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SPECIAL EDITION
Back to School



Anchorage Schools Superintendent Carol Comeau greets students at Chinook Elementary on the first day of school.

Council Gets Boost in Providing Stimulus Help

The nation's urban public school systems will receive assistance from the Council of the Great City Schools over the next two years in planning for the effective use of their education federal stimulus funding.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has awarded \$900,000 in two grants to the Council to provide technical support to large urban school districts in finding effective ways to spend federal stimulus dollars and to expand key performance indicators to gauge management progress in the districts.

The Council received a \$500,000 grant to help urban school systems develop plans that will ensure that the federal stimulus funds are spent effectively, productively and transparently.

The Council will provide a variety of activities of support, such as:

- Publishing a booklet on suggested uses for urban school leaders to spend stimulus dollars to reform and improve educational programs;
- Conducting conference calls to share information on the use of stimulus funds;
- Developing a web site for urban districts to post their preliminary plans and query each other on the use of funds;
- Creating a strategy to inform the news media of stimulus-spending data to help the public know and understand how ur-

Stimulus Help continued on page 7

Innovative Programs Kick Off New School Year For Urban Students

As the 2009-2010 school year begins, urban school districts across the nation are implementing new and innovative programs to boost academic achievement, launching dropout prevention campaigns and smoothing the transition for students moving from elementary to secondary schools. Here is a roundup of what some big-city districts are doing:

Anchorage

Alaska's Anchorage School District is piloting several new initiatives as a result of federal stimulus funds. The district is placing Career Guides in all middle schools and providing more career counselors in middle and high schools. The district

School Year continued on page 4



Atlanta Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall lauds the progress the school district has made at her State of the Schools address.

Oakland District Regains Local Control

In 2003, California's Oakland Unified School District was taken over by the State of California in return for a \$100-million emergency loan. Under the agreement, a state administrator was appointed to run the district and the school board served in an advisory role.

Six years later, the school board has regained autonomy of the 34,000-student school system. A memorandum of understanding was recently signed by the state superintendent of public instruction and Oakland school board president Noel Gallo transferring control of academic policy and financial management to the school board.

"It's been a long journey to this point and the fact that we've persevered through difficult times and emerged stronger for it is a tremendous testament to the dedication exhibited by the students, staff and families of the Oakland Unified School District as well as to the wider Oakland community," said Gallo in a news statement.

Since the takeover in 2003, a state-run financial crisis management team has measured the progress the Oakland school system has made in areas such as student achievement, facilities and financial management.



A 'Friend' Remembered

Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) addresses the Council of the Great City Schools at its 2004 Legislative/Policy Conference. When the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee died last month at age 77, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly responded with sadness, "Senator Edward Kennedy was for many years a tireless champion of urban public education. We loved him as a friend and colleague, and will miss his grace, energy and leadership terribly."



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New Leadership Starts School Year in Houston, Kansas City; Miami, Broward Leaders to Stay



Terry Grier

The nation's seventh largest school system will soon have a new leader at the helm. Terry Grier was recently selected as a finalist to lead the Houston Independent School District, succeeding Abelardo Saveedra who recently retired from the district.

Grier has been the superintendent of California's San Diego Unified School District since 2008. Prior to leading the 135,000-student school system, California's second largest, he was the superintendent of North Carolina's Guilford County Public Schools in Greensboro, where under his leadership the number of students enrolled in rigorous courses such as Advanced Placement increased 149 percent.

"Throughout his career, Dr. Grier has built a strong reputation for innovation and school reform," said Lawrence Marshall, president of Houston's board of education in a news statement. "The entire board



John Covington

was impressed with his innovative approach and passion to reform schools and improve student achievement."

Texas requires a 21-day waiting period after the announcement of superintendent finalists before a

superintendent can be hired.

The Kansas City, Missouri School District also begins the 2009-2010 school year with a new superintendent. John Covington was selected to lead the 18,000-student school system, replacing interim superin-

tendent John Martin.

For the past three years, Covington was the superintendent of the Pueblo City Schools in Colorado.

Contract Extended

Alberto Carvalho was selected as superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools in 2008, and under his tenure a record number of schools--58 percent--have earned an "A" grade by the Florida Department of Education.

This improvement in academic performance at schools in the district is one of the reasons Carvalho was recently given a three-year extension through June 2013.

Miami's superintendent was not the only Florida superintendent to receive a contract extension. James Notter, the leader of Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, was given a three-year contract extension until June 2014. He was selected as superintendent in 2007.

Two Leaders to Depart

Minneapolis Public Schools Superintendent William Green recently announced he will step down from the 34,570-student school district he has led since 2006.

Green, whose tenure will end June 2010, plans to return to his job as an associate professor of history at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. He has been on leave from the college while serving as superintendent.

In addition to serving as superintendent, Green also served as a school board member from 1993-2001.

Also stepping down is Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent William Andreopoulos, who plans to retire from the school district in 2010. He has served as the leader of the 85,369-student school district since August 2002.

Sharon Lewis Returns to Head Council Research



Sharon Lewis

Sharon Lewis, director of research for some nine years at the Council of the Great City Schools, has returned to the urban schools coalition to head research once again.

She succeeds Jason Snipes, who had led Council research since 2006. He is now a vice president at the Academy for Educational Development.

"I'm very pleased that Sharon has re-joined the Council in our expanded research program that has been developed to support teaching and learning in our big-city public school systems," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

Lewis departed the Council in 2006 to return to Detroit, where she operated as a national education consultant and for a year served as executive director of Good Schools Resource Center, an organization recognizing and supporting good schools.

She had been the Council's research director from 1997 to 2006 after retiring as assistant superintendent, research, development and coordination, from the Detroit Public Schools. She held that post for six years following other administrative and classroom positions.

Lewis has earned three degrees from Wayne State University in Detroit.

School Year *continued from page 1*

is also partnering with the University of Alaska to provide professional development and boosting its technology efforts by outfitting schools with wireless Internet.

Atlanta

Atlanta Public Schools begins the 2009-2010 school year with its first “green” school. The newly opened Springdale Park Elementary School will have a rooftop garden and implement recycling and composting programs.

The district is also joining 14 other Georgia school systems to launch the “Be There” campaign, designed to inspire parents to become more involved in their children’s education.

Austin

In an effort to encourage high school students who have left school to return, Texas’ Austin Independent School District launched a dropout recovery initiative in August that used volunteers to make calls to students who have dropped out and encourage them to return to school. Each of the district’s high schools have a dropout recovery team responsible for using the information gathered by the volunteers to follow up and recover their students.

Baltimore

Baltimore City Public School System is opening 15 new Transformation Schools this fall for middle and high school students. Run by outside organizations, the combined middle/high schools offer small classes and have a college, career, credit recovery or dropout prevention focus.

Boston

In an effort to help students prepare for middle school, Boston Public Schools held “Middle O!”, a first-of-its-kind orientation for all of the district’s sixth graders at Fenway Park baseball stadium. Students and parents had the opportunity to meet their new principals, participate in school readiness activities and get information about after-school resources.



Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, right, and Gavin Middle School Principal Alexander Matthews welcome an incoming 6th-grade student at the first *Middle O!* event for new middle school students.

As a result of a partnership between the district and the teachers’ union, three new pilot schools are opening. The schools are part of the district, but they have autonomy over budget, staffing, governance and curriculum.

Charlotte

North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is opening six new schools this year—four elementary and two middle schools—to help relieve overcrowding.

Chicago

Beginning this fall, Chicago Public Schools will require high school students to take a financial literacy education course that will teach them how to manage a household budget, control debt and plan for retirement.

And the district is implementing an initiative to ensure the integrity of data used to measure performance outcomes and progress in the district.

Cincinnati

According to district officials, Cincinnati Public Schools is the first school system in the nation to provide opportunities for its students, ages 6-12, to participate in Clever Crazes for Kids, a national wellness initiative that combines animated games and contests to motivate students to achieve healthy lifestyles. As part of the program, cash prizes will be awarded to schools with

the highest number of participating students and a total of \$25,000 in prizes will be awarded each bi-monthly period.

Clark County

Nevada’s Clark County School District in Las Vegas is opening seven new schools for the 2009-2010 school year. In addition, 17 schools have been selected to participate in the empowerment school program, which gives schools autonomy regarding governance, budget, staffing, instruction and time in an effort to address the needs of the school community and increase academic achievement.

Cleveland

Cleveland Metropolitan School District is opening six new schools this fall. Also, Cleveland Superintendent Eugene Sanders recently announced a system-wide performance transformation plan for the district to dramatically improve student academic performance.

Columbus

As a result of a levy voters approved in November, Columbus City Schools will restore instructional time that was cut three years ago because of budget constraints. Ten minutes will be added to middle school classes, while high school students will receive an additional class period.

And in an effort to promote a healthier lifestyle, the district has implemented a new lunch program offering more fresh fruits and vegetables.

Dallas

The Dallas Independent School District created the High School Early Start Academy to help 9th graders entering high school to be successful. Supported with funds from the federal stimulus package, the summer program offered ninth graders the opportunity to improve their math, science and language arts skills.

Detroit

Detroit Public Schools is launching its “I’m In” student retention campaign to encourage students to attend one of

School Year *continued on page 5*

School Year *continued from page 4*

the district schools this fall. The campaign was created to stop the steady decline in enrollment and will feature 172 6-foot-8 by 3-foot standard-size blue doors placed in prominent locations throughout the city.

East Baton Rouge

The East Baton Rouge Parish School System in Louisiana celebrated the opening of Woodlawn Elementary School, the first elementary school built in the district in approximately 35 years. The school system is also implementing a new science program for elementary students that covers physical, life, earth and space science as well as environmental science and includes hands-on activities for students.

Fort Worth

Texas' Fort Worth Independent School District is offering a Spanish Immersion program for kindergarten and first-grade students. And through a partnership with the Independent Petroleum Association of America, the district is opening the Southwest Academy of Petroleum Engineering and Technology at one of its high schools. The academy will teach students about the engineering, energy and petroleum fields.

Fresno

California's Fresno Unified School District is partnering with the Got MILK? campaign and Producer's Dairy to increase breakfast consumption in the district's high schools. The school that increases its breakfast participation the most from the previous school year will win \$2,500 to be used for school activities.

Greensboro

North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro is implementing a new campaign for athletics this fall. The "Fair Play" initiative requires all student-athletes and their parents and coaches to sign an honor code pledging to abide by



state eligibility requirements. As part of the campaign, a statement will be read before any athletic contest reminding athletic teams to promote fair play, both on and off the field.

Houston

The Houston Independent School District is launching a new online service called Parent Student Connect that will enable parents to track their children's grades, progress and attendance. Parents will

be able to set up alerts to inform them of absences, failing grades and missed work by e-mail, text or phone call.

The district is also using federal stimulus funds to launch a new dropout prevention and recovery program that will be a combination of classroom and online work.

Jacksonville

Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Fla., has partnered with the mayor and several local community organizations to launch an initiative to address the district's high school dropout crisis. The Learning to Finish Initiative will conduct pilot programs at six schools and identify 6th and 9th graders who exhibit academic risk factors and develop strategic plans to support them.

Kansas City

Four Kansas City, Missouri School District schools will participate in the Missouri Turnaround Project, a pilot effort to improve student achievement in low-performing schools. The faculty at the four schools will engage in activities designed to improve instruction, better evaluate programs and practices, and provide continuous meaningful feedback to students and parents.

Louisville

Kentucky's Jefferson County Public Schools, in partnership with the University of Louisville, is offering a joint education

doctoral program for 15-20 mid-career teachers and administrators. And a financial literacy program is being offered to fourth- and fifth-grade students at Title I schools. The students will participate in simulations of a manufacturing line, exchange goods as buyers and sellers; and make decisions about spending, saving, and/or philanthropy.

Los Angeles

The nation's second largest school district has implemented a pay incentive program for top administrators. Administrators could increase their salary or lose up to 10 percent based on several measures, including student scores on state tests.

Miami

Miami-Dade County Public Schools is partnering with local performing and visual arts organizations, museums and cultural institutions to launch the Cultural Passport Program. The program will provide students in grades K-12 with a different cultural field experience each school year. The district will also begin the 2009-2010 school year with five new schools.

Milwaukee

Beginning this fall, Milwaukee Public Schools is launching the CLEaR Justice Initiative to address issues surrounding class, language, ethnicity and race. Principals will receive training and a packet of materials to help launch the new initiative and six schools will be piloting their intensive multicultural training.

Minneapolis

Minneapolis Public Schools is partnering with the Minneapolis Police Department and the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support to launch a youth violence prevention campaign. The campaign features television and radio public service announcements designed to empower adults to initiate conversations with children about youth violence.

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Nashville

This fall, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is offering Freshman Seminar, a course designed specifically for 9th grade students to help them learn important skills such as time management, goal setting and test-taking strategies. The district is also opening three new specialty high school programs, including Diploma Plus High School, designed for students at risk of dropping out.

Newark

In an effort to increase the number of students participating in Advanced Placement courses this fall, Newark Public Schools developed an A.P. Summer Institute in which students were introduced to AP courses in calculus, biology, history and English language and literature.

The district's "Game Point" Task Force has established a policy for scholar athletes in which students with low grade-point-averages must receive academic support in order to participate in athletic activity.

Oklahoma City

Last year, Oklahoma City Public Schools offered full-day kindergarten to nearly 50 elementary schools. This year, the program will be offered district-wide to all 20,000 elementary school students. The district is also participating in ACT/America's Choice pilot program to im-

prove graduation rates by helping teachers identify curriculum gaps, increase rigor in the classroom and address the social needs of their students.

Omaha

Nebraska's Omaha Public Schools is opening the doors to a first-of-its-kind facility that includes an elementary school, a public library and a community center. Saddlebrook Elementary is a partnership among the school district, Omaha Public Library and the City of Omaha Parks and Recreation. The school serves students in grades K-4 and features a branch of the city library with computer labs and a community center with a game room, a gym and an elevated track.

Orlando

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., is launching a campaign to promote vision-testing awareness among parents. The "See You in School" campaign will emphasize the need for vision testing, coordinate events where testing will be done and help to identify agencies which will provide glasses at no or low cost. The district is also opening two high schools and one elementary school.

Philadelphia

The School District of Philadelphia is implementing *Imagine 2014*, its strategic plan to achieve excellence, equity and accountability and provide every student with a high-quality education by 2014. As part of the program, class sizes in grades K-3 will be reduced, early childhood programs will be expanded and the number of counselors will be increased in middle and high schools.

Pittsburgh

All ninth-grade students in Pittsburgh Public Schools will participate in the 9th Grade Nation program designed to ease the transition for students

between 8th and 9th grade. The program will teach students study, organization and time management skills, instruct them on graduation requirements, provide college visits and share extracurricular opportunities.

Portland

As a result of a partnership among Oregon's Portland Public Schools, the city of Portland and the city transit agency, high school students can ride public transportation free. Students receive a free pass valid through June 30 that can be used any day of the week at any time. The free public transit program is provided through business energy tax credits.

Richmond

Virginia's Richmond Public Schools is expanding an online career exploration and portfolio tool that helps students determine specific career interests and then establish career goals. The Career Cruising program will be offered at an additional six schools this fall. The district is also expanding its Effective School-Wide Discipline initiative to 10 additional schools. Launched in partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University, the program has resulted in a significant drop in the number of disciplinary infractions at schools that piloted the initiative.

Rochester

New York's Rochester City School District has partnered with three local organizations to develop the Rochester Leadership Academy to serve principals in the district and support their leadership efforts to improve student achievement. The academy will offer professional development, coaching and mentoring for principals to increase school and student performance and graduation rates.

San Diego

In an effort to prepare students for the rigor of AP classes in the fall, San Diego Unified School District created 16 AP "boot camps" this summer for 455 students. The program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, was designed to prepare stu-



Oklahoma City Schools Superintendent Karl Springer visits a full-day kindergarten class at Spencer Elementary School on the first day of school.

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First Hispanic School Leader in L.A. Dies

William “Bill” Anton, the first Hispanic superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, died in July at age 85 – just weeks before a school bearing his name was scheduled to open, according to an article in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Known as a tough administrator who put children first, he served as superinten-

dent of the nation’s second largest school district from 1990 to 1992.

“Bill was a favorite of mine,” says Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools. “He was a very good man and a terrific friend. I shall miss him.”

School Year *continued from page 6*

dents — especially minorities and the poor who historically are underrepresented in AP classes — for the demands of AP and International Baccalaureate classes.

And according to district officials, the school system will have the cleanest buses in the nation as a result of federal stimulus funds the district used to reduce harmful emissions from its school buses.

San Francisco

San Francisco Unified School District opened the doors of the new International High School for immigrants who have been in the country less than four years.

And students who have dropped out of high school or are at risk of dropping out can participate in a new program called Gateway to College. The program will give them the opportunity to earn a high school diploma while earning college credit toward an associate degree or certificate.

St. Louis

St. Louis Public Schools has partnered with community service providers to launch 13 community schools, which will provide students and their families assistance with child rearing, employment, housing, health care and tutoring.

The district is also implementing after-school programs at every elementary school.

Tampa

Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Fla., is implementing a new online

bullying reporting system that enables students to anonymously report bullying. In addition, the school is opening the doors of six new schools this fall.

Toledo

Students in Ohio’s Toledo Public Schools will have the opportunity to attend college free. The Success Scholarship Program will offer free tuition to students who attend Owens Community College in an effort to make an associate’s degree available for all students.

Washington, DC

The District of Columbia Public Schools is introducing the new Teaching and Learning Framework in an effort to provide clear expectations for teachers, align expectations with professional development and support a fair and transparent assessment system. In addition, three low-performing high schools will be run by partnering organizations, selected for their success in turning around urban high schools.

Wichita

Wichita Public Schools in Kansas is expanding a nationally recognized engineering program to one high school and seven middle schools this school year. Project Lead the Way combines traditional math and science courses to prepare students for college majors in engineering. Its middle school component, Gateway to Technology, offers students an introduction to the later high school courses.

Stimulus Help *continued from page 1*

ban school systems are using the federal dollars;

■ Providing 10 big-city school districts with a critical review of their preliminary stimulus plans; and

■ Providing on-site technical assistance to three to five districts that need extra help in developing plans for the effective use of the federal funds.

“The Council has been particularly aggressive in working with its member districts to determine how to use these funds for maximum educational impact,” says Michael Casserly, executive director of the organization, which represents 66 big-city school systems.

Measuring Performance

The Council also received a \$400,000 grant from the Hewlett Foundation to expand its pioneering efforts to measure business performance in the nation’s urban school systems.

In 2007, the Council introduced first-time key performance indicators to track and document best business practices in *Managing for Results in America’s Great City Schools: A Report of the Performance Measurement and Benchmarking Project*.

The project is designed to help urban school systems measure the effectiveness and efficiency of their business operations.

The Hewlett grant will support the Council’s efforts to develop a second generation of key performance indicators to gauge management progress in the urban school districts.

The Council plans to develop a set of “power indicators” or an “essential few” to be used to help policymakers and urban school leaders measure the overall performance of their school districts. It also plans to create a series of “standards” for each indicator among other activities.

“At the end of the two-year process, the Council expects to have a set of key performance indicators that are more policy-oriented, standards-oriented and decision-based,” says Casserly.

Gates Foundation Selects Finalists For \$500-Million Grant Program

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation recently named five finalists for its \$500-million grant program to study and improve teacher effectiveness.

The finalists for what's described as "intensive partnerships for effective teaching" are school systems in Hillsborough County in Tampa, Memphis, Omaha and Pittsburgh as well as a group of charter schools in Los Angeles.

"We really see this as groundbreaking work to be done in education," said Hillsborough County Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia in the *St. Petersburg Times*.

"This is a great opportunity to professionalize teaching, raise student achievement and change the culture of how we teach and how we reward our teachers," said Omaha school board president Sandra Jensen in the *Omaha World-Herald*.

The foundation solicited grant proposals for the half a billion dollars it intends to invest in trying to figure out what makes for a quality schoolteacher to improve student achievement. The initiative follows some \$2 billion it has spent on education reform over the past several years.

"It really is about an effective teacher for every student every year of their school career," said Vicki Phillips, director of the Gates Foundation's k-12 education program, in *Philanthropy News Digest*. "If we did that, we would make the kind of progress that we have all long dreamed about in this country."

Another five school districts – Atlanta, Denver, Florida's Palm Beach County, Maryland's Prince George's County and Tulsa – may receive smaller awards.

Final grant decisions reportedly will be made in November.



Urban Districts Prepare for H1N1 Virus

Oklahoma City Public Schools is just one of many big-city school districts across the nation emphasizing to students the importance of handwashing.

This is in response to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' newest recommendations on how schools should respond to the H1N1 influenza virus, commonly known as the "swine flu."

The 36,511-student school system recently released its H1N1 outbreak

contingency plan to address the concerns and needs of students, parents and employees. The plan includes prevention, school closings and district closing. "The prevention phase of our plan is well under way," said Debbie Johnson, Oklahoma City Schools' administrator of health services.

Emphasizing that vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of the flu, government health officials recently announced that the vaccine against the H1N1 virus should be ready by October.

Pittsburgh District Celebrates Milestone

Pittsburgh Public Schools has met federal performance standards, and is believed to be the largest school district in the state to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress under *No Child Left Behind* since NCLB was signed into law in 2002.

The district met state and federal targets set under NCLB for the 2008-2009 school year.

"Three years after launching *Excellence for All*, our plan for increasing student achievement, the district has made AYP for the first time in its history," said delighted

Superintendent Mark Roosevelt at the John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh.

"I want to applaud the hard work and accomplishments of our teachers, principals and all of our staff at every level," he continued, while also giving credit to the Pittsburgh school board for its commitment to advancing student achievement.

Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Gerald Zahorchak noted, "Pittsburgh's students and educators have done a remarkable job in recent years reaching new heights in academic achievement."

Council of the Great City Schools

**53RD ANNUAL
FALL CONFERENCE**

“Education: Bridge to the Future”

Hosted by Portland Public Schools

October 28-November 1, 2009
Hilton Portland & Executive Tower
Portland, OR

Wednesday, October 28

7:00 am-5:00 pm	Conference registration
1:00 pm-5:00 pm	Task Force Meetings
6:30 pm-8:30 pm	Welcome reception at the Portland Art Museum

Thursday, October 29

7:30 am-9:00 am	Breakfast and Welcome
9:00 am-12:15 pm	Breakout Sessions
12:30 pm-2:00 pm	Lunch and Speaker: Vicki Phillips, Gates Foundation
2:15 pm-5:30 pm	Breakout Sessions
7:00 pm-10:00 pm	20th Annual Richard R. Green Awards Banquet: Urban Educator of the Year Awarded

Friday, October 30

7:30 am-9:00 am	Breakfast and Speaker: Marc Lamont Hill, Professor
9:00 am-12:15 pm	Breakout Sessions
12:30 pm-2:00 pm	Lunch and Speaker: Soledad O'Brien, CNN Anchor
2:30 pm-4:00 pm	Town Hall Meeting- Moderated by Soledad O'Brien
6:30 pm-8:30 pm	Reception at the Portland Museum of Science & Industry

Saturday, October 31

8:00 am-9:30 am	Breakfast
8:30 am-12:00 pm	Board of Directors Meeting
9:00 am-12:00 pm	Instructional Leaders- Common Core Standards
12:00 pm-4:00 pm	Legislative Directors Meeting
6:30 pm-9:00 pm	Halloween Party at the Aura Club

Sunday, November 1

8:30 am- 11:30 am	Breakfast and Closing Session
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**Fresno Task Force
Develops Plan
For English Learners**

The Fresno Unified School District in California has more than 20,000 English Learners, students whose primary language is not English. And though they have made academic gains, only 19 percent scored at the proficient or advanced level in English language arts and 27 percent in mathematics on the 2008 California Standards Test.

As a result, Fresno Schools Superintendent Michael Hanson last year commissioned the district’s English Learners Task Force to develop a district-wide, coherent approach for accelerating the academic achievement of the school system’s English Learners.

Composed of teachers, administrators, parents and community members, the task force reviewed and analyzed student performance data, listened to nationally known experts in the field of English Learner education, studied current practices and reviewed research-based strategies.

The task force recently presented its recommendations in a report presented to the Fresno board of education. The report provides recommendations in seven areas, including professional development, student monitoring systems and community and parental involvement.

Professional development was identified as a critical need, and the report stated that it is imperative teachers are provided with targeted professional development combined with coaching support to ensure they are well prepared to meet the instructional needs of English Learners.

The task force recommended that the district provide training for teachers at all grade levels on how to prepare English Learner students to be career-ready graduates and that the district create a culture of high expectations for these students among teachers.

Fresno District *continued on page 12*

Washington Needs to Clean Up Its Act(s)--Its Regulations And Guidelines

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

After some 50 years of layering new federal laws and regulations on top of old, Congress and the U.S. Department of Education might consider weeding out unnecessary, overlapping, or contradictory provisions as a first step in the reauthorization of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). A serious culling of our laws and guidelines would better focus federal policy and clarify our national education priorities.

It has become obvious to many in Washington and in local school districts across the country that wide swaths of federal legislative language have become unmanageable and in many cases indecipherable. Even the U.S. Supreme Court in its recent special education cases struggled to sort out conflicting provisions in education law.

Unfortunately, Congress has gotten into the bad habit in recent years of adding legislative language to placate each side of an issue, or devising impractical, aspirational, imprecise, or convoluted provisions in order to pass legislation. It is not unusual for us to hear people on the Hill say, "The Department will figure this out later" or "We know you can't do it, but don't worry -- no one will take away your funding." This cavalier and now routine attitude to law-making, however, is making it increasingly difficult for local school officials to effectively administer or comply with the ever-growing volume of laws and procedures.

The U.S. Department of Education's inspector general reports that there are 588 requirements in Part A of Title I alone and called for the elimination of many of them in both the Clinton and Bush administrations. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) now runs 610 pages of small print, and the volume of federal education regulations, guidelines, and policy letters is equally daunting for both ESEA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). No one is able either to monitor all these requirements or to implement them, making federal aid a financial blessing and an operational curse.



There are numerous instances, of course, where the executive agencies attempt to "fix" unworkable provisions of law. Congress sometimes even encourages this after not being able to resolve a dispute politically. Legislators are often loathe to reopen legislation themselves or to pass "technical amendments" for fear of inviting more odious problems that are not so technical. One sees example of these fixes in the 1997 amendments to IDEA on the preparation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and in the interpretation of NCLB relating to first-year immigrant students and English proficiency.

At the same time, agencies will often fill the legislative void by creating their own interpretations or writing requirements into regulations or guidance not found in the legislation itself. The inability of Congress to police its own handiwork allows the agencies to take liberties with congressional ambiguities in ways that serve political purposes or skew the implementation of the laws the agency is regulating. Examples can be found in NCLB, IDEA, and even in the new stimulus legislation.

To be fair, it is hard to write legislation in a way that cannot be misinterpreted or twisted to someone's advantage. The problem is exacerbated by the judicial branch of government routinely ignoring legislative history that is written into conference reports by staff and never voted on by anyone. This judicial skepticism complicates how laws are interpreted, and sometimes results in decisions that are based more on conjecture and imagination than on actual legislative intent.

This is not a partisan issue, as the problem has been growing across multiple Congresses and administrations of both parties. The situation, however, is partly the result of a political atmosphere in Washington that is so fractured that clear decisions are hard to come by. But whatever the origins and reasons for the problem, it is time to fix it with a thorough scrubbing of our laws and guidelines as we look toward the reauthorization. This would indeed be transformational change.

Council Awards More Urban Education Research Fellowships

The Council of the Great City Schools has selected three more distinguished education researchers to pursue rigorous, policy-relevant research projects in collaboration with big-city school districts.

The three senior researchers selected in the third round of the Council's Senior Urban Education Research Fellowship (SUERF) program will receive funding for projects beginning this summer and fall. They are:



Martha Mac Iver

Dr. Martha Abele Mac Iver, Johns Hopkins University; *Identifying the Early Warning Signals of Dropout Outcomes in the Baltimore City Public Schools.*

Lesaux will focus on effective instruction in urban middle schools with high numbers of English language learners by evaluating the use of the "Academic Language Instruction for All Students" program model to improve the quality of classroom talk.

Borman's project will analyze the teacher and student outcomes of participation in Professional Learning Communities in St. Paul Public Schools. In addition, Borman will implement and evaluate an affirmation writing intervention designed to narrow existing achievement gaps in the district by addressing "stereotype threat" among minority students.

The third project, conducted by Mac Iver, will enhance the SUERF program's roster of student tracking studies by exploring the causes of student dropout in

Baltimore City Public Schools, as well as the school and teacher practices that can help to reduce the incidence of ninth grade failure in this and other urban districts.

The U.S. Department of Education awarded the Council more than \$2.5 million in September of 2006 to establish the SUERF program. The program aims to facilitate meaningful, on-going partnerships between senior researchers and urban school districts and to produce a set of high quality studies yielding reliable guidance regarding the challenges and decisions urban school districts face in education reform.

This is the third round of fellowship grants, awarded annually to three senior education researchers. Six other SUERF fellowship projects from two previous rounds of awards are currently under way.



Geoffery Borman

Dr. Geoffery D. Borman, University of Wisconsin; *An Evaluation of Professional Learning Communities in St. Paul Public Schools, and Implementation and Evaluation of a School-Based Intervention for Addressing "Stereotype Threat."*



Nonie Lesaux

Dr. Nonie Lesaux, Harvard University; *Classroom Talk in Urban Middle Schools: A Study of the ALIAS Program in the San Diego Unified School District.*

Two of the studies will evaluate programs aimed at narrowing achievement gaps and improving student learning for underserved students in urban districts.

Principals 'Go Beyond the Call of Duty' in Columbus



Talisa Dixon & Alesia Gillison

Beginning college this fall, valedictorian Lorraine Levels, a 2009 graduate of Brookhaven High School in Columbus, Ohio, wondered how she would travel to Georgia to move into her college dorm. Her mother couldn't make the trip because she's battling cancer.

So, her high school's former assistant principal and another administrator volunteered to drive her to Spelman College in Atlanta, where she is now a freshman.

"We want to be the first in line so we can assess (the room) and see what she needs," said

Brookhaven's assistant principal last school year, Alesia Gillison, in Columbus' *Suburban News*.

In August, Gillison, now principal of the city's Eastmoor Academy, and Talisa Dixon, also a former Brookhaven administrator and principal of another school, drove a van some 600 miles to Atlanta for the teen's freshmen move-in day.

"These ladies are indicative of the many administrators who we have in this district...who go beyond the call of duty," stressed Columbus City Schools Superintendent Gene Harris in the *News*.

"They're not looking for recognition; they're looking to do the right thing," she added.



Lorraine Levels



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Chicago, Buffalo and Minneapolis Educators Receive Top Honors

Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins of the Chicago Public Schools and Chief Academic Officer Folasade Oladele of the Buffalo Public Schools this summer received the nation's top honor in curriculum development and implementation in urban education.

Both received the 2009 Council of the Great City Schools/Pearson Education Curriculum Leadership Award at the Council's annual Curriculum and Research Directors Meeting in Chicago in mid-July.

David Heistad, executive director of the Research, Evaluation and Assessment Department of the Minneapolis Public Schools, also received the nation's top honor in research and assessment in urban education at the meeting.

He received the 2009 Council of the Great City Schools/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Research and Assessment Leadership Award.

Eason-Watkins and Oladele received the \$1,000 award for exemplifying leadership, innovation and commitment in im-

proving academic achievement of students in their respective school districts.

Heistad received his \$1,000 award for demonstrating educational excellence in the field of research and assessment that supports teaching and learning.

Urban Schools Recognized for Healthy Environments

At Blue Lakes Elementary School in Miami, 12 teachers joined together in January to create a boot camp program to help them get into shape.

Although many of the teachers had not engaged in much physical activity since high school, the teachers recruited two parents who were personal trainers to come after school three days a week to "whip them into shape."

As a result, the school was one of the 114 across the nation, including several urban schools, that were recently recognized by former president Bill Clinton for transforming their schools into healthier places

Fresno District *continued from page 9*

The task force found that a strong partnership among the district, parents and community members is critical in the education of English Learners.

The report recommends including using communication tools such as workshops, written communications and web sites to communicate to English Learner students and their families on how to succeed academically.

for students to learn and staff to work.

The schools are members of the Healthy Schools Program, a joint partnership of the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation, created to help schools develop and implement policies and practices to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

In addition to Blue Lakes Elementary, 17 schools in Miami-Dade County received awards. Also receiving an award was Randolph Heights Elementary School in St. Paul, Minn., and Kenly Elementary School in Tampa.