



- Columbus Chief to Retire, p.3
- Urban Ed's Top Prize, p.5
- New Program in Wichita p.9

Special Ed. Lawsuit Settled in Baltimore

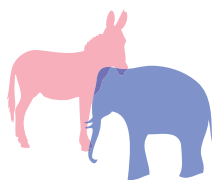
Baltimore City Schools has substantially improved services it offers students with disabilities, resulting in the school district settling one of the nation's longest-standing special education lawsuits.

In 1984, a federal lawsuit, *Vaughn G. et al. v. the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore*, was filed by the Maryland Disability Law Center over the school system's failure to meet the needs of, and deliver adequate services to students with disabilities, who comprised approximately 15 percent of the student population. The case resulted in a consent decree in 2000 that laid out the obligations the school system had to meet to end the case, such as ensuring special-education students were receiving timely assessments to create an individualized education plan that is required under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

By 2010, the district had made significant progress in educating students with disabilities and entered into an agreement to end 26 years of federal oversight of its special education services, which went into effect last month.

Baltimore Lawsuit continued on page 7

Presidential Election And Education



Where do President Obama and presidential candidate Mitt Romney stand on education? See page 7.

National Town Hall Meeting To Focus on Student Bullying

Student bullying will be the center of discussion Oct. 19 when the Council of the Great City Schools holds a National Town Hall Meeting on the pressing issue in conjunction with its 56th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 17-21, in Indianapolis.

Virginia Edwards, editor-in-chief of *Education Week*, will moderate the town meeting on *How to Prevent Student Bullying*, which will feature on the panel:

- Superintendent Richard Carranza of the San Francisco Unified School District;
- David Esquith, director, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, U.S. Department of Education;
- Stephanie Gatewood, school board member, Memphis City Schools;
- Markell Pipkins, a 10th-grade student leader in the Indianapolis Public Schools; and
- Ronald Stephens, executive director, National School Safety Center.

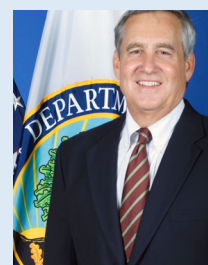
The 90-minute town meeting, scheduled 2:30 to 4 p.m., Eastern Time, from the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown hotel, will be streamed live at <http://www.ustream.tv/cgcstownhall>.



Virginia Edwards



Richard Carranza



David Esquith



Stephanie Gatewood



Markell Pipkins



Ronald Stephens

Education Secretary Names Blue Ribbon Schools

McKinley Technology High School is one of five highly specialized schools in the District of Columbia school system. In 2005, McKinley Tech students were only 38 percent proficient in math and reading. In 2012, they have raised the bar to 90 percent.

This significant progress in improving student academic achievement is one of the reasons the school was recently honored by the U.S. Department of Education.

McKinley Tech was one of 269 public and private schools in the nation to receive a 2012 National Blue Ribbon Award. The honor was awarded based on overall academic excellence, or for making significant improvements in student academic achievement.

“Our nation has no greater responsibility than helping all children realize their full potential,” U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in a press release.

“Schools honored with the National Blue Ribbon Schools award are committed to accelerating student achievement and preparing students for success in college and careers. Their work reflects the conviction that every child has promise



Houston Independent School District board member Juliet Stipeche helps hand out ice cream at Houston’s East Early College High School. The school held an ice cream party to celebrate being selected as a 2012 National Blue Ribbon school.

and that education is the surest pathway to a strong, secure future.”

In addition to McKinley Tech in Washington, D.C., big-city schools in Austin, Boston, Chicago, Charlotte, Dallas, Denver, Baton Rouge, La., Greens-

boro, N.C., Houston, Clark County, Nev., Little Rock, New York City, Oklahoma City and Shreveport, La., were named Blue Ribbon Schools.

Chicago, Houston, Greensboro and
Blue Ribbon *continued on page 3*



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Columbus Superintendent Announces Retirement After Nearly 12 Years

Garfield Elementary School in Columbus, Ohio, holds a special place in the heart of Gene Harris, the superintendent of Columbus City Schools. She started kindergarten at the school, and years later Garfield was where the Columbus Board of Education announced her selection as the district's 19th superintendent.

So, it is only fitting that Harris was back at the school recently to announce she will retire from the district in July 2013. Harris has been at the helm of the 50,000-student school system since 2001, longer than any other urban superintendent in Ohio. Her almost 12-year tenure is also substantially higher than the average tenure of 3.64 years for an urban school district superintendent, according to a report by the Council of the Great City Schools.

A graduate of the Columbus school system, Harris began her career teaching English and drama at Columbus' Everett Junior High School. She rose through the ranks, serving as assistant principal, principal and deputy superintendent in 2000,

Blue Ribbon *continued from page 2*

Shreveport each had two schools recognized, while New York had three schools awarded.

Schools selected for Blue Ribbon distinction are recognized in one of two performance categories: Exemplary High Performing and Exemplary Improving schools. Exemplary High Schools are recognized among their state's highest performing schools, as measured by state assessments, and Exemplary Improving Schools have at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that greatly improved student performance to high levels on state tests.

To celebrate their achievement, each school will be honored Nov. 12-13 in Washington, D.C. at an awards ceremony.



Columbus Schools Superintendent Gene Harris holds a press conference to announce she will retire from the school district next year.

before taking the top job in 2001.

Under her leadership, the number of schools earning an academic rating of "A" or "B" on the State of Ohio Report Card increased from 15 in 2004 to 29 in 2011, and the Virtual High Program was created to enable students to earn high school credits online.

In addition, Harris was instrumental in developing the Higher Education Partnership with eight local colleges to create programs to increase student achievement and college readiness. The district has also rebuilt or renovated 39 high schools and built a new international high school, as well as created two gender-based middle schools and several science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) focused schools.

In announcing her retirement, Harris cited her commitment to students as an inspiration for her years of service. "I'm honored to have served our students and district for 37 years, 35 as part of the Columbus City Schools," said Harris. It has meant the world to me."

Never one to rest on her laurels, in the coming year Harris said she will focus on increasing engagement between the schools and the community, citing statistics that show more than 80 percent of the student population lives in poverty.

"Getting every element of the community involved is important, because schools can't do it alone," said Harris.

L.A. Reaches Principal Agreement

The nation's second largest school district is implementing a new system that will use student achievement data to evaluate principals and assistant principals.

The use of student data was part of what district officials call an "historic agreement," reached with the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA).

Under the one-year agreement, school-wide, grade-level and departmental student achievement data will be used to measure the effectiveness of principals and assistant principals. The agreement also calls for the use of other student data to evaluate administrators such as attendance rates, how rapidly students learn English, graduation rates and enrollment and passage rates in Advanced Placement courses.

Los Angeles Schools Superintendent John Deasy believes the agreement reached with AALA will greatly help improve the quality of education in every school. "This significant agreement allows for more complete use of student performance data as one component of a multiple measure approach in the evaluation of administrators," said Deasy.

Chicago Strike Ends

The Los Angeles school system was not the only big-city school district to reach an agreement with its educators.

Teachers in Chicago Public Schools called off a seven-day strike last month that delayed the opening of schools after reaching a tentative agreement with the nation's third largest school district.

The agreement calls for a longer school day for students, teachers to receive annual raises, and the use of student test scores to evaluate teachers, who would be ranked into four categories, with teachers in the lowest category facing dismissal if they didn't improve.

Study Finds Use of Data Linked to Student Achievement

Researchers at the Council of the Great City Schools and the American Institutes for Research recently released a new study that found some aspects of the use of classroom- and school-level benchmark assessment data related to improvements in student achievement.

The new study – *Charting Success: Data Use and Student Achievement in Urban Schools* – suggests that the use of what is called interim assessment data to modify classroom instruction and inform school-wide policies and practices is significantly related to higher student achievement in some grades and subjects.

A significant increase in data availability in recent years provides educators the opportunity to base decisions about academic instruction on student achievement data. Despite the increased opportunities for data-driven decision making in teaching and learning, little is known about how teachers and principals actually use student-performance data to improve instruction and whether and how data use is linked with higher student achievement.

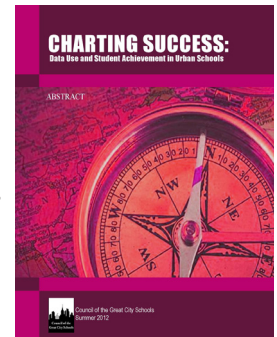
The research, supported by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is believed to be the largest study of its kind on the use of interim assessment data, and the first major study to find a significant correlation between teacher and principal data use and student achievement on state assessments.

“The findings suggest that schools’ use of regular benchmark, or interim, assessments to inform classroom instruction can improve student outcomes,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, one of the authors of the study.

Specifically, the research defined and measured key dimensions of data use and revealed that the more teachers and principals review, analyze and instructionally respond to student data, the higher their students’ achievement on end-of-year state assessments in some grades and subjects. School-level supports for data use – including having appropriate data infrastructure, adequate time to review and discuss data, and professional development – were also linked with student achievement at the elementary and middle-school levels.

“The study is an exciting first step that documents the link between data use in classrooms and schools and improved student achievement in four urban districts,” says Ann-Marie Faria of the American

Data Study continued on page 6



Students from Milwaukee Public Schools and three other Wisconsin students signed scholarship offers to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta. Milwaukee Schools Superintendent Gregory Thornton, pictured left in the back row, attended the signing.

Milwaukee Partnership Sends Students To Black Male College

Milwaukee Public Schools and Morehouse College, a historically black college in Atlanta, have partnered together to provide \$800,000 in academic scholarships to 10 Wisconsin African American males.

Each of the students received a \$25,000 scholarship to attend Morehouse College, the nation’s largest private liberal arts college for men and the alma mater of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A total of 10 black male students—seven from Milwaukee Public Schools and three from other schools in Wisconsin—received scholarships. They compose the largest-ever group of Wisconsin students to attend Morehouse.

Many of the students used the district’s new College Access Center to assist them in completing their college applications to Morehouse College.

“We’re creating a pathway for student success that runs through our schools and one of the nation’s most renowned institutions of higher education,” Milwaukee Schools Superintendent Gregory Thornton said. “It’s an honor to partner with Morehouse.”

The scholarships were funded with the help of several local donors, including Wisconsin Energy Foundation and the United Negro College Fund. Former baseball great Hank Aaron and his wife were also instrumental in helping the students secure scholarships.



John Allison



Andrés Alonso



Winston Brooks



Alberto Carvalho



Kriner Cash



MaryEllen Elia



Terry Grier



Eric Gordon



Carol Johnson



Eugene White

10 Finalists Named for Top Award in Urban Education Leadership

Ten big-city school superintendents have been nominated for the 2012 Richard R. Green Award, the nation's top prize in urban education leadership.

Anticipation will be in the air on the evening of Oct. 18 at the Council of the Great City Schools' 23rd Annual Richard R. Green Award Banquet in the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown hotel. The candidates are superintendents:

- John Allison of Wichita Public School;
- Andrés Alonso of Baltimore City Public Schools;
- Winston Brooks of Albuquerque Public Schools;
- Alberto Carvalho of Miami-Dade County Public Schools;
- Kriner Cash of Memphis City Schools;
- MaryEllen Elia of Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Fla.;
- Terry Grier of the Houston Independent School District;
- Eric Gordon of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District;
- Carol Johnson of Boston Public Schools; and
- Eugene White of Indianapolis Public Schools.

And now the time has come. Envelope, please! And the winner is....

It won't be realized until the banquet, which is part of the Council's 56th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 17-21, in Indianapolis.

Sponsored by the Council, ARA-MARK Education and Cambium Learning Group/Voyager, the Richard R. Green Award is the namesake of the first African American chancellor of the New York City school system and superintendent of the Minneapolis school district.

The award recognizes the urban education leader of the year, and is presented to a superintendent and board member in alternative years. The winner receives a \$10,000 scholarship to present to a student.

Last year's awardee was Candy Olson, a board member of the Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, who chairs the Council's Board of Directors this year.

Fresno Couple Offers Scholarships in Memory of Son

Students at one middle school in Fresno, Calif., now have even more incentive to do well in school, with the recent announcement that they could earn a scholarship toward college.

A local couple recently promised students entering seventh grade at Tehipite

Middle School that if they graduate from high school with at least a 3.0 grade-point-average (GPA), they could earn a \$1,000 scholarship for each of two years toward tuition at Fresno City College. The scholarship covers a full year at the community college. Students can also use the money to

attend an accredited four-year college.

The scholarship program was established by Fresno community leaders Francine and Murray Farber in memory of their son Steven, who died unexpectedly 11 years ago at the age of 42. The million-dollar endowment fund to be used for the scholarships will come from their son's estate. He had a successful high-tech career in Silicon Valley.

The program, known as "Steve's Scholars," will be implemented this year and participating students will tour college campuses, meet local professionals and take courses for career development. In addition to a 3.0 GPA, students must maintain a 95 percent attendance record and participate in community service activities annually to be eligible for the scholarship. And students who move from Tehipite and enroll at other district middle and high schools will still be eligible.

Tehipite was selected because the school is the focus of improvements from a number of local agencies, including the City of Fresno.

The Farbers hope the scholarship program will encourage business and community leaders to develop similar programs to motivate students to do well in school.

"We know Steve would have liked this project," said the Farbers during a recent assembly that was held at the school for seventh graders to learn about the program. "...He had donated to other educational causes during his lifetime and was interested in helping those who were in the most dire circumstances."



Murray and Francine Farber pose with Tehipite Middle School principal Yvonne Zysling (center) and a group of students from the school. Photo Credit: Anthony Bernard

Data Study continued from page 4

Institutes for Research and lead author of the study's report. "This research provides evidence – as previous studies suggested – that simply supplying teachers with data is not enough. Rather, teachers who are more engaged in the data-use process, including spending time with their students' data and modifying their instruction in response, are the ones who see better academic outcomes for their students."

Charting Success is important new research because of the lack of such large-scale studies examining the relationship between the use of benchmark, or interim, assessments, instructional changes and actual improvements in student academic outcomes. And the ramifications are substantial because of the dollar resources that school districts nationwide devote to these assessments. Up to this point, it was not clear that such investments paid any dividends.

Study of Teachers, Principals

The three-year study analyzes the use of interim assessment data by more than 1,500 school teachers and 150 principals of some 90,000 students across four major urban school districts in as many states.

Researchers examined key dimensions of data use and student achievement in two major content areas – reading and mathematics – and two grade levels – elementary and middle – in which interim assessments are most often used. They measured four key dimensions of interim assessment data use – context of data culture, supports for data use, working with data, and instructional responses.

The study found that teachers' general data use based on the four key dimensions was related to student achievement in elementary-grades reading and middle-grades mathematics—the two areas where urban schools are improving the most nationally.

"Our results indicate that teachers' review of data and subsequent instructional responses were the data-related practices and perceptions most strongly linked to improved student achievement and can be a focus for intervention and improvement," the study's authors stress.

In examining school principals in the study, their general data use was also related to student achievement in middle-grades mathematics. There was no relationship in middle-grades reading and elementary-grades math and reading, but principals' direct work with data and school-level instructional responses were positively related to students' math scores in the elementary grades, and their perceptions of supports for data use were positively related to achievement in both elementary reading and mathematics.

The study suggests that data use by principals, particularly in elementary school, may be as important as teacher data use.

"Findings in this study have implications for data use policies and practices in urban school districts, which is very important as the nation moves toward the Common Core State Standards and the assessment systems that will accompany them," the Council's Casserly emphasizes.

The report can be downloaded at www.cgcs.org.

Baltimore Lawsuit *continued from page 1*

According to the *Baltimore Sun*, over five school years through 2011, the district's graduation rate for students with disabilities increased 31 percent, dropout rates for students in special education decreased by nearly 51 percent, suspensions for students with disabilities declined 25 percent and the number of students with disabilities who improved in reading and math increased by 53 percent. In addition, the number of students in special education being taught in classrooms with the general population increased 40 percent.

Baltimore City Schools CEO Andrés Alonso said the settlement reflects the hard work of so many people over such a long period of time, including staff, the parties of the lawsuit who have worked with the school district and "our students who have made major gains and shown what they can do when we, the adults, get things right."

Alonso and district officials have said that even though the lawsuit has ended, the school system will continue to provide special education students with a quality education.

"While we got much better as a result of *Vaughn G.*, there is still much work to do to continue to ensure excellent services and supports to our students with disabilities," said Alonso.

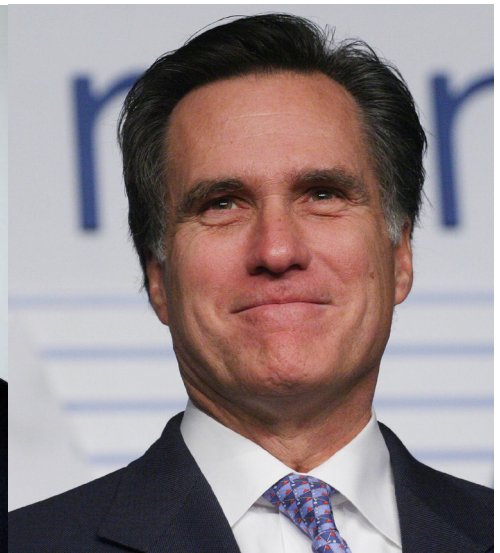
Urban Districts Make 100 Best Communities List

In an effort to improve educational opportunities, New York City has developed a number of after-school programs. As a result, America's Promise Alliance recently included the city on its list of 100 Best Communities for Young People.

In addition to New York City, Anchorage, Charleston, S.C., Cincinnati, Jackson, Miss., Miami-Dade, Nashville, Oklahoma City, Portland, Ore., Providence and Tampa's Hillsborough County made the list, which spotlights communities that demonstrate a commitment to improving the lives of youth through programs and services.



Barack Obama on Education



Mitt Romney's Education Plans

Where Do They Stand on Education?

President Obama believes his administration has implemented several initiatives to strengthen public education for students.

- Launched Race to the Top (RTT) initiative, offering bold incentives to states willing to spur systemic reform to improve teaching and learning. Last year, RTT launched at the school district level.
- Signed the Education Jobs Bill into law that provided states \$10 billion in emergency funding to keep approximately 130,000 educators in the classroom.
- Provided states flexibility within *No Child Left Behind* to pursue comprehensive plans to improve educational outcomes for all students.
- Expanded and strengthened Head Start and Early Head Start to reach an additional 64,000 children.
- Proposed a \$30 billion investment in modernizing the nation's schools.
- Proposed to double the funding for parent engagement to a total of \$270 million, while also enhancing information and transparency in school report cards about academic performance and school climate for parents.

As president, Mitt Romney has said he would pursue education reform that provides a chance for every child. Here are his proposals to improve education:

- Allow low-income and special needs students to choose which school to attend by making Title I and Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds portable.
- Provide incentives for states to increase choices for parents and develop quality alternatives.
- Build on the success of effective charter and digital schools.
- Expand the Washington, D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program to serve as a model for the nation.
- Reform *No Child Left Behind* by emphasizing transparency and responsibility for results.
- Attract and reward great teachers through increased flexibility and block grants.
- Eliminate unnecessary certification requirements that discourage new teachers.

Dallas School Among Top Winners In Intel Math, Science Contest

The School of Science/Engineering Magnet (SEM) in Dallas has a 100 percent graduation rate, the highest number of African American and Hispanic students who passed Advanced Placement Calculus exams in the nation during the past three years, and boasts an impressive 100 percent of its students who have demonstrated proficiency in math since 2007.

As a result, the school was recently honored as an Intel School of Distinction, netting the top award for high school mathematics. The 2012 Intel School of Distinction Award program recognizes schools that demonstrate excellence in math and science education through innovative teaching and learning environments.

Sponsored by the Intel Corporation, the program spotlights six schools—two elementary, two middle and two high schools—that have developed an environ-

ment and curricula that meet or exceed benchmarks put forth by national mathematics and science content standards.

At SEM, the study of mathematics has proven to be the cornerstone for academic success. Freshman students attend a pre-high school boot camp in order to prepare for the rigorous math content that is integrated throughout the school's fast-track STEM curricula.

As a winner of the Intel School of Distinction, SEM will receive an estimated \$75,000 in combination of cash grants and an award package including curriculum materials, professional development resources and hardware and software.

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.

Urban Educators Win Yale Award



Chand Desai

Chand Desai holds a Ph.D. in biology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was an assistant professor at Vanderbilt University Medical Center before he left to become a science teacher at Martin Luther King Academic Magnet in Nashville. Chand has left a lasting impression on his students, including last year's class salutatorian Jiahe Gu, who nominated Desai for the 2012 Yale University Educator Award, recently announced.

The Yale Educator Recognition Program honored 50 teachers and 40 counselors from around the world who support and inspire their students to achieve at high levels. Matriculating Yale students are

Yale Award continued on page 9

Two Superintendents Settle Friendly Wager

Last June, Miami-Dade Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho made a friendly wager with Oklahoma City Public Schools Superintendent Karl Springer on the outcome of the NBA championship between the Miami Heat and Oklahoma City Thunder basketball teams.

The Miami Heat won the championship in five games and Miami schools superintendent recently had the pleasure of collecting on his bet.

As the loser of the wager, Springer donned a Miami Heat jersey and taught a class on the history of Miami to kindergarten students at Oklahoma City's North Highland Elementary School.

Carvalho was actually able to follow the simulcast from his office and even helped teach the class.

The kindergarten class learned about the Everglades, alligators, the state bird, the mockingbird, and their favorite topic--Mickey Mouse and Disney.



Miami's Alberto Carvalho



Oklahoma City's Karl Springer



Approximately 70 students from Wichita's Brooks Technology and Arts Magnet Middle School will participate in the Airbus Flying Challenge.

Airbus Engineers Mentor Wichita Students

Last year, aircraft manufacturer Airbus launched a pilot program in a middle school in France to improve students' academic performance in science and math by providing them with strong mentoring and tutoring relationships. Now students in Wichita, Kansas, will have the opportunity to participate in the same program.

The Airbus Flying Challenge program will pair approximately 70 students from Wichita's Brooks Technology and Arts Magnet Middle School with 48 Airbus engineers and 18 engineering students from Wichita State University. The partnership will encourage students to learn about careers in aviation and to see how math, science and engineering can be used in their daily lives.

The students will meet with their mentors at school during lunch periods for 40-minute mentoring sessions as well as attend field trips. At the end of the school year, students who complete the program will fly in an airplane with their mentor.

Students met with their mentors for

the first time at the program's launch event held last month. "I'm excited about how they will be able to help us," said seventh-grade student Kamryn Grant. "Interacting with them is a lot more exciting than looking at a textbook."

And the students are not the only ones who hope to get something out of the program.

"I hope to get more girls interested in science and math," said Rosemary Lesser, an Airbus engineer. "I am also excited about what the students can teach me. This is a fun group of kids."

The Airbus Flying Challenge program is a partnership among the Brooks school, Airbus, the United Way, Communities in Schools and Wichita State University.

Wichita Schools Superintendent John Allison said the district is very appreciative of Airbus and United Way spearheading this partnership.

"It's not typical of a company to establish a partnership of this scope with a school. This will have an impact on our stu-

dents for not only this year, but for years to come."

Airbus gave the United Way \$250,000 to sponsor the program for the first time in the United States, after the pilot launched in Toulouse, France, Airbus' headquarters, proved to be such a success. Next year, Airbus plans to expand the program to Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Yale Award *continued from page 8*

invited to nominate high school educators, and a committee composed of Yale admission officers review the nominations.

In addition to Desai, big-city teachers from Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Atlanta, New York City, Seattle and Tampa, Fla., were selected as 2012 recipients of the Yale University Educator Award.

The big-city teachers who won the award were among 274 nominees, who represented 33 states and 12 countries.

Former Seattle School Board Member Honored

Cheryl Chow, a former school board president for Seattle Public Schools, was recently honored for her commitment and the many contributions she has made to benefit children in the Seattle school district over the past 40 years.

The school board issued a proclamation honoring Chow, who began her career with the Seattle school district as a teacher at Hamilton Junior High School in 1970. Throughout the years, she held various positions with the school system, including assistant principal, principal, administrative supervisor for middle schools and area director.

She retired from the school district in 2001, but in 2005 she was elected to serve on the Seattle school board. Chow was not only a member of the school board for four years, but was board president for two of those years.

In addition to being a school board member, Chow also served on the Seattle City Council and was a leader of the Girl Scouts as well as a youth basketball coach.

“Her reputation precedes her and the work she has done on behalf of our students throughout the city is greatly appreciated,” said board member Sherry Carr, who served on the board with Chow for two years.

During the proclamation ceremony, Chow, who is battling brain cancer, thanked her family and school board members for their service and urged the community to support Seattle Public Schools.

“I want to thank the citizens who come to these meetings, and I encourage you to look at the positive, and get in there and get on a committee and help these hard working people out,” said Chow.

New Program in D.C. To ‘LIFT’ Teachers

The District of Columbia Public Schools in the nation’s capital recently announced a new initiative to boost teachers up the career ladder by creating a system to recognize and retain great teachers.

The five-stage career ladder, known as Leadership Initiative for Teachers, or LIFT, is the first such comprehensive teacher career advancement system established in an urban public school system, according to district officials.

LIFT has five career stages which progress from teacher to established teacher, advanced teacher, distinguished teacher and ultimately an expert teacher. Advancement includes eligibility for additional compensation, increased leadership and career opportunities without leaving the classroom and the chance to help recruit and select new teachers for the school system.

Teachers’ annual performance evaluations under the evaluation system known as IMPACT will determine how a teacher moves up the ladder.

District of Columbia Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson said the district demands excellence from its teachers and works hard to honor and recognize them as professionals. “LIFT takes that one step further, making career advancement, a standard practice in every other profession, a reality for DCPS teachers,” said Henderson.

More than 300 teachers participated in the development of LIFT last year.



Former Seattle school board member Cheryl Chow speaks at a ceremony honoring her years of service.

Big-City School Districts Receive Federal Teacher Grants

The U.S. Department of Education awarded 10 big-city urban school systems with its Teacher Incentive Fund Grants. Totalling \$290 million, the five-year grant supports efforts to attract, retain and reward quality teaching professionals in high poverty schools.

The urban school districts are among 35 grant recipients encouraged to develop and implement innovative performance-

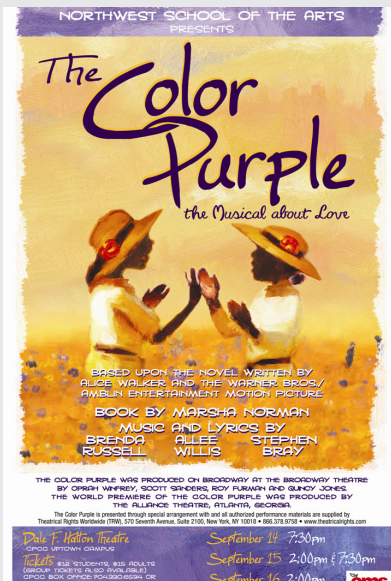
based compensation systems for teachers and principals. The goal of the new compensation system is to broaden professional opportunities for high performing teachers both monetarily and through increased leadership.

Big-city school districts in Charleston S.C., Houston, Denver, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Miami, New York City, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale and Orlando re-

ceived grants.

The Houston Independent School District will use its grant to recruit more science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) teachers, while South Carolina’s Charleston County School District will use its grant to improve pay structures, reward great teachers and principals and provide greater professional opportunities to teachers in high-poverty schools.

Charlotte Students Stage *Color Purple* Musical



Oprah Winfrey's Broadway musical *The Color Purple* has been performed at only two high schools in the nation, and one of those schools is Northwest School of the Arts in Charlotte, N.C.

The school recently performed three shows of the musical adaptation of Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Color Purple*, a family saga that follows the life of Celie, a poor southern black woman, through her trials and triumphs. The school received permission to perform the fully staged production from the Theatrical Rights Worldwide Group, which licenses productions of touring and Off-Broadway shows.

Last spring, more than 80 students auditioned for the seven lead roles and 27 supporting roles that make up *The Color Purple*. Students began rehearsing during the summer, putting in nearly 40 hours a week at school and practicing hours more at home.

The total cost of the play, including renting the theatre at Central Piedmont Community College, to transporting the Broadway set to Charlotte, cost more than \$33,000. But Corey Mitchell, the show's director and a Northwest teacher, told television station *Fox Charlotte* that the cost was worth it.

"What we're doing is the closest thing to a professional show you'll ever see from a high school cast-- from the production design, to the costumes, to the musicians," said Mitchell.

Keston Steele, a junior, was chosen to perform the lead role of Celie. "I feel excited, but overwhelmed," she said during rehearsals. "Everything my parents have taught me about working hard and reaping what you sow has finally come to fruition."

Steele's hard work paid off during one performance when she received a standing ovation after her big Act 2 song "What About Love?" And Steele's performance as well as the entire production was praised by Perry Tannenbaum, a theatre critic for *Creative Loafing Charlotte*, an alternative newspaper in Charlotte.

"There was nothing at all 'junior' about this high school musical," wrote Tannenbaum. "It had Broadway aspirations, and it hit a home run."

Tannenbaum was not the only person the production impressed. After its three performances, the school was invited to perform on the main stage of the Thespian Festival in Nebraska next June. They will be the first North Carolina school in 33 years to perform on the festival's main stage.



Keston Steele, center, performs with other cast members in Charlotte's Northwest School of the Arts production of *The Color Purple* musical. Photo Credit: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Memphis Teacher Among Five Winners of NEA Award



Melissa Collins

Melissa Collins, a second-grade teacher at John P. Freeman Optional School in Memphis, refers to her students as "junior scientists" who use the scientific method to explore the world of music in her classroom.

Collins' ability to infuse music and dance with science in a fun, interactive classroom lesson is just one reason she was selected as one of five recipients of the 2013 Horace Mann Award for Teaching Excellence.

Presented by the NEA Foundation, the award recognizes, rewards and promotes excellence in teaching and advocacy for the profession. Collins was one of 38 educators nominated by NEA state and federal affiliates.

"Dr. Collins has been selected for this award by her peers because she has attained

the highest teaching standards, as shown by her exemplary instruction, advocacy for the profession, attention to diversity, leadership in professional development and engagement of parents and community," said Harriet Sanford, president and CEO of the NEA Foundation. As a recipient of the award, Collins will receive \$10,000.

Collins has been certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and in 2008 was honored with a Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.



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Retired Houston Teacher Wins Award For Former Student's Success

Anne Heil, a retired teacher from Houston Independent School District, was named a winner of Texas A&M University's Inspiration Award for Exceptional Secondary Education.

Each year, graduating seniors at Texas A&M are invited to nominate a teacher who challenged them to excel at the collegiate level and beyond. Former student Anna Lachner nominated Heil, who she credits with helping "to find my true passion in life," while enrolled in her Advanced Placement psychology class.

During the ceremony, Heil presented

her former student with a college degree from Texas A&M. Additionally, Heil was recognized during commencement ceremonies at the university, where she was presented a check for \$2,000. Her former school, Westside High School, received \$1,000 prize to support student projects.

Texas A&M University recognizes only four recipients of the Inspiration Award each year.



Retired Houston teacher Anne Heil presents her former student, Anna Lachner, with a college degree from Texas A&M University in May. Heil received TAMU's Inspiration Award after being nominated by Lachner, who took some of Heil's classes while a student. Photo credit: Michael Kellett

Editor's Note

Danyell Taylor, who has written for the *Urban Educator* as an intern, is now a staff writer for the Council of the Great City Schools' award-winning news publication. Earning a master's degree last year in mass communications and media studies, Taylor will also contribute to other communications projects at the Council.

Great City Grads



Photo by Jason Merritt – © 2011 Getty Images

Tom Hanks

Oscar-winning actor

1974 graduate

Skyline High School

Oakland Unified School District