



Urban Educator

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Urban School Progress Climbing Report Analyzes State Assessments

Student achievement in the nation's major city public school systems continued to climb in 2004, defying public perception of stagnant urban academic performance.

Students in 65 city school systems in 38 states have posted new gains in math and reading on state-mandated assessments from not only a year ago, when urban school progress was cited in evaluating the inaugural year of the federal *No Child Left Behind* law, but stretching back to 2001.

A report released in late March by the Council of the Great City Schools called *Beating the Odds V* shows substantial progress by urban school districts in reading and math performance, indicating that an upward trend in urban education may be solidifying.

"The gains appear to be deepening and broadening since when first reported on our state testing results in 2001," said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly in a news conference broadcast live on C-SPAN at the National Press Club in Washington.

Between the 2001-2002 and 2003-

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Increases in Percentages of 4th and 8th Grade Urban Students Scoring at or above Proficiency in Reading and Math*				
	2002	2003	2004	Change
4th Grade Reading	43.1%	48.1%	51.0%	+7.9
4th Grade Math	44.1%	50.8%	55.3%	+11.2
8th Grade Reading	37.2%	38.5%	39.9%	+2.7
8th Grade Math	36.5%	39.4%	43.8%	+7.3

*Percentages based on differing state proficiency levels, enrollment counts and districts using identical tests in all three years.

Cities Having 'Educational Rebirth,' Says Education Secretary

In what was billed as her first appearance before an elementary and secondary education organization, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings recently addressed more than 200 big-city educators from across the nation who convened in Washington, D.C., to attend the Council of the Great City Schools' Legislative/Policy Conference.

The first mother of schoolchildren to serve as secretary of education, Spellings praised the conferees for the work they are doing to improve student achievement.

"You are all having an educational rebirth in your cities," said Spellings. "You have a great story to tell."

A graduate of the Houston Independent School District, Spellings noted that the Council's *Beating the Odds* report last year showed that in just one year fourth graders in the nation's urban schools improved their reading proficiency by 4.9 percent and math proficiency by 6.8 percent.



Education Secretary Spellings speaks

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Urban Educator

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

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Minneapolis Superintendent Calls for Change

Superintendent Thandiwe Peebles has called for a major change in the way her Minneapolis Public Schools administers its academic programs, following a Council of the Great City Schools assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the district's curriculum and instructional operation.

A Council report titled *Foundations for Success in the Minneapolis Public Schools* noted that Minneapolis historically had one of the nation's best urban school systems. "The district is now seeing signs of deterioration," the report said, and it "will only get worse unless important steps are taken."

New goals for academic progress and a tough new accountability system for educators are called for among key recommendations by a team of urban educators from other school systems that the Council assembled for the assessment.

Upon request from a superintendent, the Council dispatches "strategic support teams" to conduct assessments of various district operations under its *Cities Building Cities* initiative.

Since 1998, the Council has sent 90 teams to 26 cities to help Council urban school systems improve operations and instruction.

Minneapolis is one of nine cities that has had its instructional programs assessed by the Council.

"In general, the Minneapolis school district seems to be a system of schools rather than a school system," the report said. "Many people in the district appear to be doing their own thing."

In reaction to the report, Peebles said, "It is not hard to find exemplary schools here in MPS. Our challenge is to spread these 'best practices' across the district.

"Clearly, we need strong standards of academic achievement, and a rigorous accountability system that holds everyone responsible for results," she said in a press release. "This report is absolutely right."

The report notes that despite its challenges, the Minneapolis school system is well positioned to make the necessary reforms because the district has "better than adequate tools to keep itself from flagging." It points to a stable school board and a superintendent who took the helm last summer with 40 years of experience in education.

Coming on the heels of the report, the Minneapolis Public Schools recently received a favorable "report card" in the form of significant reading gains on the Minnesota Basic Skills Tests for eighth graders.

The big-city district saw reading scores of its eighth-grade students on the 2005 MBST increase 12 percentage points, with the passing rate rising to 64 percent, up from 52 percent last year. Math results advanced to 48 percent, a 7 percentage point increase from 41 percent.

"Math continues to be a challenge across the district," said Superintendent Peebles, indicating that the Council's assessment of the district's academic programs revealed that the problem is exacerbated by the lack of a unified strategy in mathematics districtwide.

Dallas and Norfolk Name Superintendents; Richmond Keeps Leader While Duval Co. Loses Chief

The Dallas Independent School District recently selected Michael Hinojosa to lead the 158,000-student school system. He will succeed interim superintendent Larry Groppel.



Michael Hinojosa

A graduate of the Dallas school system, Hinojosa is superintendent of Texas' Spring Independent School District, with 28,000 students.

In 2002, he was named Texas Superintendent of the Year.

Virginia's Norfolk Public Schools is also getting a new leader.

Stephen Jones was recently selected as the new superintendent of the 36,000-student district. Jones, superintendent of New York's Syracuse City School District, will replace Norfolk's interim superintendent, Denise Schnitzer.

Jones has been superintendent of the Syracuse school system for nearly six years.

In a news statement, Jones said he is excited about taking the reins in Norfolk, because he views the district as a model for urban education. "I'm very impressed with the work that has been accomplished in Norfolk Public Schools thus far, especially in terms of closing the achievement gap while continuing to raise the academic performance of all students."

While Norfolk is getting a new superintendent, another school system in

Virginia -- Richmond Public Schools -- is keeping its leader.

Deborah Jewell-Sherman has been the superintendent of the Richmond Public Schools



Deborah Jewell-Sherman

since 2002, and under her leadership the number of fully accredited city schools has risen from 10 in 2002 to 39 this year. In addition, the school system's rate of improvement on the state's assessment exam, Standards of Learning, is the highest in Virginia.

As a result, Jewell-Sherman recently signed a three-year contract, which will keep her as the superintendent of the 25,000-student district until June 2008.

Before becoming superintendent, Jewell-Sherman held the district's number two position as associate superintendent.

In another development, John Fryer, the superintendent of Florida's Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, recently announced his resignation as leader of the 129,000-student school system.

A retired Air Force major general, Fryer took the helm of the school district in 1998 and during his tenure

identified research-based strategies and innovative action plans that have improved student academic performance, school safety and accountability.

"John's visionary leadership has brought great progress to this district," said Nancy Broner, the chair of the Duval County school board.

Fryer will leave the district at the end of the school year.

"No experience in my life has been more rewarding than the seven years in which I have been privileged to serve as superintendent," said Fryer in a press release.

Million-Dollar Scholarship Fund Created in Austin

A \$1-million scholarship fund was recently created to help students in Texas' Austin Independent School District pursue careers in health care.

The W. Neal Kocurek/St. David's Scholarship Fund will be the largest scholarship fund in the district's history. Named for the late Kocurek, an Austin civic leader, the scholarships will be awarded to help students attend colleges and universities next fall.

All scholarship applicants must be pursuing a health care career path and demonstrate a financial need.

As it grows, district officials estimate that the scholarship fund could provide higher education tu-

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Urban School Progress....

2004 school years, the percentage of urban fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency in mathematics on state tests rose from 44.1 to 55.3, an 11.2 percentage point increase. For eighth graders, the percentage climbed from 36.5 to 43.8, a jump of 7.3 percentage points.

In reading, urban schoolchildren also posted gains, but not as fast as in math. From 2001-02 to 2003-04, the percentage of fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency in reading on state tests rose from 43.1 to 51.0 – nearly an eight percentage point increase. For eighth graders, the percentage rose from 37.2 to 39.9, a little more than a two percentage point hike.

“The progress in urban schools is not a fluke,” Casserly stressed. “It is consistent with the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores for large central cities and appears to show real headway by urban educators in raising student achievement.”

Work 'Paying Off'

In a press statement, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings said of the report, “These findings would suggest that the work of urban educators to raise student achievement is paying off. Children held to high academic standards can perform – they just need to be given the chance.”

Superintendent Deborah Jewell-Sherman of Virginia’s Richmond Public Schools noted at the Washington press conference to release *Beating the Odds V* that “failure is not an option.” She emphasized, “In Richmond Public Schools, we have committed ourselves

at every level of the organization to ensuring that all of our students achieve at high levels.

“This commitment to using best practices, coupled with a dogged determination to excel, has propelled our improvement on our state assessments from 10 fully accredited schools in 2002 to 39 of our 51 schools in 2004,” she pointed out.

“This 58 percent improvement over two years is clear and compelling evidence that urban school districts can meet the challenges of teaching all students to high standards in spite of obstacles,” the Richmond superintendent maintained.

Paul Vallas, CEO of the School District of Philadelphia, also noted at the press conference that he has seen “dramatic growth” in the nation’s eighth largest school system. “Last year, Philadelphia public schools beat the state’s overall average increase for reading and math on the demanding PSSA (Pennsylvania System of Student Assessments) test,” he explained.

“Thanks to the hard work of our students, teachers, principals and staff in embracing our standardized curriculum and data-driven decision making, we were able to increase the number of schools meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of *No Child Left Behind* from 58 to 160,” he stressed.

Reason for Progress

The Council’s executive director gives “some credit” to the NCLB law

for the urban school progress in recent years. “*No Child Left Behind* is not the only thing behind our gains,” he quickly pointed out.

“Urban educators are working harder and smarter than I have seen them work in the 28 years I have been at the Council,” he explained. “They deserve the lion’s share of the credit.”

But he also gives “some credit” to increased funding devoted to NCLB in its first two years. “We think the new dollars have helped,” he said.

The Council’s fifth annual report on *Beating the Odds* gives city-by-city analysis of how inner-city schools are performing on the academic goals and standards set by their respective states to measure student achievement and to hold districts and schools accountable for results.

Math Trends

Of all grades tested in the big-city school systems, 91.1 percent had shown gains in math scores and 54.2 percent had improved faster than

their states.

Although urban schools show gains in math performance, the big cities still lag behind state and national averages. However, three major urban school districts – Albuquerque, Anchorage and San Francisco – had higher math scores than their states in all grades tested.

Other school systems that had average math scores in half or more of the grades tested in 2004 that were higher than their respective states were



Council's Michael Casserly reports data to the press as Philadelphia's Paul Vallas prepares to address the media.

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Urban School Progress....

Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Hillsborough County (Tampa) and Palm Beach County in Florida, as well as Portland, Ore.

Reading Trends

Overall reading trends show that 77.2 percent of *all* grades tested in the big-city school systems had shown gains in reading scores – 45.8 percent had improved faster than their states.

Similar to math, reading scores in urban schools were generally below state and national averages. But Albuquerque, Anchorage and San Francisco had higher reading scores than statewide averages in *all* grades tested.

Other urban districts – Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Charleston, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Portland, Ore., San Diego and Seattle — had average reading scores in half or more of the grades tested that were higher than their respective states.

Achievement Gaps

Beating the Odds also presents data on racially identifiable achievement gaps, language proficiency, disability and income, as well as urban school demographic conditions and funding.

“The study shows some preliminary evidence that gaps among ethnic groups and between poor and non-poor, English language learners and native English speakers, and special education and non-special education students may be starting to narrow,” Casserly pointed out.

Beating the Odds V is available on the Council’s web site at www.cgcs.org

Prominent Suburban District Turns to Urban School System for Help

Fairfax County Seeks Aid from Richmond Schools

Northern Virginia’s Fairfax County Public Schools, a well-respected district across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., sought assistance recently from an urban school system, Richmond Public Schools, two hours down Interstate 95.

Fairfax County educators looked to Richmond’s school system for tips on how to boost test scores among poor and minority students to close academic achievement gaps between them and their predominately white, affluent classmates.

The Richmond school system is credited with establishing proven strategies for closing racial and economic achievement gaps for reading, science and mathematics, which is reflected in higher test scores.

“They’re doing exactly those kinds of things we need to be doing,” said Fairfax County Superintendent Jack Dale in the county’s newspaper, *The Connection*.

The paper points out that Richmond’s African American and economically disadvantaged students outperform their counterparts in Northern Virginia in every subject.

And Richmond’s Hispanic students also performed better in math and science, according to the Virginia Department of Education.

“When you start to think you’re the best and that you can’t improve, then that’s a bad situation,” Fairfax school board member Brad Center told the county newspaper. “The day we think no one can teach us anything is

the day we start heading down the tubes.”

A delegation from Fairfax County Public Schools reportedly traveled a few months ago to Richmond, the state’s capital city, to find out how the urban school system could be doing so well – even though it has a much higher poverty rate than Fairfax.

After the trip, Superintendent Dale noted in *The Connection* that some of the strategies employed by Richmond Public Schools would be implemented in Fairfax County schools.

Calling the relationship between Richmond and Fairfax a “partnership,” Richmond Schools Superintendent Deborah Jewell-Sherman says, “Just as we have learned from other school districts, we are happy to have the opportunity to share some of that knowledge with Fairfax.

“While there is still work to be done, we see this as another indication that Richmond Public Schools is ‘Moving from Good to Great.’”

In another development, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings last month visited Richmond’s Huguenot High School, touting President Bush’s initiative to improve high schools. Virginia Gov. Mark Warner joined her at the school, the Richmond school system’s first fully accredited comprehensive high school.

Since 2001, Richmond Public Schools has posted measurable gains in academic achievement, growing from five schools fully accredited to 39 today.

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Education Secretary....

She also said that the report revealed that big-city schools are narrowing the achievement gap between African American and white students and that these results are no accident.

“It took hard work and a great curriculum,” said Spellings. “Districts around the country need to look and find out what you’re doing.”

Supporting NCLB

Prior to Spellings becoming the nation’s eighth secretary of education in January, she served as assistant to the president for domestic policy and helped craft the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act.

In her address to urban educators, she praised the Council for being an early supporter of NCLB.

“NCLB changed the educational landscape of this country,” said Spellings. “But you deserve credit for making the law work.”

Spellings told conferees that she is meeting with educators from across the country and listening to what they have to say about NCLB.

However, she cautioned that changing the annual assessments and disaggregating of data are not negotiable.

“We are on the right track measuring student performance every year,” said Spellings.

She pointed out that President Bush has requested a \$603 million in-

crease in Title I funding in his 2006 budget and this represents a 52 percent increase for Title I since NCLB was implemented.

Spellings said that in return for increased funding, the president is asking for progress and for increased student academic performance.

“If you have an innovative way of achieving the law’s goals, let us see the data,” Spellings told conferees. “The destination – a well-educated nation – is more important than the journey.”

High School Initiative

The nation’s top education official mentioned a recent *Washington Post* article she read about college students and

their high school experiences. She recalled how one student said her fellow classmates were assembled into two groups: those that were going to college and those who weren’t.

“We’ve done a good job of selling the dream of college,” said Spellings, “but not a good job of selling the skills that will afford them the opportunity to achieve that dream.”

In an effort to improve the nation’s secondary schools, Spellings said the U.S. Department of Education has proposed a \$1.5 billion High School Initiative.

The initiative would not only test high school students but also help students get the individual attention and academic skills they need.

“It’s about affording every American the American dream,” said Spellings.

She lamented the fact that many students reach high school without receiving adequate preparation in reading. To alleviate this problem, the U.S. Department of Education has created a \$200 million program called *Striving Readers* to improve reading instruction in middle and high schools.

In addition, a \$120 million mathematics initiative for secondary students has been developed and \$45 million will go toward Pell Grants and the State Scholars Program in which states offer college-ready programs to high school students.

“That’s close to \$2 billion total dedicated to improved high school education,” said Spellings.

The secretary told urban educators that she understands the issues they are facing and wants to continue working with them to implement NCLB in their respective school districts.

“We all want to see this law bloom into the great potential it can offer kids in your district,” said Spellings.

The education secretary held a question-and-answer session with conferees after her speech.

One board member expressed her concern that there are schools classified as low-performing but are making strides. “Is there a model that can take into account achievement that is happening in these schools?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” said the secretary. “Our ears are open to approaches and we are interested in talking, but the



Council Chair Judy Farmer, left, shares a moment with Secretary Spellings as Assistant Secretary Ray Simon and Council Executive Director Michael Casserly look on.

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Education Secretary....

first thing I ask is how are the kids doing.”

A Congressman’s Priority

Also addressing the conference was Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-Pa.), who discussed the need for the nation to spend more money on education.

Fattah attended Philadelphia’s public schools and as a congressman has been the primary sponsor for GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), a federal program that helps low-income middle school students prepare for college.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, Fattah doesn’t understand why the nation spends only two cents out of every federal dollar on education. “We spend more on military defense,” said Fattah.

The Pennsylvania congressman agrees with President Bush’s goal that by the end of 2005 every child should have a qualified teacher.

“But what I know is most of our urban and rural districts have a hard time finding a teacher who is majoring in their discipline, especially math and science,” acknowledged Fattah.

He said that in almost every single state there is a differential ratio in terms of per pupil spending between urban and suburban school districts.

“People want to compare the [test] scores, but if you spend \$100,000 more on suburban districts than in urban dis-

tricts, there are going to be differential [differences] in terms of outcomes,” stressed Fattah.

He noted wealthy suburban districts are able to provide schoolchildren with smaller classes, qualified teachers, access to library facilities and up-to-date technology and textbooks – all the essential ingredients to getting a high-quality education that poorer urban districts often lack.



Rep. Chaka Fattah

“The federal government insists on measuring progress on an annual basis,” said Fattah. “But we have to insist we get to a point where children have a comparable opportunity to learning.”

He told conferees that if money were not everything in determining who receives a quality education, then equalize it and have everyone get the same amount of educational funding regardless of where they live.

“If money doesn’t matter, than why have 48 of 50 states been in courts trying to adjust the balance in funding formula if it doesn’t matter?” asked Fattah.

The 2002 recipient of the Council’s Thurgood Marshall Award for Excellence and Equity in Urban Education, Fattah believes the nation has a responsibility to get people interested in education from pre-school all the way to college.

“It has to become a higher priority in our nation,” said Fattah. “Because no matter what the cost of an education, ignorance costs our country more.”

Federal High School Initiative Addressed

The issue of reforming the nation’s high schools has recently received a great deal of attention with everyone -- from



Susan Sclafani

educators, governors and even Microsoft founder Bill Gates -- discussing how to improve secondary education.

At the Council of the Great City Schools’ recent Legislative/Policy Conference, Susan Sclafani, the assistant secretary for the office of vocational and adult education at the U.S. Department of Education, gave urban educators a briefing on the department’s new secondary schools initiative.

According to Sclafani, it is vital that high schools do a better job of educating the nation’s students so that young people can have the opportunity to move as far in the future as they can.

“There is no place for somebody without a high school education,” said Sclafani. “Eighty percent of jobs created now and between 2015 require more than a high school diploma.”

She told conferees that education department officials have found that students who undergo vocational training are not provided with rigorous academics, while students in the academic track don’t get the opportunity to explore different careers.

“We want to merge the two streams,”

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Charlotte Students Becoming More Involved in Global Learning

Students in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools were recently given the opportunity to share the stage with several former U.S. ambassadors at a two-day educational global summit.

The summit, held on the campus of the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, discussed the roles and responsibilities of developed countries and featured presentations from various experts regarding the conditions of world economies, politics, social issues and natural resources.

The event was organized by students in the Center for Leadership and Global Economics, a magnet program in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and Students in Free Enterprise, a non-profit organization.

During the summit, Charlotte students were able to share information about their experiences in the magnet program, which enables them to interact with partner schools in Russia, China and South Africa. In fact, students and teachers from the partner school in Berlin attended the summit, as well as teachers from the partner school in China.

Summit participants engaged in breakout discussion sessions and also heard from three former U.S. ambassadors, including Edward Brynn, who served as ambassador to Ghana from 1995 to 1998.

District officials plan to use the global summit as a spring board for future efforts in the magnet program. "...Our students must be successful in today's competitive world," said Charlotte Schools Superintendent James Pughsley. "That means they must understand global issues and be motivated to create change for the better."



\$25,000 Prizes Available to Schools With International Programs

Big-city schools that are providing students with a world-class education may be rewarded \$25,000 for their efforts.

The 2005 Goldman Sachs Foundation Prizes for Excellence in International Education will award a \$25,000 prize to one elementary school/middle school and one high school that are raising American awareness of the world and bridging the international knowledge gap.

Created in 2003 by the Goldman Sachs Foundation and the Asia Society, the awards program seeks to promote international knowledge and skills in the nation's schools.

To be eligible for the prize, elementary or middle schools must teach students about other world regions, cultures and languages. Eligible high schools must engage all or most of its students in learning about Asia, Africa, Latin America or the Middle East,

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Salt Lake City District Expands Exchange Programs

A teacher exchange program between Utah and the People's Republic of China will help students in the Salt Lake City School District learn Chinese.

An agreement, or memorandum of understanding, was signed recently between the Utah State Office of Education and the People's Republic of China that will bring a Mandarin Chinese language teacher to Salt Lake's West High School for two years.

The agreement also invites a Utah teacher to offer English in China. According to district officials, only one other state, South Carolina, has a similar agreement with China.

The district is already recruiting students to sign up for the language classes in Chinese at West High School, which will begin this fall. If the classes are popular, district officials may extend them to other high schools and split the visiting teacher's time between two or more schools.

According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the memorandum requires the China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language to pay for the Mandarin teacher's salary.

Nearly 1.1 billion people speak Mandarin Chinese, twice the number of English speakers in the United States.

But China is not the only country that the Salt Lake City school system has a relationship with. The district also has a similar teaching exchange program with Spain and is working to create another one with Mexico and Arabic-speaking countries.

Pictorial of 2005 Legislative Conference



Council Chair and Minneapolis school board member Judy Farmer makes a point at the legislative briefing.



San Diego school board president Luis Acle, left, chats with Florida's Broward County Superintendent Frank Till.



San Francisco Superintendent Arlene Ackerman and school board member Jill Wynns attend the congressional reception at the Legislative Conference.



Clark County school board member Shirley Barber and Superintendent Carlos Garcia listen intently during conference session.



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly poses with Congressman Chaka Fattah, center, and Council Director of Legislation Jeff Simering.



District of Columbia Superintendent Clifford Janey, center, talks with conference attendees.

Photos by Alex Jones

Senate Pushes Back On Education Budget Cuts

By Jeff Simering, Director of Legislation

On the heels of three consecutive years of dwindling increases in federal K-12 education appropriations and the Administration's FY2006 Budget proposal that cuts funding from the U.S. Department of Education, the United States Senate passed a number of amendments to the Congressional Budget Resolution that allow for additional investments in education.



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are not binding on the appropriations committee and do not directly translate into increased budget resources for any particular program or even for education in general.

The fight for increased federal education funding will continue throughout the congressional budget process and into the congressional appropriations process during the summer and fall.

Education funding must be the top legislative agenda item for the nation's public schools in the new 109th Congress, or the federal investment in education will undoubtedly erode.

The U.S. House of Representatives, on the other hand, rejected amendments to the budget resolution that would have increased the education budget category. The Senate and House now face the daunting task of resolving the numerous differences between their two versions of the budget in conference committee.

An amendment offered by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) added \$5.4 billion to the Senate's budget resolution for the purpose of restoring cuts in a variety of higher education, vocational and adult education programs, as well as increasing loan forgiveness for teachers teaching in high-need schools.

Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) also offered a successful amendment of \$500 million to restore funding for the Department of Education.

While these Senate education amendments represent a long-awaited signal that education funding continues to be a priority for a majority of the Senate, these budget amendments

Students Kick Off Anti-Violence Drive In Palm Beach Co.

In March, a Minnesota high school student killed nine people, wounded 14 others, then apparently killed himself in the nation's second worst school-shooting rampage since the Columbine massacre in Colorado in 1999.

Fed up with gun violence, students at a high school in Florida's Palm Beach County School District last month kicked off a public awareness campaign to speak out against gun violence.

Students from Suncoast Community High School in Riviera Beach, Fla., formed a group called Alter8tion and wrote a rap song, created a music video, cut a CD and created a web site (www.alter8tion.com) urging their peers to stop the violence.

"How many times have we heard the figures on gun deaths among children and teenagers, with little to no change in response to their cry for help?" asked Aldric Marshall, a behavior intervention specialist at Suncoast High School. "Kids are left wondering if anyone really cares."

Marshall, who helped the students produce the "Stop the Violence" CD, says that the goal of Alter8tion is to "finally make schools, communities and politicians hear their message."

The eight members of the group, who recorded their first rap single called "Touch Your Mind," have been scheduled to appear at a number of events.

On April 4, Alter8tion performed at the Youth Millennium Conference, a gathering of Palm Beach County middle and high school students, at

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Great City Grads



Ruth Simmons

President, Brown University
First African American president
of an Ivy League Institution
1963 graduate
Wheatley High School
Houston Independent
School District

St. Paul District Seeks Standards of Excellence In the United Kingdom

Many school districts that want to find ways to improve teacher quality often visit school districts in other states to see what practices they have implemented.

But in its search to find the best teaching practices, officials from Minnesota's Saint Paul Public Schools traveled all the way to England.

St. Paul Schools Superintendent Patricia Harvey recently led a delegation of district teachers, principals and state education officials to London as part of the school system's International Search for Excellence, an initiative to help district teachers implement educational best practices from around the world.

In an effort to develop a high quality professional development for teachers, the delegates toured several schools

and met with national education officials. They compared Saint Paul's curriculum, instructional methods, professional development, leadership and organizational structure with those in the United Kingdom.

During the visit, district officials also began to develop the framework for ongoing partnerships, discourse and opportunities between St. Paul schools and those in London.

Harvey believes that exploring different approaches to teaching and learning in diverse urban environments

by visiting schools in different countries is critical to understanding educational outcomes.

"If we want our students to compete in the international community when they graduate, our teachers must understand what is working around the world and be able to implement it here in the United States," said Harvey in a news release.

The eight-day trip was funded with a grant from the British Council-USA and 3M Corporation.

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Million-Dollar....

ition support for as many 20 as students each year as well as alleviate the shortage of qualified health care workers in the Austin area.

In 2003, the district opened the W. Neal Kocurek Health Science Institute at Lanier High School to prepare students for careers in medical science and health professions.

"The Scholarship Fund and the Institute will continue [Kocurek's] legacy of providing opportunities for students to learn, grow and develop professionally in the helping field of health care, where more workers are needed," said Doyle Valdez, president of the Austin school system's board of trustees.



First lady Laura Bush speaks to B.S. Carson Honors Preparatory School about the initiative *Helping America's Youth*.

First Lady Visits Atlanta School

Students at Atlanta's Benjamin S. Carson Honors Preparatory School were recently treated to a visit by first lady Laura Bush. A former school librarian, Bush was at the school to discuss a new White House initiative called *Helping America's Youth*.

The initiative will help children and teenagers by emphasizing three areas: family, school and community.

During her visit, Bush was introduced to a pilot program at Carson called the Computer Assisted Debate Project, which introduces students to the educational benefits of debate.

Bush said debate offers a healthy way for teenagers to express themselves. Debating skills "open students' eyes to the world of higher education," said Bush.

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Federal Initiative....

stressed Sclafani. She advocates that vocational teachers and academic teachers need to work together to help prepare students.

“We are not telling our kids often enough what is important for their future,” said Sclafani.

The assistant secretary said that under President Bush’s new High School Initiative states will be given block grants to provide funding for such programs as career and technical education.

“We give you the funding,” Sclafani told conferees, with the expectation that state and local educators will provide students with all the tools they need to be successful.

She said the High School Initiative also calls for doubling the money available for high schools to provide Advanced Placement courses.

“Forty percent of high schools don’t even offer AP,” she noted. “Stu-

dents there don’t even get a chance to have that head start.”

In addition to providing funding for AP courses, Pell Grant awards will be increased by \$1,000 to enable more low-income students to attend college under the high school initiative.

The State Scholars Program spurs secondary students to take more rigorous courses and the High School Initiative calls for the program to receive \$12 million.

Before coming to the education department, Sclafani was chief of staff for educational services for the Houston Independent School District.

She recalled that in Houston the district went from a quarter of students graduating from the state scholars program to three quarters graduating. She praised the program for exposing students to a college prep curriculum.

“Unless we can ensure kids get the background they need to succeed, we would have failed this next generation,” said Sclafani.

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Palm Beach....

Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

“We are very proud of the activism of the students,” says school district spokesman Nat Harrington.

If the group attains some fame, members indicate in a *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* article that their goal is more profound than popularity.

Sophomore Kevin Brooks emphasized in the newspaper, “All the autographs don’t mean anything until someone says, ‘This CD stopped me from killing or hurting someone.’”

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International Programs....

or about international affairs through its curriculum and through partnerships with other countries.

Applications for the program are due May 17 and can be found at www.internationaled.org/prizes.



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