Dallas Independent School District

**Chief Academic Officer Chris Dominguez**  
Long Beach Unified School District

**Chief Academic Officer July Elliot**  
Los Angeles Unified School District

**Chief Academic Officer Valeria Silva**  
Saint Paul Public Schools

**Associate Superintendent Katherine Blasik**  
Broward County Public Schools

**Research Director Ritu Khanna**  
San Francisco Unified School District

**Assistant Superintendent Jane Rhyne**  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

**ELL Executive Director Maria Santos**  
New York City Department of Education

**Executive Director Michael Casserly**  
Council of the Great City Schools

**Academic Achievement Director  
Ricki Price-Baugh**  
Council of the Great City Schools

## Boston District Creates Management Institute To Boost Operations

Many big-city school districts have implemented professional development programs for teachers, but Boston Public Schools is taking it one step farther by providing professional development for operations managers.

The school district recently launched the Boston Public Schools (BPS) Management Institute that will provide professional development and establish performance goals for senior and mid-level operations managers.

The program was created to strengthen management skills among central office staff and change how operational services are delivered in the district. Participants will receive formal training and coaching support to learn how to be more effective and efficient managers.

Professional development sessions will cover a range of subjects, including strategy, marketing, performance management and operational effectiveness.

As part of the Institute, each participant will be given a performance challenge to be completed during a 12-week period. The performance challenges are specific work-related goals for each manager that achieves measurable results.

The challenges could include a manager in the information technology department being asked to address and resolve IT requests 20 percent faster within 12 weeks, or a human resources manager could be asked to reduce the number of days to fill job vacancies by 20 percent within three months. Participants will apply classroom learning to achieve their performance challenges with the help of one-on-one and small group meetings with an executive coach.

The Institute was developed in partnership with the District Management Council, a group that provides management advice to public school leaders, and funded by a private donor. Each cohort of the BPS Management Institute will run for three months and enroll 25 managers.

The first year of the program will involve managers from the district's operations and finance divisions, such as human resources, budget, technology and transportation. The district plans to eventually expand the programs to other departments.

Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson said the Management Institute is designed to ensure that central offices provide top-notch service to schools and families, enabling resources to be directed to classroom instruction and student achievement.

"This program will help our operations leaders improve their managerial skills and be held accountable for results within specific performance targets," said Johnson.

## Past Council Conference Sparks Idea for Tampa Teacher Program

In 2006, MaryEllen Elia, superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Fla., and Susan King, the district's supervisor of magnet schools and programs, attended the Council of the Great City Schools Annual Fall Conference in San Diego.

They went to a presentation on the Urban Teacher Academy program that Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., had developed in 2000. The program was created to develop, hire and retain high-quality teachers committed to teaching in urban schools.

Elia and King were so impressed by the program that they decided to create their own academy.

Hillsborough's Urban Teaching Academy is the district's newest magnet program

**Teacher Program** continued on page 12

## Austin School District Ranks Among EPA's Best in 'Green Power'

Texas' Austin Independent School District is one of the largest purchasers of green power among government organizations, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The EPA recently released its Top 20 "Green Power" list, which names the largest purchasers of green power among government entities. The Austin school system placed eighth and was the only school district on the list.

Green power is electricity from environmentally preferable renewable resources such as solar and wind. Green power purchases help reduce the environmental impacts of electrical use and accelerate renewable energy development in the nation.

Since October 2003, the Austin school district has purchased 65.64 million kilowatt-hours of green power, accounting for approximately 40 percent of all of its electric power needs. It is enough to power 5,386 homes year-round.

"AISD believes in being good stewards of our resources," said Austin Schools Superintendent Meria Carstarphen. "It is also important for our students that we set an example of respect and responsibility to the environment."

The Green Power Partnership is an EPA voluntary program working to standardize green power procurement as part of best-practice environmental management. Partners in the program pledge to switch to green power for a portion of their electricity needs in return for EPA technical assistance and recognition.





## Jacksonville Student Makes Mark in Medicine

At age 14, a Jacksonville, Fla., student developed a medical technique that now has him working on a project with CNN chief medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta.

Tony Hansberry II is a student at Darnell-Cookman School of the Medical Arts, believed to be first magnet school in the nation to develop an integrated medical curriculum for grades 6-12.

Last year, the ninth-grader presented his research before physicians and scholars during a Medical Education Week program hosted by the University of Florida College of Medicine-Jacksonville, which



Tony Hansberry explains his discovery to Duval County Public Schools Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals at a medical education program last year in Jacksonville.

has a partnership with the school.

He developed a technique that reduces surgical time for minimally invasive hysterectomies.

**Jacksonville Student** continued on page 12

## U. of Phoenix Pledges Support to the Council In Concert Tour

Singer/songwriter Kate Voegelé kicked off a 30-city concert tour Oct. 7 in Cleveland that will benefit the Council of the Great City Schools in a “Support of Public Schools” promotion inspired by the University of Phoenix.

The university is pledging a contribution of up to \$50,000 to the Council through a social networking venture by tapping support from fans during the concert tour that ends Nov. 15 in Chicago.

The singer will encourage fans at her concerts to send a text message supporting K-12 public education or pledge their commitment to life-long education. Each text will result in a \$1 donation by the University of Phoenix to the Council – up to \$50,000.

The young vocalist is a spokesperson for the university, where she has been a student pursuing a baccalaureate degree in psychology since 2008 through the school’s online campus.

The university tapped the singer, who has also appeared on the CW television network drama “One Tree Hill,” for a campaign to promote higher education, featuring her as a good example of how someone can balance education with a professional career.

She is also partnering with the university to benefit K-12 public education by supporting the Council.

**St. Louis** continued from page 5

the program have met or exceeded those standards in a variety of measurements.

One of the federal standards calls for 83 percent of students to know 20 or more upper-case letters. In St. Louis, 91 percent of students achieved this feat.

“I feel that we are providing the academic foundation for the most important population in society: the young child,” said Nancy Frailey, project manager of the district’s Early Reading First program.



## Noted Dallas Student Appears on NBC’s Today

Dalton Sherman, who last year at age 10 addressed 17,000 Dallas school system employees to open the school year, gets a hug from correspondent Jenna Bush Hager during a break from a taping of the *Today* show. The former president’s daughter interviewed Dalton and his family for the morning show’s Sept. 18 broadcast. The celebrity student has appeared on the *Oprah* and *Ellen* shows, and has delivered speeches throughout the nation.

# Unnecessary Barriers to Reform

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

Closing achievement gaps and turning around persistently low-achieving schools are top items on the national education agenda. Urban school officials face huge challenges to overcome the damaging effects of poverty, inadequate resources and facilities, and the limited supply of exceptional instructional leaders. The infusion of nearly \$100 billion in federal education “stimulus” aid over the next several years holds the promise of mitigating some of the effects of the faltering economy and underwriting important new education initiatives. Implementing the needed reforms, however, continues to be complicated by equally persistent barriers in intergovernmental relationships.



A recent memorandum from the Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Education warns that some states were using the flexibility provided in the federal stimulus package to cut state education funding below levels otherwise necessary, and using the State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (SFSF) of the stimulus package to replace those state funds. The Inspector General cited three states (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania), in particular, where these additional cuts to state education funds were occurring.

Prophetically, urban school superintendents in numerous other states warned of this financial “shell game” at the state level even before the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was finalized. Congress was alerted to this potential, but struggled to craft the SFSF grants in a way that would help states backfill their widely varying revenue losses and prevent them from gaming the flexibility that was granted. In order to help those states hit hardest by the recession, the legislation set a basic maintenance-of-effort requirement at the 2006 education funding level with waivers allowed for deeper cutbacks on a case-by-case basis. For states with less revenue losses, the SFSF grants were expected to provide a boost in education funding despite the economic downturn. Unfortunately, some states viewed this flexibility as an opportunity to avoid cuts in other areas of their budgets, reduce state education spending to 2006 levels, and supplant those state education funds with federal stimulus grants.

Since there was nothing in the legislation that expressly prevented states from engaging in this practice, Secretary Duncan used the bully pulpit to suggest that future federal funding under “Race To The Top” and other grants might

be withheld to states that disproportionately cut education funding. The Inspector General sounded a similar alert in late September by suggesting that “reducing state funding for education and replacing it with SFSF funds ... could adversely affect the achievement of the education reform objectives of the program.”

Moreover, as local school officials rolled out their stimulus-funded categorical programs, particularly the \$10 billion in Title I grants, restrictive interpretations by state departments of education often prevented reform activities in Title I schools. Some of the inaccurate state-level interpretations, such as prohibiting extended-day programs, were corrected quickly. But many others were not. Such inaccurate interpretations of the law as prohibiting district-reserved funds for broader systemic reforms and school-improvement initiatives in Title I schools could not be reversed in a number of states before the start of the school year. The U.S. Department of Education’s September Title I Guidance clarified that such reform efforts were allowable, but the guidance was issued too late to support a number of city reform initiatives in the first school year of the two-year stimulus program.

State efforts to supplant state education funds with federal funds are nothing new. And, restrictive or inaccurate state interpretations of federal requirements are a common occurrence in federal grants that are passed through the states. Unfortunately, the ability of school districts to address local educational needs or to innovate in ways that many were encouraging us to do were thwarted as a result.

Greater congressional attention to crafting anti-supplanting provisions by the states seems warranted. And resurrecting the 1988 “response to inquiries” provision requiring a 90-day response from the U.S. Department of Education to school district questions might go a long way to resolving issues of interpretation in a timely manner.

These patterns of federal-state-local interactions will continue to delay and at times deprive students of the benefits of the stimulus funding and the stifle efforts at reform that urban school districts want and need. With \$8 billion in additional national and state pass-through grants about to come available under Race to the Top, the Innovation Fund, and School Improvement Grants, it is important to get this right and right in a timely manner.

## Council Launches National Ad

“The fabric of our nation is woven by our great city schools.”

That’s the message in a national advocacy advertisement by the Council of the Great City Schools that ran in September in *USA TODAY*.

The half-page ad asked the question: “Did you know that urban schools are improving dramatically?” It then gives a few

examples of improvements in the nation’s big-city school districts.

The ad (below) is available for Council school districts to publish in their own in-house publications as well as in their respective local newspapers. And the Council is now considering running the ad in other national publications.

The opportunity to publish the ad in

“The Nation’s Newspaper” came about from USA TODAY Education joining the Council’s Blue Ribbon Corporate Advisory Group. The newspaper’s education division provides resources to enhance student learning.

To receive more “Did You Know” information about urban schools, access the Council’s web site at [www.cgcs.org](http://www.cgcs.org).



*The fabric of our nation is woven by our great city schools*

Did you know that urban public schools are improving dramatically? Math achievement has jumped 40% over the last several years and reading has increased 30%. Urban public schools now have the highest numbers of National Board Certified Teachers in the nation. And half of the country’s top performing public high schools are now in our major cities. Our Great City Schools are working hard to provide America with its next generation of leaders.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE IMPROVEMENT OF OUR URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS. [WWW.CGCS.ORG](http://WWW.CGCS.ORG)





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**Jacksonville Student** *continued from page 9*

“I always had a passion for medicine,” he said in an interview with BlackAmericaWeb.com. “The project I did was basically the comparison of novel laparoscopic instruments in doing a hysterectomy repair.”

**“I just want to help people..., knowing that I can save lives.”**

—Tony Hansberry II

The idea of the procedure developed last summer when Hansberry interned at the university’s Center for Simulation Education and Safety Research at Shands Hospital in Jacksonville.

His project won second place in the grade 9-12 division at a regional science fair last February.

“I just want to help people and be respected, knowing that I can save lives,” said the son of a church pastor.

He reportedly plans to become a neurosurgeon.

**Teacher Program** *continued from page 8*

for students who want to become teachers at a big-city school.

The rigorous, four-year curriculum is based on effective teaching strategies used by master teachers.

Students get the opportunity to work closely with veteran teachers and get hands-on teaching experience in urban school classrooms. They also receive academic counseling and visit area college campuses.

“I had a great experience,” said one program participant about her first classroom teaching experience. “I kept the students on track, they participated, we had fun and their teacher was pleased.”

Students who successfully complete the program will receive a college scholarship, funded through the Hillsborough Education Foundation.

When students finish their college coursework, they are guaranteed a teaching job at a Hillsborough County school.

**Great City Grads**



**Janet Napolitano**

**Secretary of U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

**1975 graduate**

**Sandia High School**

**Albuquerque Public Schools**