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New York City Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza, third from left, is joined by city officials and students at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Brooklyn STEAM Center. Photo credit: Radhika Chalasani/Brooklyn Navy Yard

NYC Opens State-of-the-Art STEAM School

The nation's largest school district recently opened the doors of the Brooklyn STEAM Center, a 30,000-square-foot facility developed with high-tech industry leaders to help students identify career interests and learn how to pursue those careers.

The \$17 million school focuses on science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) and is located at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, an industrial campus that houses more than 400 businesses across creative, industrial, technology and other sectors.

The STEAM Center offers 300 high school juniors and seniors from eight high schools the opportunity to pursue careers in the culinary arts, computer sci-

ence, construction technology, design and engineering and film/media at a location with professionals that specialize in these industries. The program is designed to help students develop skills in their field of interest, along with developing relationships with potential future employers based at the Navy Yard.

Students apply to the program, although no minimum grade-point-average or test scores were required. According to the *New York Times*, approximately 93 percent of participants are African American or Hispanic, and 74 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

The school's new home has conference rooms, computer labs, a recording studio, a

STEAM School continued on page 4

Urban Schools Launch National Purchasing Consortium

The Council of the Great City Schools and the Los Angeles Unified School District recently launched an initiative to improve the quality of math materials for English Language Learners.

Under the initiative, a nationwide "bench of contracts" with three publishers: Curriculum Associates, LLC; Imagine Learning, Inc.; and Open Up Resources; have been established. The publishers were chosen because they met the Council's pre-determined quality criteria for ELL middle-school math materials.

As a result, any school district in the nation can now use these contracts to purchase the vetted materials to support teachers of English learners.

The initiative is believed to be the first effort to harness the joint purchasing power of the nation's major city school systems to improve the quality of instructional materials across the nation.

The effort began in 2012 when survey data revealed that urban school districts with the largest numbers of English learners were frustrated with the overall quality and availability of instructional materials for these students.

The Council and its member urban districts then joined together to devel-

Purchasing Consortium continued on page 4

Six Urban Educators Receive \$25,000 Milken Awards

As the Title I coordinator at Ala Wai Elementary in Honolulu, Sara King works to increase parental involvement at the school, including inviting parents to monthly coffee hours to share testing, learning and homework strategies they can use to aid their children's progress.

Before taking over the Title I coordinator role in August 2017, King taught first grade and served as grade-level leader where she pioneered student-led conferences in which students walked parents through a binder holding their children's work and progress charts. As a result, the entire school now uses these tools.

In recognition of her efforts, King was one of 33 teachers across the nation to receive a 2018-19 Milken Educator Award.

The award, sponsored by the Milken Family Foundation, is presented with a \$25,000 cash prize to outstanding educators in early to mid-career. Hailed by *Teacher Magazine* as the "Oscars of Teaching," the awards alternate yearly between elementary and secondary educators.

King was not the only big-city school educator to be honored. Also receiv-



Hawaii Teacher Sara King receives a hug from her students for winning the Milken Educator Award as Hawaii Governor David Ige, left, and Hawaii U.S. Representative Ed Case, right, look on. Photo credit: Milken Family Foundation

ing a Milken Educator Award was Janet Do, a teacher in Oregon's Portland Public Schools; Michelle Johnson, a teacher in Rhode Island's Providence Public Schools; Erica Stephens, a teacher in Shelby County Schools in Memphis; Shelly Gaughan, a teacher in Metro Nashville

Public Schools; and Anitra Jones, a principal in Seattle Public Schools.

Candidates are recommended for the award by an independent blue ribbon committee appointed by every participat-

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Newspaper Spotlights Two Big-City Educators



Angela Ward

Angela Ward is the supervisor of race and equity programs for Texas' Austin Independent School District, where she oversees the district's restorative

practices, an alternative to traditional forms of discipline that teaches students to talk through their problems and experiences.

In 2017, the Austin school district received a five-year, \$3.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to expand the use of restorative practices at 10 middle and elementary schools.

Ward was recently profiled in *Education's Week's* 2019 "Leaders To Learn From" report. She is among nine educators from across the nation who have been recognized for their efforts to find solutions and try new approaches in their respective school districts and are "working to enact—and inspire—transformational change."

Also profiled was Christie-Jo Adams, fine arts instructional specialist in Virginia's Richmond Public Schools. Adams was recognized for helping students enrich their learning and improve in their overall achievements.

Milken Awards *continued from page 2*

ing state's department of education, with the Milken Family Foundation making the final selections.

In order to be eligible for the award, recipients must demonstrate exceptional education talent as evidenced by effective instructional practices and student learning results, have educational accomplishments beyond the classroom, and have an engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community.

Since 1987, more than 2,700 educators have received more than \$68 million in cash awards. This year the award was presented to elementary educators.



Christie-Jo Adams

Using the arts as a tool, Adams has "made sure every 4th and 5th grader has access to orchestra and band—instrumental music classes that were only available in certain schools when she started," the report stated.

Education Week editors selected Ward and Adams from hundreds of nominees submitted by readers, staff reporters, and experts in the K-12 field.

For more information on the leaders, access <https://leaders.edweek.org/>.

A Vote of Confidence For Broward Leader

Robert Runcie was named superintendent of Florida's Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale in 2011, and during his tenure student academic achievement has improved and the district has the nation's largest debate program.



Robert Runcie

As a result, the school board recently voted to retain Runcie to lead the 271,000-student school district.

Broward County school system is still healing from the tragedy last February at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, where 14 students and three faculty were shot and killed.

In a press release, Runcie said that his focus remains on working to make schools safer for students, faculty and staff.

"Safety in all of our schools will always be our number one priority," said Runcie. "At the same time, we must continue to fulfill our core mission of providing a quality education, in safe environments, to prepare our students to succeed in tomorrow's world."

Fort Worth Partners With University To Improve Schools

Texas' Fort Worth Independent School District and Texas Wesleyan University have formed a partnership with the goal of sustaining academic growth made at five schools that have struggled with low academic achievement.

If the partnership receives approval from the state, beginning next school year, Texas Wesleyan plans to operate and manage five schools under the new Leadership Academy Network. However, the schools, which serve approximately 3,000 students, will remain a part of the Fort Worth school system and will be staffed by district teachers.

"We firmly believe that all students



Kent Scribner

can succeed and thrive, given the right learning environment," said Fort Worth Schools Superintendent Kent Scribner in a press release. "Between the demonstrated successes of the Leadership Academy model and the institutional resources Texas Wesleyan will bring to these campuses, we expect strong results going forward as we prepare these students for college, career and community leadership."

Fort Worth officials are making use of Texas Senate Bill 1882 passed in 2017, which allows public school systems to cooperate with outside entities to revamp campuses that were listed as "improvement required" by the state.

The district's partnership with Wesleyan creates an 1882 school, which uses additional state dollars to reinvent a low-performing school, create a new school or replicate an innovative school model. Each school will receive about \$1,800 a student.

Fort Worth *continued on page 8*

STEAM School *continued from page 1*

sound stage, a screening room and a teaching kitchen. Students will take two-year programs, alternating their time between their home high school and the STEAM Center, where they will take courses taught by experts in their fields of interest and participate in internships and job shadowing opportunities.

After completing the program, students will have received industry-specific certifications and will have gained experience, connections and portfolios to help pursue work in their chosen field or to further their education.

“The site is a game-changer,” said New York City Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza in the *BK Reader*, an online newspaper. “These students are getting so much more than a diploma—they are getting an early start on the road to college and career success.”

The school is a partnership between the New York City Department of Education and the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation. According to the *Times*, the STEAM Center is one of only two schools in New York City based at a workplace and grew out of a pilot program to increase career and technical educational opportunities for high school students in Brooklyn.

The STEAM Center is the brainchild of principal Kayon Pryce; David Ehrenberg, president and CEO of the Brooklyn Navy Yard; and Lester Young Jr., a former city education official. An advisory board has been created composed of industry experts who have helped develop the school’s curriculum.

“The Brooklyn STEAM Center is a cutting-edge model with tremendous potential in building our workforce of tomorrow,” said Pryce in the *BK Reader*. “We’re setting them on a path that will give them a leg up when competing for the high-tech jobs of the future, including those being created at the Navy Yard.”

The New York City public school system has made a concentrated effort to expand its career and technical education programs. There are currently 301 programs across 135 schools, reaching approximately 64,000 high school students.



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, back row center, and Council Director of ELL Policy and Research Gabriela Uro, fourth from left, met with Los Angeles School leaders and educators recently to launch an initiative to improve the quality of math materials for English Language Learners. Los Angeles school board member Kelly Gonez is third from the right.

Purchasing Consortium *continued from page 1*

op criteria to ensure that materials in both mathematics and English language arts served the needs of English learners and reflected the rigor of new academic math standards being implemented across the nation.

Based on those criteria, the Council assembled procurement officers from big-city school districts to design a system to make the joint procurement process possible.

“English Language Learner educators saw the need to set clear criteria for instructional materials,” said Gabriela Uro, the Council’s director of ELL policy and research. “The project entailed important collaboration between the academic side of the house and procurement to understand the needs of English learners and the procurement process.”

The Los Angeles school district stepped forward to serve as the lead district in the selection and contracting process and sent a request for proposal (RFP) to education companies asking them to develop middle-school math materials for ELLs in exchange for being included in a joint purchasing agreement.

More than 100 publishing groups requested initial information on the project; with three publishers ultimately chosen.

“This is the first national effort that we know of where a consortium of major school systems has banded together to drive market demand for higher quality instructional materials,” said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “Our school districts have sent a clear message that they will demand more for these students and more for their scarce educational funding.”

The Council will now inform school districts nationwide of the availability of the contracts and will encourage public school systems of all sizes to purchase high quality math materials for English learners. There are no fees or conditions for school district use of the contracts.

Several urban school systems have expressed interest in buying materials using the joint purchasing agreements.

“L.A. Unified serves the largest number of English Language Learners, and we’re pleased to join with the Council of the Great City Schools in putting that experience to work,” said Los Angeles Schools Superintendent Austin Beutner in a press release.

The first products released under the initiative will be middle school math materials that have been created to prepare more English Language Learners to take Algebra by 9th grade.

Presidential Adviser and Best-Selling Author To Address Conferees at Fall Conference

Former presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett and presidential historian and author Jon Meacham will address the nation's urban school leaders at the Council of the Great City Schools' Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 23-27, in Louisville, Ky.



Valerie Jarrett

In her role as the longest-serving senior adviser to former President Barack Obama, Jarrett oversaw the Offices of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs and chaired the White House Council on Women and Girls.

During her eight years of service in the Obama Administration, Jarrett worked to promote advocacy for workplace policies that would benefit working families. She was also instrumental in leading campaigns to reform the criminal justice system, end sexual assault and reduce gun violence.

Jarrett is currently a senior adviser to the Obama Foundation and a senior distinguished fellow at the University of Chicago Law School.

Meacham is the author of six best-selling books. His most recent book, *The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels*, debuted at No. 1 on the *The New York Times* bestsellers list.



Jon Meacham

Meacham received the Pulitzer Prize in 2009 for his book, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*.

His other bestsellers include *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush* and *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*.

A contributing editor for *TIME* magazine, Meacham is currently working on a biography on James and Dolley Madison.

Miami-Dade Tops List Of Nation's Best Magnet Schools

The top magnet schools in the nation were recently named and Miami-Dade County Public Schools had the most schools awarded this year than any other district.

The Magnet Schools of America (MSA) awarded 28 schools in Miami with the Magnet School of Excellence Merit Awards, the highest designation a magnet school can earn.

In order to be considered for the top award, magnet schools must demonstrate a commitment to high academic standards, school diversity, family engagement and specialized curricula and instruction.

Also receiving Excellence Awards were Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas (8); North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (5); and Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa (5); and Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale (4).

Connecticut's Bridgeport Public Schools and the Los Angeles Unified School District had three schools honored. And the Houston Independent School District and Florida's Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville and the School District

of Palm Beach County had one.

Miami-Dade County school system has more than 72,000 students enrolled in 380 magnet programs at 114 schools.



Larry Feldman

"Thanks to a concerted effort and the willingness

of the school board and superintendent, we have been able to roll out new, innovative magnet choice options year after year and really push the envelope in terms of programmatic development," said Miami school board member Larry Feldman.

Ballot Measures Pass in Seattle



Voters in Seattle recently showed their support for education by renewing two expiring levies to benefit students in Seattle Public Schools.

The three-year Educational Programs and Operations Levy will raise \$815 million the district will use to fund teacher salaries, textbooks, school lunches and special education services. And the six-year Building Excellence Capital V Levy will provide the school system with

\$1.4 billion to fund capital improvement projects to replace aging school buildings, reduce the number of portable classrooms, update fire-alarm systems, make earthquake improvements and increase access to classroom technology.

In a video posted on the district's website, Seattle Schools Superintendent Denise Juneau thanked Seattle voters for approving the levies.

"By once again approving our levies, you will help us continue to meet our goal of academic success and preparing every student for college, career and community participation."

Tulsa Teacher Corps Prepares New Educators for Success

By Tonya Harris

Software engineer-turned-teacher Susan Mullen clearly recalls the day last August she first faced her fifth-grade class at Grimes Elementary School. “My first day was terrifying. I was very nervous and hid in the bathroom until the moment the kids came through the door,” said Mullen in an interview with the *Urban Educator*.

By the end of that first day, with nerves subsided, the first-time teacher knew everything was going to be okay. “I was like, I got this; teaching is what I’m supposed to be doing with my life,” she said.

Looking back, Mullen credits lessons learned in the Tulsa Teacher Corps with helping her gain the confidence to pursue her new career. Tulsa Public Schools created the program last year to recruit and train college graduates from non-education careers to become teachers in Tulsa’s classrooms. It was prompted in part by a teacher shortage in Oklahoma that forced school district administrators to emergency certify teachers to fill vacant positions.

“There were less and less students coming out of institutions of higher education and more and more people coming into the classroom with little or no training or experience in an education setting,” said Quentin Liggins, Tulsa Public Schools director of Talent, Acquisitions, Retention and Development. “So, we took it upon ourselves to ask, ‘what is the innovative solution to this problem, and decided to create our own teacher prep program.’”

While the district will continue to work with valuable partners such as Teach for America to recruit educators, Liggins said the Tulsa Teacher Corps has the advantage of training teachers in the exact curriculum they will follow in the classroom starting on the first day.

“Everything we have invested in the district, from classroom behavior management and curriculum to providing students



Tulsa teacher Julie Hooker helps two of her students. The first-grade teacher is a member of the Tulsa Teacher Corps, a teacher preparation program.

with grade-level tasks, is Tulsa specific,” said Liggins.

The training program was free to participants and provided a \$1,500 stipend to defray summer living or relocation expenses. While applicants were not required to have teaching experience, a bachelor’s degree and 2.5 grade-point-average were required.

The district embarked on a campaign to get the word out, posting on online job boards, sharing information with area colleges and universities and reaching out to partner organizations such as City Year. More than 200 candidates from a variety of backgrounds applied for the first cohort, which consisted of nearly 100 participants.

Summer Bootcamp

For five weeks, Corps members experienced an intensive, hands-on, bootcamp-type training regimen. From 7 a.m. until noon they served as teachers for summer school students. Afternoons featured how-to lessons from veteran educators who shared successful teaching skills, classroom

curriculum, practice at creating and delivering challenging lessons and strategies for building strong classroom culture. At 5 p.m., students transitioned from classroom training to online classwork for two to four hours a day.

“It was stressful for a lot of us who have never taught before,” recalled Mullen. “It was baptism under fire, but I learned so much in those five weeks.”

Corps members who successfully completed the summer program were hired as full-time emergency certified teachers and placed in elementary schools where the need was greatest.

Tulsa Teacher Corps member Julie Hooker who teaches first grade at Gilcrease Elementary School recalls that one of the summer’s most valuable courses centered around examining personal biases.

“The courses really helped, not just with teaching the kids, but also with adult interaction,” said Hooker, who is Caucasian. Most of the teaching staff at her school is African American. “In the classroom going in, you think you don’t really have any biases until you start learning that everyone does, so the courses helped me connect better with my colleagues.”

The program also featured daily role playing, including such scenarios as how to manage a classroom using positive narration. Corps member Mullen believes that without this training she would’ve never known how to manage her classroom effectively.

“Even though I’m a first-year teacher at my school, my principal and veteran teachers have gone out of their way to commend my classroom management skills,” said Mullen. “And it’s all from everything I learned in the summer.”

Mullen also found value in lessons demonstrating how to help students work col-

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Tulsa Teacher continued from page 6

laboratively. As a result, she has organized her entire fifth-grade classroom in teams.

“Other than tests and assessments, students are constantly working together in teams and presenting things together,” said Mullen. “They compete against each other, and it’s healthy competition. And they love it, and it’s working out so well.”

The training for Corps members doesn’t stop once they have their own classrooms. It continues with regular visits and feedback from veteran teachers who serve as coaches.

When Hooker first started teaching, her coach visited her classroom regularly to observe, and if she was doing something wrong, would even redirect her. Now her coach observes her classroom once a month, letting her know what she did well and what things she can do better.

“You cover stuff in the summer, but you’re not really experiencing it until you get in your own classroom,” said Hooker.



“I know that I can come to my coach for anything and she will give me honest feedback and in-the-moment coaching. She has been invaluable.”

Mullen’s coach has helped her examine her students’ data and forecast their expected growth.

“There’s so much to teaching outside of teaching,” said Mullen. “I have to look at their reading and math scores and where they are now, and then figure out where they should be in the spring. So my coach has helped me do a lot of data analyses, which has been a big help.”

An important goal of the Corps program is increasing the racial diversity of the district’s teaching staff. According to district officials, 74 Corps members became new teachers in the 2018-2019 school year, with 40 percent identifying themselves as persons of color. In contrast, only 27 per-

cent of teachers in the Tulsa school system are persons of color.

Applications are currently being accepted for the 2019-2020 school year, with the district looking to bring in 125 new teachers. To reach the goal, officials are redoubling recruitment efforts at historically black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions.

The Tulsa Teacher Corps is funded by a \$5 million, three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Supporting Effective Educator Development program awarded to the Tulsa school system and its partner TNTP, a national teacher-training organization. Funding from the grant will end in 2020, but the program has been so successful administrators are looking for funding alternatives, such as through the district’s foundation.

“Our plan is to build the internal capacity for Tulsa Public Schools to sustain the program,” said Liggins. “We hope to continue to diversify our teaching force, while preparing teachers with foundational teaching skills to lead our classrooms.”

New teachers Hooker and Mullen eventually plan to take the courses and exams to become licensed Oklahoma teachers. For them, the Tulsa Teacher Corps has opened avenues into a career they might not otherwise have pursued.

“There were definitely times in the summer where you question the sanity of why you are in this program,” said Hooker, a former accountant. “But when I look at the emergency certified teachers that just come in and they haven’t had the training I’ve had, it’s so overwhelming for them.”

Mullen, whose background was in the software industry, was working as a teaching assistant at a Tulsa high school when the principal suggested she become a Corps member.

“Now I’m a big proponent and I’m always telling people they should apply,” said Mullen. “I have this whole new career that I absolutely love and I’m forever grateful for the principal who convinced me to join the Tulsa Teacher Corps.”

L.A. and San Antonio Rated Tops on School Breakfast Scorecard

Los Angeles Unified School District and Texas’ San Antonio Independent School District were named the top-performing school districts offering the “most important meal of the day,” according to a new report.

School Breakfast: Making it Work in Large School Districts, was recently published by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). The report measured the reach of the School Breakfast Program in 76 urban school districts in the 2017-2018 school year.

The Los Angeles school district came in No. 1 on this year’s scorecard. This is the third consecutive year the school system has been recognized as having the highest participation in a school breakfast program among other urban school districts in the nation. The San Antonio school system claimed the No. 2 position.

Other urban school districts recognized in the report were New Jersey’s Newark Public Schools; Houston Independent School District; Virginia’s Richmond Public Schools; Dallas Independent School District; San Diego Unified School District; Cincinnati Public Schools; New York’s Buffalo Public Schools; Oklahoma’s Tulsa Public Schools; and Shelby County Schools in Memphis.

Participation rates were measured by comparing the number of students from economically disadvantaged families receiving school breakfast to the number of such children receiving free or reduced-price lunch.

The Los Angeles school system offers free breakfast to eligible students at the majority of their schools and in 2011, initiated the Breakfast in the Classroom pilot program.

The FRAC report examined school breakfast participation and policies in 76 large school districts and can be accessed at <http://www.frac.org/>.



Mary Beth Tinker and John Tinker hold black armbands commemorating the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court case on student free speech they were plaintiffs in.

Des Moines Celebrates 50th Anniversary Of Landmark Ruling for Student Free Speech

Mary Beth Tinker was an 8th grade student at Warren Harding Junior High School in Des Moines, Iowa when she, her brother John, and a couple of other students wore black armbands to school in a silent protest of the Vietnam War. That simple protest led to a landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that cemented students' right to free speech in public schools.

Mary Beth and John recently visited nine schools in Des Moines to mark the 50th anniversary of the ruling in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community Schools*.

Making History

The siblings come from a family of civil rights activists and their parents traveled to Mississippi in the 1960s to register African Americans to vote.

As a 13-year-old, Mary Beth was greatly affected by images of the Vietnam War that were being broadcast on television. So, she came up with the idea to wear black armbands to school to protest the fighting. When the group of students came to school wearing the black armbands they

were suspended after refusing to remove them.

During their suspension, the students' parents filed a lawsuit against the Des Moines school system for violating their children's right to free speech.

The students were represented by the American Civil Liberties Union and the case eventually wound its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. On Feb. 24, 1969, the court ruled 7-2 in favor of the Tinkers, writing that, "students do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

The decision that ruled in favor of students in schools having First Amendment rights is considered one of the highest profile student rights cases argued before the Supreme Court.

But the Tinkers do not think of themselves as student rights icons. "It's great that eventually a blow was struck for students' right to free speech," said Mary Beth, in a story that appeared on the district's website. "But after all, our goal was to end the war and that went on for a long time."

Des Moines continued on page 12

New Orleans Creates Partnership to Boost Early Education

The Orleans Parish School Board has partnered with the City of New Orleans and National League of Cities (NLC) to launch a new initiative to work together to increase funding, quality, and access to early childhood education.

As part of the initiative, the Orleans Parish School Board, which oversees 78 schools, has established an Early Childhood Working Group that includes a collection of local leaders and educators. The group will provide recommendations to the school board regarding a strategy of expanding access to early childhood education to New Orleans children and families.

"This partnership is vital to achieving our goal to expand access to early childhood education to New Orleans children and families," said New Orleans Schools Superintendent Henderson Lewis Jr.

Under the initiative, the New Orleans school district and city officials will also be able to utilize NLC's Institute for Youth, Education and Families Early Learning Communities and Action Guide and Progress Rating Tool to assess their progress and develop action plans. The technical assistance program also offers guidance from national experts.

Fort Worth continued from page 3

In 2017, the district turned the five schools into leadership academies and staffed them with highly qualified teachers and administrators.

Last fall, the district received the news that all the leadership academies came off the Texas Education Agency's "Improvement Required" list. The schools "met standard" for the first time in many years and made gains in reading and math.

The partnership between the district and Texas Wesleyan University is focused on continuing academic gains. "This is an effort not to repeat history," Scribner said.

High School Dropout Turned School Board Member Gives Parents a Voice

Danielle Ford was a 17-year-old junior when she dropped out of high school in the Clark County School District in Las Vegas.

Years later, when she decided to run for a position on the district's board of trustees, critics cited her leaving school before graduation as a reason to disqualify her from serving on the board.

Contrary to that opinion, Ford said in an interview with the *Urban Educator*, "Dropping out of high school is what precisely made me a good candidate because I've seen firsthand the ways the district has not supported students."

Her constituents apparently agreed, electing Ford over her opponent by more than 20 percentage points. In January she was sworn in to represent 48 schools in the Clark County School District, the nation's fifth-largest school system.

A single mom of two children who attend district schools, Ford was elected despite a lack of political experience. She overcame eight candidates in the primary election and, in the general election, bested an establishment candidate who raised almost \$50,000 in comparison to Ford's self-funded campaign that totaled just \$12,000.

Ford, who served on her children's school PTO, believes one of the reasons she won was the community's desire for a school board member who is a parent. "They wanted someone with skin in the game," she said. "In addition to my own children, I have 12 nieces and nephews who are in the district or who will be in the next few years, so it's personal to me."

Born and raised in Las Vegas, Ford attended eight different district schools and admits living in a chaotic household that experienced financial problems. In the face of those challenges, Ford, who began working at the age of 14 to support her family, often missed school.

"A lot of times I prioritized work over school," she said.

Ford was a good student, but when she found herself in high school short of the credits required to graduate, her counselor



Danielle Ford is sworn in as a member of the Clark County School Board of Trustees during an oath of office ceremony.

suggested she would be better off dropping out of school and getting her general equivalency diploma (GED).

So at age 17 Ford left school, earned a GED and enrolled in beauty school, eventually obtaining a beautician license. Looking back, she wishes her high school had offered her more emotional and academic support. "Nobody noticed I had attended eight different district schools," said Ford. "There were no vocational programs available to me."

Based on her personal experience, the newly elected trustee said she plans to focus on increasing the emotional and mental health services available to students. She also wants to ensure that every student leaves school with a skill that will prepare them to be successful and support themselves financially with just a high school diploma.

"We need to make sure students can go out in the real world, even if they want to go to college, and be able to make money doing something that is unique to them," said Ford.

Bringing Common Sense

According to Ford, the biggest challenge facing the 320,000-student school system is the state's education funding formula. A recent report by the Council of the Great City Schools revealed that Clark County school district is one of the nation's lowest-funded urban school districts, spending just \$8,964 per student, compared to the Great City School median of \$13,730 per student.

"Nevada needs to announce that education is going to be a priority, because we keep on saying it's a priority but then we prioritize other things like a [football] stadium," said Ford. She is also a proponent of revenues from marijuana sales going directly to education.

At 33, Ford, one of two new members on the all-female school board, said she believes in rules and policy, but only if they make sense. At a recent board meeting, she cast the lone dissenting vote on an issue, explaining she felt the decision helped political officials but negatively impacted principals and schools.

An online marketing strategist, Ford regularly communicates with her constituents via social media, and during her campaign was often compared to newly elected New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. "A lot of people say I remind them of her, and it's funny how aligned our campaigns were," said Ford. "I do see a lot of similarities to her."

At the end of her four-year term on the board, Ford wants to be remembered for giving a voice to parents and bringing some common sense to the district. In two years, the board will have three more new members, who she hopes are nontraditional candidates like her, who care about children but who perhaps never thought running for the school board was something they could do.

"Me winning the election, a high school dropout with no political experience whatsoever, has really shown people that anybody can be a politician and that every voice matters."

School Infrastructure Legislation Underway in the House of Representatives

By Jeff Simering, Director of Legislation

The *Rebuild America's Schools Act* (H.R. 865) is the first bill to be debated and reported out of the House Education and Labor Committee in the 116th Congress. In prioritizing this school facilities bill, Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA) cited \$46 billion in annual underfunding of school facilities and \$197 billion to bring the nation's schools into good repair. The \$100 billion legislative package includes a \$70 billion needs-based grant program for school infrastructure over 10 years and \$30 billion in tax-subsidized bonds, like the federal aid provided under the stimulus legislation in 2009.

Prior to formal markup and votes on the bill, the committee held a hearing at which Guilford County Schools Superintendent Sharon Contreras testified. She outlined extensive infrastructure needs in her large countywide school system and underscored the increasing deterioration of the nation's public schools. The Guilford County school system is responsible for 126 schools with an average age of 50 years, along with 300 separate buildings and 469 mobile units. And even with a \$457 million county bond investment a decade ago, a new local study finds \$1.5 billion in school renovation and construction needs, which included some 55 percent of schools rated as in unsatisfactory or worse condition. Much like other large urban public-school systems, Guilford has prioritized spending on instructional and related services for students, but the result is a substantial deferred maintenance backlog and growing capital needs across the district.

Virtually every national study--starting with the 1995 U.S. General Accountability Office (GAO) report detailing \$112 billion in unmet needs--shows significant deterioration in public school facilities over the years. A 2011 Great City Schools study of 50 urban school districts found a combined \$81.5 billion in renovation, repair, modernization, and construction needs along with \$19 billion in deferred maintenance. And in 2014, the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences documented \$197 billion in school infrastructure needs. In grading the nation's current school infrastructure as a D-plus, only



the American Society of Civil Engineers showed any level of improvement over the D-minus grade the group gave in 2013. Still, they rated nearly one in four schools in fair to poor condition. And, now GAO has been tasked by Congress with updating its 25-year-old national school infrastructure assessment.

The House Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over the tax-related portion of the *Rebuild America's Schools Act*, has recently scheduled its first hearing on the overall national infrastructure investment problem. Unfortunately, the signature 2016 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of the 115th Congress repealed the tax-based school bond programs that the federal government put on the books years ago. Now, the Ways and Means Committee will look broadly at roads, bridges, ports, the electric grid, as well as school facilities.

Whether the *Rebuild America's Schools* bill moves forward in the House or is packaged with a larger comprehensive national infrastructure bill remains unclear. The Senate has shown little inclination to approve a large-scale infrastructure measure. Nonetheless, the President's mid-March release of his Administration's 2020 budget may clarify whether he intends to follow through on his 2016 campaign pledge on infrastructure improvements or whether the issue will be left for the 2020 campaign.

In any case, federal financial issues are likely to dominate the federal agenda over the next few months. With the March 2nd expiration of the federal debt ceiling, pressure will mount on defense and domestic federal budget caps, and everything will compete in the federal appropriations process. In addition, there is the possibility of an across-the-board sequestration of FY 2020 funds and the ongoing controversy over the border wall. Fitting any infrastructure investments into these funding conflicts will be difficult at best.



Guilford Leader Testifies on Capitol Hill

Sharon Contreras, superintendent of Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C., testified Feb. 12 at a hearing before the House Committee on Education and Labor titled “Underpaid Teachers and Crumbling Schools: How Underfunding Public Education Shortchanges America’s Students.” Contreras told representatives how as an educator she has seen firsthand how inadequate facilities negatively affect learning and expressed her support for the Rebuild America’s Schools Act of 2019 recently introduced by Congressman Bobby Scott (D-Va.). “I encourage this Committee and Congress to come together and prioritize investments in our school buildings and our students,” she said.

Retired Albuquerque Teacher Starts Podcast

New Mexico’s Albuquerque Public Schools has always benefited from hearing compelling stories about its students, staff and families and staying abreast of community information will now be easier than ever.

The district’s communications department; radio station KANW 89.1 FM; and retired teacher, Mark Goodrum; have partnered to introduce a new monthly podcast called APS Open Book.

Goodrum, host of the show, spent 33 years as a teacher and band director in the Albuquerque school system. He is passionate about his classroom experiences, is a captivating storyteller and relatable expert.

“We’re excited to introduce the APS Open Book podcast,” said Albuquerque

Albuquerque Podcast continued on page 12



Albuquerque retired teacher Mark Goodrum hosts the APS Open Book podcast.

Orlando Teacher Wins Grammy Award

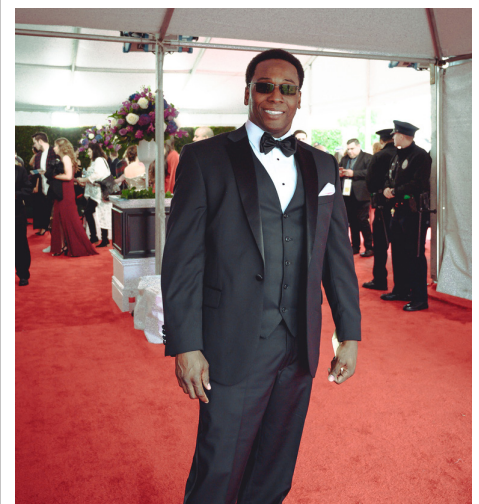
Jeffery Redding, a music teacher at West Orange High School in Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., was the recipient of the 2019 Music Educator Award.

Sponsored by the Recording Academy and the Grammy Museum, the award was established to recognize current educators who have made a significant and lasting contribution to the field of music education and who demonstrate a commitment to the broader cause of maintaining music education in the schools.

Redding, who is also a graduate of the Orange County school district, has led his choirs in performances at state, regional and national conventions of the American Choral Directors’ Association. His leadership has earned the choir first-place awards in various festivals, including the International Music Festival in Verona, Italy, where they not only received a Gold Award for best choir, but Redding was also honored as top director.

During the February broadcast of the 61st Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, Redding was announced as the winner of the Music Educator Award.

As a recipient of the award, Redding receives a \$10,000 grant and another \$10,000 grant will be given to his school.



Music teacher Jeffery Redding walks the red carpet at the Grammy Awards.



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Des Moines *continued from page 8*

During their recent tour of schools, the Tinkers visited Brody Middle School where students discussed issues ranging from mental health to the border wall. After the discussion was over, the school's Student Improvement Leader Maureen Griffin was encouraged by the dialogue that took place. "We can get some small groups going and really get people talking to each other about important issues," said Griffin. "This was a good start."

In a recent editorial in the *Des Moines Register*, Des Moines Schools Superintendent Thomas Ahart celebrated the outcome of the Tinker case and observed that educating students who will go on to be engaged and informed citizens is at the core of the district's work.

"The Tinker decision ties directly into the expectations we have of our students, from understanding the rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national, and global levels to being actively engaged in community life," wrote Ahart. "Toward those ends, the Tinker decision is as relevant today as at any time in the past half-century."

Albuquerque Podcast *continued from page 11*

Schools Superintendent Raquel Reedy. "This unique way to share and gain knowledge is both convenient and free. And I'm thrilled to have a seasoned teacher leading the discussions."

According to Goodrum, guests of the show will be engaging and knowledgeable and will dig deep to better understand timely, relevant and even challenging topics.

The first episode in February addressed suicide rates in New Mexico. According to the New Mexico Department of Health, suicide was the second leading cause of death among those ages 10-34.

A teacher, crisis outreach counselor and student spoke candidly about what it's like to know someone contemplating suicide, the immediate actions necessary to save a life and the frequency in which students deal with this threat.

The APS Open Book podcast will be broadcast on the district's radio station 89.1 KANW-FM and accessible 24/7 to anyone with internet access. Goodrum intends to collaborate with the district and listeners to identify future topics.

Great City Grads



Veronica Escobar

U.S. Congresswoman

1987 Graduate

Burges High School

**El Paso Independent
School District**