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SF and Oakland school officials get prime time with President Obama — face to face

By [Jill Tucker](#) on March 16, 2015 11:32 AM

Two Bay Area education officials were among a small group gathered around a table in the White House's Roosevelt Room with **President Obama** Monday morning, a White House meeting that offered insight into what's working in schools and what's still needed.

San Francisco Superintendent **Richard Carranza** and Oakland school board member **Jumoke Hinton Hodge** were among a dozen education officials from across the country invited to the 45-minute sit-down with the president.

They were all part of the Council of Great City Schools, which is composed of urban city education officials.

Carranza sat across from Obama.

"We had a conversation like we were going to share a taco," Carranza said. "He was incredibly engaged."

The conversation included a discussion about the new Common Core curriculum and standardized testing as well as the need to maintain federal funding for the country's public schools, Hodge said.

The president asked a lot of questions, specifically about districts' efforts to support African American males, as outlined in Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative.

But the president also talked about the need for school and learning to be fun, something he reiterated "at least three or four times," Hodge said.

"This cat is just incredibly realistic and focused and thoughtful," she said.

Both Bay Area officials spoke of programs and other efforts to improve urban education, including San Francisco Unified's partnerships with tech companies to help students get to college and ultimately be the kind of top talent those companies will be looking for in the future, Carranza said.

After the meeting, Obama cited the districts as examples of success supported by his administration.

“The good news is that we are seeing, as a consequence of some of the reforms that we’ve initiated and partnered with at the state and local levels, we’re seeing improved reading scores, improved math scores, improved graduation rates,” Obama said in a statement. “And (the Council of Great City Schools) I think has taken on the challenge and has been able to begin a process of turning school districts around and making sure that young people are getting the kind of education that they need to be able to compete in the 21st century.”

The other education officials present included superintendents from Milwaukee, Cleveland, Fresno and Boston, among others.

While Hodge and Carranza said the meeting was professionally productive and that they had a discussion about urban education reform, they both also said it was a surreal experience to be in the room where **Theodore Roosevelt**’s Nobel Peace Prize is displayed.

And even more surreal to have the president invite them into the Oval Office for a photo.

“We felt like a group of kids: ‘Oh my goodness we’re in the oval. Oh my goodness, there’s Teddy Roosevelt’s Nobel Peace Prize,’” Carranza said. “It was a bunch of oh-my-goodness moments.”

“We were totally like little kids on a field trip,” Hodge said.