

IN THIS ISSUE



- Top Urban Educator? **p.3**
- Fresno Names New Chief, **p.9**
- LEGISLATIVE**
- Deadlines Looming, **p.10**

Council Town Hall Meeting to Address Equity in Education



Moderator Van Jones of CNN

“What does equity really mean?”

That’s the question to be discussed at the Council of the Great City Schools’ National Town Hall Meeting on Oct. 20 in conjunction with the coalition’s 61st Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 18-22, in Cleveland.

Moderated by CNN political commentator Van Jones, the 90-minute town hall meeting will feature a panel of urban-school leaders, a parent and two students:

- Cleveland Metropolitan School District CEO Eric Gordon;
- Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Darienne Driver;

- Denver school board member Allegra “Happy” Haynes;
- Dallas Independent School District Superintendent Michael Hinojosa;
- Parent of two Cleveland students, Jessica Nelson;
- Cleveland high-school senior Shauntia Adams; and
- Cleveland 10th-grader Jonathan Chikuru.

“Equity for all is everyone’s business,” said Superintendent Driver, who chairs

Town Hall continued on page 4

2017 Blue Ribbon Schools Named

Louisville’s Norton Elementary, Philadelphia’s Gen. George A. McCall School and St. Louis’ Mallinckrodt Academy of Gifted Instruction are among 33 urban public schools recently named 2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos on Sept. 28 honored 342 public and private elementary, middle and high schools as Blue Ribbon Schools, recognizing them for overall academic performance or closing achievement gaps among student subgroups.

Blue Ribbon continued on page 4

Graduation Rates in Several Urban Districts Exceed the 83 Percent National Rate

At least nine big-city school districts in the nation have four-year graduation rates that exceed the national rate, the *Urban Educator* found in reviewing most recent reports.

The nation’s public high-school graduation rate reached a record 83 percent in the 2014-15 school year, according to the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

But far exceeding the federal rate in the 2015-16 school year were three big-city school districts: San Diego Unified

School District (91 percent), Austin Independent School District (90.7 percent) and North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (90 percent).

A new report by the San Diego Education Research Alliance recently documented San Diego Unified’s record 91 percent graduation rate. And the students who graduated in the Class of 2016 did so

under the district’s new, more rigorous standards.

Graduation Rates continued on page 4



2016 Top Urban Educator Surprises Cleveland Student with Scholarship

Brinden Harvey, a 2017 graduate of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, learned he received a \$10,000 college scholarship not in the mail or in a phone call, but in the form of Cleveland Schools' CEO Eric Gordon, who appeared on the front steps of his house one day in June holding a \$10,000 cardboard check.

Gordon surprised Harvey with the news that he was the winner of a \$10,000 Green-Garner scholarship that was given to Gordon last year to give to a student after winning the nation's top urban leadership award—the Green-Garner Award—at the Council of the Great City School's 60th Annual Fall Conference in Miami. The award is sponsored by the Council, Aramark Education and Scholastic, Inc.

Harvey is currently attending Ohio's Baldwin Wallace University to pursue a bachelor of fine arts degree in acting and is following in the footsteps of his mother and brother, who are both Baldwin Wallace graduates. The scholarship is more than just a weight off his shoulders financially, but also a testament to the love and support he feels from his school, the district and the city.

"It's a lot of love coming from my city to be able to get things like this and have

the support of amazing people in Cleveland," Harvey said in a story that appeared on the school district's website. "I'm speechless about how amazing the love is."

Gordon not only selected Harvey

to receive the scholarship, but will also mentor the young man throughout his college career.

"You and I will stay in touch for the four years you're in college to make

Cleveland Student continued on page 5



Cleveland CEO Eric Gordon surprises Brinden Harvey at his home with a \$10,000 scholarship check. Harvey, a 2017 graduate of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, is using the money to attend Ohio's Baldwin Wallace University.



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'Envelope, Please! And the Urban Educator of the Year Is...'

Eleven finalists will be announced on the evening of Oct. 19 for the nation's top award in urban-education leadership. One of them will become the Urban Educator of the Year.

The winner will be honored by peers at the Council of the Great City Schools' 61st Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 18-22, in Cleveland.

Anticipation will be in the air when the envelope is given to announce the winner among 11 big-city school board members vying for the top prize at the 28th Annual Green-Garner Award Banquet.

The Green-Garner Award recognizes outstanding leadership, and is presented to an urban-school superintendent and board member in alternative years.

The 2017 finalists are school-board members:

Betty Arnold of Wichita Public Schools;

Sharon Bailey of Denver Public Schools;

Carol Cook of Florida's Pinellas County Schools (St. Petersburg);

Alan Duncan of North Carolina's Guilford County Schools (Greensboro);

Kathleen Gordon of Florida's Orange County Public Schools (Orlando);

Michael O'Neill of Boston Public Schools;

Peggy O'Shea of Florida's Pinellas County Schools;

Diane Porter of Kentucky's Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville);

Manuel Rodriguez Jr. of Houston Independent School District;

Chuck Shaw of Florida's School District of Palm Beach County; and

Felton Williams of California's Long Beach Unified School District.

And now the moment everyone has been waiting for. And the winner is...!

Sponsored by the Council, Aramark K-12 Education and Scholastic, Inc., the Green-Garner Award is named in memory of Richard R. Green, the first African American chancellor of the New York City school system, and businessman Edward Garner, who served on the Denver school board.

The winner receives a \$10,000 college scholarship to present to a student.

Last year's awardee was CEO Eric Gordon of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.



Peggy O'Shea



Diane Porter



Manuel Rodriguez Jr.



Chuck Shaw



Felton Williams

Town Hall *continued from page 1*

the Council's Board of Directors. "As district leaders, we must work with those at the state level to identify the issues that challenge all of our schools and prevent us from treating students fairly--and to produce solutions that will benefit all students." she stressed in an *Education Week* commentary.

**Eric Gordon****Darienne Driver**

The Council holds a national town hall meeting every year on an issue of the day in urban education, and it's the pinnacle event of the annual Fall Conference.

Bill Gates to Speak**Michael Hinojosa**

Business leader, entrepreneur and philanthropist Bill Gates, who co-founded Microsoft, will deliver the conference's keynote address on Oct. 19. Other guest speakers on Oct. 20 will be actress Rosario Dawson, and Van Jones will address urban school leaders before he moderates the town hall meeting.

**Happy Haynes**

Hosted by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, the five-day conference will be held at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown.

To register for the conference, access the Council's website at www.cgcs.org. Registration can only be conducted online.

**Graduation Rates** *continued from page 1*

"We now have another report that validates the improving academic results in our district," said Superintendent Cindy Marten in a news release. "It shows again that academic excellence is on the rise across San Diego Unified."

The Austin Independent School District graduation rate rose to 90.7 percent in the 2015-16 school year, according to the Texas Education Agency. "I am so #AISDProud of the gains our students and staff have made in graduation and dropout rates," said Superintendent Paul Cruz in a recent news release, noting that the dropout rate has decreased to 1.1 percent.

"... This is a great step in preparing all students for college, career and life, and shows our dedication to reinventing the urban school experience," he emphasized.

The nation's 83 percent public high-school graduation rate is the highest since 2010-11 – the first year a four-year adjusted graduation rate was measured for high school completion. "In other words, more than 4 out of 5 students graduated with a regular high school diploma within 4 years of starting 9th grade," says NCES.

In addition to San Diego, Austin and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, six other urban school districts also had higher graduation rates than the national rate in the 2015-16 school year of students completing high school in four years, according to a recent Council of the Great City Schools survey.

The six were Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C. (89 percent), the School District of Palm Beach County (89 percent), Norfolk Public Schools (88 percent), San Francisco Unified School District (87 percent), Fresno Unified School District (85 percent) and Fort Worth Independent School District (85 percent).

And there were several big-city school districts near or at the 83 percent national rate, including Nashville, Houston, Orange County in Orlando, El Paso, Sacramento, Richmond, Va., Miami-Dade, Jefferson County in Louisville and Pinellas County that covers St. Petersburg, Fla.

Blue Ribbon *continued from page 1*

"National Blue Ribbon Schools are active demonstrations of preparing every child for a bright future," Secretary DeVos said in a press statement.

"The Blue Ribbon School award affirms the hard work of students, teachers and staff in schools demonstrating achievement at the highest levels – and Norton is a great example of that in our district," said Acting Superintendent Marty Pollio of Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville.

By state, big-city school districts that saw their schools win Blue Ribbon honors include:

Alaska – a K-8 school in Anchorage, the only school in the state to be recognized;

California – schools in Long Beach, Los Angeles (2) and San Francisco Unified;

Colorado – an elementary school in Denver;

District of Columbia – an elementary and high school;

Florida – schools in Miami-Dade County (3) and Broward County;

Illinois – two elementary schools in Chicago;

Kentucky – Norton Elementary in Jefferson County (Louisville);

Minnesota – an elementary school in Saint Paul;

Missouri – Mallinckrodt Academy in St. Louis;

Nebraska – an elementary school in Omaha;

Nevada – two elementary schools in Clark County (Las Vegas);

New York – three schools in the New York City school system;

Pennsylvania – McCall Elementary in Philadelphia;

Rhode Island – a high school in Providence; and

Texas – schools in Dallas (3), Houston (2), El Paso (2) and San Antonio.

San Francisco STEM Education Receives Millions Of Dollars in Support From Tech Firm

Already widely acknowledged as one of the leading cities in the nation for technology-based careers and organizations, STEM (Science, Technology, Education, Math) education in San Francisco is now receiving a significant boost.

Salesforce.org, the philanthropic arm of the technology company Salesforce, recently donated \$7 million to the San Francisco Unified School District. The donation comes through a partnership between the San Francisco-based company and the school district by the city's mayor, Edwin Lee, and his Middle School Leadership Initiative.

After five consecutive years of contributing, the company has accumulated a grand total of \$26.7 million in giving to the school system. The latest multi-million-dollar donation will be directed to specific operations such as increased computer science enrollment, math coaches, teacher professional development with New York University, personalized learning capabilities for students, and \$100,000 in unrestricted funds to all middle and K-8 schools.

"Salesforce.org understands that an investment in our youth is an investment in the future of San Francisco," said Mayor Lee.

STEM Middle Schoolers

The Middle School Leadership Initiative is in place to connect young students with the STEM skills needed to succeed in high school and beyond. The plan is to use middle schools as the bridge to make that connection with young students. "In addition to enabling improved teaching and learning for all our students, this partnership is bringing access to young people who have historically been underrepresented in STEM fields. It's a game changer," said San Francisco Schools Superintendent Vincent Matthews.

Nationally, President Donald Trump has recently issued a memorandum order-

ing the Department of Education to spend \$200 million yearly on STEM education grants with the hope of increasing the number of female students and minority students involved in high level STEM classes.

In the San Francisco school district, females and underrepresented groups have already risen tremendously to equal almost half of the enrollment of computer science courses. San Francisco is also the first school district in the nation that provides a computer science curriculum for every grade.

With the program's ongoing successes, Salesforce plans on continuing their contributions to the school district.

"We want to live in a city, and in a country, where every child has access to education that will prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow," said Rob Acker, CEO of the company.

Cleveland Student *continued from page 2*

sure you stick with it and go all the way through," Gordon told Harvey. "If you're having a bad day or you feel like you can't do it anymore, you can reach out to me."

As a student at the Cleveland School of Science and Medicine, Harvey had plans to become a doctor. But after he participated in an arts apprenticeship program, he realized that acting was his true passion. During his senior year, he performed in several local theater productions.

After graduation, Harvey said he would like to come back to Cleveland and create an after-school arts program for children so they can express themselves and develop their artistic talents.

"Growing up in Cleveland, I've seen so many diamonds in the rough," said Harvey. "I fell in love with the beauty of the people and how genuine it is. I've always wanted to give back to the city in the same way I've seen people give to me, if not better."

Mexico Honors K.C. School Administrator

Luis Cordoba, the chief student support and intervention officer for Missouri's Kansas City Public Schools, has worked closely with the Consulate of Mexico in Kansas City to create programs that serve Mexican nationals and other Latinos who are parents of children in the district.

For his efforts, the consulate recently presented him with the Ohtli Award, which honors those who dedicated their lives and efforts to the welfare of the Mexican community abroad. It is considered one of the most prestigious awards given by Mexico.

"His is truly an awe-inspiring life story," said Head Consul Alfonso Navarro-Bernachi, at the award presentation. "The results of his efforts are indisputable."

Cordoba was born in Mexico and moved to Los Angeles, where he grew up among some of the toughest gangs in East Los Angeles. He eventually joined the California Highway Patrol, excelling at drug interdiction and anti-gang efforts.

In 1988, he moved to Missouri and continued his work with high-risk youth and gang members and utilizing his bilingual skills to help Kansas City's Latino communities. He volunteers his time teaching race relations at the Kansas City Police Department.

Mexico Honors *continued on page 6*



Kansas City Schools administrator Luis Cordoba, right, accepts the Ohtli Award as Alfonso Navarro-Bernachi with the Consulate of Mexico City looks on.

Newark District to Return to Local Control

After 22 years, New Jersey's Newark Public Schools will regain control of its school district. The New Jersey State Board of Education recently voted to return control of the school system to a locally elected school board, citing the significant academic progress the district was making.

The board approved two resolutions: one resolution moves control of the final functional areas of governance and instruction to the Newark School Board. The second resolution calls for the Newark school district and the New Jersey Department of Education to collaborate on creating a transition plan, which will include a timeline for returning local control and the hiring of a superintendent. A city-wide vote must also be held to determine if the school system will continue to have an elected school board or a school board appointed by the mayor.

The State Board of Education cited academic improvements the district made including: gains in both English Language Arts and math on the preliminary

2016-17 PARCC results, with the district's growth exceeding the state in both subjects.

The school system has also improved on the state student growth measure, with students growing in reading faster than their peers across the state in 2015-16. In addition, the district has also experienced an improvement in graduation rates.

In 1995, the State Department of Education seized control of New Jersey's largest school district with 48,000 students because for more than 10 years it was unable to meet the state education department's standards for school district certification.

An examination of the school system found the district suffered from low student test scores, high dropout rates, financial mismanagement and unsafe and deteriorating school buildings.

After the takeover, the district was run by superintendents appointed by the state, including Beverly Hall, Marion Bolden, Clifford Janey and Cami Anderson.

Newark District *continued on page 8*

Mexico Honors *continued from page 5*

ment cadet classes and is a former member of the Missouri Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs. He taught multicultural studies as an adjunct professor at the University of Central Missouri and served as a national consultant on the Safe Schools Healthy Student Initiative, managing 10 major public schools in a 10-state region. As a result of his experiences, Cordoba has been an invited speaker at more than 300 national presentations.

Cordoba joined the Kansas City school system in 2010, where he has led efforts to build a compassionate system of support and guidance for students who face difficulties getting to schools and succeeding in class.

In February, he helped the Kansas City School system launch a partnership with the Mexican consulate called "Plaza Comunitaria," which will help offer English

language classes to native Spanish-speaking parents and help them receive a high school diploma.

Upon accepting the Ohtli award, created from the indigenous Nahuatl word for "the one who opens the gap," Cordoba discussed the invaluable contributions immigrants have made to the United States and how educators must help immigrant students succeed.

"We must continue to promote a welcoming environment in our schools, workforce and community in everything that we do, which includes hiring highly skilled bilingual Latinos to form positive and caring relationships with our Spanish-speaking communities here in Kansas City, Missouri," said Cordoba. "I will continue to create pathways and be the voice of *mi familia*."

Yale University Recognizes Inspiring Urban Educators

Janet Waldeck is a physics teacher at Pittsburgh Taylor Allderdice High School. She wanted to ensure that students in Pittsburgh Public Schools were getting the most up-to-date materials they needed, so in 2012 she began creating a series of science learning kits teachers across the district can use to teach science to their students.

Going out of her way to help students succeed is one of the reasons Waldeck was selected to receive the 2017 Yale Educator Award, which recognizes outstanding educators from around the world who have supported and inspired Yale students to achieve at high levels.

Students matriculating at Yale University are invited to nominate high school teachers and counselors who have motivated and supported them. The winning recipients are selected by a committee composed of Yale admission officers.

Waldeck, who has a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from Stanford University, was nominated for the award by former Allderdice student Cecily Gao, who spent two years in Waldeck's science research class.

According to the *Print*, a local Pittsburgh newspaper, in an essay to accompany the nomination, Gao wrote that because of

Yale University *continued on page 9*



Pittsburgh Public Schools teacher Janet Waldeck received a 2017 Yale Educator Award.

A Superintendent Returns to Lead a District Again -- Where it All Began

Michael Hinojosa grew up in Dallas, is a graduate of the Dallas Independent School District, began his career teaching at a district school, and served six years as the school system's superintendent, before leaving in 2011.

So, when another Dallas superintendent departed abruptly in 2015, who did the board of trustees turn to? Hinojosa was named interim superintendent, and four months later became the leader of the school system for a second time.

"He's from here, grew up here, went to school here, taught here, was the superintendent here," said trustee Edwin Flores in an interview with KERA-Radio, right after Hinojosa was hired. "I mean, who knows our community better?"

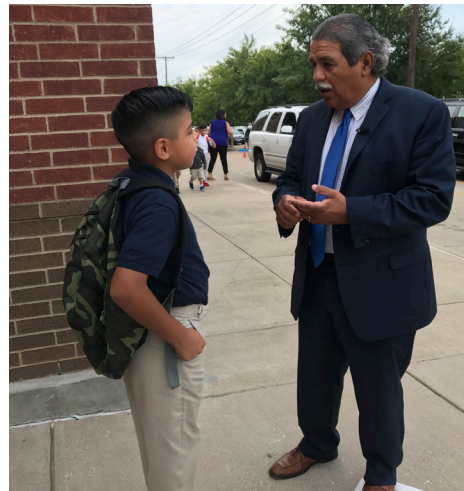
And why did Hinojosa, who a year earlier had finished a three-year stint as superintendent of Cobb County Schools, Georgia's second largest school system, come out of retirement to take over the nation's 14th largest school district?

"Dallas is in my blood, it's always been a part of me," said Hinojosa in an interview with the *Urban Educator*. "I love this city, and I love this district so much, so it was very easy for me to say yes."

This time around, Hinojosa has set several objectives he would like to accomplish before 2020. He recalled that a board member once said that picking a superintendent is an inexact science, so his goal is to have at least one or more candidates ready to step into the position when he leaves.

"It's much easier for a district to keep moving forward with their initiatives if you have a leader from within," said Hinojosa, who was Dallas' seventh superintendent in 10 years when he first took the reins in 2005.

Hinojosa also wants to modernize instruction, teaching and technology as well as the district's buildings. "A lot of parents pick schools because of how good their buildings look, so we need to have a plan to make sure we modernize our physical structures," said Hinojosa. In November 2015, he helped persuade voters to approve a \$1.6 billion bond program, the district's



Dallas Schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa talks with a student on the first day of school.

largest in history.

And in a partnership with the Dallas County Community College District, the Dallas school system has opened 18 new collegiate academies that offer first-generation college students an opportunity to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an associate degree in four years. The new schools are a dream come true for Hinojosa, who said he would love to be on stage in 2020 when the first cohort of students graduate.

Making Diversity a Priority

When Hinojosa tried to get a job as an assistant principal in Dallas, he couldn't even get an interview and had to go to another district. So, increasing the number of people of color and women in the district's leadership ranks is vitally important to him. One of the proudest accomplishments in his 30-year career is witnessing 29 people who have worked alongside him become superintendents, the majority of whom are people of color and women.

"I believe in diversity and that's what I practice," said Hinojosa, who has developed an executive leadership academy composed of a diverse group of central office administrators, as well as a top performing principals group.

Diversity is not only a goal for the administration, but for its students. Dallas schools, with a student population of 70.2 percent Hispanic, 22.5 percent African American and 4.9 percent white, is seeking to launch 35 new choice schools by 2020, in hopes of not only competing against charter and private schools but also integrating more schools.

"That's our biggest challenge, how do we hang onto our market share and make sure that this district is a choice for our families," said Hinojosa.

Believing that "sleep is overrated," the 61-year-old starts his day at 4:15 a.m. every morning. In his first go-around as superintendent, he visited a school every Wednesday—a tradition that continues to this day.

Born in Mexico, his father and mother moved him and his nine siblings to the United States at the age of 3 for a chance at a better life. "That's why I do what I do," said Hinojosa, "because even though my parents had a third-grade education, they knew [education] was our ticket out.

In his spare time, the former basketball and baseball coach attends student baseball games and has been married for 28 years to his wife Kitty. He has three sons, two of whom are graduates of the district.

In 2008, Dallas schools faced a huge deficit that forced him to lay off 1,000 teachers, an experience he vows will never happen again. "Having the humility to know you've made a mistake, you work extra hard to make sure you don't repeat that mistake," said Hinojosa.

Despite the challenges he faces running a big-city school district with 157,000 students, 20,000 employees and 239 schools, he loves his job and enjoys coming to work every day.

"I love that in urban America; you can make a big difference," said Hinojosa.



Selena Sena



Justin Pena



Yilian Sanchez

Tampa Teachers Return to Childhood Alma Mater

Back to school carried a double meaning for third-grade teacher Selena Sena, physical-education teacher Justin Pena and first-grade teacher Yilian Sanchez. They recently became teachers at the same school they attended as children.

They began the 2017-2018 school year as teachers at Crestwood Elementary

School in Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa.

Sena is happy to be working with some of her former teachers, including music teacher Nate Strawbridge. "I remember thinking Mr. Strawbridge was the meanest and scariest teacher ever," Sena said. "But I left with him being one of my favorites."

Physical education was one of Pena's favorite classes when he was a student, so it seems fitting that he is now teaching the class he enjoyed as a child.

And new teacher Sanchez credits her time working as a classroom aide for inspiring her to become a teacher.

Three Urban Schools Named Among America's Healthiest Schools

Three big-city schools are among America's Healthiest Schools, according to the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, an organization that helps children develop lifelong, healthy habits.

Marjorie Rawlings Elementary School in Pinellas Park, Fla., Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School in New York City and Maxine Smith STEAM Academy in Memphis were awarded the organization's National Healthy Schools Award, Gold-level designation. Only 10 schools in the nation were honored with the alliance's highest achievement, the Gold-level award.

A health evaluation program outlining the basic standards was followed and analyzed to be named one of America's Healthiest Schools. The program included

progressive health policies, effective health education and community involvement.

All recognized schools must meet or exceed federal nutrition standards for school meals and snacks, offer breakfast daily, implement district wellness policies and update progress annually, and provide students with at least 60 minutes of physical education a week and ensure physical activity throughout the school day.

Each recognized school participates in the Healthy Schools Program—one of the nation's largest school-based childhood obesity prevention initiatives.

"Every child deserves to go to a healthy school," said Howell Wechsler, CEO of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. We couldn't be prouder to recognize these schools for leading the way."

Newark District *continued from page 6*

In 2014, the district was given control of its finances, and in 2016, two years later, regained control over personnel decisions, including hiring and firing.

"This is really an historic moment," said Schools Superintendent Christopher Cerf in the *Newark Star-Ledger*. Cerf was appointed in 2015. "The Newark public school students have indeed made great progress as reflected in virtually every measurable statistic that one cares to look at."

In a press release, Newark Mayor Ras Baraka recalled that he was a young teacher in Newark Public Schools when they were taken over in 1995. "So it is wonderful to be mayor of the city of my birth at this point, to be able to say that now we have control of our schools, and ready for responsibility to move our kids into the next century."

Kansas City Superintendent Named One Of Top School Communicators



Mark Bedell

Communication is obviously important to any group operation, yet everyone is not capable of doing so adequately. Mark Bedell is not only capable, he thrives at communication and has made it a significant part of his ability to lead as superintendent of Missouri's Kansas City Public Schools.

His efforts were rewarded recently when named a "Superintendent to Watch" by the National School Public Relations Association. (NSPRA)

This year's "Superintendent to Watch" list is compiled of outstanding superintendents across the country with fewer than five years of experience. They all must be effectively using communication technology

with an innovative approach.

From the start, Bedell was communication-driven, launching a listening and learning tour at the very beginning of his term as superintendent. This face-to-face interpersonal communication even extended to evening and weekend pickup basketball games to positively interact with staff, students, and the community. Bedell has also been very active through social media, arranging town hall meetings and speaking engagements, and establishing a concise strategic plan for the district.

Bedell claims a major asset to his performance is his revamped communication department. "As superintendent, it's my job to provide the big ideas around how to reach the community at large, but those ideas have to be executed by the experts in that department, so all credit goes to those professionals." As he enters his second school year as superintendent, Bedell joins just 20 others as a "Superintendent to Watch."

American Heart Association Honors School Superintendent in Tampa

Through his leadership as superintendent in Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida, Jeff Eakins has been honored as the national Administrator of the Year by the American Heart Association.

Under Eakins' leadership, more than 97,000 students and families received information on heart attack and stroke



Hillsborough County School Superintendent Jeff Eakins, left, is presented with a plaque by an American Heart Association official.

vention and awareness, and developed an internal American Heart Association District Leadership team.

This team is tasked with organizing methods to reach staff, students, and the community on important health issues. Exercise and healthy eating was also an important component to

warnings, the district raised more than \$300,000 for heart attack and stroke pre- Eakins' strategic health plan.

Tampa Superintendent continued on page 12

Fresno Unified Elevates Interim Superintendent



Robert Nelson

Serving as the interim superintendent since this past February, Robert Nelson has officially been named the superintendent of California's Fresno Unified School District. His promotion marks the first time an internal employee from the district has held the office of superintendent in almost 30 years.

Nelson has spent most of his career in education serving Fresno. "I've been through the system," says Nelson. "I've seen what works and what doesn't, as well as the needs of our students and employees. I'm thankful for the relationships I have made in Fresno over two decades."

His career began as an elementary school teacher in the district in 1991. After a short stint as superintendent with a neighboring school district, Nelson returned to Fresno in 2015 as chief of staff and is optimistic about Fresno's future as its new superintendent. "...I'm looking forward to showcasing how innovative, compassionate and progressive Fresno Unified is becoming," said Nelson.

Yale University continued from page 6

Waldeck's efforts in her science research class, "both I and many of my peers were able to make significant strides in our respective fields of science."

This year, 58 teachers and 30 counselors were selected to receive the award out of 411 nominees. In addition to Waldeck, urban school educators from Florida's School District of Palm Beach County, Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Shelby County Schools in Memphis and New York City were honored.

Year-End Deadlines Looming in Jam-Packed Federal Legislative Calendar

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

Once again, Congress faces another set of year-end fiscal cliffs over which they could topple. The federal government's annual appropriations bills to keep the trains running through fiscal year 2018 still need to be enacted. In this case, the cliff is on December 8, a date set by the last continuing resolution (CR). Moreover, the short-term extension of the debt ceiling also was enacted to prevent a federal default, something that could be extended another few months with some creative accounting. Resolving either one or both issues is hard enough, but their passage is further complicated by other key legislative priorities, including hurricane disaster relief, DACA immigrant status, increased border security, and a major tax overhaul.



Each house of Congress has begun moving its respective appropriations bills, but the measures are designed mostly to signal congressional spending priorities and will not necessarily be carried forward in a final omnibus appropriations measure. Few if any of the separate appropriations bills are likely to pass, although an emergency disaster relief bill to handle the three recent hurricanes may move ahead on an omnibus spending package.

At this point, however, the House appropriations bill freezes funding for the \$15 billion Title I program at current levels, and the Senate bill adds a meager \$25 million. For the \$12 billion IDEA formula grants, the Senate bill freezes current funding, and the House adds a modest \$200 million. Both House and Senate bills freeze Title III grants for English language learners, and the 21st Century After-School program. And both houses would increase the new Title IV Support and Enrichment Program by \$50 million and \$100 million, respectively. The House adopted the Trump administration's request to terminate the Title II program for teacher quality and class size reduction, while the Senate preserves the current \$2.1 billion level. And, no new private school voucher program has been included in any of the spending bills. Still, school districts may see their current federal grant allocations temporarily reduced because of a small across-the-board cut (less than 1 percent) enacted in the short-term continuing resolution.

The September announcement by President Trump of a six-month phase out of the "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" (DACA) program sparked renewed bipartisan interest in enacting authorizing legislation. Packaging some version of the "DREAM Act" together with an expansion of border security may provide the basis for action in the politically-volatile area of immigration reform.

All those issues aside, a comprehensive tax overhaul has become the centerpiece of the congressional "to do" list. The high-profile failures to pass healthcare repeal and replacement legislation add to a renewed sense of urgency to achieve a major legislative win for the Trump administration and the Congressional majority. Congress is now ready to pass a "budget resolution" bill that will trigger a "fast-track" process for the new tax bill, requiring a simple majority, and circumventing any Senate filibuster. Nonetheless, the framework for the tax bill, which was issued jointly by the Trump administration and the Congressional majority, provides only the barest details about what is being proposed. The business tax cuts alone would reduce federal revenue by over \$2 trillion in a ten-year period. An elimination of the estate tax and changes to individual tax provisions (e.g., lowering the highest income tax bracket and repealing the Alternative Minimum Tax) would reduce federal revenue by another \$700 billion or so. The main tax increase under this joint proposal would involve the repeal of the state and local tax deduction, which would reap over \$1 trillion in federal revenue for a ten-year period. Of course, eliminating state and local tax deductions on both income and property taxes would substantially affect the ability of state and local governments -- and school districts -- to raise their own revenues, since residents' federal tax bills would no longer be lowered correspondingly. Real estate property values (as well as assessed tax valuations) are projected to fall as a result--if this time-honored deduction is terminated. In addition, the state and local tax (SALT) deduction has become one of the most controversial proposals in the proposed tax framework. No private school tax subsidy has been included yet in the tax framework to date, but the bulk of smaller tax revisions have yet to be determined.

How these varied legislative issues will be crafted and managed -- either separately or together-- remains to be seen. Thankfully, there is little appetite for a government shutdown or government default as a way of leveraging policy concessions or budget cuts. But, the confluence of all these major pieces of legislation at the end of 2017 allows a small opening in the next few months to craft major legislative agreements with slim bipartisan majorities. Nonetheless, there have been few agreements between the Trump administration and the many factions on Capitol Hill on either side thus far, making the upcoming action some of the most challenging in years. On the other hand, Congress rarely faces a deadline it couldn't extend or delay. Stay tuned.

Council Bus Transportation Study Yields Results in Omaha; MIT Improves Boston School Bus Operation

Last year Nebraska's Omaha Public Schools experienced a shortage of bus drivers on the first day of school, resulting in delays of students being picked up and dropped off. According to the *Omaha World-Herald*, district officials estimated that about 3,000 students who ride buses were affected by the problems, with the headline of one article stating, "Officials apologize to OPS families for busing problems, promise to improve."

In an effort not to repeat the mistakes, the district turned to the Council of the Great City Schools to conduct an audit of its transportation program. Under the Council's Cities Building Cities program, which provides on-site assessments, technical assistance and peer reviews to Council member districts, a team of senior managers with extensive experience in transportation operations from school districts such as Los Angeles and Denver was assembled.

The team traveled to Omaha to conduct a four-day site visit, where they observed transportation operations, conducted interviews and examined documents and data. After the visit was concluded, they issued a report to the school district with a number of recommendations.

Omaha Public Schools contracts with the company Student Transportation of America to transport its general education students, and the Council recommended that the district work more closely with the company as well as prepare and give the firm student bus routes earlier.

The audit also recommended an effective call-center that provides parents, school staff, students and employees a single point of contact for callers seeking information, and called for the school system's Department of Transportation to play a bigger role in bus driver recruitment.

The Council also suggested that Omaha Schools reduce its transportation costs by identifying stops, runs and routes that could be consolidated or eliminated.



After the report was presented to the district, officials took several steps to implement the recommendations, according to Trevis Sallis, Omaha school system's transportation director in an interview with the *Urban Educator*. Sallis said that the district has updated its phone system and now has a single point of contact for parents. The district also provided student busing routes to the busing contractor two months earlier than it had in the past and boosted its recruitment efforts, working closely with the Human Resources Department.

"We also initiated a student assignment plan that helped reduce the number of routes from 476 needed at the beginning of last year to 330 starting this year," said Sallis.

And most importantly, the school district has developed a closer working relationship with the bus contractor, increasing official meetings to weekly from monthly.

Sallis believes the Council's audit was extremely helpful because "anytime you can get assistance or input from people who are subject-matter experts, it's always going to be an asset and benefit to you."

So how was busing in the district on the first day of the 2017-2018 school year? "It was a success," said Sallis, with 99 percent of general education buses arriving on time.

And Sallis was not alone in his assessment. The editorial in the *Omaha World-Herald* the day after schools opened in Omaha stated, "OPS buses are off to a good start."

The report, *Review of the Transportation Program of the Omaha Public Schools*, can be accessed on the Council's website at: www.cgcs.org.

Boston Gets Help from MIT

Boston Public Schools was spending \$120 million on its school bus transportation program, one of the most expensive per-pupil school transportation systems in the nation. In an effort to reduce these costs, the district held a contest in April, awarding \$15,000 to the winner to devise a system that would enable the district to use fewer buses for the same number of students.

Called the BPS Transportation Challenge, the contest was a way for the school system to tap into the expertise of the nation's leading experts and solve a problem that if fixed, could save the district millions of dollars that could go toward the classroom.

The "Quantum Team" from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology won the contest by creating a computer-based model that decreases the number of bus routes by strategically reconfiguring bus stops, increasing the number of students riding each bus and reducing the amount of time buses travel when no students are on board.

While it's one thing to create a system, how did the system work when put in place the first days of school?

"The MIT Quantum Team's new algorithm has indeed revolutionized the way we are routing our buses, and it's been quite a success," said Richard Weir, the district's director of communications, in an email to the *Urban Educator*.

Weir said that the new computer-based bus routing model the school system implemented has enabled the district to eliminate 50 buses from its fleet, without laying off any bus drivers, and generated \$5 million in cost savings that is being reinvested back into the schools.

"It is also creating a 20,000-pound reduction in carbon emissions produced by [Boston] buses each day and will remove nearly 1 million miles of traffic-clogging bus trips off the road each year," said Weir.



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Cleveland District Wins Council Research Award

In the education field, research is the foundation of professional development and student achievement. Which is why the Council of the Great City Schools recently honored an urban school district research department that has demonstrated excellence in the field of research and assessment.

The Office of Research and Evaluation for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District was the winner of the Council's 2017 Research and Assessment Leadership Award. The award was presented at the Council's Annual Academic, Information Technology & Research Conference in Palm Beach, Fla.

Cleveland's Office of Research and Evaluation has developed vendor and partner report cards for the district, which collect and analyze data about each vendor or partner-sponsored program, then assigns each program a grade based on the evaluation. The grading system is identical to school grades for easy comprehension.

"The Vendor Report Cards are easy to access and are an example of bridging school district evaluations and feedback

with external research to improve instructional quality," said Moses Palacios, legislative and research manager with the Council. "Now Cleveland can make sound assessments on the progress of multiple initiatives. This will make the district more effective and ultimately aiding its students."

The award comes with a \$1,000 prize to be given to any educational organization or scholarship fund of the winner's choice.

Tampa Superintendent *continued from page 9*

More than 6,000 elementary students participated in the Heart Healthy Challenge, where children played for 60 minutes a day and learned about making the right choices for a healthy diet.

"We believe this award is well-earned and well-deserved," said Eric Stommes, youth market director with the American Heart Association. Superintendent Eakins promotes health and wellness throughout the district and that is truly saving lives."

Founded in 1924, the American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization fighting heart disease and stroke.

Great City Grads



Carlos Santana

Grammy Award-Winning Musician

1965 Graduate

Mission High School

San Francisco Unified School District