



Council Assesses Hurricane Damage In New Orleans

The Council of the Great City Schools assembled a team of facility managers from five urban school districts last month to assess the damage of schools in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The team found at least 15 of 21 schools inspected could reopen in a relatively short time, if contractors were available to make repairs of the limited damage sustained.

An initial team recommendation focused on drying out buildings and conducting emergency patching to prevent additional rain damage while repairs were being arranged.

Believed to be the nation's worst natural disaster, the Aug. 29 hurricane caused devastating wind and flood damage to New Orleans and most of its schools. "But the city refused to bow to the predictions of many that it had no future, moving immediately to rebuild," says the Council's preliminary hurricane assessment report of New Orleans school facilities.

"Central to its strategy of getting back on its feet was reopening as many of the city's schools as soon as possible," stresses the report.

To aid the New Orleans school system, the Council assembled what it calls a strategic support team under

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Beverly Hall



Thomas Payzant



Candy Olson



Eugene Sanders

Urban High School Reform Focus of Town Meeting

A recent national poll found that the American public believes more attention needs to focus on improving high schools than elementary education.

In March, governors of some 13 states convened at the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools in Washington to form a coalition to reshape high schools in their states.

"Too many kids are falling through the cracks," stressed Virginia Gov. Mark Warner at a pre-summit press conference. "High school reform has been the tail on the education dog."

To address the issue at the local level, the Council of the Great City Schools will hold a national town hall meeting on "High School Reform in Urban Schools" in conjunction with the Council's 49th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 19-23, in Atlanta.

Moderated by Claudio Sanchez, education correspondent at National Public Radio in Washington, the 90-minute town meeting on Oct. 21 features:

- Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall
- Boston Public Schools Superintendent Thomas Payzant
- Florida's Hillsborough County (Tampa) board member Candy Olson

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urban Educator

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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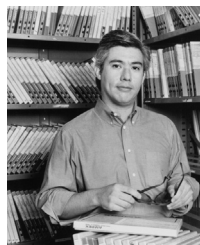
its "Cities Building Cities" initiative. By request of a Council member superintendent, the Council taps experts from other member urban school districts to conduct assessments of a variety of administrative, technical and academic operations in big-city school systems.

Facility managers from school districts in Miami, Indianapolis, Albuquerque, Nashville and Clark County in Las Vegas visited New Orleans in mid-September to assess damage of its public school buildings when half of the city was still flooded. It was initially thought that only eight schools had sustained limited damage, but the team found at least 15 buildings.

Because of additional flooding as a result of Hurricane Rita, the team of building engineers, architects and other facility managers postponed a subsequent trip last month, but plans to return to the Crescent City.

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Urban High School...

- Toledo Public Schools Superintendent Eugene Sanders



Moderator
 Claudio Sanchez

Additionally, four Atlanta public school students will give their perspectives on what contributes to high school reform in a forum aimed at exchanging information and exploring strategies on what works in urban high school reform.

And the Council also plans to dispatch an instructional delivery team to help rebuild the academic structure after a few schools are ready to receive students again.

At a New Orleans school board meeting convened in Baton Rouge, La., Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, who led the facilities team, reported preliminary findings of the assessment to Interim Superintendent Ora Watson and Bill Roberti of Alvarez and Marsal, a firm overhauling the district's finances and operations.



Hurricane Katrina uprooted trees and blew out windows at New Orleans' Fortier High School.

Anchorage Teacher Strike Averted

A teachers strike in Alaska's Anchorage School District was recently averted when the teachers union and the school system reached a one-year agreement.

Under the agreement, teachers and other employees, such as librarians, school nurses and counselors, will receive a 3 percent raise and the school year will continue as scheduled.

"With this agreement in hand, we can continue the school year uninterrupted, allowing all of us to remain focused on student instruction and success," said Anchorage Schools Superintendent Carol Comeau in a news release.

In August, teachers in the school system had voted to authorize a strike.

New Orleans Board Member Ponders What's Next for School District

Imagine being a board member of a school district that is no longer operating; its 53,000 students scattered in places across the country.

Well that is the situation Heidi Lovett Daniels has found herself in.



Heidi Lovett Daniels

Daniels has been a school board member for New Orleans Public Schools since January 10, 2005. And though no schools are currently open in the district, she still has a job to do.

On September 15, she attended her first school board meeting since Hurricane Katrina. The meeting was held in Baton Rouge at the offices of the Louisiana Department of Education.

Among the numerous things the seven-member board discussed was the district's fiscal status. "We are still an employer and employees are still on the payroll," says Daniels in an *Urban Educator* interview.

The board also discussed the possibility of opening some of its 128 schools.

"We are looking at opening 10 schools sometime in November," says Daniels, who said the Council of the Great City Schools has provided invaluable assistance to the district in determining what schools can open.

Daniels says the board is optimistic, but nevertheless is realistic about the situation the district faces.

"We have to evaluate the schools, clean them up and restaff them," says

Daniels. "It will be a difficult process."

The school district is asking for approximately \$291 million from the federal government to get the district up and running.

In addition to opening schools, Daniels believes the biggest challenge facing the district is trying to communicate with its students, employees and parents. "We are trying to get information out in multiple formats," she says. "But some people have no access to a computer."

Daniels notes that board members are communicating with the local media to get information out. She is also urging people who want information about the district to access the web site for the Louisiana Department of Education at www.doc.state.la.us.

Meanwhile, Daniels says she has been receiving calls from teachers and staff about when they can return.

"But then we have the problem of where are they going to live," Daniels emphasizes. She said the district has a request to the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide local housing for teachers.

Not having a place to live is something Daniels is familiar with.

A few days before Hurricane Katrina landed, she evacuated with her family to Georgia. Currently, she is living in Houma, Louisiana, which is about 35 minutes from New Orleans.

In late September, she went to her house in New Orleans for the first time since the hurricane hit on Aug. 29. And what she found was not pretty. All of the

Richmond Schools Leader Testifies On Capitol Hill

Superintendent Deborah Jewell-Sherman of Virginia's Richmond Public Schools testified in Congress on Sept. 29 that her district has made impressive progress in increasing student achievement.

Speaking before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Educa-



Deborah Jewell-Sherman

tion and the Workforce, Jewell-Sherman shared the rapid gains that public school students in Richmond have been making on Virginia's academic assessments, as well as the district's progress in meeting the

requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*.

For the third consecutive year, Richmond has increased the number of schools meeting the federal standard for Adequate Yearly Progress. The district has also increased the number of schools meeting Virginia's standard for school-level achievement, often considered one of the most challenging benchmarks in the nation.

Moreover, Superintendent Jewell-Sherman testified that five major subgroups in Richmond showed increases during the 2004-05 school year, and that the district's African-American and Hispanic students closed the achievement gaps with white students in both English and mathematics.

She attributed much of the success in Virginia's capital city to district-wide and research-based reforms, including a new reading instructional program, a comprehensive curriculum alignment, a

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Urban Districts Gain Flexibility In *No Child Left Behind* Law

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings recently gave the Chicago school system flexibility to provide its own tutoring to students under the provisions of the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act.

The announcement opened the way for a select number of urban school districts to gain flexibility in an agreement forged between the Council of the Great City Schools and the U.S. Department of Education.

The flexibility allows the Chicago Public Schools and other big-city school systems to provide supplemental educational services to schools in need of improvement rather than relying solely on external and private providers.

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Richmond Schools...

new instructional model, ongoing staff development, and the deployment of a student assessment and data management system.

Rep. Robert Scott, D-Va., shared a little-known fact outside of Richmond at the congressional hearing. When originally hired, Jewell-Sherman's contract required that she be terminated if she was unable to increase the number of schools meeting specific state standards by 10 that year, the congressman explained.

"Under her leadership, the district increased the number of schools reaching those standards by 13, and has continued to add to that total each year since," he emphasized.

Flexibility arrangements have been made with the public school systems in New York City, Los Angeles, Boston, Memphis, Anchorage and Dayton, Ohio, with as many as 10 districts expected to benefit.

"The goal of the flexibility is to increase the number of students receiving supplemental educational services, improve student achievement, and evaluate

the effectiveness of both district-run and external programs," explains Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

"We applaud the secretary and the Department of Education for working with us to craft an arrangement that will be good for students and helpful as we implement *No Child Left Behind*," he stressed.

Envelope, Please! And the Winner Is...

Who will win the nation's top prize in urban school leadership?

This year, it will be a past or current school board member of a district represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.

In 2004, the Richard R. Green Award was open to superintendents, with Boston Public Schools Superintendent Thomas Payzant earning the prize.

And the nominees are:

- Darnetta Clinkscale, St. Louis Public Schools
- Anna Dodson, Norfolk Public Schools
- Julie Brim Edwards, Portland (Ore.) Public Schools
- Carl Johnson, Memphis Public Schools
- Stephen Johnson, Richmond Public Schools
- Robert Parks, Broward County (Fla.) Public Schools
- Thelma Parks, Oklahoma City Public Schools
- Lorenzo Poe, Portland (Ore.) Public Schools

Envelope, please! And the winner is...

Announcement of this year's Richard R. Green Award, named for the late superintendent of New York City and Minneapolis school systems, takes place at the Council's Fall Conference banquet, Oct. 20, in Atlanta.

The Green awardee receives a \$10,000 college scholarship from ARAMARK education, a food and facilities management services firm, to present to a high school senior.

Inside the Council

Norfolk District Wins Broad Prize

Three years in a row, Norfolk Public Schools has been a contender for the Broad Prize in Urban Education, awarded to an urban school district that has improved student achievement while also reducing the racial achievement gap in academic performance.

The 37,000-student school district is a contender no more: Norfolk Public Schools was recently awarded the \$500,000 prize, sponsored by the Los Angeles-based Broad Foundation.

The award, considered the largest prize in education, has been awarded annually since 2002.

Four big-city school districts were finalists for the award: Boston Public Schools, the New York City Department of Education and the San Francisco Unified School District. Texas' Aldine Independent School District was also nominated.

Each of the finalists will receive \$125,000 for scholarships.

This year, more than 80 urban school districts were eligible for the Broad Prize. Once the five finalists were selected teams of educational researchers then conducted site visits.

The winning district was chosen by a selection jury composed of national leaders from business, government and nonprofit sectors. Also included on the panel were Rod Paige and Richard Riley, former U.S. secretaries of education.

"This truly is like winning the Nobel Prize," said Superintendent Stephen Jones in a press release. "...Winning the Broad Prize confirms that we have made significant progress in becoming a world-class school district."

Urban Teachers Sought For Fulbright Program in Japan

Big-city teachers will get the opportunity to travel to Japan for three weeks in a program designed to promote greater intercultural understanding between the United States and Japan.

The Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher Program (JFMF) is seeking up to 600 educators to participate in the 2006 program, sponsored by the government of Japan.

Participants will travel to Tokyo where they will undergo an orientation on Japanese life and culture and meet with Japanese government officials and educators. They will then travel to cities outside of Tokyo where they will visit schools and talk with Japanese students and teachers.

Upon their return, program participants will share what they learned about Japan with their students and communities through several outreach projects.

Since 1997, more than 4,600 K-12 teachers from the United States have visited Japan through the JFMJ Teacher Program.

The trips will be held in June, October and November 2006. K-12 teachers of all disciplines and from every state and the District of Columbia are encouraged to apply. The deadline to apply for the program is December 10, 2005, and applications are only available online at www.iie.org/jfmf.

Duval County, Providence Name New Leaders

As the new school year gets under way, two big-city school districts have selected veteran education leaders to take the reins.

Joseph Wise was recently named the superintendent of the Duval County School District in Jacksonville, Fla. He succeeds John Fryer, who resigned from the 129,000-student school system he led since 1998.



Joseph Wise

Wise is the superintendent of the Christina School District in Delaware, the largest school district in the state with 20,000 students. He has been superintendent of the district since 2003.

However, Wise is no stranger to the Duval County school district. He was a student for 10 years in the district's schools before moving away from the area.



Donnie Evans

In another development, Donnie Evans, the chief academic officer for Florida's Hillsborough County School District in Tampa,

was named superintendent of Providence Public Schools in Rhode Island.

He succeeds Melody Johnson, who is now the superintendent of Texas' Fort Worth Independent School District.

"Dr. Evans is a highly accomplished scholar, researcher and administrator," said Providence Mayor David Cicilline.

CLOSE-UP

Four Former Superintendents Return to the Helm – Why?

By Henry Duvall

The nation's major city school systems generally operate within high concentrations of poverty, homelessness, crime, drug abuse, teen pregnancies, racial tension, disabilities and limited English proficiency – societal problems.

Then, there are such challenges as declining financial resources, heavy media scrutiny and aggressive unions and community groups, as well as political factions.

So, why would an educator, or even non-educator for that matter, want to be at the helm of such an institution that faces so many disparate forces?

Since last year, four former superintendents of big-city school systems actually returned to the top post of what

some consider one of the hardest jobs in America. Why?

Carl Cohn, who just took the reins of San Diego City Schools, was recently a clinical professor at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California. He also served as a faculty adviser for the Broad Superintendents Academy.



Carl Cohn

He had retired from the superintendency of Long Beach Unified School District in 2002, after leading California's third largest school system for 10 years.

"It's one thing to prepare the next generation of urban superintendents (USC), and it's quite another thing to coach the current generation (Broad Foundation), but there's nothing quite like the sheer challenge of taking the controls again, trying to field a new, equally strong, team in a new place with a different institutional history," he responded in an *Urban Educator* inquiry.

A year ago, he had conversations with the District of Columbia Public Schools to lead that system. Asked if that experience gave him the urge to return to the helm of a major city district, he said, "Washington got me thinking about it in earnest, but I concluded that the multiple governance structure there didn't really fit my leadership style."

While heading the Long Beach school system, Cohn amassed a proven track record, and received the Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Education for his leadership.

"Someone recently called me the "horse whisperer of school boards," he noted, meaning someone who can bring a sense of calm and cohesion to an undisciplined or fractious entity. "I want to find out if that's true, and rescue some kids in the process."

Journey to Buffalo

This past summer, another former urban schools superintendent took the reins of the Buffalo Public Schools after serving two years as chief academic officer for Community Education Partners, an education firm that partners with public schools and the community to get disruptive and low-performing students back on track.

James Williams had formerly led Ohio's Dayton Public Schools from 1991 to 1999, and won the Council of the Great City Schools' Richard R. Green Award as the nation's top urban school leader in 1996.



James Williams

After departing Dayton, he served as deputy superintendent of schools for Maryland's Montgomery County Public Schools until 2003, when he joined Community Education Partners.

Asked why he has returned to a superintendency, Williams points out in an *Urban Educator* interview, "In a second time around, I think I can do it better."

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Inside the Council

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Four Former...

He says that his experience in Montgomery County gave him a “different lens,” explaining that the school system concentrated on its rural, suburban and urban regions in a collaborative manner that leveraged the county’s pockets of wealth to help the poor. By working together, adding rigor to the curriculum, all students, teachers and principals were held to the same standards and expectations, he adds.

At Community Education Partners, the focus was on alternative education. “I was like a traveling superintendent,” he says of his experience there before his journey to Buffalo.

“I’m loving the job that I’m doing,” stresses Williams, noting that he wants to make the Buffalo school system a “model that can be duplicated around the country.”

In the past 90 days, Williams notes that he has set in motion a collaborative plan with the community focusing on literacy in grades pre-kindergarten to third. He’s also extending the school year in the 22 elementary schools with the highest concentration of poverty of the city’s 40 public elementary schools.

“I’m here in Buffalo because I want to be here,” he says, while outlining a number of reforms he’s implementing or planning.

Always a Superintendent

“I never left the superintendency,” says Clifford Janey, who has led the District of Columbia Public Schools since

September of 2004. “In my heart and mind, I never left.”

Janey had been the superintendent of New York’s Rochester City School District from 1995 to 2002, and had chaired the board of directors of the Council of the Great City Schools during his tenure.



Clifford Janey

In his two-year absence from the helm of a big-city school system, he served as vice president for education at Scholastic, Inc., the big multimedia education publishing company, for a year until he became public schools superintendent in the nation’s capital.

He indicates that one gains more knowledge when taking another

high position, determining past experience that’s transferable to build on.

But regardless of what urban district one heads, “all roads have to point to Rome,” he stresses in an interview, using an analogy. He explains that all roads must connect, new and old, and small roads can’t be ignored as a school system leads the drive to advanced student learning and achievement.

New York to Miami

Also last year, Rudolph “Rudy” Crew became superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools after leading the nation’s largest school system, New York City, from 1995-1999.

In the interim years before taking the reins in Miami in July 2004, Crew served as director of district reform initiatives at the Stupski Foundation, which supports the improvement of public education. He also had served as executive director of a think tank, the Institute for K-12 Leadership.

Three urban school districts competed to hire Crew, including St. Louis and the District of Columbia, before he decided on Miami.

“I came back into the superintendency largely because it’s the best match, challenge and satisfaction I can find in my career,” he says in a *District Administration* magazine interview. “The only other thing that probably rivals that would be my stint as a high school principal.”



Rudy Crew

However, the task of overseeing an entire urban school system “ranks up there with the responsibilities of police chiefs, city managers and public transit directors,” says a report by the Council of the Great City Schools titled *The Urban Superintendent: Creating Great Schools While Surviving on the Job*.

Although urban school superintendents face a mountain of challenges, there is still one major element that appears to keep them motivated.

Perhaps Miami’s Crew says it best: “I truly enjoy being in an environment where the energy and the tensions of raising children and educating them are what you work through.”



School District in Louisville Gets \$25-Million Boost

Kentucky's Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville recently received its largest non-governmental grant ever with a \$25-million award from the GE Foundation to improve student math and science achievement.

The grant is part of the foundation's new national five-year, \$100-million expansion of its College Bound program to help school systems prepare students for college.

"This generous grant from the GE Foundation will support our schools in preparing all of our children to acquire the math and science skills necessary for their success as adults," says Superintendent Steve Daeschner in a news release.

According to the district, the rate of "college-going students" in 2004 was 69 percent. And only 38 percent of the district's 97,000 students scored at proficient or above in math and 37 percent in science.

With the grant, the Jefferson County Public Schools will create a "district implementation team" composed of the Jefferson County Teachers Association, district staff and broad-based community groups, which plan to implement standardized curricula and use research to drive decisions.

Says Daeschner in Louisville's *Courier-Journal*, The funds "will absolutely guarantee that we will have to raise the bar in this district."

Gang-Prevention Project Launched in Sacramento

In an effort to reach children before they are drawn into gangs and violence, California's Sacramento City Unified School District has implemented a gang resistance program.

The G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training) Program is operating in four elementary schools located in high-crime areas involving street gangs.

A collaboration between the school system and the Sacramento Police Department, the 13-week program is designed to teach students at an early age about the pitfalls of gangs and substance abuse before they enter high school.

Police officers visit fifth and sixth graders at the four schools for an hour-

long session where they urge students to find solutions to their problems other than violence, and identify role models in their lives. Before participating, officers must undergo a week-long training program.

"The program covers about every aspect necessary to keep a student out of trouble and get them to stay in school," said district police sergeant Vince Matranga in the district's newspaper, *The Connection*. "It is very gratifying to see students involved in a program like this."

The G.R.E.A.T. program was created in 1991 by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Phoenix Police Department. Since its inception, nearly four million students have graduated from the program.

Hmong Refugees Make Progress In St. Paul

Last year, Minnesota's St. Paul Public Schools received an influx of more than 1,000 Hmong students from the Wat Tham Krabok refugee camp in Thailand.

Many of them arrived in St. Paul never having held a pencil, traveled on a school bus, or spoken a word of English.

Yet one year later, the students have made remarkable progress and are thriving in the district's schools, according to school system officials.

One of the reasons for the refugees' success is the district's Transitional Language Centers (TLC's). Each TLC classroom is staffed with educators who speak both English and Hmong, and stocked with educational materials to help the Hmong students quickly transition into mainstream classrooms and prepare them for life in an American school.

The centers not only receive funding from the school district, but also from a variety of government agencies and social service providers.

The Hmong students, who first started arriving in St. Paul in the summer of 2004, have shown amazing progress over the last year, according to Mark Thompson, a TLC teacher at Como Park Elementary.

"Writing improved from one-word descriptions to multi-page documents," said Thompson in the school district's newspaper *SPPS Today*. "In math, we went from simple computation work to advanced work in word problems and problem-solving. That's amazing progress."

High Gas Prices Cause School Program Cutbacks

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, President Bush recently directed all federal agencies to conserve energy. And the federal government is not alone: several big-city school districts are also taking measures to conserve fuel.

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools has temporarily halted all field trips for students in the district because of the rising cost of fuel, combined with fuel supply shortages.

“It’s not a move we take lightly, because field trips have great educational value,” said Nashville Schools Transportation Director Keith Phillips in a press release. “However, faced with limited fuel supplies, we want to use what is available now for transportation of students to and from their schools.”

The school system operates nearly 580 buses, using 991,000 gallons of diesel fuel in a school year. According to district officials, the price of diesel fuel has increased up to 56 percent more a gallon. They estimate that if prices are not lowered, the district may spend a half-million dollars more this school year for fuel than they spent last year.

However, administrators are optimistic that the cancellation of field trips is a short-lived measure. “We’re not sure how long the field trips will be suspended, but for now it’s our best alternative,” said Phillips.

Also feeling the effects of an increase in fuel prices is North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. As a result, the district has cancelled all after-school activities that require bus transportation.

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Blue Ribbon Schools Announced

The High School for Performing and Visual Arts in Houston offers programs in theater, dance, instrumental music, vocal music and the visual arts. The school has won numerous awards not only for its arts curricula but also for high student academic performance.

The school recently received another award. It was one of 295 schools across the nation selected among the *No Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon Schools for 2005 by the U.S. Department of Education.



Schools received the award for demonstrating significant progress in closing the achievement gap or for high academic achievement.

The Houston school was not the only big-city school district to earn blue-ribbon status. Schools in Anchorage, Tucson, San Francisco, Fresno, Orlando, Jacksonville, Shreveport, Omaha, Charlotte, Cleveland, Charleston, Memphis, Milwaukee and Dallas were also designated as Blue Ribbon Schools.

Two schools in the San Francisco Unified School District made the list while four schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools were selected.

To be nominated for the Blue Ribbon Award program, schools must have at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds improve student performance on state tests or must have students, regardless of backgrounds, achieve in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests.

Jackson District-Local University Collaborative Pays Off

Five schools in Jackson, Mississippi, that are part of a professional development collaboration with Jackson State University and the Mississippi Department of Education will benefit from a \$5 million donation.

James Barksdale, the former chief executive officer of Netscape Communications Corp., recently announced that he is donating \$5 million over five years to the collaboration known as the Mississippi Learning Institute (MLI).

Created in 2002, the collaboration offers intensive training for teachers based on school data, scientific research and best practices.

And MLI has shown results. Students from two of the schools in the collaboration – Isable and George elementaries – have made significant improvements in test scores.

According to Theresa Green, principal of Isable, the collaborative has provided needed professional development programs to the school. “Our teachers can get tuition-free reimbursements for graduate and specialist degrees from Jackson State, and teacher assistants can seek undergraduate degrees there for little or no cost.” “...Yes, MLI has definitely made a difference in our school.”

Will Congress Cave In On Vouchers?

By Jeff Simering, Director of Legislation

When billions of new federal dollars are about to be spent by Congress—even for a good cause like hurricane relief, the opportunities for political gain and economic profiteering are almost irresistible.

The massive aid package in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita is a case in point, with an unprecedented scramble for tax breaks, regulatory relief, and federal pork.

The initial effort to provide immediate aid to school districts affected by the storms has become complicated by other interests attempting to gain a piece of the pie or to further a political or ideological agenda.

Even the U.S. Department of Education is not immune from attempting to politicize the Act.

In the immediate wake of Katrina, the Department stepped forward with a very credible education relief package, asking for immediate aid to school districts affected by the disaster. Secretary Spellings recommended that her department assume responsibility for the initial infusion of cash into the affected areas and set up a web site by which people could ask for and receive aid.

The funding part of the proposal recognized the limitations and questionable track record of FEMA in dealing with school systems during past disasters.

The flaw in the aid package, unfortunately, was assuming that the “directly impacted” and the “receiving” school dis-

tricts had similar needs that could be met through a single, lump sum allotment to the states. This approach pitted heavily storm-damaged school districts like New Orleans and Biloxi against receiving districts like Shreveport and Jackson.

The larger political problem, however, arose when the Administration decided to dust off its long-dormant school voucher initiative.

Though details remain sketchy, any hurricane-displaced student, whether previously enrolled in a public school or a private school, would be eligible to receive a federally funded voucher of up to \$7,500

per child, totaling some half billion dollars nationwide.

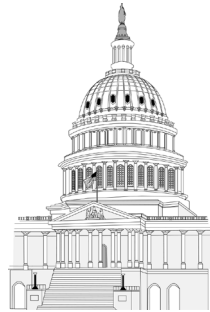
There is, of course, a growing consensus on Capitol Hill for swift and flexible aid to impacted and receiving schools alike, but this new proposal unnecessarily complicates and slows badly needed aid.

We do think there is a case to be made for students of all kinds on the heels of this unprecedented tragedy, but the Council of the Great City Schools wonders if there isn't a more constitutional route to providing textbooks, equipment, supplies and even teachers to serve displaced private schoolchildren along the lines of what is allowed under the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

This new “hurricane voucher” is the latest in a long line of attempts to argue for the federal government's subsidizing of private school tuition, no matter what the context.

We have seen “low-income” vouchers, “dangerous school” vouchers, “low-performing school” vouchers, and “District of Columbia” vouchers. Now the “hurricane” voucher. There is apparently no social ill that can't be solved with a voucher.

The Council encourages the Senate and House to craft a hurricane relief package that meets the needs of the schools in the affected areas, and leaves the contentious issue of school vouchers for another time.



LEGISLATIVE COLUMN

Great City Grads



Randall Pinkston
CBS News Correspondent
1968 graduate
Lanier High School
Jackson Public Schools

Chicago, Miami School Leaders and Mayors Launch Programs

Last year, the Council of the Great City Schools held a national town hall meeting in which urban school superintendents in Las Vegas and St. Paul discussed how they were working together with the mayors of their cities.

Also working together to improve academic achievement are the superintendents and mayors in Miami and Chicago.

Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley recently announced a new high school reform initiative to transform the district's high schools. The 10-year plan is estimated to cost from \$50 million to \$100 million.

Under the plan, new high school instructional programs in English, math and science will be offered in an effort to improve classroom instruction. The new programs will be offered to 15 high schools, starting in the fall of 2006.

The reform plan also calls for a new "score card" to be implemented that will not only track scores but also school environment, students' participation in extracurricular activities, teacher absence rates and student outcomes after graduation. District officials plan to have the cards published this fall.

"Parents and students told us that they looked at many factors besides test scores in choosing a school, so we want them to have all of this information," said Chicago CEO Arne Duncan. "I don't know of any other school district that has even tried to measure schools in this way."

In addition, the reform plan will offer teachers more professional development programs, create more schools, strengthen efforts to recruit principals and increase the number of preparation programs to ease the transition for

students from elementary school to high school.

District officials developed the reform effort after meeting with more than 400 students, parents, teachers, principals, educators and national education experts.

In another development, Miami-Dade County Public Schools and the City of Miami recently announced the formation of an education compact to improve education.

The compact calls for the district and the city to collaborate on everything

from construction to facilities use to the creation of new programs in an effort to ensure all graduates of the district's schools have the tools they need to succeed in life.

Among the goals of the compact are creating early childhood centers in new high-rise buildings and organizing a community literacy in city neighborhoods to help adults improve children's skills. Other goals of the compact include collaborating on legislative agendas in support of education, recruiting high-quality teachers and partnering on grant development opportunities.



Congressman Major Owens, third from left, presents leadership awards to urban school superintendents, left to right, Detroit's William Coleman, Memphis' Carol Johnson, San Francisco's Arlene Ackerman, Richmond's Deborah Jewell-Sherman and Rochester's Manuel Rivera.

Congressman Honors Urban Educators

Seven big-city superintendents were recipients of an award for their leadership and exemplary service to the nation's youth at the recent Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Conference in Washington.

Rep. Major Owens (D-N.Y.) and the Education Technology Think Tank presented the 2005 TEC Champion Leadership Award to William Coleman, chief executive officer for Detroit Public Schools; Arlene Ackerman, superintendent of San Francisco Unified School District; Carol Johnson, superintendent of Memphis City Schools; Deborah Jewell-Sherman, superintendent of Richmond Public Schools; and Manuel Rivera; superintendent of Rochester City School District; Gene Harris, superintendent of Columbus Public Schools; and Clifford Janey, superintendent of District of Columbia Public Schools.

Seattle School Wins Top Prize In National Award Program

The John Stanford International School in Seattle recently received the top prize in the 2005 School of Distinction Awards program.

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High Gas Prices ...

The shortage of fuel has also been felt in Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla. In an effort to prepare the district for possible interruptions of diesel fuel deliveries as a result of Hurricane Katrina, Superintendent Ronald Blocker announced in September that the school system would not provide transportation to athletic games or for field trips.

Parents were also told to provide their own transportation for students to attend school, but the district announced later in the month that there was enough diesel fuel to continue district bus operations.

Presented annually by Scholastic, Inc. and the Intel Corporation, the program honored 20 schools that have demonstrated exceptional commitment to achievement and innovation in education.

The Seattle school was named the "Best of the Best" winner in the elementary school category for its use of local, national and international partnerships to promote student achievement.

Two other big-city schools also received awards: Lee Elementary School of Technology in Tampa and Advanced Technologies Academy in Las Vegas.

Each of the winning schools received a \$10,000 grant and products ranging from curriculum materials to computer software valued at more than \$3 million.

The John Stanford International School received an additional \$15,000 grant for being the top winner.

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New Orleans ...

walls of the house have mold on them. "Right now the only way I can live there is if they blow the walls of my house up," says Daniels.

Yet, she is optimistic that the situation will improve, not only for her, but also for the school system she loves so dearly.

"I'm not afraid that students and teachers won't come back to the district," stresses Daniels. "I guess it's not in my personality to be afraid."

She also points out that New Orleans will get a lot of new employers coming into the city to help it rebuild. She believes that these employers will bring in families with school-age children who will help repopulate the school district.

"We have an opportunity to build a world class educational system," Daniels maintains. "We are going to be back bigger and better. That's what I'm working toward."



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