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## Bill Gates Sets New Priorities in Address At Council Conference

CLEVELAND — As the co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, philanthropist Bill Gates has been involved in efforts to improve K-12 education in the United States since 2000. In the past 17 years, a lot has changed in education reform. But what has not changed is the foundation's goal of wanting every student to get a great public education.

"It's so key to the future of America, whether it's the economic strength of the country or, more importantly, our commitment that individuals have an opportunity to succeed," said Gates to more than 1,000 urban school leaders assembled here for the Council's 61<sup>st</sup> Annual Fall Conference.

Those educators had a front row seat as Gates unveiled what the priorities of his foundation are going to be for the next five years in the area of education.

**Bill Gates** continued on page 6



Philanthropist Bill Gates

## Council Leads Team to Help Reopen Schools in Puerto Rico

A team of eight urban-school leaders led by the Council of the Great City Schools recently spent a week in Puerto Rico, assessing damaged school buildings and conducting repairs to reopen schools in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria that hit the island in September.

Puerto Rico Secretary of Education Julia Keleher had requested a Council facilities team to visit 35 schools in every region of the island to inspect and assess the condition of school buildings and determine the extent of damage caused by Hurricane Maria. The team was also asked to ascertain repair and maintenance needs of each of the schools and conduct repairs to help reopen damaged schools.

The team arrived in San Juan on Nov. 5, and traveled throughout Puerto Rico for seven days in two trucks. At one point, the team was stranded on a mountain top in the Puerto Rican countryside by a washed-out bridge.



Council team members John Dufay and Mark Zaher cut an electrical ground cable to enable students access to Jose Robles Otero School in Puerto Rico.

And this was the same week that U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos visited the island on Nov. 8, meeting with the

**Puerto Rico** continued on page 4

## 'Courage Award' Given to Urban Districts Impacted by Hurricanes

CLEVELAND — The Houston public school system and seven big-city Florida school districts impacted by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, respectively, received awards from the Council of the Great City Schools at its recent Fall Conference here.

The Council's *Courage in Crisis Award* was presented to the Houston Independent School District and the urban school districts in Florida's Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Duval County (Jacksonville), Hillsborough County (Tampa), Miami-Dade, Orange County

**Courage Award** continued on page 4

## Long Beach School Board Member Named Top Urban Educator

CLEVELAND—The Green-Garner Award, the most prestigious honor in urban education leadership, was presented to school board member Felton Williams of California's Long Beach Unified School District during the Council of the Great City Schools' 61<sup>st</sup> Annual Fall Conference here.

Sponsored by the Council, Aramark K-12 Education and Scholastic, Inc., the award recognizes Williams as the top urban educator of 2017, and affirms his outstanding contributions in urban education. Along with the award is a \$10,000 college scholarship Williams will be able to give to a student in the Long Beach school system.

Williams has served on the Long Beach school board for 13 years and is widely acknowledged for his efforts to improve student achievement, including a program to boost the number of students of color pursuing enrollment in Advanced Placement courses and exams.

"I am positively on cloud nine,"



Felton Williams holds his Green-Garner Award and is congratulated by, left to right, Yvette Turner of Aramark K-12 Education, Tai Chapman of Scholastic, Inc., and Larry Feldman, chair-elect of the Council of the Great City Schools.

said Williams upon receiving the award. "I want to extend my appreciation to the men and women and students of the Long Beach Unified School District for adding meaning to my life. They take their responsibility seriously in the worst of times and the best of times. They are committed, resilient and work diligently to provide chal-

lenging opportunities to each and every student."

### Queen Smith Award

Alicia Isaac, a teacher for 11 years at Boca Ciega High School in Florida's Pi-

**Top Educator** continued on page 8



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## Education Equity Focus of Council Town Hall Meeting

CLEVELAND—What does equity really mean?

That was the focus of a town hall meeting moderated by CNN political commentator Van Jones at the Council of the Great City Schools 61st Annual Fall Conference here.

Jones noted that the panelists, comprised of four big-city school leaders, a parent and two students, had 90 minutes to tackle the toughest issue in the country, if not the world.

For Eric Gordon, CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, equity is the core of what he does. “I want to make sure my kids and my kids’ families can dream without limits and fully be able to pursue whatever that dream is,” said Gordon. “To me, that’s the ultimate win in equity.”

Darrienne Driver, superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools, said that Milwaukee has the worst achievement gap between white and black students, which has led to a narrative that blacks can’t achieve. So she believes that part of her mission is to change that narrative, and the way to do that is through equity.

“It really does mean that we are bold and brave enough to put the resources in places where they are needed most,” said

Driver. “That sounds really great on paper, but it’s about doing business differently and getting the community around the whole concept of having to serve the needs of our students and approaching it in a very different way.”

Jones noted that the challenge of equity often requires taking resources and putting them somewhere else.

Denver school board member Allegra “Happy” Haynes said that when people equate the idea of equity with taking away from one group and giving it to another it’s a lose, lose strategy.

“So I like to turn it around and talk about every child because it’s too easy to lose the individual needs of a child,” said Haynes. “If you know me and what my needs are as a student, then you’ll understand what it takes to educate me and meet me where I am.”

“What are some of the things you see working?” asked Jones.

Haynes said that the school board recently received a report about low-performing schools that received intensive supports and they are now improving.

“You can’t just throw money at the problem and that’s the end,” said Haynes. “They changed, were accountable and did

the things that made a difference.”

Dallas Schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa said that part of the district’s equity strategy is a program called ACE, Achieving Campus Excellence, where the best teachers are paid more money to teach at the toughest schools. The district also did an equity audit. “We had someone from the outside come and tell us where our issues are,” said Hinojosa.

He also advises school district officials who want to redistribute money where it is most needed to appeal to people’s altruistic values. “Tell them to do this for the greater good, and if they have none, I appeal to their property values,” said Hinojosa. “If you don’t do this, ain’t nobody going to buy your house. Everyone has values somewhere, you just have to find them.”

Jessica Nelson is a parent of a recent graduate and two current students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

When her kids started school, the question she always asked herself is ‘Am I an advocate for my child and what school do I want them to attend?’ As a result, she researched different schools and became an active parent. “I do not have a problem going into a school and classroom and that’s

**Town Hall** continued on page 8



Van Jones, left, moderates the Council’s Town Hall Meeting on equity featuring panelists, left to right, Cleveland Schools CEO Eric Gordon, Milwaukee Schools Superintendent Darrienne Driver, Denver school board member Allegra Haynes, Dallas Schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa, Cleveland parent Jessica Nelson, Cleveland high school senior Shauntia Adams and Cleveland 10th grader Jonathan Chikuru.



Council team in Puerto Rico working on water supply problems at Cruz-Garcia and Jose-Padin schools.

**Puerto Rico** *continued from page 1*

governor of Puerto Rico, education secretary and other officials, including Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, who led the team of facilities and operations leaders from seven big-city school districts.

Of the 35 schools visited, the Council team recommended 20 to be opened or brought back on line, and 15 were deemed not ready to open or should be shut down. Reportedly, more than 450 schools on the island remain closed due to hurricane damage.

“People were crying, praying and cheering when we announced that their schools were opening,” says Casserly in an *Urban Educator* interview.

With no electricity on most of the island, Casserly points out that there were more electrical repairs that the team conducted than anything else, which included tying off live electrical wires and hooking up generators to provide power to schools. The team also made minor plumbing repairs.

Additionally, the team identified broad facilities issues that the Puerto Rico Department of Education was likely to face in the aftermath of the storm, and provided guidance to the department in working with FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers. Moreover, it provided a series of

recommendations to the department on island-wide rebuilding and school-by-school repairs.

At the end of the week, the Council facilities team submitted a 230-page report to the Puerto Rico secretary of education that gave findings, photos of damages with observations, inventory of building-by-building conditions and recommendations on next steps for the buildings.

Because so many Puerto Ricans were fleeing the heavily damaged island, the team faced a challenge trying to get flights home. Joining Casserly on the mission to reopen schools were Eugene Salazar, director of business operations for the Houston Independent School District; John Dufay, executive director of maintenance and operations for the Albuquerque Public Schools; Mark Zaher, director of school operations for the Miami-Dade County Public Schools; Keith Scroggins, chief operating officer of the Baltimore City Public Schools; Alex Belanger, assistant superintendent for facilities management and planning for California’s Fresno Unified School District; Julius Monk, executive director of facilities for North Carolina’s Guilford County Public Schools in Greensboro; and Patrick Zohn, chief operating officer of the Cleveland Metropolitan Public Schools.

## Detroit Enrollment Increases for First Time in 15 Years



**Nikolai Vitti**

The Detroit Public School Community District recently reported its first increase in student enrollment since the 2002-2003 school year – 15 years ago.

Some 4,600 more students enrolled in the Detroit school system this year, bringing the total enrollment up to more than 50,100 students from 45,500 last year.

“There are few indicators more important than enrollment to determine the health of a district because it reflects the intentional decision on the part of parents to place their children where they believe they will receive the best education,” said Superintendent Nikolai Vitti in a press release.

Moreover, more than 1,650 students enrolled in the Detroit public school district from charter schools in September, according to the district, which saw the low-

**Detroit Enrollment** *continued on page 12*

**Courage Awards** *continued from page 1*

(Orlando), Palm Beach County and Pinellas County (St. Petersburg).

Following the conference, a few school districts announced the award at their school board meetings.

In Jacksonville, Florida, the “Courage” Award was presented to Duval County Public Schools Superintendent Patricia Willis during the district’s recognition ceremony for all employees who provided services during Hurricane Irma.

“This award belongs to all of you,” Willis said to the more than 200 employees at the ceremony who represented school-based staff, administrators, school police, food service workers and maintenance and operations staff. “You all worked tirelessly for the cause of children.”



# CNN's Van Jones and Actress Rosario Dawson Address Urban School Leaders

CLEVELAND— CNN political commentator Van Jones calls himself a progressive. Yet, he believes the best educators must be both liberal and conservative. He believes liberal educators will fight for the resources, policies and support that schools need to be great, while conservatives will make sure students take personal responsibility for their own growth.

"The fact that this seems like an odd conversation, that conservative and liberal values are both needed to make America strong, is a part of why nothing is working anymore," said Jones in an insightful address to more than 1,000 urban school superintendents, senior administrators, board members and deans of colleges of education assembled here for the Council's 61st Annual Fall Conference.

The son of two teachers, Jones said he learned from his parents the importance of educators. "A future that can be great or terrible is sometimes based on a single word from a teacher," said Jones. "There's no more noble work than your work."

A political commentator on television for almost four years, he believes that the nation has underestimated the heroism of its cause as Americans.

"In America, there are 300 million people of every color, class, faith, gender, sexuality, ability level, every kind of human being ever born in one country and we mostly get along," marvels Jones.

When he travels the world, he visits countries that may have only two ethnic groups, but fight all the time. "You look at what we do every day, in your cities, is a miracle in human history," observed Jones, because for 10,000 years it was perfectly acceptable to kill people because they are in a different tribe.

"You are the only weird people that have somehow convinced yourselves that your tribe is everybody," he said.

The bestselling author realizes that it is so much easier to divide people based on a problem than to unite people based on a solution, but he urged people not to give up. "Democracy is hard to do, this is tough."



CNN commentator Van Jones

He also noted that Americans may wonder how people on the left and right sides of the political spectrum can listen to one another and help students succeed, when they don't even listen to the same news or share the same body of facts.

But he believes the nation can get through the turmoil if they follow those words found in the Pledge of Allegiance, 'liberty and justice for all.'

"Liberty is a right wing concept, justice is a left wing concept," said Jones, and "justice without liberty is a nightmare." He said that the two need each other and compared it to a bird who cannot fly without a left or right wing.

"What holds those two wings together is a beating heart," Jones told conferees. "You're that beating heart that knows the value of all those kids."

## Helping Emotionally

Actress Rosario Dawson was born to a 16-year-old teenage mother who had to drop out of school. But her mother didn't let poverty deter her from raising Dawson to believe she could do anything she wanted to do.

When Dawson was in elementary school, her mother and a group of parents

started a school, with funding from local colleges. The actress was one of 60 children that ended up being in a segmented part of an elementary school where the students were encouraged to participate in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) activities. In the summer, Dawson took a calculus course at a local college where her favorite teacher helped her understand how exciting it was to understand math.

"I think it's so remarkable how much time and energy people spend on trying to figure out what the influencers are on their children, and how little research they do into the teachers that they actually spend most of their time with," said Dawson. "I'm grateful that my mom put that time in and I'm grateful that all of you do."

Dawson told conferees that she understands how neglected so many urban communities are and that the neighborhood she grew up in New York City had high teenage pregnancy and high school dropout rates.

And she believes that the biggest thing educators are fighting against is the emotional intelligence of the children they are working with, those who may come from single-family homes, have to dodge bullets on their way from school or are worried about their parents being taken away because they are undocumented.

An advocate herself, Dawson praised educators for not just helping students get good grades and a strong future, but helping them emotionally.

"When you show up for them, it becomes what poet Maya Angelou said, 'the rainbows in the clouds'. And I want to thank you so much for being rainbows in the clouds because it's stormy out there. And you are showing up and showing what true service is."



Actress Rosario Dawson

**Bill Gates** continued from page 1

He said that the foundation's biggest investment will be funding a network of public schools across the nation that are committed to using data-driven continuous learning and evidence-based interventions to drive student achievement.

The networks will start initially with high-need schools and districts in six to eight states. Each network will be backed by a team of education experts skilled in continuous improvement, coaching, data collection and analysis.

According to Gates, while the networks might look different from each other, they will all have a commitment to continuous improvement, as well as a commitment to use the data to examine the progress of students.

"The goal is to share the results, including the things that don't go well," said Gates. "So that other people don't go down the same path."

The foundation backed the Common Core State Standards because it believed, and still believes, that all students – no matter where they go to school – should graduate with the skills and knowledge to succeed after high school. As a result, the foundation is increasing its commitment to developing great curricula and professional development aligned to state standards.

In the past, the foundation invested directly in teacher evaluations, and while this will no longer be the case, it will continue to gather data on the impact of these systems and encourage the use of tools that help teachers improve their practice.

Gates, co-founder of Microsoft, said that innovative research involving technology and digital learning will also be an area the foundation will delve into.

He then posed this question to conferees, "So, what does this mean for our work with you and others?"

During the next five years the foundation will invest more than \$1.7 billion in K-12 education initiatives, announced Gates. And the majority of that funding, more than 60 percent, will support the networks of public schools and the curricula they will be using.

And while the foundation will continue to be involved in charter schools and help them in areas they have challenges, such as serving special needs students, "we feel we need to put the vast majority of our money into these networks of public schools," said Gates.

Most importantly, the effort will be driven by the schools themselves. "We will let people come to us with the set of approaches they think will work for them in their local context," said Gates.

### **Using Data Effectively**

He noted that many school districts now have the data they need to track student progress and achievement, and some are using it to great effect.

He cited California's Fresno Unified School District, which discovered that students weren't aware of their college options. The district then created individualized college information packets for every senior who met the state's college requirements, and the result was a 50 percent increase in the number of students applying to California's public universities.

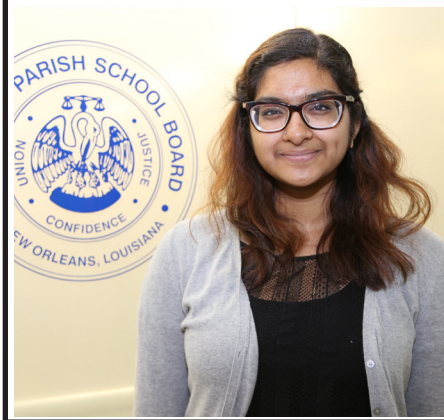
And he mentioned how Chicago Public Schools partnered with the University of Chicago to create their Network for College Success, a network of schools that is using data to identify strategies.

"So these kinds of approaches, where networks of schools have the flexibility to propose the approaches they want, we think this will lead to more impactful and durable systemic change that will be attractive enough to be widely adopted by other schools," said Gates.

He told conferees that the role of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is to serve as a catalyst of good ideas, driven by these guiding principles: helping all students, especially low-income students and students of color, so that everyone has access to a great public education that fully prepares them for adulthood. "We won't give up on this until this has been achieved, and we look forward to continued partnership with you in this work in the years to come," said Gates.

## **New Orleans Student Aces SAT and ACT**

Obtaining a perfect score on a college entrance exam is an incredible accomplishment. And Maanasa Narayanamoorthy, a 16-year-old senior at Benjamin Franklin High School in New Orleans, did it not once – but twice! She received the highest possible marks on both the ACT and SAT college readiness exams. Narayanamoorthy's advice to other students is to customize their approach. "You have to find the testing strategy that works best for you," she said in an interview with the *Times-Picayune*.



## **Council Math Director Elected to Board**

Denise Walston, the director of mathematics for the Council of the Great City Schools, was recently elected to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Board of Directors. The board sets the direction, establishes policy and oversees the activities of the math teachers group.

As the Council's director of mathematics, Walston provides member districts support for improving student achievement and for implementing the Common Core State Mathematics Standards. She has also served on numerous Council support teams in the area of curriculum, instruction and professional development.

## 40 Years of Service: Executive Director Recognized

## Des Moines Opens New Americans Center

CLEVELAND — In a surprise announcement, the chair of the Council of the Great City Schools Board of Directors noted that “rarely during our busy schedules . . . do we take time out to celebrate the accomplishments of our colleagues.”

But Darienne Driver took the time on Oct. 19 at a Council Fall Conference breakfast to recognize “a colleague who has devoted 40 years to one organization and poured nearly every day . . . into improving the lives and educational outcomes of urban schoolchildren.

“Today, we have the unique opportunity to celebrate the nation’s foremost champion for urban education, Dr. Michael Casserly.”

Casserly, executive director of the Council since 1992, joined the national urban-school coalition in 1977, and served as the Council’s director of legislation and research for 15 years.

The board chair, Superintendent Driver of the Milwaukee Public Schools, surprised him further when she invited Casserly’s wife and daughter as well as the organization’s officers and staff to the stage for the recognition of Casserly’s long tenure.

Applause thundered through the hotel ballroom as urban school leaders from around the nation attending the conference here paid tribute to Casserly. But there was more.



**Council Executive Michael Casserly receives a congratulatory hug from Council Chair Darienne Driver for his 40 years of service.**

Driver also announced, on behalf of the board and staff, the creation of the Michael Casserly Urban School Leadership Institute to honor the work and legacy of “urban education’s greatest champion.”

Casserly has expressed an interest over the years in working with urban-school districts to support the development of senior executives, such as superintendents and chief academic officers.

Clearly surprised, Casserly graciously accepted the honor and delivered impromptu acceptance remarks.

## Chicago School Progress Substantiated

Chicago Public Schools was once labeled the worst school district in the nation. But now the district is experiencing a remarkable turnaround, with students making gains on test scores, and a recent study by Stanford University revealing that the academic growth of district students is 25 percent higher than average on national test scores among big-city school districts.

These improvements were the focus of a recent forum, *What’s Driving Chicago’s Educational Progress?* Sponsored by the Joyce and Spencer Foundations, the forum

assembled educators and school-reform advocates in Chicago to discuss the factors behind the improvements taking place in the nation’s third largest school district.

“The forum was an excellent way to highlight the progress and accomplishments of Chicago Public Schools,” said Ray Hart, director of research for the Council of the Great City Schools, who participated in the program, “while exploring explanations for why the district has shown significant improvements over the years.”

In America’s heartland, Iowa’s Des Moines Public Schools this school year launched the Center for New Americans, a facility for newcomers to the United States.

The new center has evolved from the school district’s DMPS Welcome Center, which was equipped to help families new to the school system. But the need has grown to provide families new to the country, many from refugee camps, a range of specialized services to help them get acclimated to their new homes.

“I don’t mean any disrespect, but the people who are in there {the center} learning basic English phrases like how to introduce themselves are in many cases not even literate in their native languages when they come to us,” says Vinh Nguyen, who supervises the new Center for New Americans, in a school system blog story. “We need to teach them as well as their children.”

Interpreters at the center welcome immigrants who speak Arabic, Nepalese, Burmese and other languages.

### Refugee Challenge

Trying to absorb a refugee population in the community is a challenge the Des Moines school district faces. The resettlement agencies sponsor families for three months, and then they’re on their own, according to the district.

But the mission of the Center for New Americans is “to serve and help acclimate newly arrived language minority families into a new environment and school setting.”

“The feedback we get from these families is very positive,” says Laura Secory, a school district bilingual family liaison at the new center. “How do we gauge feedback? You look around the room and read people’s faces. People who, on the one hand are relieved to have escaped dire situations in their homelands, but on the other are frightened to be strangers in a land that’s foreign to them in all ways.”



**Town Hall** *continued from page 3*

the one thing I inform our parents, you are the advocate for your child, you are the one who will speak for that child.”

“What do we do about parents who can’t be advocates like yourself?” asked Jones.

“Look for resources because there’s always someone to speak for them,” said Nelson. “...It takes a village to raise a child.”

Shauntia Adams is a senior in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and serves on her school’s leadership team. She believes that equity means being fair, but also impartial and treating all students with the same respect.

“In order for me to achieve success, I have to achieve equity,” said Adams, who takes a biochemistry class at a local community college and said that because it is her most challenging subject, it is her favorite subject.

Jonathan Chikuru is a 10th-grade student in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District who has lived in the United States a little more than a year. Before moving to Cleveland, he lived in a refugee camp in Uganda for many years. “It’s a big opportunity to come from Africa to here as a refugee, I thank God for that,” said Chikuru. “In America, they see your goals and help you achieve them.”

Jones asked Gordon what is he doing to make Cleveland students like Chikuru be successful.

“Our answer to this is creating every opportunity with the resources we have and giving every family the opportunity to self-select where they want to go.” He said that within the last decade the district has worked hard to create a full array of choices, including charter schools.

“I don’t care who owns kids, I care that they have the opportunity to get the education that they want,” declared Gordon. “That’s our strategy, take the resources we have and create as many opportunities as we can.”

## Correcting Biases

According to Driver, in the Milwaukee school system 87 percent of students are of

color, 70 percent of teachers are white, and 70 percent of principals are of color.

“I don’t believe you have to be black to teach black kids, but in a hyper-segregated city people just don’t know how to interact with each other,” said Driver. “We’re expecting people who never have to do it in their daily lives to do it in a classroom.”

Milwaukee has instituted a policy that eliminates suspension from kindergarten to second grade. The district has also instituted cultural competency teaching and has an equity specialist, but Driver admits it’s been a journey.

“We are testing people’s belief systems about what they think children can do. But regardless of what you believe, you have a responsibility to teach our students.”

Haynes said the Denver school board passed a resolution ending suspensions in the early grades and received feedback from teachers, who said they were afraid of 4 year-olds. “That’s the elephant in the room when it comes to our achievement gap and issues facing our young men and women of color,” said Haynes. “You cannot teach someone you are afraid of. We have a lot of work to do.”

Hinojosa said there is no silver bullet because everyone has assumptions and biases they come to the table with. But he said that while members of his school board often disagree with each other, they were unified after the violent incidents in Charlottesville, Va., agreeing to change the names of schools students considered offensive. “And we passed a resolution unanimously to protect our Dreamers,” said Hinojosa, referring to deferred immigrants.

During a question-and-answer session, the panelists were asked about their efforts to hire more teachers of color.

The Cleveland school district is finding ways to hire more of the district’s paraprofessionals, many of whom are minorities.

“It’s something you have to be real intentional about,” said Gordon. “If we continue just going down the road to the universities in Ohio, we will never solve this problem, even if we hired every traditional candidate that was a minority. We have to create new pipelines.”

**Top Urban Educator** *continued from page 2*

**Alicia Isaac holds her Queen Smith Award.**

nellas County Schools, was the winner of the Queen Smith Award in Urban Education. The \$5,000 award is named in honor of the late vice president of urban programs for Macmillan/McGraw Hill Publishing Company.

A social studies teacher, Isaac has created an afterschool study club that has led to a significant increase in the number of students passing Advanced Placement exams.

## Urban Impact Award

The Council of the Great City Colleges of Education, an affiliate group of deans working with urban school leaders, presented the Dr. Shirley Schwartz Urban Impact Award to Florida’s Broward County Public Schools, the School District of Palm Beach County and Florida Atlantic University for the Establishing Excellence in Elementary Preparation (EXCEED) Program. The initiative works to improve teacher preparation in core subject areas (mathematics, science, social studies, English language arts) and is currently operating in 55 schools.



**Winners receive the Dr. Shirley Schwartz Urban Impact Award from Lehman College CUNY Dean Deborah Shanley, left.**



## Council Releases New Reports

The Council of the Great City Schools recently released new reports focusing on cyber-security, internal auditing, operational management, males of color and a pilot report on key academic performance indicators.

*Cyber-Security in Today's K-12 Environment* outlines key consideration for establishing secure environments in large urban school districts. "Technology has ushered in a new era for teaching and learning in classrooms from kindergarten through high school..." says the report, noting that the digital age has also affected district administrative and operational offices.

*Internal Auditing in the Great City Schools* describes best practices in internal auditing and makes the case for the value

of the function. "Internal auditing offers school boards and senior management an independent and objective source of information that can help them identify... operational and compliance issues preventing them from meeting their goals," the report emphasizes.

*Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools 2017* is an update of the Council's annual report on performance measures that could be used to improve business operations in urban school districts, such as procurement, information technology, budget and finance and other business and management services.

*Excellence for All: Creating Environments for Success for Males of Color in the Great City Schools* gives a summary of the Council's Males of Color Policy Conference in the spring of 2017 paired with research-based strategies for boosting the outcomes of males of color. "Urban schools are in the best position to change how society values males of color and invests in their success," says the report.

*Academic Key Performance Indicators Pilot Report* is a preliminary collection of data that presents a number of ways urban school districts can analyze the data by disaggregating results, showing trends and combining variables. The report focuses on the data collection and analysis of academic key performance indicators such as pre-k enrollment relative to kindergarten enrollment, algebra I completion rates, absentee rates by grade level, Advanced Placement participation rates among other KPIs.

## Law Firm, Council Win Legal Brief Award

A team of Husch Blackwell attorneys and the legal and legislative team from the Council of the Great City Schools recently won the 2017 "Best Brief" Award from the Education Law Association.

**Legal Award** continued on page 12

## Voters Weigh in On Education Ballot Issues

Election Day brought positive results for four large urban school districts.

A \$1.05-billion bond proposal was approved by voters for Texas' Austin Independent School District. Funds from the bond will be used to modernize or construct 16 new campus facilities, technologically upgrade learning spaces and purchase new school buses.

"We're grateful to the voters for placing their trust in Austin ISD, and we're excited to get started creating 21st-century learning spaces for all our students," said Austin Schools Superintendent Paul Cruz.

Voters in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools approved \$922 million in funding for the school system. The bond will aid the construction of new schools, renovations of old schools and the remodeling of more than a thousand classrooms. "The approval of the bond means that we will be able to expand access to some of our most popular programs," said Charlotte Schools Superintendent Clayton Wilcox. "We'll also be able to create and provide learning spaces worthy of our students and our staff, expanding the scope of teaching and learning across the district."

A \$750-million bond package for Texas' Fort Worth Independent School District was approved, which will be used to make capital improvements at 14 schools. Voters also approved an accompanying "Penny Swap", which will restructure a portion of the tax rate and provide the district with an additional \$23 million annually. According to the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, it is the third bond package in 10 years passed by voters.

And voters in Cincinnati approved Issue 24, the renewal of a tax levy for Cincinnati Public Schools. The levy covers 10 percent of the district's operating budget and, as a renewal, will not raise taxes.



## Humanitarian Award

Superintendent Alberto Carvalho of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools receives the 2017 Alvah H. Chapman Jr. Humanitarian Award for his commitment to serving the homeless. "Providing support and resources to children and families who are displaced... is not uncommon to the work we do; it is part of our mission to place every child on a path to personal and academic success," he stressed.

## Public Schools Clear Losers Under Pending Tax Legislation

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

Congress is rushing to complete a federal tax overhaul under expedited procedural rules before the end of the calendar year. The House has already passed its bill, and the Senate will consider its version after the Thanksgiving recess.

Ironically, this fast-track “budget reconciliation” process being used now was created decades ago to get the federal deficit under control, but it would add \$1.5 trillion to the national debt over the next 10 years. And while some of the details of the tax bill continue to change as negotiations proceed, the basic contours remain unaltered.

The driving force behind the “Tax Reform” initiative is tax relief for corporations and certain “pass-through” businesses (S-corps, LLCs, partnerships, and sole proprietorships), which would garner over a trillion dollars in tax breaks over the next 10 years. Other winners and losers in the federal tax sweepstakes depend on specific financial circumstances, or even state or local tax jurisdiction. For each set of taxpayers getting a tax benefit, others will lose one.

Alternatively, tax breaks can reduce federal revenues and balloon future federal deficits. The pending tax bills in both the House and Senate do both—reduce revenues and increase deficits. Either way, public school districts are clear losers under the pending tax bills—both directly and indirectly.

For example, over 30 million taxpaying families are at risk of losing their state and local tax deductions (SALT) in addition to other deductions. The bulk of school district revenues, of course, comes from state and local property taxes and state and local income and sales taxes, which are currently “write-offs” for nearly a third of the nation’s taxpayers. The loss or limitation of SALT deductions would likely restrict the ability of school districts (as well as states, cities, and counties) to maintain or raise operational revenues, as well as reduce home values and assessed valuations for homeowners in every school district nationwide.

Further, repealing three specific tax-favored bonding authorities will directly undercut school-facility financing. And, the House bill changes federal tax policy to allow tax-free gains on “529” education savings accounts of



up to \$10,000 per year to cover private school tuition, and two other private school voucher subsidies may be considered by amendment on the Senate floor.

Moreover, the trillion-dollar business tax cut is coupled with an array of tax cuts for individual taxpayers in various income categories. To offset these major tax cuts, a new trillion-dollar revenue source was envisioned – a border-adjustment tax levied on imported products once they were sold in the United States.

However, opposition to this provision from President Trump as well as corporate and consumer groups forced Congress to create an alternative trillion-dollar revenue source—i.e., eliminating the individual SALT deductions (\$1.3 trillion) and eliminating the personal exemption of \$4,050 for each family member (\$1.5 trillion). Finally, adding \$1.5 trillion to the deficit over the next 10 years ultimately provides the budget room to underwrite or fund the major tax cuts contained in both bills.

The tax legislation became even more partisan and controversial when the Senate added repeal of the pivotal Obamacare “individual mandate” that levied a tax penalty on anyone not covered by or purchasing health insurance. The legislation also sunset individual tax cuts after 2025 while making the business tax cuts permanent. Moreover, the \$1.5 trillion deficit created by the tax bill is set to trigger renewed attention on cutting federal domestic spending, and even a return to spending “sequestration,” especially to non-exempt domestic entitlement programs.

In sum, regular taxpayers are paying for much of the corporate and small business tax breaks in both House and Senate bills. And, public schools will face direct and collateral damage in the pending tax legislation because of the shifting federal tax preferences and subsidies. The Council of the Great City Schools has strongly opposed both the House and Senate versions of the tax legislation and their damaging effects on the nation’s public schools.



## Pictorial of 61st Annual Fall Conference



Philanthropist Bill Gates, third from left, poses with the Council leadership, left to right, Secretary-Treasurer Eric Gordon, Past Chair Felton Williams, Chair Darienne Driver, Chair-elect Lawrence Feldman and Executive Director Michael Casserly.



Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Superintendent Shawn Joseph, Pittsburgh Schools Superintendent Anthony Hamlet and Kansas City Schools Superintendent Mark Bedell participate in a session on leading urban school districts as new superintendents.

## Photos by Clarence Tabb Jr.



Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson welcomes conferees to the city of Cleveland.



Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Raquel Reedy facilitates a session on language and diversity.



Dallas Schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa presents information at a session facilitated by Miami Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho.



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## Former D.C. Schools Chief Remembered

Dr. Vincent Reed, a former District of Columbia Public Schools superintendent, died on Oct. 17 at his Washington home. He was 89.

Dr. Reed spent more than 20 years in the D.C. school system, beginning as a teacher and rising to various administrative positions leading to becoming superintendent in 1975. Before taking the reins, he was the first black principal of the predominantly white Wilson High School in the city.

He led the school district in the nation's capital for five years, and was very active in the Council of the Great City Schools, says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

"Dr. Vincent Reed was one of the most popular superintendents D.C. Public Schools has ever had," Casserly pointed out.

In 1981, President Reagan named Dr. Reed assistant secretary for elementary and secondary schools. A year later, he became the vice president of communications at the *Washington Post*, a post he held for some 15 years until he retired in 1997.

### ***Cincinnati Leader Dies***

Also remembered is Cincinnati school board member Chris Nelms, who reportedly died Sept. 19 at 64 after a fight with cancer.

Elected to the Cincinnati Board of Education in 2008, Mr. Nelms helped launch the Cincinnati Public Schools' M.O.R.E. program -- Men Organized, Respectful and Educated -- a mentorship organization for black students.

He was also affiliated with Activities Beyond the Classroom, a support group for extracurricular activities for students.

**Detroit Enrollment** *continued from page 4*

est exodus of students to charter schools in four years.

While reporting the district's enrollment increase at a press conference, Superintendent Vitti also rolled out a new three-year strategic plan.

The strategic plan, emphasizing that "Every Student Deserves an Excellent Public Education in Detroit," focuses on five priorities: outstanding achievement, transformative culture, whole-child commitment, exceptional talent and responsible stewardship.

"Parents, it's a brand-new day and a brand-new district, come on out and be part of it," Detroit parent advocate Derrick Anderson stressed.

**Legal Award** *continued from page 9*

The legal firm and the Council wrote and filed an *amicus curiae* brief in the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District*. The brief was submitted on behalf of the Council, a Husch client, in support of the respondent school district.

In a unanimous ruling last March, the

Supreme Court clarified the legal standard that federal courts must apply in evaluating individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The ruling and discussion in the high court's opinion significantly reflect the legal arguments set forth in the brief.