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Urban Schools Open to New Initiatives

The nation's big-city school systems kicked off the 2006-07 school year focusing on improving student achievement, attendance, health and safety among an array of new initiatives. Many districts opened new schools. In an *Urban Educator* round-up of what's new, here's what districts reported:

Anchorage

In an effort to help students develop healthy eating habits, Alaska's Anchorage School District begins the new school year with a ban on soda and junk food sales in schools.

Under the ban, sodas and snacks in vending machines and school stores that are high in fat content and sugar will be replaced with low calorie alternatives such as water and juices.

Urban Schools continued on page 4



Wichita Superintendent Winston Brooks watches students in the kindergarten circle at Chisholm Trail Elementary on the first day of school.

Urban Education's Future is Topic of Town Hall Meeting

Award-winning journalist and commentator Bill Moyers will moderate a national town hall meeting on "The Future of Urban Education" as the Council of the Great City Schools celebrates its 50th anniversary.



Bill Moyers

Urban school leaders from around the nation will converge in San Diego for the Council's Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 25-29, to address today's issues and challenges, as well as zero in on what's working in their

public school systems.

Their discussions will lead up to the town hall meeting on Oct. 27, the conference's pinnacle event featuring a panel of leading urban educators and others.

Moyers will deliver the conference's keynote address prior to the town meeting. Under the banner "Riding the Wave of Educational Excellence," the conference will

also feature:

- Sonia Manzano – "Maria" of television's Sesame Street fame;

- The Richard R. Green Awards program naming the top urban school leader; and
- Freeman Hrabowski, university president and author of books about African-American academic achievement.

The five-day conference is hosted by the San Diego Unified School District.

- Preliminary conference highlights on page 9.

Marcia Page Scholarship Awarded To Chicago and Nashville Grads

Two 2006 high school graduates from Chicago and Nashville recently won the highly competitive Marcia Page Scholarship for Mathematics, Engineering and Technology Excellence, sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools and Texas Instruments.

The \$5,000 scholarship is awarded to two African-American female students who completed their senior year of high school this past spring in a Council member district.

Felicia Udoji, who graduated from Tennessee's Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, and Candice Gant, from Chicago Public Schools, are the winners in the second year of the Marcia Page Scholarship program.

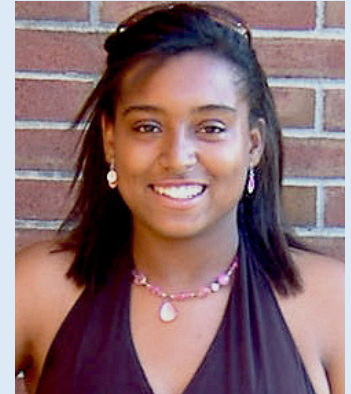
After being accepted to such universities as Harvard and Vanderbilt, Udoji chose to enroll at Tennessee State University to follow family tradition

in attending the historically black school. She's majoring in biology to pursue a possible career in biomedical engineering.

Gant is a co-ed at Cornell University. She's undecided on a major, but is very interested in genetics and a possible career as a



Felicia Udoji



Candice Gant

"We had outstanding candidates who applied for the two scholarships."

—Michael Casserly, Council Executive Director

scientific researcher.

"We had outstanding candidates who applied for the two scholarships," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, pointing out that there were 91 applicants from 39 school districts of the Council. They had

to express a desire to pursue a career goal in a mathematics, engineering or technology field, and be accepted for college.

The Marcia Page Scholarship winners will have an opportunity to meet the scholarship's namesake at the Council's Fall Conference in San Diego during a breakfast program on Oct. 26 sponsored by Texas Instruments.

Page, vice president of public affairs at the company and loaned executive to the Foundation for Community Empowerment in Dallas, will serve as a mentor to the two scholarship recipients as they pursue their careers.



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A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 66 of the nation's largest urban public school districts.

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Kansas City Names New Leader; Interim Leaders Take Helm In Boston, St. Louis, Okla. City, Oakland; Philly, Columbus Chiefs to Stay

Several big-city school districts are experiencing changes at the helm as the 2006-2007 school year begins.

The Kansas City Missouri School District recently selected veteran educator Anthony Amato to take the reins of the 27,000-student school system. He succeeds Bernard Taylor, who is now the superintendent of schools in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Anthony Amato

Amato recently was the superintendent of the New Orleans Public Schools. He has also led the school district in Hartford, Conn., and was a superintendent in a district in New York City.

According to the *Kansas City Star*, Amato will implement several initiatives in an effort to improve student achievement, including boosting early-childhood programs, converting elementary and middle schools into K-8 schools and requiring high school students to enroll in at least one college advanced placement course.

“Be passionate, be urgent and be consistent and this school system will be second to none,” Amato recently told district employees at a recent reception.

Interim Leaders Named

Boston Public Schools recently chose Michael Contompasis, the district’s chief operating officer, to become the interim superintendent, succeeding Tom Payzant, who left the district to become a senior lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This marks the second time Contompasis has served as the district’s interim superintendent.

St. Louis also recently named an interim superintendent, Diana Bourisaw, to replace Greg Williams, who resigned after being at the helm since April 2005. Bourisaw is a former superintendent and most recently

worked as the president of a Missouri consulting firm.

Also selecting an interim superintendent is Oklahoma City Public Schools, which chose veteran educator Linda Steele Brown, the district’s senior human resources officer, to serve as its interim superintendent. She succeeds Bob Moore, who recently left the school system after three years to become superintendent of the Victoria Independent School District in Victoria, Texas.

In another development, Kimberly Statham has been appointed as the interim state administrator for California’s Oakland Unified School District. Statham, the district’s chief academic officer, replaces Randolph Ward, who left the district he had led since 2003 to serve as the superintendent of San Diego County schools.

Contract Extensions

The School District of Philadelphia recently had some good news regarding its

chief executive officer: the district gave Paul Vallas a three-year contract extension, which will extend his term to 2009. Vallas has been at the helm of the 178,000-student school system since 2002, and under his tenure, the number of students scoring advanced or proficient on the state test has increased by 14.1 percentage points in reading and 22.3 percentage points in math.



Paul Vallas

“I am thrilled that Paul is staying in Philadelphia so that we can continue our dynamic partnership,” said James Nevels, chairman of the district’s School Reform Commission in a news release. “I am proud of how far we have come. Now that we are seeing real progress, I don’t want to break up this team or lose momentum.”

New Leader continued on page 8

New Kansas City Leader Aided By Council ‘Manual’

When Tony Amato took the reins recently of Missouri’s Kansas City Public Schools, a “manual” of how to fix the district’s problems awaited him.

The school board last fall had asked the Council of the Great City Schools to conduct a peer review of its operations and instruction. The Council assembled teams of administrators from other urban school systems to review the strengths and weaknesses of the Kansas City school district under the Council’s *Cities Building Cities* program.

A report on the review was recently presented to the school board that noted, in a nutshell, that “...the district is not working as a team on behalf of the city’s children.”

In an editorial, the *Kansas City Star* said of the report, “It is a manual for fixing operational systems and quickly boosting student achievement, using tools that have worked in other cities.”

Moreover, it said, “The school board, which comes in for its share of criticism in the report, showed courage by asking for the review.”

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Atlanta

Atlanta Public Schools is launching a new Math Initiative to strengthen student comprehension and performance in math-



Atlanta Superintendent Beverly Hall talks with students on the first day of school at E. Rivers Elementary School. (Photo by Scott King)

ematics at every grade level. The district is also requiring all schools to develop and implement wellness plans that include both fitness and nutrition strategies for students and staff.

Austin

Texas' Independent School District is launching the Skills for Life Middle School Initiative in 11 middle and four elementary schools to provide students between the ages of 11-14 with knowledge, support and skills to develop good decision-making ability.

Also, the district is celebrating its 125th anniversary with several events taking place during the 2006-2007 school year.

Baltimore

Baltimore City Public School System begins the new school year with several new initiatives designed to improve academic achievement, including an enhanced reading program for students in preK-12 and a revised social studies curriculum that includes an American government course.

Boston

In an effort to increase teacher retention, Boston Public Schools is implement-

ing the New Teacher Developer Program to provide beginning teachers with the training and support they need during their first year on the job. Novice teachers will receive classroom-based support and mentoring from veteran teachers.

The district is also opening 17 new pre-kindergarten classrooms to improve early childhood education.

Broward County

Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., is expanding to all district schools a new electronic security system that instantly conducts criminal background checks of those seeking access to schools. The computerized system, Security Tracking and Response, automatically accesses FBI and police databases when visitors swipe their driver's license or other identification through a scanner. The system signals individuals who have been convicted of sexual and violent offenses, and those people are denied entry to schools.

Buffalo

Buffalo Public Schools is adding approximately 50 teacher positions in seventh and eighth grades in reading and mathematics in an effort to raise student achievement in those subjects. The district is also opening a new school, the Math Science and Technology Preparatory School, for students in grades 6-12. The school is a College Board School designed to prepare students for post-secondary education by offering a rigorous academic program and Advanced Placement courses.

Charlotte

In an effort to increase responsiveness and community outreach, North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is launching Connect-Ed, a new communications system enabling principals to alert parents and staff during emergency situations.

The district is also converting two high schools into smaller, themed schools with

innovative instructional programs to increase student performance and prepare students for college and skilled careers.

Chicago

The nation's third largest school district is launching its Back-To-School Sports Challenge in which professional athletes and teams from Chicago will challenge targeted communities with low school attendance last year to improve their student attendance rates. High schools and elementary schools with the most improved attendance will win tickets to sporting events and receive visits from professional athletes.

Cincinnati

Cincinnati Public Schools is launching a Parent Leadership Institute to help develop more effective parent involvement in district schools. Recruiting for the first class of the Parent Institute begins this fall and a pilot of the institute will begin featuring a curriculum based on parent engagement and student achievement. The district is also offering free breakfast to all elementary students.

Clark County

The nation's fastest growing school district, Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas, is opening nine new schools this fall. The school system is also implementing Schoolpassport.com, which offers parents the option of paying for their child's meals online.

Cleveland

Cleveland Municipal School District is launching the 3Rs Initiative (Rights, Responsibilities, Realities), in which more than 600 lawyers and judges will spend one day each month of the school year in classrooms instructing students on the U.S. Constitution, the law, careers in law and assisting students to pass the citizenship portion of the state graduation test.

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Columbus

Ohio's Columbus Public Schools is implementing a new program, SuccessWorks Academy, to help disruptive students obtain the support and skills they need to be successful in school. The program will serve approximately 150 students in grades 3-7 and provide them with services to improve their academic, social, emotional and physical health. The district is also establishing a Positive Behavioral Support system to help schools develop programs that improve student behavior and school climate.

Dallas

The Dallas Independent School District is opening 12 new schools this fall, including the Early College High School in which students take courses at a local college and earn up to two years of college credit toward an associate's degree. The district is also implementing Dallas Achieves, an initiative that includes realigning the curriculum at all levels and allocating more resources directly to the classroom.

Dayton

In an effort to boost student attendance, increase the graduation rate and prepare students to earn college degrees, Dayton Public Schools is opening the Dayton Technology Design High School. Students may choose from three career pathways: technology, business or humanities, and will receive one-on-one and small group instruction. The school is primarily for students in grades 9-12 who have dropped out of high school or are likely to do so.

Denver

Denver Public Schools is teaming with a local physicians organization to develop a pilot program at four elementary schools to increase the number of children walking and riding their bicycles to schools. Funded by the Colorado Department of Education, the program will teach children the skills they need to be safe pedestrians and

cyclists by providing them with a pedestrian curriculum and bicycle skills training workshops.

Detroit

To promote a safer school environment and higher academic achievement, Detroit Public Schools is implementing a new dress code for students. Under the code, pants that sag, tight clothing and clothes with big logos will be banned and all pants and skirts must be solid khaki, navy blue or black.

Also, the district has launched the Virtual Early Middle College in which high school students will be able to take high school classes and college classes online.

Greensboro

To prevent students who move to different schools from falling behind academically, North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro is establishing the Home Field Advantage Program in 10 elementary schools. The program allows students whose families move to other parts of Guilford County to stay at their original school, with the district providing students with round-trip transportation.

Houston

The Houston Independent School District begins the new school year with a plan to instill a college-bound culture at every school. Elementary school parents will receive more help understanding college opportunities, middle school students will work with counselors to start mapping out college plans, and seniors in high school will receive help with college preparatory skills and information on college admission applications and financial assistance.

The district is also opening 10 new schools this year, implementing tougher penalties for bullying and academic cheating, and providing free breakfast to all students.

Indianapolis

Beginning this fall, Indianapolis Public Schools offers its first International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme at

Northwest High School. The program is a challenging two-year curriculum centered on higher-level academics and includes rigorous workloads in math, foreign language, history, science and the arts.

And in an effort to create stronger bonds between fathers and their children, the district launched "Dad's Day is the First Day," in which fathers were encouraged to take their children to school on the first day and be active participants in their child's education.

Los Angeles

Beginning this fall, the Los Angeles Unified School District is providing 80 middle and senior high schools with extra counselors to work with students who are at risk of dropping out. The nation's second largest school district is also reducing class sizes in 8th and 9th grade algebra classes to allow for more personalized attention and is opening 13 new schools as part of its \$19.3 billion school construction program.

Louisville

As part of its new \$25 million math and science initiative, Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Ky., is implementing science modules at all elementary and middle schools this fall. Each module contains the supplies and equipment students need to learn inquiry-based science. Students investigate, read, write and share their findings as they study a concept.

Memphis

Memphis City Schools is opening two new schools, including the New Small High School designed to offer students a smaller learning environment that focuses on college and career-preparatory studies. In addition to academics, service learning, leadership and social justice will be included in the daily curriculum.

Miami

Miami-Dade County Public Schools has opened its first all-girls school: the

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Young Women's Preparatory Academy. The school serves approximately 450 students in grades 6-12 and provides an educational program that emphasizes the development of essential academic, personal and social skills for girls.

Nashville

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is launching a new telephone message service to notify parents about emergency situations and important issues affecting their child. The new call-out system will be used by principals and central office staff to provide information to families as quickly as possible.

Newark

New Jersey's Newark Public Schools, through its Crime and Violence Prevention Task Force, is partnering with the city of Newark to develop and implement effective intervention strategies to prevent crime and violence in and around schools. This summer, the district worked closely with city officials to promote its Safe Summer Initiative anti-violence campaign, which included an aggressive publicity effort to share information about curfew laws.

New York City

The nation's largest school district has joined forces with the College Board to offer the PSAT exam to all 10th and 11th grade students free of charge. The PSAT helps prepare students for the SAT college entrance exam. District officials will encourage students to take the PSAT and will use the results of the exam to identify students who have potential for advanced high school coursework and encourage those students to consider post-secondary school options.

Oakland

California's Oakland Unified School District is expanding its arts education initiative to 24 schools this year. The Arts Learning Anchor Schools initiative to create and support innovative visual and per-

forming arts program was launched last year and was so successful that district administrators want to integrate arts into the regular curriculum of all district schools.

Oklahoma City

Oklahoma City Public Schools is opening the first new elementary school built under MAPS for Kids, a \$512-million bond issue and tax initiative passed in 2001 to enable every student to attend school in a new or renovated school. The \$12 million Martin Luther King Junior Elementary includes brand new band/orchestra classrooms, music rooms, visual arts facilities and a media center.

Omaha

Omaha Public Schools is embarking on a major initiative to improve literacy instruction in the district's 62 elementary schools. Under the initiative, teachers and administrators will learn what skills and strategies students need to know at every grade level.

Orlando

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., is opening nine new schools this year in an effort to relieve overcrowding. The new schools will add 8,625 additional seats.

Philadelphia

The School District of Philadelphia has opened the School of the Future in partnership with the Microsoft Corporation. The \$46-million, state-of-the-art high tech facility incorporates the latest technologies to support and enhance administrative functions and the academic program for 700 students in grades 9-12. The district will have access to Microsoft personnel and research in the areas of data integration and management, collaboration and communication, organizational efficiency, and leadership development.

Pittsburgh

Junior and senior students in Pittsburgh Public Schools will have the opportunity to earn up to 12 college credits a year at four local colleges free as a result of a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The grant covers tuition and books.

Portland

Oregon's Portland Public Schools begins the new school year with a new high school math curriculum, featuring new



Portland Mayor Tom Potter, Principal Kathleen Kaczke and Portland Superintendent Vicki Phillips greet students as they arrive for the first day of school at Rigler Elementary. (Photo courtesy of Portland Public Schools)

texts, workbooks and teachers' handbooks for a rigorous college prep program. Also, the district begins shifting schools to a K-8 model with 16 schools adding sixth grade this year.

Providence

Rhode Island's Providence Public Schools is implementing the "Providence Effective Schools Initiative," which includes 10 dimensions of school effectiveness designed to accelerate student achievement and fundamentally change the culture of schools. This school year

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the district will focus on emphasizing the principal as leader and making the school's culture responsive to and supportive of the needs of the students, parents and the community.

Rochester

As a result of a \$5-million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, New York's Rochester City School District is opening two new small high schools in partnership with the College Board to prepare students for access to and success in college. The Northeast College Preparatory High School will focus on science, technology, engineering and math and the Northwest College Preparatory High School will focus on law and government. Both of the schools will be independent, small schools located within larger high schools and will serve 150 students in grades 7 and 9.

San Diego

Recognizing the connection between student attendance and student performance in school, San Diego Unified



San Diego Schools Superintendent Carl Cohn passes out back-to-school supplies to students at Balboa Elementary on the first day of school.

School District has developed a year-long attendance campaign called "Every Day Counts."

Tampa

Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Fla., is implementing an Internet safety training program to help teachers

Council Decries Action Against School Diversity Programs

The Council of the Great City Schools recently opposed the Bush Administration's decision to file U.S. Supreme Court *amicus* briefs challenging the Seattle and Jefferson County, Ky., (Louisville) programs to maintain integrated schools and prevent racial re-segregation of their school systems.

This summer, the Supreme Court agreed to rule whether race can be a factor in assigning public school students to specific schools in promoting cultural diversity.

The Council plans to file its own *amicus*, or "friend-of-the-court" brief in the Supreme Court supporting the Seattle and Jefferson County school districts that prevailed in both the 6th and 9th Circuit Courts of Appeals.

According to the coalition representing the nation's urban public schools, the Seattle and Jefferson County school districts have exercised good faith efforts over many years to maintain desegregated school systems. The Council believes this to be a compelling governmental interest.

The limited use of racial considerations to voluntarily prevent racial isolation among the nation's school systems should not be limited to only *de jure* segregation, stresses the organization.

"The Council views the Administration's stance before the Supreme Court as counterproductive for school districts trying to maintain a diverse and desegregated environment capable of meeting the needs of all children," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "This is a giant step backward for the United States, which hopefully will be rejected by the Court."

recognize sites that, while popular with students, could prove dangerous to their safety. The district is also opening five new schools.

Wichita

Wichita Public Schools in Kansas is embarking on a district-wide high school reform initiative to improve student achievement in secondary schools. Under the initiative, high school curriculum, instruction and assessment strategies based on high standards and best practices research will be implemented. The initiative also calls for schools to integrate technology into the curriculum, incorporate smaller learning communities, use data and other information to understand student needs, benchmark student progress regularly and develop professional learning communities for staff.

Teacher Strike Mars Opening Day in Detroit

A teacher strike marred the opening of schools in Detroit on Sept. 5.

"Due to the strike by Detroit Federation of Teachers, there will be no school until further notice," said a Detroit Public Schools press release.

A judge called on the school district and the teachers union to continue bargaining.

The union, which represents 9,500 teachers and others, reportedly rejected a district proposal to cut salaries to balance the school system's budget. The union voted to strike in late August.

The strike is illegal under state law. Almost a week later, a judge ordered teachers back to work, and subsequently an agreement was reached.

Urban After-School Tutoring Program Expands

The U.S. Department of Education recently expanded the Supplemental Educational Services (SES) Pilot Program to include the Anchorage Public Schools, the Memphis Public Schools, as well as Florida's Hillsborough County school district in Tampa, giving them flexibility to provide their own tutoring to students under the provisions of the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act.

The three districts join the Boston Public Schools and Chicago Public Schools that are entering their second year of the pilot program.

The SES pilot program is a collaborative initiative between the Department of Education and the Council of the Great City

Schools. The primary goal of this initiative is to increase the participation of low-income children in the supplemental educational services program of school districts identified for improvement under NCLB.

The school district, as well as private tutoring providers, will offer supplemental after-school tutoring to children enrolled in identified schools.

"The SES pilot program offers the opportunity to evaluate the impact on student achievement of the *No Child Left Behind* tutoring programs delivered by the public schools and by the private providers," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "Our bottom line continues to be increasing student achievement."



D.C. Public Schools Superintendent Clifford Janey with Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, seated, explain significance of the school system's new student test. (Photo by Ron Thomas)

Results, Significance Of New D.C. Test Discussed

Superintendent Clifford Janey of the District of Columbia Public Schools recently released the results of a new student test, emphasizing the importance of setting a new benchmark for academic achievement in the nation's capital.

The new D.C. Comprehensive Assessment System, a highly rigorous test formu-

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New Leader continued from page 3



Gene Harris

The board of education for Ohio's Columbus Public Schools recently voted to extend Superintendent Gene Harris' contract for four years through July 2010.

Harris has been at the helm of the school district since 2001.

"I'm pleased to have the board express its support and confidence in my leadership by granting me this four-year contract," said Harris in a news statement.



Indy Schools Chief Installed as AASA President

Indianapolis Public Schools Superintendent Eugene White, right, receives the ceremonial gavel and ring from the American Association of School Administrators' immediate past president, David Gee, as White is recently installed as the AASA's new president.

Houston School Bus Drivers Trained To Watch for Terrorists

When news broke in early August of a foiled aviation terror plot in England, a thousand Houston school district bus drivers had just completed training to learn how to spot signs of terrorist activity to keep children safe on school buses.

All 1,000 Houston school bus drivers completed anti-terrorism training and were ready to be certified experts in the "School Bus Watch" program directed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

School bus drivers were trained to identify suspicious behavior, inspect buses before starting a route, and to report anyone at a school bus facility or along a route asking unusual questions.

"Our number one job every day is to keep children safe and secure," said Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra in a press release. "I'm proud of the professionalism and diligence of our school bus drivers who have under their care so many children every school day."

Council of the Great City Schools

50TH ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE

“Riding the Wave of Educational Excellence”

October 25-29, 2006
Loews Coronado Hotel
San Diego, CA

Wednesday, October 25

7:00 am- 5:00 pm	Conference registration
1:30-5:00 pm	Task Force meetings
6:30-8:30 pm	Welcome reception at the Loews Coronado

Thursday, October 26

7:30 am- 9:00 am	Breakfast and Welcome
9:00 am-12:15 pm	Breakout Sessions
12:30-2:30 pm	Lunch and Speaker: Sonia Manzano
2:15-5:45 pm	Breakout sessions
7:00-10:00 pm	Richard R. Green Awards Banquet: Urban Educator of the Year Awarded Entertainment: The Supremes



Sonia Manzano

Friday, October 27

7:30 am- 9:00 am	Breakfast and Speaker: Freeman Hrabowski
9:00 am-12:15 pm	Breakout Sessions
12:30-2:00 pm	Lunch and Speaker: Bill Moyers
2:30-4:00 pm	Town Hall Meeting
6:00-8:45 pm	Reception and Dinner Cruise



Freeman Hrabowski

Saturday, October 28

8:30 am- 12:00 pm	Board of Directors Meeting
12:00-4:00 pm	Legislative Directors Meeting
6:00-9:30 pm	Closing Celebration: Seaworld Adventure Park

Sunday, October 29

8:30 am- 11:30 am	Breakfast and Closing Session
11:30 am	Adjourn

Los Angeles School District to File Lawsuit Against Legislation

The Los Angeles Unified School District recently decided to file a lawsuit to overturn legislation giving Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa authority over the city’s schools.

School board President Marlene Canter said that several stakeholders, including the PTA of Los Angeles, the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles and the California School Boards Association, requested the action.

“Although it is important to resolve the outstanding constitutional questions, the district continues to welcome the opportunity to work with the mayor to improve Los Angeles schools,” she stressed in a press release.

In late August, the State Legislature passed a measure to give the Los Angeles mayor shared control of the nation’s second largest public school system. Villaraigosa and a regional council of mayors would share authority over the city’s schools with the school board.

D.C. Test *continued from page 8*

lated after the Massachusetts assessment system, replaces the school district’s Stanford 9 test, which had been administered over the past eight years.

Because the new test is much different and more stringent than the previous assessment, a larger number of district students will not meet their federal *No Child Left Behind* targets.

By implementing the new test, D.C. Public Schools made an “important statement,” said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools at a D.C. school system forum. “It is saying that it wants its students to be judged by a tough, honest assessment of their academic achievement.”

Said Superintendent Janey, “We want the high school diploma to have placement value” regarding job as well as college placement.

Evidence-Free Education Policy

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

Data-based decision making is acknowledged by nearly everyone as a critical factor in effective educational practice. *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) is replete with requirements for instruction to be grounded in scientifically-based research.

The central concept behind the “Reading First” program is the use of scientifically-based reading approaches. And, the 2004 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require research-based activities, as do the new IDEA “response to intervention” (RTI) regulations.

Yet, the evidence-based educational approaches so prominently found in Congressional legislation and Administrative regulations are often summarily ignored by federal policy makers in promoting other major components of national education policy.

Two recent reports by the Education Department’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) have indicated that charter schools and private schools do not outperform traditional public schools in student achievement once student demographic characteristics are taken into account. But the science behind these analyses, however preliminary, have been largely dismissed by the Administration as it continues to argue that publicly funded charters and vouchers are “better” alternatives to the regular public schools.

Over the past five years, the two most heavily promoted initiatives by the Administration in the *No Child Left Behind Act*—student transfers and private supplemental services—also



have little evidence behind them to suggest that they boost student achievement beyond what the regular schools can do.

No Child Left Behind, moreover, requires consistently low-performing schools to undertake such alternative governance arrangements as state takeovers, reconstitution, chartering, and privatization, despite the limited evidence that any of these strategies will remedy poor performance or improve student achievement.

Congress, for its part, has devoted billions of dollars over the last ten years to Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration programs—most of which were grounded in scant research and have produced limited results.

In short, national policy makers often gravitate to anecdotal, novel, well-promoted, or politically-driven educational approaches, despite the lack of data demonstrating significantly better educational outcomes.

The nation’s capital has been dubbed facetiously as an “evidence-free zone.” And, some elements of national education policy seem to validate that characterization. With another reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) looming on the horizon, policy makers might pause for a moment to acknowledge mistakes of the past, look at the research closely, and discontinue national policies that contribute little to the educational achievement of the nation’s school children.

Charlotte Principal Heads To Germany

Kandace Williams, a principal at A.G. Middle School in North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools, will begin this fall as a principal in a school in Germany.

Williams will be a principal at the John F. Kennedy School in Berlin, Germany for

two years. The K-6 school was founded in 1960 to promote German-American relations and has a student population of approximately 1,700 students, composed of Germans and American students who learn together in both languages.

Williams will take a two-year sabbatical

from A.G. Middle School, where she has served as a principal for a year.

According to district officials, other principals have spent short stints at the Kennedy School, but Williams is believed to be the first Charlotte principal to be selected for a two-year job.

Local Church and Home Improvement Stores Help Oklahoma City Schools Open New Year

A local Oklahoma City church conducted a “summer of service” by sprucing up eight schools and providing school supplies to some 300 teachers, while home improvement stores refurbished a school’s playground in August.

Considered one of the largest back-to-school missions of its kind, Crossings Community Church recently beautified eight Oklahoma City schools in the first phase of a project called “Live Brightly – Summer of Service.”

A group of volunteers cleaned up, painted, landscaped and repaired facilities at eight elementary schools. “The people at Crossings truly live their missions,” said Laura Morris, principal at Capitol Hill Elementary in a news release.

“We see the need in our schools and know that anything we can do for our children is a blessing for us,” stressed Cindy Rowe with Crossings Community Church.

The second phase of the “Summer of Service” featured an Adopt-A-Teacher pro-

gram, whereby people in the church community fill a wish-list of school supplies for teachers. The church had learned that most teachers spend money out of their own pockets to provide some classroom supplies to students.

This is the second year that the church conducted the “Summer of Service.” Last year, the project adopted 10 schools, completed renovations and repairs, collected school supplies as well as “purchased close to a thousand school uniforms for our students who otherwise had trouble purchasing them,” said district spokesman Cordell Jordan.

Home Depot Helps

Local Home Depot stores reached out to help what is considered Oklahoma City school system’s poorest school, Shidler Elementary, where 100 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

Students at the school recently worked with Home Depot employees to refurbish the school’s playground under the local home improvement company’s Project Playground.

“Usually, each store picks one project at a school/church site, but the need was so great at Shidler, all of the Oklahoma City area Home Depot stores pooled their resources for this one school,” said the school district’s Jordan.

“A school mentor also raised enough money to purchase brand new playground equipment,” Jordan added.

Sharon Creager, principal of Shidler Elementary, noted that Home Depot’s aid had a dual benefit. “Project Playground is not only a means for these community partners to refurbish the children’s playground, but it also helps students understand how the education they are receiving today can help them acquire the knowledge they need to do things such as home improvement later in life.”

Urban Schools Selected for NASA Program

At Jean Childs Young Middle School in Atlanta, 92 percent of eighth graders passed the state writing test, the school’s sixth graders met or exceeded all state standards and the band received a “superior” rating.

The school now has something else to be proud of: it was one of 26 schools across the nation to be selected by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration as a NASA Explorer School.

NASA will establish a three-year partnership with the school to improve teaching and learning in science, technology, engineering and math.

And Jean Childs was not the only big-city school to receive this honor. Also named NASA Explorer Schools were Johnson Elementary Magnet for Space Exploration and Technology in San Diego,



Teachers from Atlanta’s Jean Childs Young Middle School view a shuttle rocket engine during the NASA Exploration orientation workshop at the Kennedy Space Center.

Southeast Middle School in Baltimore and Vernon School in Portland, Ore.

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Council Historic Moments

Federal involvement in education led the Council of the Great City Schools in the late 1960s to move its operation to Washington, D.C., from Chicago, where the urban school coalition began in 1956.



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In addition, the Norfolk public school system had four schools—Chesterfield Elementary, Oceanair Elementary, Jacox Elementary and Campostella Elementary—selected as NASA Explorer Schools.

Teams composed of full-time teachers and a school administrator at all of the NASA Explorer Schools will develop and implement an instructional plan to address challenges in science, technology and mathematics education. Under the program, teachers will attend summer professional development workshops and receive one week of intensive training to learn how to integrate NASA content into existing school curriculum.

Throughout the school year, teachers will receive professional development coordinated by teacher leaders and trainers, including NASA aerospace education specialists.

Students at the Explorer schools will be provided the opportunity to become involved with NASA's research, discoveries and missions through simulation activities, speaking with astronauts and visiting the Kennedy Space Center.

Editor's Note:

With this issue, we introduce a re-designed *Urban Educator* following 14 years of the same graphic design since the publication's inception. We hope that the newsletter will continue to be priority reading for you.



Great City Grads



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