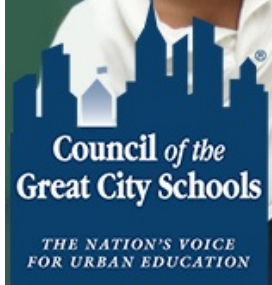


COMMUNICATIONS

STATEMENTS



MESSAGE *from the* Executive Director

Statement Opposing Executive Order to Dismantle the Department of Education

A great nation emphasizes the importance of education and lifelong learning as the primary driver of success for the country and its people.

A great nation prioritizes the significant duty of serving the students who historically have been disregarded.

A great nation is responsive to the challenge of improving educational and life outcomes for low-income children, students with disabilities, English learners, and homeless students.

A great nation protects students and enforces the laws that ensure discrimination, harassment, and prejudice have no place in our schools.

A great nation does not relegate the essential mission of education to other departments and agencies where critical functions are consolidated and the urgency of improving student outcomes is subsumed.

The Council of the Great City Schools strongly opposes the Executive Order from the Trump Administration to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education. The Department plays a crucial role in supporting states and local districts while fostering educational opportunities for all students attending public schools in the major cities and throughout the United States.

Ray Hart
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

PRESS RELEASES



NEWS...NEWS...NEWS

1331 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 1100N, Washington, D.C. 20004 | cgcs.org

Baltimore CEO Sonja Brookins Santelises to Chair Urban Schools Coalition

WASHINGTON, July 8 – Sonja Brookins Santelises, CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools, has been named the new chair of the Council of the Great City Schools’ Board of Directors for a one-year term, effective July 1. Santelises has served as the chair-elect since last year and succeeds Marcia Andrews, a school board member from Florida’s School District of Palm Beach County.

The 162-member board is composed of the superintendent and a school board member from each of the 81 big-city school districts represented by the Council, the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools.

Santelises has served as the CEO of Baltimore City Schools since 2017, making her the longest-serving superintendent in over 30 years. Under her leadership, the school district, which serves 76,841 students, has achieved a stable budget, significantly improved student literacy and math scores, raised graduation rates, invested in school facilities, increased the number of community schools, and expanded opportunities in fine arts, gifted and advanced learning, and Advanced Placement programs.

Valerie Davis, school board president for California’s Fresno Unified School District, will assume the role of chair-elect. Jill Baker, superintendent of California’s Long Beach Unified School District, will serve as secretary-treasurer, rounding out the leadership team.

“We are excited to welcome Sonja as the new chair of the Board of Directors,” said Council Executive Director Ray Hart. “Her passion and expertise in fostering successful environments for students will be a tremendous asset to our organization. With Sonja at the helm alongside Valerie and Jill, their varied perspectives and experiences will strengthen the Council’s mission of championing urban schools and uplifting inner-city students.”

Watch a [video](#) of Sonja Brookins Santelises as the new chair of the Board of Directors.

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1331 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 1100N, Washington, D.C. 20004 | www.cgcs.org

PRESS RELEASE
July 1, 2025

CONTACT: Tonya Harris at (202) 393-2427
or tharris@cgcs.org

Urban Schools Coalition Urges Administration to Immediately Release Critical Federal Education Funding Approved by Congress

The federal funding was signed into law by President Trump in March

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 1 —The Council of the Great City Schools, the nation’s primary coalition of large urban public-school systems, calls on the U.S. Department of Education and the White House Office of Management and Budget to immediately release funding approved by Congress and signed into law by President Trump in March.

Districts have budgeted and planned the use of these program allocations since Congress passed the FY 2025 Continuing Resolution in March to continue federal education funding at the same level as the previous school year. This enacted legislation requires the Trump Administration to allocate funds by July 1, and the Council urges their immediate release to avoid understaffed classrooms, layoffs or budget deficits where staff have already been hired for the year, and a significant disruption to learning environments across the nation.

“Withholding this vital federal funding from school districts two weeks before schools begin the new academic year is unacceptable,” said Council Executive Director Ray Hart. “School districts rely on these funds to pay teachers and principals, provide school safety, support children and families with after-school and summer school programming, and offer academic enrichment to millions of students across the country.”

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About the Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 81 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research, and media relations. For more information, visit www.cgcs.org



NEWS...NEWS...NEWS

1331 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 1100N, Washington, D.C. 20004 | www.cgcs.org

PRESS RELEASE
June 18, 2025

CONTACT: Tonya Harris at (202) 393-2427
or tharris@cgcs.org

Council of the Great City Schools Presents Boston Graduate With \$10,000 Dr. Michael Casserly Scholarship for Educational Courage and Justice

WASHINGTON, D.C., June 18, 2025—The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) recently presented Andrew Cruz Mendez Troncoso, a 2025 graduate of Boston Public Schools, with the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Scholarship for Educational Courage and Justice. Sponsored by Curriculum Associates, the \$10,000 college scholarship will be used by Troncoso to pursue a degree in finance at Bentley University in Massachusetts.

The scholarship is part of the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice, named after the Council's former executive director. The annual award, now in its fifth year, is presented to a person who has made outstanding contributions in the field of Grades K–12 urban education by taking a courageous and passionate stance on the issue of educational justice and equity. This year's awardee was Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), who currently serves as ranking member of the House Committee on Appropriations and its Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee, where she oversees the nation's investments in education, health, and employment.

Troncoso is a 2025 graduate of the Boston Arts Academy, the city's only public high school for the visual and performing arts, where he was a viola major and played in the school's orchestra. Additionally, he was an active member of the school's A.C.T.S. club, which focuses on giving back to the community through service. During his time in the club, he contributed over 200 volunteer hours through various projects, including creating care packages, assisting at shelters, and supporting military personnel with handmade items and letters.

After graduating from college, Troncoso wants to become a financial consultant and eventually start an organization that helps low-income families learn how to budget, invest, and build wealth.

“I am pleased to have chosen Andrew as this year’s recipient of a scholarship named in my honor,” said Casserly. “He is extremely deserving of this scholarship and is a prime example of the wonderful graduates our nation’s urban public schools produce. As he pursues his degree, I know he has a bright future ahead of him, and I thank Curriculum Associates for their generous support.”

The CGCS is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 81 large-city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate on behalf of inner-city students through legislation, research, and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts that share common problems to exchange information and collectively address new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth.

“Through our partnership with the Council of the Great City Schools, we are proud to once again sponsor the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Scholarship for Educational Courage and Justice and recognize a standout rising college student,” said Kelly Sia, CEO at Curriculum Associates. “We are impressed by all of Andrew’s achievements and his commitment to his studies and community. We wish him all the best as he progresses in his educational journey.”

To learn more about the CGCS, visit [CGCS.org](https://www.cgcs.org). To learn more about Curriculum Associates, visit [CurriculumAssociates.com](https://www.curriculumassociates.com).

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ARTICLES: SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE



Divided APS board vacates coaching, governance contract. New provider to be selected in fall.

[By Noah Alcala Bach / Journal Staff Writer](#)

Jun 5, 2025

After pushback from some board members, Albuquerque Public Schools won't renew its contract with the **Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS)**, which cost the district around \$50,000 over nearly three years.

CGCS is a Washington, D.C.-based organization that partners with urban districts to improve students' academic performance and assist school boards' governance strategies.

The district will instead put out a request for proposals allowing vendors to apply to provide coaching services and student outcomes-focused governance as APS attempts to turn around academic performance as the largest district in a state that often ranks last in the nation for education.

The district's contract with CGCS will expire June 30 and applications to fill the vacancy are due by Aug. 1. The board will likely vote on a new vendor at its Sept. 17 meeting.

CGCS didn't answer questions or respond to interview requests sent over several weeks but stated Wednesday that it had "no involvement in the school board's decision not to renew its contract."

APS' Board of Education met Wednesday and was initially expected to vote on renewing the contract. However, it was announced May 30 in a memo from APS

Board President Danielle Gonzales that the district would seek a different provider for coaching services.

“This effort to establish community engagement goals was to be transparent, to be clear, and also to hold ourselves accountable to meeting these specific goals,” Gonzales said Wednesday, opening the discussion. “I want to acknowledge that no board had ever done this before, and this was not happening before.”

She also referred to several meetings in which the board unanimously approved topics related to the contract and student governance strategies, dating back to June 2024.

However, one of the contract’s critics, board member Josefina Domínguez, outlined longstanding issues she has had with CGSC in an email sent from her personal address to her APS address. The email — which she told the Journal was a draft — was obtained through an Inspection of Public Records Act request.

Domínguez states that CGCS, “deliberately inserted themselves into the APS Board’s business” and that board leadership interpreted “coaching to suit their needs.”

“Key decisions within the APS Board are made with the knowledge of only four members, leaving the other three members in the dark,” she wrote. “This lack of collaborative governance is evident in our board meetings.”

The split to which she [refers](#) concerns the three board members endorsed by the Albuquerque Teachers Federation union and the four backed by business community entities, such as the [Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce](#) and the local chapter of NAIOP, a commercial real estate organization.

That divide was on display Wednesday as the three union-backed board members present — Domínguez, Heather Benavidez and Ronalda Tome-Warito — discussed the issues they had with CGCS.

Domínguez and Tome-Warito stated that CGCS didn't offer enough to help students who are minorities, specifically Native students, and Benavidez took issue with the divisiveness caused by coaching.

"I would like a coach that is not going to pit board members against each other; that's going to foster cohesion," Benavidez said. "I think that needs to start with the board, the board members. We cannot be productive as a board if we don't get along."

The discussion over the contract dominated the meeting, which took place among the five board members present. Crystal Tapia-Romero, who has now missed the past three meetings, was not in attendance, nor was Janelle Astorga, who is on maternity leave.

The trio of union-backed members successfully pushed for discussions on a few items, including revising the timeline for student-focused outcomes, reflecting on the contract with CGCS and establishing criteria for a new vendor to be presented to the board at its July meeting, but in doing so, earned the ire of the board's vice president, Courtney Jackson.

"I haven't slept for two stinking days because of the headspace and the time and the energy," Jackson said. "I am trying so hard to focus on effective governance, and this has spun so far out of control because of narratives, because of misunderstandings, because of hurt feelings."

She also called CGCS one of "the leading organizations in the nation" and added that the organization has a "proven" record of turning around student academic performance.

“I represent roughly 90,000 constituents. You know what they want me to be focusing on?” Jackson said. “They want to make sure that our kids can read. They want to make sure that our kids can do math. That’s what they want me to do.”

Fox 26News

FUSD shares its plan to improve student performance. Part 2

by Monty Torres

Tue, June 10th 2025 at 7:43 PM

So, how does Fresno Unified School District plan to reach the high goals it has now set for itself and its students in its new "Goals and Guardrails" program?

I asked FUSD Superintendent Misty Her that question.

She, along with Interim Chief Academic Officer Dr. Carlos Castillo and Instructional Superintendent Dr. Marie Williams agreed to outline the plans they are hoping will lead to the district's success, starting with district-wide training.

"We all decided that our district needed to go in a different, more transformative direction," Her explained, "So, our board paused and we decided to go through what's called, Student Outcomes Focused Governance training." Something that Her says will now be provided to all FUSD employees at every level.

Created by the **Council of The Great City Schools** and its director, A.J. Crabill, "Student Outcomes Focused Governance" describes itself as a framework that guides school boards, districts and their staff in focusing their efforts solely on student outcomes and in taking personal responsibility for that.

"So it absolutely has to be inclusive of not only the community and the board and the superintendent, not only the senior staff, but also certainly principals, teachers and students," AJ Crabill described, "and so part of this training will make it all the way to where the frontline of where education actually happens, which isn't here in the boardroom, but there in the classroom."

"What this forced us to do was to look at ourselves," Her elaborated. "We're not getting student results because of me. I'm not doing certain things. I'm not taking responsibility and so there's a lot of changing, just putting the mirror to ourselves to say, we are at 30% only at English Language Arts not because of anybody else but because my behavior has contributed to that."

Tracking the progress of students more frequently will also be vital to ensure the district's strategies are working. FUSD's Interim Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Carlos Castillo laid out a calendar showing the every-other-monthly schedule already set for public discussion of student progress toward the district's interim and long-term goals.

"These are the board meetings that we have for the entire year," Castillo pointed out. "The first one, the one on the left, is the board meeting where we're going to present the data. "So, August 13th will be the first one. Even though the main goal is five years out... we have two years for this interim goal. We have the big, 2-year goal and now we have these, which are like in between. It's just a way for us to really be accountable to ourselves about the work."

Instructional Superintendent Dr. Marie Williams also pointed to enhanced teacher training as a major contributor to the student success the district is hoping to see.

"I think the difference would be most notable in the instructional practices and the strategies that the teacher is using," Williams opined, "and so we will, in terms of professional learning, provide resources and supports to help teachers deepen their understanding of the content standards."

"Williams and Castillo also cite ongoing efforts to reduce class sizes and increase available classroom technology as additional strategies for achieving the district's goals.

- Promoting a district-wide program of personal responsibility for student outcomes,
- More frequent tracking of student progress.
- Enhanced teacher training, smaller class sizes and more classroom technology.

Castillo and Williams also say the district is reviewing current and supplemental instructional materials as part of a five-year, \$100 million investment in early literacy.

The goal? To discover which materials are the best at promoting student success.

All are solid strategies for improving student performance if conscientiously, consistently and carefully applied.

We hope to bring you more on the Fresno Unified School District's efforts to meet its high goals, how it's doing that and how well its working as this journey continues.



How did the APS school board score its last quarter of work?

[By Noah Alcala Bach / Journal Staff Writer](#)

April 21, 2025

Albuquerque Public Schools board members might want to hide their latest report card from district parents.

During its final April meeting last week, the board performed a quarterly self-evaluation. The evaluation is done using a rubric mandated as part of its framework to improve student outcomes set by the **Council of the Great City Schools**, a nonprofit organization with which the district has a contract that costs around \$60,000 annually.

So how did the board score? By the standards of the district it governs, if the board were a high school student, it would have gotten an F.

The board is tasked with turning around student outcomes for the largest district in a state that in many metrics has consistently ranked last in the nation for education. APS itself has struggled with absenteeism and student academic performance, lagging behind the state in those metrics, according to the latest statewide monitoring report: the New Mexico Vistas report card.

On a scale of 100 possible points among six categories, the board gave itself a 58 for its work from January through March. That marks the lowest score on the evaluation since receiving a 53 for its work from April to June 2024. APS considers grades of 60 or higher — for its students — to be passing.

By that metric, since it began doing quarterly self-evaluations in 2022, the board has only given itself a passing grade twice.

To open, board President Danielle Gonzales recommended that the board award itself all 35 possible points in the values and guardrails category. That was met with pushback from District 6 representative Josefina Domínguez.

“We’ve lost the community sense of ownership of the goals, feedback from parents, for example,” Domínguez said. “That feedback tells me that they don’t fully understand our process.”

Still, a majority of the members agreed on the 35 score and gave themselves the perfect score in the category.

On the next category of monitoring and accountability, Domínguez also objected and said the rubric itself was flawed. The board ultimately gave itself 10 of 15 points in the category.

So what did the board members agree on the most? Their inability to work together.

“For communication and collaboration, perhaps, there was the most consensus here with the score of a one,” Gonzales said.

The single point the board gave itself in the communication and collaboration category was out of 10 possible points. The board also gave itself scores of a single point out of five on both the categories of unity and trust and continuous improvement.

PPS parents say academics, consistency should be among the board's top goals

90.5 WESA | By [Jillian Forstadt](#)

Published June 3, 2025 at 9:07 PM EDT

Pittsburgh Public Schools parents and community members want to see the district sharpen its approach to academics, social skills and career readiness.

That's according to survey data presented to school board members Tuesday night. Board members collected survey responses and held [12 listening sessions](#) this spring in an effort to determine community-driven, measurable goals for the years ahead.

Participants were asked what "students should know or be able to do" as a result of their time at PPS. Their answers emphasized academics, social skills and career exploration, as well as the need for experienced and well-resourced teachers, practices tailored to each student's needs and continued community engagement.

The board's goal-setting efforts come as school closure plans remain in flux. Many parents surveyed stressed the need for consistency if and when the district transitions to a new footprint.

Superintendent Wayne Walters' [latest facilities proposal](#) would shutter nine buildings, phase out most magnet programs and redraw attendance zones.

Director Sylvia Wilson called the timing of the listening sessions — distinct from town halls previously held to solicit feedback on potential school closures — "unfortunate".

"Some people came to these sessions with only the facilities presentation in their mind," Wilson said. "We lost a few people who were upset because that's not what we were talking about, and some others slipped in some things that had to do directly with the facilities plans."

In addition to the feedback provided by the couple dozen community members present at each listening session, school board members received 60 survey responses.

Board member Devon Taliaferro voiced concern about the low turnout, attributing it to the burnout and unease many PPS families feel more than a year into conversations about school closures.

"Transitioning and changing a school district of over 18,000 students is major and it can't be taken lightly," Taliaferro said. "But I think it has, in some ways, been maybe not taken in

consideration that that's a major haul for everybody, on top of the community feeling tossed in the wind.”

During a separate committee meeting Monday, PPS chief financial officer Ron Joseph told board members the most recent consolidation proposal would save the district \$3.2 million in 2026. Joseph said the district would see greater savings in the years that follow as they close schools and restructure programs.

But even with school closures — and a potential tax hike — Joseph said the district would still need to carve out an additional \$22.2 million to balance the district’s preliminary 2026 budget.

“We have our work cut out for us, and we have a lot of difficult decisions potentially ahead of us,” Joseph said.

The district hopes to raise revenue by [forcing a countywide property reassessment](#) and ending the [ongoing diversion of earned income taxes](#) to the City of Pittsburgh. Both practices are the subjects of ongoing lawsuits.

But school board president Gene Walker said, until those cases are resolved, the district has few options beyond taxation.

“I’ve been opposed to raising taxes my entire time on the board because I don’t think that, without some of the other levers being pulled, that it makes a huge difference,” Walker said. “I don’t know if I feel that way anymore because we’re backed against a corner.”

“We’re back against the wall to where we have to bring in money however we can.”

Next steps

Last year, PPS approved a \$100,000 contract with the **Council of Great City Schools (CGCS)** for board coaching services. The board has increased its focus on community engagement and goal-setting as part of that process, and passed a [slate of streamlining governance policies](#) with guidance from CGCS in February.

The process will ultimately lead to the school board adopting measurable goals that guide the district’s actions for the next three to five years. But Ben Mackey, a consultant with CGCS, recommended Tuesday that the board host additional listening sessions as it refines and monitors the goals it chooses.

“It can be a constant conversation that builds more trust with the community,” Mackey said.

The next step, according to Mackey, will be a multi-hour workshop in which board members and PPS administrators narrow down potential goals. He recommended that the process be done publicly so that community members may share feedback with the board.

PPS' board is asking families to brainstorm for the future, but present questions remain

90.5 WESA | By [Jillian Forstadt](#),

Published April 22, 2025 at 5:32 AM EDT

Pittsburgh school board members are canvassing their communities to find out what goals the district should prioritize in the coming years.

Board members say the process will allow them to run Pittsburgh Public Schools more efficiently, increase transparency and respond directly to community feedback. But some parents and stakeholders have been hesitant to share what they will value most in the future without more clarity on the [looming school closures](#) at present.

“We have a shared vision of what a good education looks like,” said Marat Valiev, a father of three Colfax K-8 students. “The problem is whether these values will transform into the right actions.”

At a listening session inside Squirrel Hill’s Allderdice High School on Monday, board members gathered parents and other stakeholders to brainstorm ideas for the district with a focus on the big-picture.

The board plans to use the feedback shared at the Allderdice listening session and 11 others this spring to determine which measures of student success — such as graduation rates or test scores — they will work with district leaders to monitor closely.

PPS entered into a two-year, \$100,000 contract with the national [Council of Great City Schools](#) to undertake this work last year, and, in February, the board [approved a slate of streamlining governance policies](#) as a result.

But several parents said they came to Monday’s meeting expecting to share their feedback on the district’s [facilities utilization plan](#), which proposes restructuring Colfax into a middle school, phasing out most of the district’s magnet programs and closing 14 schools.

Valiev called the plan and its declared objectives the “elephant in the room.”

“How is it going to work out?” he asked.

District 4 board member Yael Silk said that while the two initiatives are separate, feedback shared with the board during this goal-setting effort will be used to shape their future votes — including those related to school closures.

“We, as your elected officials, are taking the time to ask for your input about what direction you want us to go in,” Silk said. “And in good faith, we’re committed to using that information to guide our decision-making moving forward, whether it’s the restructuring plan or any other large initiative or small initiative that we’re responsible for overseeing in the coming years.”

“It is layered, it is messy, and your input is really important,” she added.

About a dozen participants at the Allderdice listening session were split into three groups to discuss what skills students should obtain during their time at PPS. Parents emphasized the importance of critical thinking skills, preparedness for employment and the ability to relate to people from diverse backgrounds.

When asked what the district should maintain in the coming years, participants stressed the need for diverse and equitable programming, robust staffing and investments in core curriculum.

Community members also said the district should take additional steps to retain good teachers, push students to meet high expectations and take a thoughtful, data-driven approach to change.

Similar priorities were echoed during an April 1 listening session at King PreK-8, where community members coalesced around critical thinking, workforce preparation and an appreciation for music and fine arts.

District 8 director Dwayne Barker led the listening session at King, and helped facilitate Monday’s meeting at Allderdice.

“You all are speaking the same things, which is beautiful, because that lets us know that ultimately, we’re all one community,” Barker said. “We all want the same thing for our future leaders and our staff, and anyone within the outside community that directly affects our actual school communities.”

Parents at the King listening session similarly lamented being asked to get excited about a big future vision as the district faces closures.

“I think it’s a struggle for folks right now because we feel threatened,” said Emily Sawyer, parent to PPS students at Manchester PreK-8, Schiller 6-8 and Perry High School. “It just feels a little bit like everyone’s trying to sort of grab whatever they can get.”

Kimmie Givens, the parent of a 13-year-old student at Pittsburgh Schiller 6-8, said she came to the listening session to learn more about the district's plan to close schools on the North Side, which she said she opposed. She said she had not been able to attend previous district meetings on the topic due to a conflicting work schedule. Givens left shortly after the listening session began.

Nichole Sims, a North Side parent and grandparent who works with A+ Schools and Black Women for a Better Education, said she "loved" the evening's conversation and believed the school board would listen to community input, but felt the district needed to improve parent engagement.

"The most marginalized families are missing," Sims said. "There are a lot of other factors and reasons why they're not here. And I am not even sure that I understand all of those barriers. But I do think it's the district's job to figure that out."

Five additional listening sessions will be held through the beginning of May.

ARTICLES: COURT ISSUES



Federal judge to hear arguments over whether to block immigration arrests in US schools

By COLLEEN SLEVIN

Updated 12:18 AM EST, March 7, 2025

DENVER (AP) — A federal judge is set to hear arguments Friday over whether he should block immigration agents from conducting arrests at schools under a Trump administration policy that has yet to be acted upon.

Denver Public Schools is asking U.S. District Judge Daniel Domenico to block immigration enforcement in schools across the country while [its lawsuit challenging the new policy](#) plays out in court.

The suit says the possibility of routine immigration arrests in its schools has led to a drop in attendance. It also says the district has had to divert resources to respond to fear among students and families over the lifting of longtime rules restricting immigration enforcement [near schools, churches and other sensitive locations](#).

“This includes providing mental health support to students, diverting administrator attention from academics to immigration issues, and assisting students who miss school to catch up,” lawyers for the school district said in their request to block the new policy.

Under the previous “sensitive locations” guidance, officers were generally required to get approval for any enforcement operations at those locations, although exceptions were allowed for matters like national security. The policy change announced in January by the acting leader of the Department of Homeland Security, which includes Immigration and Customs Enforcement, emphasized that field agents should use “common sense” and “discretion” to conduct immigration enforcement operations without a supervisor’s approval.

The head of ICE later issued a directive that immigration arrests at sensitive places like schools had to be approved by supervisors, lawyers for Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said in a court filing.

Such arrests have been rare. According to data from ICE cited by lawyers for Denver schools, there were only two immigration arrests made in schools between 2018 and 2020 along with 18 arrests near schools.

There have not been any arrests at schools under the new policy as of last week, according to a filing submitted **by the Council of the Great City Schools** in support of Denver's lawsuit last week.

The federal government says Denver schools haven't proved they've been directly harmed by the policy change and do not have legal standing to pursue a lawsuit.

Last month, a federal judge in Maryland [blocked immigration agents](#) from conducting enforcement operations in houses of worship for [Quakers](#) and a handful of other religious groups after they filed a lawsuit challenging the directive. The order does not apply to any religious groups beyond the ones who brought the lawsuit.

It's not known how soon Domenico, a Trump appointee and Colorado's former solicitor general, could rule.

Groups nationwide eye Supreme Court hearing on Montgomery County LGBTQ books in schools case

William J. Ford

Tue, April 22, 2025 at 6:50 AM EDT

When the Supreme Court hears arguments Tuesday in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, it will be considering whether Montgomery County parents have a right, on religious grounds, to opt their children out of classes in county schools that use LGBTQ+ friendly books.

But to the scores of religious, legal and educational groups across the country who have filed friend-of-the-court briefs, it's a case with national implications.

"Whatever rule the Court promulgates in this case will apply far beyond the circumstances of this dispute," says a [30-page](#) brief filed on behalf of the School Superintendents Association, Consortium of State School Boards Associations, **Council of the Great City Schools** and National School Attorneys Association. That brief does not support either side in the dispute, but asks the justices to tread carefully.

Most of the other briefs, however, are decidedly on one side or the other: With the parents who argue that the county policy infringes on their right to raise their children according to their religion, or with the school board that says the books are part of an inclusive curriculum and are not coercive or targeting any religion.

The case began at the start of the 2022-23 school year, when the county unveiled a list of "LGBTQ+-inclusive texts for use in the classroom," including books for grades as low as kindergarten and pre-K. After initially saying that parents could opt their children out of lessons that included those and other books, the school board reversed course in March 2023 and said opt-outs would not be allowed beginning in the 2023-24 school year.

Parents are allowed to opt their children out of parts of sex education classes, but not other parts of the curriculum, like language arts.

The parents sued the school board in May 2023, saying the inability to opt their children out of the classes infringes on their First Amendment freedom of religion rights. They also wanted the schools to notify them when lessons involving the books were coming up, and to plan alternative lessons for their children.

But [school officials](#) claim the books were not part of “explicit instruction on gender identity and sexual orientation in elementary school, and that no student or adult is asked to change how they feel about these issues.”

In its [December filing](#) that urged the Supreme Court to reject the case, the county said, “MCPS (Montgomery County Public Schools) believes that representation in the curriculum creates and normalizes a fully inclusive environment for all students and supports a student’s ability to empathize, connect, and collaborate with diverse peers and encourages respect for all.” It went on to say “teachers are not permitted to use the storybooks to enforce a particular viewpoint.”

Lower courts have rejected the parents request for a preliminary injunction, with a divided panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that the county policy did not have the coercion required to make it a burden on religious exercise.

In [their petition](#) to the Supreme Court, the parents cited a few of the elementary-aged books the school board includes as “LGBTQ-inclusive” and the guidance for teachers that went with each:

- “Born Ready,” a story about Penelope, a student who identifies as a boy. “Teachers are told to instruct students that, at birth, doctors guess about our gender, but we know ourselves best”;
- “Love, Violet,” a story about two young girls and their same-sex playground romance. “Teachers are encouraged to have a think-aloud moment to ask students how it feels when they don’t just like but like like someone”; and
- “Intersection Allies,” a picture book for children to ponder what it means to be “transgender” or “non-binary” and asks, “what pronouns fit you?”

Mark Graber, a regents professor at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey Law School in Baltimore, said in an interview Monday that a Supreme Court decision in favor of the petitioners, or parents, would create “an administrative nightmare.”

“There are a lot of religions out there. Schools have to figure out what violates religion, what parents they have to contact,” he said.

Graber said the court will have to determine whether county teaches the topics “as secular” subjects.

“The parent has the right to go in and say, ‘What are you teaching?’ Public schools can teach one plus one equals two, regardless of what your religion says about the simpleness

of mathematics,” he said. “They can teach about different forms of couples, regardless of what religion says about the simpleness of different kinds of relationships.

“The crucial thing is public schools must teach it as secular,” he said. “They may not praise or condemn any religion for holding opinions consistent with the public schools, or inconsistent.”

Even though parents have lost in lower courts on their preliminary injunction request, Graber said it makes sense for them to press the case with the current Supreme Court, given the justices’ openness to free exercise claims.

“The court has been extraordinarily sympathetic to free exercise claims brought by evangelical Christians,” he said. “They think they got the most sympathetic court they’ve ever had, so why not [petition the court]?”

‘Case is very important’

The fact the high court will be hearing the case based only “on an undeveloped and untested, preliminary injunction record,” and not hearings on the full merits of case in lower courts, was concerning to the school groups that filed the brief in support of neither side of the case.

“There are great risks presented by asking the Court to potentially adopt new rules for evaluating Free Exercise claims or constitutionalizing notice and opt out requirements,” said the brief from the School Superintendents Association, Consortium of State School Boards Associations, **Council of the Great City Schools** and National School Attorneys Association.

[One other brief](#) that supports neither side in the dispute came from the California Parents for the Equalization of Educational Materials (CAPEEM), a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization that focuses on “eradicating the disparaging treatment of Hinduism” in that state’s public schools.

The organization’s brief proposes the court adopt a four-part test to determine if school policies violate free exercise rights: Does the curriculum material negate religious beliefs or practices?; does the curriculum material itself or the process through which it was adopted reflect targeted hostility toward religion or a particular religion?; does the material or the adoption process lack neutrality toward a particular religion?; and is the curriculum material coercive?

“The outcome of this case is going to clearly affect my client’s rights, but whatever test the court comes up with ... we have ideas in what would make sense in litigating the case,” Glenn Katon, counsel representing CAPEEM, said in an interview Monday.

“We’re not there to help either party. We’re there to try and get the court to adopt the test that makes sense, that will help Hindus get treated fairly in California,” he said. “This case is very important for schools in California [and] even across the country.”



'The impact has been real': ICE raid fears keep students out of classrooms

Educators tell NBC News they've seen a dip in attendance and increased anxiety among some students during the Trump administration.

March 6, 2025, 1:31 PM EST

By [Didi Martinez](#), [Julia Ainsley](#) and Maura Murphy

The Trump administration's policy allowing Immigration and Customs Enforcement to make arrests in schools is bringing down attendance and driving up fear and anxiety among students and teachers, a group representing 78 large school districts across the country is arguing in court.

The group, the Council of Great City Schools, filed an amicus brief late last month supporting a lawsuit that the Denver public school system has filed against the Trump administration asking for relief from the policy.

In a press release about the amicus brief, the council said it had conducted a survey about the policy among its 78 member school districts and found that "they have already seen increased absenteeism, higher anxiety among students, increased bullying, less parental involvement, and heightened fear as a result of the change in guidance."

In January, the Trump administration rescinded a policy that had been in place since the Obama era, including during the first Trump administration, that largely prohibited ICE from conducting operations in schools, houses of worship and hospitals. There is no evidence that ICE has arrested students in schools so far.

In response to the lawsuit, the Trump administration has said the schools have not been harmed, in part, because no students have been arrested in schools.

But Denver Public Schools Superintendent Alex Marrero argues that, regardless of whether ICE has actually gone into one of his schools, the news of the change in policy alone has caused injury to the plaintiffs.

Speaking to NBC News in the library of a Denver school, he said the attendance rate there has dropped from 95% to 85% since a Feb. 5 immigration raid at two nearby apartment buildings.

"We don't have to wait for them to walk through those doors, the impact has been real," Marrero said. "And in this very library, the day of the raid, which — it didn't happen in our schools, but it happened nearby, the emotion, the fear and the terror in the eyes of our educators was significant. So no one can tell me that we weren't harmed. It's clear as day to me."

That same day, Nadia Madan-Morrow, the principal of the school, said buses that were supposed to be taking children to her school were diverted because of the commotion at the apartment buildings. And she held children at school that day rather than dismissing them early, as had been planned, because parents asked her to wait until they knew it was safe.

"ICE agents have now gone to their apartment buildings, and they're calling us and telling us, 'Don't put our students on the bus. We don't want them coming here,'" Madan-Morrow said, recalling the calls she received from parents that day.

Four students from her school were arrested in the ICE raids and have not returned, she said. NBC News has not confirmed the identities of those students or whether they had criminal or immigration violations.

Another person arrested that day was Maria Gonzalez, an immigrant from El Salvador. Gonzalez said ICE broke down her door without knocking, leaving a gaping hole. She was taken into the hallway and placed in plastic handcuffs, she said. She was then taken into ICE custody, leaving behind her daughters, Nicolle, 9, a student in Denver Public Schools, and Jade, 11 months old.

"My biggest fear was that they would send me to some place and deport me and they would leave my babies," she said.

She was released six hours later and reunited with her children.

Her lawyer, Matthew Barringer, said Gonzalez had crossed the border illegally twice from El Salvador but has not committed any violent crimes. Gonzalez's daughter Nicolle has been given a notice to appear before an immigration judge this

month, at which point, Barringer said, he will be notifying the immigration court that she is in the process of applying for special immigrant juvenile status to eventually make her a permanent resident.

For now, Gonzalez said, Nicolle cries at night and is scared to go to school because she is worried ICE will come there, especially after she heard a rumor one day that its agents were standing nearby, though they did not come inside her school.

Asked what she thinks about in school, Nicolle said, “That they can come again to school and this time they will be able to enter and they will take us.”

Lizyuri Gallardo, a counselor at the school in Denver where Madan-Morrow is the principal, said 300 of the 900 students at her school have sought counseling this year, mostly to discuss their fear of deportations. While the school system does not track students’ immigration status, Madan-Morrow said that more than 80% of the students come from families where a language other than English is spoken in the home.

Gallardo says she tries to make students feel emotionally prepared for anything they might encounter and to try to ease their anxiety at school

“I think that something we do here that is so beautiful at our school is telling them that we love them and that we care about them, and that we are a family and that we’re here to support them,” she said.

But the anxiety is something Gallardo continues to see, even without ICE coming into the building.

“Kids feel it. Kids are the first to feel it. They’re like little sponges,” she said.

On Friday, Denver Public Schools and lawyers for the Trump administration will present oral arguments in federal court over whether ICE should reinstate the policy that largely prohibited its agents from going into schools and other so-called sensitive locations without supervisor approval.

“[ICE] supervisory law enforcement personnel exercise judgment in making case-by-case determinations regarding whether, where, and when to conduct an immigration enforcement action at or near a school,” an ICE spokesperson told NBC News. “ICE does not typically conduct immigration enforcement activities at schools or school buses. Such law enforcement actions are conducted only when warranted by exigent circumstances and approved by a supervisory law enforcement official. As a law enforcement agency, ICE expects all employees to

adhere to the highest standards of professional conduct and to demonstrate integrity and professionalism in all aspects of their work.”

ARTICLES: LEADERSHIP



CPS school board votes to require next leader be an educator, not a CEO

After 30 years with a CEO in charge, CPS' next leader will be a superintendent. The board approved a resolution requiring a licensed educator to run the school district.

By [Sarah Karp | WBEZ](#) and [Nader Issa](#)

Mar 20, 2025, 9:42pm EDT

The Board of Education has voted to require the next leader of Chicago Public Schools to be a licensed educator, changing the role from a CEO to a traditional superintendent.

Chicago's schools have had a CEO since 1995, when they became the first in the country to be overseen by a chief executive — a corporate title that at times has troubled parents and advocates who found it to be an odd fit with the responsibility of educating the city's children.

Elected school board member Che "Rhymefest" Smith, 10th District, introduced a resolution at Thursday's monthly meeting aimed at changing the role's purpose. It directs CPS to require its next leader to hold an Illinois teacher license and a superintendent certificate. The resolution also calls on the Illinois General Assembly to change state law to require the CPS leader to be a licensed educator just like every other school district in the state.

The school board voted unanimously to approve the resolution.

"Mayor Daley instituted a policy of CEO over superintendent. And today, we will bring our infrastructure and our body back into place," Smith said. "[The Trump administration is] [eroding the Department of Education](#). There is no time like now to make sure that Chicago ensures that whoever leads CPS understands the core work of schools and we don't lose that experience and education."

The change will have an immediate effect as the district is currently searching for a new leader. CPS CEO Pedro Martinez was fired in December and is set to leave his post at the end of June. His contract allowed him to stay on for an additional six months.

While the school board can set certain qualifications for the district's top leader, the state legislature would have to change the title and cement the higher standard for employment.

The legislature handed over control of the school district to former Mayor Richard M. Daley 30 years ago, including the

power to appoint the school board and CEO. The only qualification for a CEO in state law is that it “shall be a person of recognized administrative ability and management experience.”

State Sen. Robert Martwick (D-Chicago) previously said he was open to exploring the idea.

“The advantage of a superintendent is that they ask, ‘What do we need to do to educate our children and what resources do we need?’ “ he said in February when [Smith first introduced the topic](#). “While a CEO might say, ‘What resources do we have and how can we use them to educate children?’ It is somewhat of a different focus.”

Martwick said the legislature considered a change when it created the elected school board in Chicago in 2021, but lawmakers decided to hold off.

Superintendents must have a master’s degree, usually in education, two years of experience in an administrative role and a superintendent endorsement from an accredited university. That endorsement requires training, classes and a 12-month internship.

Thirty years ago, Daley was looking for someone to help the district dig out of a financial hole, as well as improve low test scores. It was also a time that some leaders were embracing a corporate management style for school districts. The change to a CEO allowed Daley to pick Paul Vallas, the city’s budget director. CPS has also had a chief education officer effectively second in charge after the CEO.

Over the years, other CEOs have had no education experience, including Ron Huberman and Forrest Claypool, both of whom, like Vallas, worked in city government prior to running CPS. Janice Jackson, a former teacher and principal who served as CEO until 2021, stood out because of her education experience. Martinez is an accountant by training but ran other school districts as a superintendent prior to taking over at CPS. He still has his superintendent certification.

Some other cities followed Chicago’s lead in having a CEO run their school districts. The Council of Great City Schools says that seven of its 78 members, including Chicago, don’t have superintendents. Four are CEOs, two are chancellors and the last is director of schools.

READER

What's next for CPS?

New leadership and looming budget problems are on the horizon for Chicago Public Schools.

by [Maureen Kelleher](#) June 26, 2025

June 18 was the last day on the job for Pedro Martinez, the long-embattled chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools. Only a week before he left, the Chicago Board of Education narrowly voted to appoint Mayor Brandon Johnson's senior director of education policy, Dr. Macqueline King, as interim CEO.

The leadership change comes after months of strife over power and money between Martinez and the mayor. Johnson wanted Martinez to support borrowing \$300 million to make a pension payment for nonteaching CPS staff and fund the new Chicago Teachers Union contract. Martinez refused.

Some parents see this moment as a refreshing change from all the drama of the past year. "I'm looking forward to a clean slate," said Corina Pedraza, a CPS parent and community organizer who works at the Back of the Yards public library. "There's a partially elected school board now. We have a new person coming in to replace Pedro. And for the first time in a long time—not ever, but in a super-long time—we have a progressive mayor. I'm excited to see what could happen now that those three are aligning."

Others are more skeptical. "I'm not optimistic about the interim CEO. I believe she has been placed there to do Mayor Brandon Johnson's bidding," said CPS parent Natasha Dunn, a longtime activist in South Shore. "The board is not addressing the literacy crisis. They are not addressing the schools that are half empty. That needs to happen, and I think it's not going to happen."

For months, rumors swirled that the mayor's choice for interim leader of CPS would be his chief of staff, former state senator Cristina Pacione-Zayas. CPS parent Mark Smithivas, who volunteered on her first campaign for the Illinois state senate, said, "I would have loved to have [her] be the interim CEO. I found her very thoughtful about education policies. She has experience as an elected official and a chief of staff."

But in March, the school board unanimously voted to require both the interim and the final hire to hold a superintendent's license. Pacione-Zayas does not have that credential, but

King does. She will serve as interim until the currently underway search for a permanent superintendent is complete.

Task number one: fixing finances

King's first task will be to find a way to close the school district's estimated \$529 million budget deficit. In mid-June, the Civic Federation, a fiscal watchdog of the Chicago and Illinois governments, warned that [the estimate is based on questionable assumptions](#). Among these assumptions are that CPS will not see any cuts to federal funding and that the city will make a massive contribution to school district finances through tax increment financing (TIF) funds. The Civic Federation also noted that the budgets sent to schools in May were based on an even lower estimate of the budget shortfall.

Additionally, Mayor Johnson wants CPS to contribute \$175 million to a city pension fund that includes non-teaching staff in the school district. The city, not the school district, is legally obligated to pay into the pension fund. Under Mayor Lori Lightfoot, CPS began contributing to the fund to more clearly separate school district finances from the city. But this year, the school board did not contribute.

"I definitely don't perceive that this will be easy," King told the Chicago [Sun-Times](#) earlier this month.

Who Is Macqueline King?

Previously an award-winning CPS principal, King's record was tarnished by investigations into negligence of student safety protocols during her years as principal of Uptown's Courtenay Language Arts Center. She never received more than a warning for her actions, and recently told the [Sun-Times](#) she takes full responsibility for what happened in the incidents that were investigated.

Back in the early 2000s, aspiring teacher Monica Sims Lewis met King, who worked as a mentor teacher at the Chicago Academy elementary school. There, the Academy for Urban School Leadership trains aspiring teachers through a yearlong residency under the supervision of experienced mentor teachers. Though King didn't mentor her directly, Lewis said, "I saw how great she was with students. She was one of those teachers a lot of us young teachers looked up to and admired." In fact, King inspired Lewis to earn National Board Certification, an advanced credential for outstanding teachers. Today, Lewis is a senior managing director with Teach for America Detroit.

A CPS [press release announcing](#) King's appointment noted her recent experience working across city agencies to enroll migrant students and expand access to early childhood programs. "Identifying an interim candidate who understands the services, components,

concerns, and politics that go along with this role—and how to balance them—was paramount,” said Sean Harden, board president.

Board members have said they hope to make a permanent hire by the fall, but [a brief from the Council of the Great City Schools](#), a nonprofit that supports the country’s largest city school districts, suggests a realistic timeline could be as long as nine months.

How Superintendents Can Prioritize the Political Part of the Job

By [Evie Blad](#) — March 20, 2025 4 min read

Superintendents aren't just educational administrators; they are also civic leaders their communities turn to to weigh big decisions and navigate uncertainty.

That's increasingly true as national political debates percolate down to [stoke local controversies](#), and as districts face tough calls related to budget cuts and meeting the needs of a changing economy, said a panel of experts who help superintendents embrace the political nature of their roles.

The group of former superintendents and leadership experts, members of a new effort called the Collaborative on Political Leadership in the Superintendency, spoke March 6 at the national conference of AASA, the School Superintendents Association.

"For many people across the community, the first person they look to during difficult times is their school superintendent," said Kristine Gilmore, a former superintendent who now serves as associate executive director of AASA's leadership network.

To manage that responsibility, superintendents must establish and maintain personal priorities, set aside time for intentional relationship-building, and make the work a priority, long before a crisis emerges, the panel said.

Here are six tips for superintendents who want to be more politically savvy.

1. Build coalitions, not just relationships

Superintendents should first focus on "building the broadest coalition that we can" to support the ambitious vision of providing a quality education for all children, said Lindsay Whorton, president of the Holdsworth Center, an organization that works with Texas superintendents.

Leaders should go beyond one-on-one relationships, instead drawing together community members, like the leaders of civil rights organizations and key businesses, to help build a shared vision and sense of advocacy, she said. To create a broader coalition, members may have to agree to disagree on some non-essentials, Whorton added.

2. Build the groundwork early

Leaders should build this “kitchen cabinet” of advisers long before there’s a big decision or change on the horizon, said Ray Hart, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.

“If you wait until you want to put a bond on a ballot and then you decide to create those relationships, you are too late,” he said.

3. Prioritize nonnegotiables

“These days, everything is contested,” said Jennifer Perry Cheatham, a former superintendent who is now a senior lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and co-leader of the collaborative. It can make it difficult to find areas of agreement when people argue about terminology like “equity” and “standards,” she said.

Superintendents should write down their core values and post them in visible places, like the corner of their laptop during a school board meeting, so they can “know intentionally and proactively the line you won’t cross,” said Caitlin Sullivan, the founder and CEO of Leading Now, an organization that helps cohorts of superintendents navigate their civic roles.

Leaders shouldn’t compromise on anything related to the safety and well-being of children, for example, but they might be more willing to be flexible about things like messaging strategies if it helps the public understand their aims, she said.

“We don’t want anyone dying on accidental hills,” Sullivan said.

4. Factor your civic role into your daily routine

Many superintendents were drawn to the role by a desire to shape learning and a skill at organizational management, Whorton said. Those leaders may find the political nature of their roles a less natural fit.

But it’s important for leaders to acknowledge that political deftness is an increasingly key part of the job and intentionally schedule it into their days so that it doesn’t feel tacked onto an already crowded list of responsibilities, Whorton said.

Superintendents should build time into their calendars to speak with members of the media, troubleshoot problems, and consult with community allies, said Carl Cohn, a former superintendent of the Long Beach, Calif., district and co-leader of the collaborative.

Cohn held a regular “cookies with Carl” event where teachers and staff had an open door to come and ask questions or discuss challenges. He also made it a point to be visible at community events so parents and the public felt familiar with the man steering the district through big changes.

5. Put on your own oxygen mask first

It can be difficult for superintendents to balance the very urgent work of leading a school system with a need to slow down and engage with people, Cheatham said.

As superintendent in Madison, Wis., Cheatham stuck brightly colored sticky dots in ordinary places, like under the door handle to her office, reminding herself to slow down every time she encountered one throughout the day.

“The next person who comes into your office deserves for you to show up for them,” Cheatham said. “If people saw me as frantic, that would be deadly for the rest of the system.”

6. Keep your eyes on the local context

While national political issues—like President Donald Trump’s pledge to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education—often seem to blot out the sun, parents, students, and teachers are usually more focused on what’s happening in their own classrooms, speakers said.

While superintendents must follow, and respond to, the ways state and national decisions affect their systems, they should always focus most on the immediate needs of their communities, Gilmore said.

Whatever the status of the federal agency, “today there are kids in classrooms who don’t care about this,” she said. “They care about their experiences in their schools, and we care about leaders within our schools.”

Marcia Andrews Plans To Retire After Four Terms On School Board

By

[Louis Hillary Park](#)

April 18, 2025

Sixteen years on the Palm Beach County School Board will be enough, Vice Chair Marcia Andrews said this week about her decision not to seek re-election in November 2026.

As her 50th year in education unfolded, Andrews said she began talking about retirement to the mayors and other community leaders in her District 6 and it “feels like the right time.”

Now she’s making it official.

Besides her time on the school board, which dates back to 2010, Andrews has served as a middle school teacher, assistant principal, principal, director of recruitment and chief human resources officer for the school district, which is the county’s largest employer.

A longtime resident of Wellington and later Royal Palm Beach, Andrews said she does not have a favorite to replace her and wants to see an open competition for the seat she captured for the fourth time in 2022 with 56.9 percent of the vote.

Andrews’ district includes all of the western communities and the Glades.

The decision coincides with Andrews’ upcoming completion of a one-year term as chair of the Washington, D.C.-based **Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) Board of Directors**. The council consists of two representatives from each of the nation’s 78 largest school districts, serving approximately eight million students.

The Palm Beach County School District ranks 10th nationally, serving some 189,000 students.

At the Wednesday, April 23 school board meeting, Andrews will be honored for her service to the county and the country as part of the CGCS executive board, first as secretary, then treasurer, chair-elect and finally chair. She will remain a part of the organization as past-chair through July 2026.

Though Palm Beach County has been a CGCS member for some 20 years, Andrews was the first representative from the local district to gain the top position.

Council Executive Director Dr. Ray Hart said this week that Andrews' service to the council and those they serve has been stellar.

"She's a visionary," said Hart, who will be on hand to honor Andrews. "She can see around the curve to what's needed."

The coalition is dedicated to the improvement of education for children in the inner cities, according to its web site at www.cgcs.org. The council and its member school districts work to help school children "meet the highest standards and become successful and productive members of society."

Andrews said that while the issues are different for districts from Seattle to Miami and Los Angeles to Boston, "we have more in common than we have differences."

As immediate past-chair, Andrews will continue to help set the vision for the organization, Hart said.

Andrews, whose district includes 41 schools throughout the western parts of the county, said the goals she set for herself and the district when first elected in 2010 have been accomplished. The goals included improving facilities and education opportunities in the Glades, and building or renovating a number of District 6 schools to meet the needs of the county's booming western communities.

The latest addition is Saddle View Elementary School, due to open in August just outside the gates of the Arden community near 20-Mile Bend. Another elementary school is expected to open in Westlake in 2027, with a new high school set for the area near Northlake Blvd. and Seminole Pratt Whitney Road planned for 2030.

Where will Marty Pollio head next? Retiring JCPS superintendent announces new job

[Krista Johnson](#)

Louisville Courier Journal

April 30, 2025

Marty Pollio is heading across the Ohio River to enter the world of postsecondary education.

Set to [retire as the superintendent of Jefferson County Public Schools](#) at the end of June, Pollio will start his role as president of [Ivy Tech Community College](#) in Indiana the following day.

His appointment and three-year contract was approved by the college's board Wednesday afternoon.

"I'm excited to get into postsecondary," Pollio, who has worked for JCPS for 30 years, told The Courier Journal. "I've done a lot of work on workforce development — between being a principal and doing this — so I think it's a good next step for me."

Ivy Tech has 45 locations across Indiana, with its central office located in Indianapolis. The school, which grants associate degrees, collectively has more than 175,000 students — a good chunk of whom are high school students enrolled in dual credit courses.

Pollio said his goal will be to continue to grow the college's dual credit program and to "really align the work being done at Ivy Tech with the workforce in Indiana and even Kentucky."

In order to do that, Pollio pointed to [JCPS' Academies of Louisville program](#), indicating he'd like to take that model into K-12 schools across Indiana.

JCPS launched the model in 2017. The wide-range of academy programs gives high school students career-themed lessons and, in some cases, allows them to earn industry certifications before graduation.

This could be especially helpful to Ivy Tech's goal of combatting the state's workforce shortage in response to a [recent report](#) from the college that noted Indiana's decline in skilled talent, particularly in the advanced manufacturing; transportation and logistics; healthcare; and technology fields.

The academies program, Pollio previously told The Courier Journal, is one part of his legacy he is especially proud of.

Ivy Tech's current president, former Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann, [announced her upcoming retirement last year](#) after serving in the role for eight years. Her contract also ends in June.

Pollio announced he'd be retiring from JCPS in September. Having spent the last seven years as superintendent, he is one of the longest-tenured superintendents of any large urban district in the country, according to the **Council for Great City Schools**.

In the time since, Pollio said he had been struggling with what his next steps would be, and he's "had a lot of opportunities come my way over the past nine months."

When he received a call about Ivy Tech, he said he wasn't sure about going into postsecondary education, but "the more I started looking at the opportunity and the impact that I can have on both kids and adults alike, it really piqued my interest."

Other aspects of Pollio's lasting impact on JCPS include the district's new [strategic plan](#), coined "Future State."

That plan included expanding school choice for families through the district's new student assignment plan — though JCPS' decision to end magnet transportation for most students has drawn criticism among those who previously supported the new assignment plan.

Under Pollio's leadership, the district has also launched numerous large capital improvement projects; increased access to technology; increased funding for some schools serving high-needs populations; created an internal police department and aligned reading and math curriculums across all K-8 schools.

"Together, we have traversed through two of the largest crises in the history of public education," Pollio wrote in his retirement announcement. "As a result of the pandemic and severe staffing shortages, our jobs have become much more difficult. Through all the major challenges, I am so proud of the accomplishments we have made together for the students of this community. As a superintendent, it would have been easier to keep the status quo. Change is very hard. But I am extremely proud that we made the decision to make the most substantial changes in the history of JCPS despite many challenges. I truly believe that these changes will result in decades of improved outcomes for our students."

The district is still looking for a replacement for Pollio. Last week, six candidates were identified as finalists from a pool of 34 applicants. After a selection committee conducts interviews next week and narrows the field down to two candidates, their names will be made public. Public interviews will be scheduled the week of May 19.

MEDIA



Council of the Great City Schools

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT MONTHLY UPDATE FOR Q2 2025



April 2025

Media Mentions

Q2 2025

Title	Publication	Date
Marcia Andrews Plans To Retire After Four Terms On School Board	The Town-Crier	4/18/2025
How did the APS school board score its last quarter of work?	Albuquerque Journal	4/21/2025
Groups nationwide eye Supreme Court hearing on Montgomery County LGBTQ books in schools case	Yahoo News	4/22/2025
Fresno Unified School Board May Change Longstanding Role Under Revised Bylaw	GV Wire	4/29/2025
Where will Marty Pollio head next? Retiring JCPS superintendent announces new job	Courier Journal	4/30/2025

Email Campaigns

Q4 2024

Campaign	Date	Recipients	Delivered	Bounces	Open Rate
April 2025 Urban Educator	4/30/2025	7,789	6,241	1,548	40.6%

May 2025

Email Campaigns

Q2 2025

Campaign	Date	Recipients	Delivered	Bounces	Open Rate
May 2025 Urban Educator	5/29/2025	7,958	6,387	1,571	46.4%

June 2025

Press Releases

Q2 2025

Title	Date	Link
Council of the Great City Schools Presents Boston Graduate With \$10,000 Dr. Michael Casserly Scholarship for Educational Courage and Justice	6/18/2025	bit.ly/4nwJerg

Media Mentions

Q2 2025

Title	Publication	Date
PPS parents say academics, consistency should be among the board's top goals	90.5 WESA	6/3/2025
Divided APS board vacates coaching, governance contract. New provider to be selected in fall.	Albuquerque Journal	6/5/2025
FUSD shares its plan to improve student performance.	Fox 26 News	6/10/2025
What's next for CPS?: <i>New leadership and looming budget problems are on the horizon for Chicago Public Schools.</i>	Reader	6/26/2025

Email Campaigns

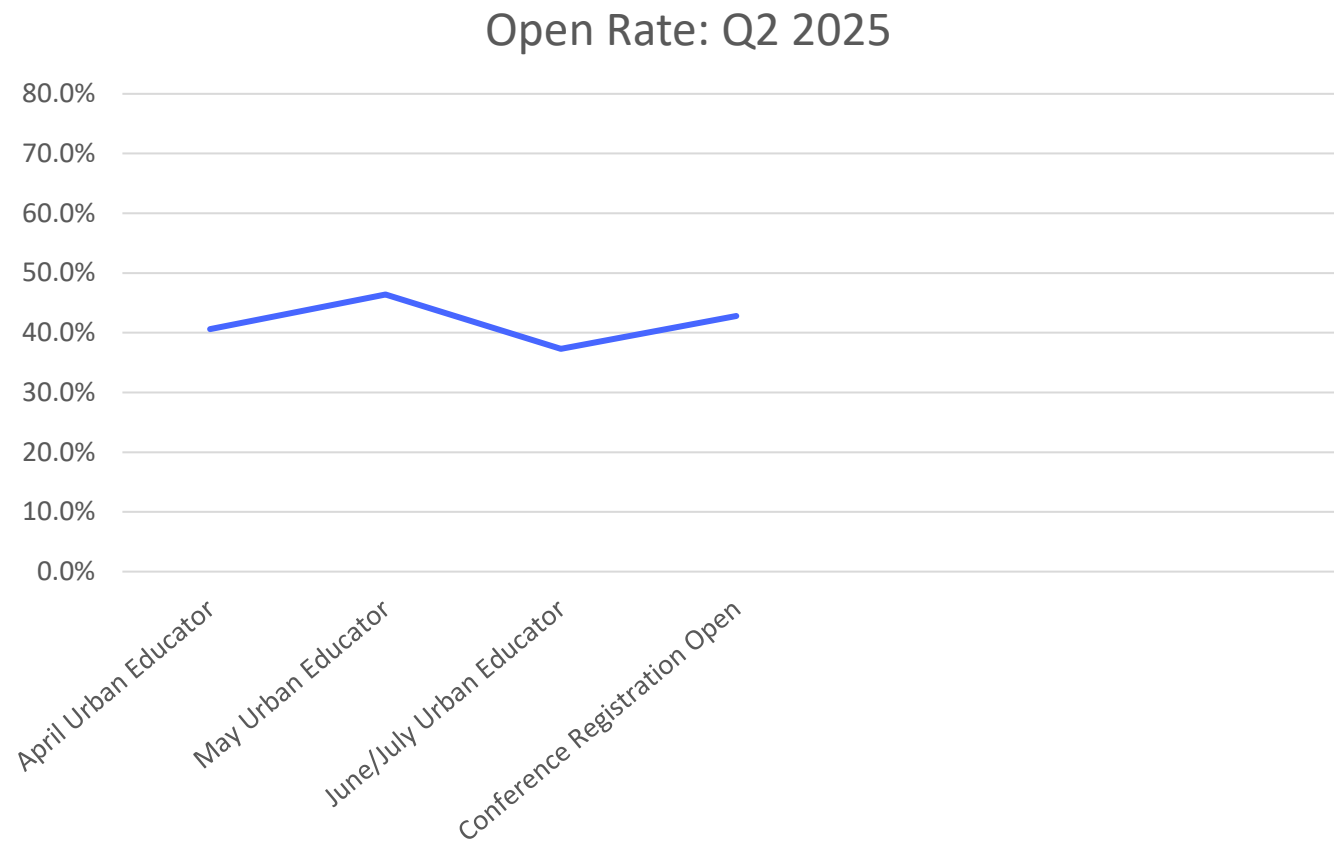
Q2 2025

Campaign	Date	Recipients	Delivered	Bounces	Open Rate
June/July 2025 Urban Educator	6/26/2025	8,034	6,396	1,638	37.3%
2025 Fall Conference Registration Open	6/27/2025	7,992	6,291	1,701	42.8%

Analytics

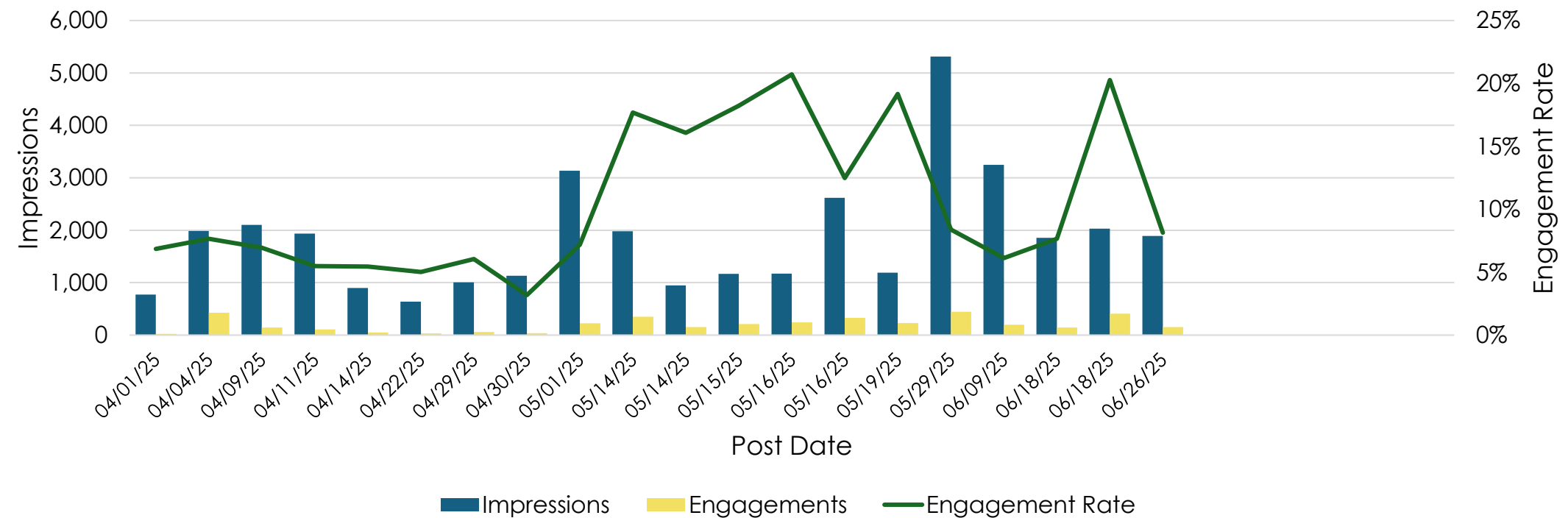
Email Performance

Q2 2025



LinkedIn Post Performance

Q2 2025



LinkedIn Top Posts

Q2 2025

Highest Impressions



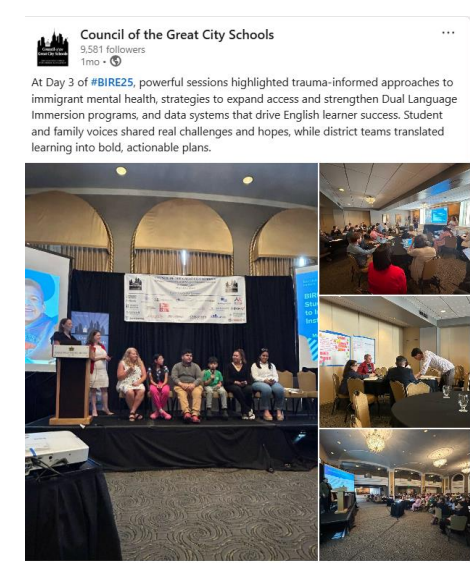
Impressions: 5,311
Engagement: 445
Engagement rate: 8%

Highest Engagement



Impressions: 5,311
Engagement: 445
Engagement rate: 8%

Highest Engagement Rate



Impressions: 1,173
Engagement: 243
Engagement rate: 21%

Takeaways and Highlights

Q2 2025

- In Q2, we typically see a decline in social media activity as our member districts begin transitioning to summer break. However, our posts still performed well this quarter, driven by the opening of fall conference registration and the announcement of our keynote speakers.
- On LinkedIn, engagement and impressions were especially strong. Our top-performing post announced the fall conference keynote speakers, followed by posts highlighting information from the Council's superintendent report.
- We also had media mentions in both April and June, further boosting the Council's visibility.
- By the end of Q2, our follower count reached 9,583 — an increase of 755 followers since the end of Q1.

THE URBAN EDUCATOR





FEATURED SPEAKERS AT THE
LEGISLATIVE/POLICY CONFERENCE



Council of the
Great City Schools
THE NATION'S VOICE
FOR URBAN EDUCATION



MANU RAJU
CNN SENIOR CONGRESSIONAL
CORRESPONDENT



TARA SETMAYER
POLITICAL COMMENTATOR



JOSH COWEN
EDUCATION POLICY EXPERT

Legislative Conference to Feature CNN Congressional Correspondent, Political Commentator, and Education Policy Expert

Manu Raju, CNN's Chief Congressional Correspondent and anchor, will speak at the Council of the Great City Schools' Legislative/Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., March 22-25 at the Mayflower Hotel.

[Read More](#)



Las Vegas, Rochester Name New Leaders; Albuquerque Superintendent Receives Contract Extension

Two educators with vast leadership experience have been named to lead schools in Las Vegas and Rochester, N.Y.

[Read More](#)



Council Releases Statement Opposing Executive Order to Dismantle the Department of Education

A great nation emphasizes the importance of education and lifelong learning as the primary driver of success for the country and its people.

[Read More](#)



Two Urban School Educators Selected as 'Leaders to Learn From'

Bill Briggman, chief human resources officer for the Charleston County School District in South Carolina, believes the math is simple: Teachers who can comfortably live where they want and afford their bills will have more mental and emotional energy to dedicate to improving the lives of their students.

[Read More](#)



\$25,000 Milken Educator Awards Announced

At Jessie Beck Elementary School in Nevada's Washoe County School District, fourth-grade teacher Allie Galas strives to make her classroom inclusive, positive, safe, and engaging by empowering students to take ownership of their learning.

[Read More](#)

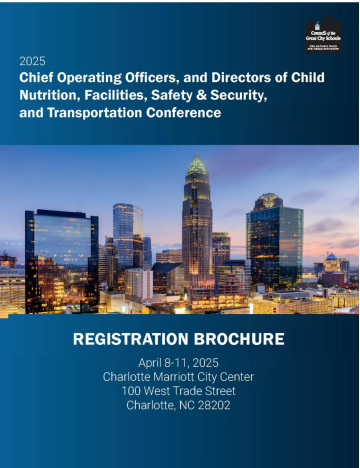


Fresno Unified’s Project ACCESS Supports Unhoused and Foster Youth

For young people living in foster care, it can be hard to trust adults. But staffers with California’s Fresno Unified School District’s Project ACCESS are working to change that while ensuring its students who are unhoused or living in foster care have all their needs met.

[Read More](#)

Upcoming Events



Chief Operating Officers, and Directors of Facilities, Child Nutrition, Safety & Security, and Transportation Conference, Charlotte, NC

When:
April 8 - April 11

Where:
Marriott City Center, Charlotte, NC

[Register](#)



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Urban Educator



CNN Congressional Correspondent Shares Insights from Capitol Hill with Urban Educators

CNN journalist Manu Raju offered timely advice to educators: Press your case for public education both to Congress members and to local journalists.

[Read More](#)



Political Commentator Emphasizes the Importance of Leadership

Political commentator Tara Setmayer calls herself a “proud, proud, product of New Jersey Public Schools” and criticizes efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education, calling such actions to be a direct threat to the future of students, teachers, and the nation’s economic and democratic stability.

[Read More](#)



Former Federal Judge Discusses the Changing U.S. Public Schools Legal Landscape

The current presidential administration’s attempts to use civil rights law against protected groups present vulnerabilities for public school students, and school districts must be prepared to defend their students, said civil rights attorney and former U.S. Court of Appeals judge David Tatel.

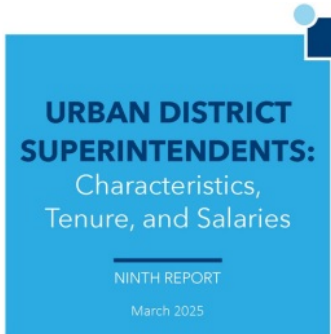
[Read More](#)



New Orleans Names New Leader; Kansas City Superintendent Receives Contract Extension

NOLA Public Schools recently appointed Fateama Fulmore to permanently take the helm as the district’s superintendent. She has served as the interim superintendent of the 41,583-student school district since November.

[Read More](#)



New Report Finds Current Urban Superintendents Are Relatively New to Their Roles

A recent survey conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools shows that superintendents currently leading the largest urban public school districts have not had the same longevity as their immediate predecessors.

[Read More](#)



School Bonds Pass in Kansas City and Anchorage

For the first time in 58 years, voters in Kansas City, Missouri, approved a school bond measure that will bring increased funding to Kansas City Public Schools to address critical needs in the 14,725-student district.

The \$424-million school bond measure overwhelmingly passed in April with about 85 percent of the vote.

[Read More](#)



Federally Funded Tutoring Program Credited for Getting Guilford County Schools Students Back on Track

At a time when U.S. public school students continue to experience COVID-19-related academic and social setbacks, students attending Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C., are showing academic gains. The district credits its homegrown tutoring program for the improvement.

[Read More](#)



Legislative Column

The November elections of 2024 resulted in a significant shift in federal leadership. The election of Donald Trump to the presidency, combined with a new Republican majority in the Senate joining the Republican-led House, changed the governing dynamic in Washington.

[Read More](#)

Upcoming Events



Bilingual, Immigrant, and Refugee Directors Meeting, May 13-17, Baltimore, MD

When:
May 13 - May 17

Where:
Lord Baltimore Hotel, Baltimore, MD

[Register](#)



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UrbanEducator

69TH ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 22-26, 2025

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
PHILADELPHIA

FEATURED SPEAKERS



GIANCARLO ESPOSITO
AWARD-WINNING ACTOR
AND DIRECTOR
ARTS & EDUCATION ADVOCATE



ANA NAVARRO
GOP STRATEGIST AND
POLITICAL CONTRIBUTOR TO
CNN, TELEMUNDO; CO-HOST
OF ABC'S THE VIEW



MICHAEL SMERCONISH
HOST OF THE MICHAEL
SMERCONISH PROGRAM ON
SIRIUSXM, HOST OF CNN'S
SMERCONISH AND CONTRIBUTOR

Political Analyst, Acclaimed Actor, and Radio Host to Address Urban School Leaders at Council Fall Conference

Political analyst Ana Navarro, award-winning actor Giancarlo Esposito, and radio and television host Michael Smerconish will address the Council of the Great City Schools' 69th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 22-26 in Philadelphia.

[Read More](#)



Louisville and Fresno Name New Superintendents; Seattle Leader to Step Down

Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Ky., is in negotiations to select H. Brian Yearwood as superintendent of the 97,000-student school district, the largest school system in Kentucky. If his contract is approved, he will succeed Marty Pollio, who is retiring in July after leading the school district since 2017.

[Read More](#)



Long Beach Unified Opens Center of Black Student Excellence

In an initiative aimed at uplifting and enhancing the educational experiences of Black students, California's Long Beach Unified School District recently launched the Center of Black Student Excellence.

[Read More](#)



Toledo Urban Educator of the Year Awards \$10,000 Green-Garner Scholarship to Two Students

When Romules Durant was given \$10,000 in scholarship money for being named the 2024 Urban Educator of the Year at the Council of the Great City Schools' Fall Conference in October, the decision was easy about what type of student should get the money.

[Read More](#)



Chicago School Wins Urban Debate Championship for the Second Year in a Row

For two Chicago Public Schools students, preparing for this year's national debate competition came with extra pressure—their school was defending its national title.

[Read More](#)



Federal Funds Helped Atlanta Schools Boost Student Attendance and Achievement. Will the District Sustain Those Gains Without That Funding?

Since Willam J. Scott Elementary started welcoming back students into the building in 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic forced it and other Atlanta Public Schools to close their doors, the school community has had much to celebrate, thanks to two federally funded programs that have helped boost student attendance and growth in math.

[Read More](#)



Voters Approve \$1.83 Billion Bond for Portland Public Schools

Voters in Portland, Ore., overwhelmingly approved a \$1.83 billion bond for Portland Public Schools. The bond was the largest school bond in Oregon history.

[Read More](#)

Upcoming Events



Chief Information Officers Conference, June 10 - 13, Chicago, IL

When:
June 10 - June 13

Where:
Westin Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL

Register



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Celebrating the Class of 2025

A graduate from Denver has achieved her lifelong dream by walking across the stage to receive her diploma. A scholar from Philadelphia had many college options but chose to attend a nearby school so he could serve as a role model. A graduate from St. Paul was on the wrong path until he discovered his Native American heritage; he is now joining the Marine Corps Reserves before heading to college. These are just a few of the inspiring urban students from the Class of 2025. Read about their amazing stories.

[Read More](#)



Baltimore CEO to Lead the Council

Sonja Brookins Santelises, CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools, will become chair of the Council of the Great City Schools’ Board of Directors for the 2025-2026 school year, effective July 1.

[Read More](#)



San Diego Names Interim Superintendent as Permanent; Santa Ana Selects New Leader

Instead of launching national searches, two big-city school districts in California chose to look within their own ranks for new leadership.

[Read More](#)

69TH ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 22-26, 2025
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



FEATURED SPEAKERS



GIANCARLO ESPOSITO
AWARD-WINNING ACTOR
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TO CNN, TELEMUNDO,
CO-HOST OF ABC'S THE VIEW



MICHAEL SMERCONISH
HOST OF THE MICHAEL
SMERCONISH PROGRAM ON
SIRIUSXM, AND CNN'S SMERCONISH

Council Fall Conference Registration Begins

The Council of the Great City Schools will hold its 69th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 22-26, in Philadelphia.

[Read More](#)



Nominations Sought for the 2025 Urban Educator of the Year

The 2025 top award for urban education leadership will be given to a school board member from one of the 81 big-city school districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools.

[Read More](#)



Boston Student Awarded \$10,000 Michael Casserly Scholarship

The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) recently presented Andrew Cruz Mendez Troncoso, a 2025 graduate of Boston Public Schools, with the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Scholarship for Educational Courage and Justice.

[Read More](#)



Title I-Supported Classroom Interventionists Help Los Angeles Students Grow

Differentiating instruction to meet all students' needs is one of the most challenging parts of teaching. The academic setbacks many of America's students have experienced after the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily closed schools have made it even harder.

[Read More](#)



Three New Districts Join the Council

Durham Public Schools in North Carolina, Jersey City Public Schools in New Jersey, and Madison Metropolitan School District in Wisconsin have joined the Council of the Great City Schools, increasing the urban-school coalition's membership to 81 public school systems.

[Read More](#)

Upcoming Events

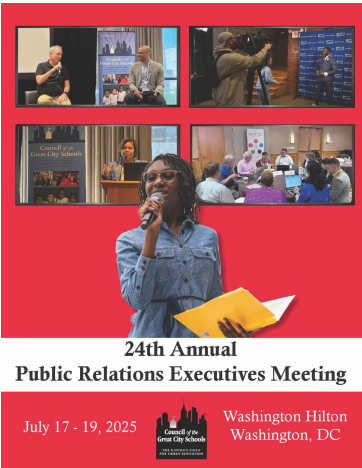


Curriculum & Research Directors' Meeting, July 8-11, 2025

When:
July 8 - July 11

Where:
Westin Book Cadillac Detroit, Detroit, MI

[Register](#)



Public Relations Executives Meeting,
July 17-19, 2025

When:
July 17 - July 19

Where:
Washington Hilton, Washington, DC

Register

Publishing Note

The Urban Educator will not publish in August. We will return to your inbox in September.



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NSPRA AWARD



2025

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
SPECIAL PURPOSE PUBLICATION

PRE MEETING



24th ANNUAL PUBLIC RELATIONS EXECUTIVES MEETING

July 17-19, 2025

Washington Hilton

1919 Connecticut Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20009
#PRE2025

Draft Agenda

Thursday, July 17

6:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Dinner

Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab
750 15th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005
(A 10-minute cab ride from the Hilton)

Welcome

Tonya Harris, Director of Communications
Council of the Great City Schools

Ray Hart, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

Greetings

Dr. Lewis Ferebee, Chancellor
District of Columbia Public Schools

Guest Speaker

LaWanda Toney, former Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Communications and Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Education

Award-winning communications executive, LaWanda Toney explores how powerful, people-centered communication can transform urban schools from the inside out. With humor and real talk, she will break down what effective internal and external communication *really* looks like in today's fast-moving, culturally rich school communities. Set against the backdrop of a rapidly shifting education landscape—marked by political tensions, evolving parent expectations, and increased demands for transparency—LaWanda will unpack what these changes mean for communications professionals and why their role has never been more critical.

Friday, July 18

7:00 – 7:30 a.m.

Yoga in the Morning (Heights Courtyard, Lobby Level)

Start your day with an accessible, all-inclusive exercise program. All levels welcome. Set your intention for the conference and leave feeling refreshed. Mats and towels will be provided. If you would like to participate, **please [click on this link](#)** to sign up.

7:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Registration (Tenleytown, 1st floor)

8:00 – 9:00 a.m.

Breakfast (Tenleytown, 1st floor)

Sponsor: K12 Insight
Peachjar

9:00 - 9:25 a.m.

Welcome & Introductions (Tenleytown, 1st floor)

Tonya Harris, Director of Communications
Council of the Great City Schools

2025 PRE Survey Findings

Joanne Coley, Communications Manager
Council of the Great City Schools

9:25 – 9:30 a.m.

5-Minute Morning Mindset Reset

Begin your conference experience from a place of clarity and focus with this brief yet powerful guided meditation. In just five minutes, reconnect with your breath and presence to enhance your ability to absorb insights, engage authentically, and approach the day's learning with an open, centered mind.

Presenter:

Karianne Michelle, Founder & CEO, Lofti

9:30 – 10:00 a.m.

The Dynamic Duo: How Superpowered Superintendents and Communication Leads Can Build Trust, Tackle Misinformation, and Increase Positive Media Coverage

Batman and Robin. Thelma and Louise. Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen. Sonny and Cher. The list goes on. There are countless examples of partnerships whose synergy has yielded to amazing results. In school public relations, there are few partnerships more important than that of the superintendent and the communications lead and their team. In this engaging and informative session, you'll learn from a member of one such dynamic duo and hear strategies and tips based on real-life examples of how the School District of Philadelphia drives and measures positive media coverage, improves public perception, executes effective crisis communications, and increases awareness of district initiatives and programming.

Presenter:

Alexandra Coppadge, Chief of Communications and Customer Service

The School District of Philadelphia

10:00 – 10:45 a.m.

The Five Phases of Enrollment Marketing

Nearly every aspect of a district's operations, from staffing to program offerings, stems from one key factor: enrollment. Your enrollment numbers determine your funding, and your funding determines just about everything else. Enrollment marketing is a complex problem that can't be solved with a simple answer, but one strategy can help: the customer journey. Learn the path to building exceptional enrollment marketing for your schools. Learn from Denver Public Schools how they went to a 100% school choice district and their success in enrollment marketing to all families.

Presenters:

Bill Good, Chief of Communications, Denver Public Schools

Greg Turchetta, Strategic Communications Advisor

Apptegy

10:45 – 11:00 a.m.

Coffee Break

11:00 - 12:15 p.m.

What Works! Sharing Best Practices/Breakout Groups

A round robin discussion where districts will be asked to share successful communication strategies and initiatives. We will also break out into groups to discuss these four “hot topics” facing urban school district communicators.

“When Tragedy Strikes: Reclaiming the Narrative Amid a Storm of Blame”

Communicating about a tragedy and handling the media's misplaced blame on the school district.

"In the Wake of Loss: A District's Role in Healing and Support"

How do school districts appropriately respond to the death of a student?

“The Shutdown Shake-Up: Lessons From Two Closure Plans”

Closing schools – and how plans can work.

“After the Arrest: Standing Strong When the Threat of ICE Comes to the School Community”

Reacting to the ICE arrest of a student – and protecting other students, families, and the district's reputation.

Moderator:

Barbara Griffith, Communications Consultant and Former Senior Communications Officer for Fort Worth Independent School District

12:15 – 1:15 p.m.

Lunch (Tenleytown, 1st floor)

1:30 – 2:30 p.m.

Didn't you read the thing???

Writing so busy people read and respond

Professor Todd Rogers from Harvard University teaches how to write so busy families, staff, and other stakeholders read, understand, and respond. Everyone is busy. That's why we skim emails, talking points, social media posts, forms, websites, documents, and nearly everything else.

In this session, attendees will learn the practical cognitive and behavioral science of communication, and the six actionable principles it generates. This session will make your writing more effective—and kinder—by teaching how to

write in a way that's easier to read. The session concludes with an [actionable checklist](#) and this [AI email coaching tool](#).

Presenter:

Todd Rogers, Weatherhead Professor of Public Policy, Harvard University

2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Work Smarter Not Harder: Using AI to Work More Efficiently

Surveys indicate that two-thirds of communicators are utilizing AI technology, with 70% calling it a game-changer. A panel of urban school communicators will provide specific examples of how they are using AI for content creation, media relations, social media, and external and internal communications. They will also discuss how AI is improving their overall efficiency and productivity.

Moderator:

Greg Toppo, Former national education reporter for *USA Today* and author

Panelists:

Emma Garrett-Nelson, Chief Communications Officer Colorado Department of Education

Fermin Leal, Chief Communications and Community Relations Officer, Santa Ana Unified School District

Marisol Ramos-Lopez, Chief of Communications, Rochester City School District

3:30 – 4:00 p.m.

Refresh, Reflect & Plan

This session will help you pause, reflect, and integrate the insights you've gained while setting clear intentions for what you want to accomplish next. Through guided meditation and mindful goal-setting exercises, connect with your professional vision and create actionable steps that build on today's learning and maximize tomorrow's opportunities.

Presenter:

Karianne Michelle, Founder & CEO, Lofti

4:00 p.m.

Adjourn

5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Cocktail Reception

Johnny Pistolas

2333 18th St NW

Washington, DC 20009

(A 10-minute walk from the Hilton, in the culturally diverse Adams Morgan neighborhood known for its eclectic dining scene and nightlife)

Sponsors: Apptegy

Finalsite

ParentSquare

SchoolMint

Saturday, July 19

7:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Registration (Tenleytown, 1st floor)

8:00 – 9:00 a.m.

Breakfast (Tenleytown, 1st floor)

Sponsor: PowerSchool

Barbara Griffith Communications

9:00 – 10:30 a.m.

The Social Media Workshop (Tenleytown, 1st floor)

9:00 – 9:45 a.m.

Beyond the Algorithm: Building Authentic Engagement and Explosive Growth on Social Media

Social media can feel overwhelming, especially with so many new platforms emerging and organic growth becoming more challenging due to ever-changing algorithms that prioritize paid content. This session will share the practical strategies and insights used at Florida's Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) to achieve real growth and engagement. OCPS has seen a 23% follower growth in 2024, now reaching nearly 200,000 followers across Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn. Attendees will learn how to develop an upbeat, engaging voice that connects with a diverse audience, balancing important information with engaging content. We'll demonstrate how to connect with student audiences on Instagram, creating relatable content that encourages engagement.

Presenters:

Scott Howat, Chief Communications Officer & President of the Foundation for Orange County Public Schools

Jason Smith, Director, Public Relations, Orange County Public Schools

9:45 – 10:30 a.m.

Gen Z is Watching: Rethinking School Branding for the TikTok Generation

In an era where attention spans are short and creativity drives engagement, school districts must rethink their messaging to reach Gen Z where they are, through short-form video platforms. This session will explore how to build a student-first social media strategy that is authentic, engaging, and grounded in your district's core values. Using real-world examples from Denver Public Schools, attendees will see how one large urban district successfully shifted its approach to better connect with Gen Z. You'll learn best practices for content creation, student collaboration, trend anticipation, and platform-specific storytelling. Walk away with a practical checklist for producing consistent, on-brand content plus 10 proven storytelling formats that spotlight student stories and transform everyday school moments into scroll-stopping stories.

Presenter:

Javier Ibarra, Sr. Manager, Media & Public Relations
Denver Public Schools

10:30 – 10:45 a.m.

Coffee Break

10:45 – 11:45 a.m.

Responsible AI for Urban School Communicators

This session will focus on:

- Practical AI workflows for district communication teams
- Ethics checkpoints: data privacy, bias, student safety, misinformation
- Quick-start governance checklist + free tools attendees can test

Presenter:

Bianca Prade, Visiting Scholar, George Washington University

Bianca is teaching a new graduate course, “**Strategic Communications & AI Ethics**,” at George Washington

University's Graduate School of Political Management. This session will draw on that curriculum while staying tailored to K-12 realities.

Noon – 1:00 p.m.

Lunch

1:00 – 1:45 p.m.

Launch Like a Pro: Untangling the Web for a Savvy Tech Rollout

Launching a new website or communications platform doesn't have to be a headache—or a hot mess. Join the Dallas ISD Communications team and Jeannine Richardson from Finalsight for a lively session that transparently pulls back the curtain on how to make tech rollouts smooth, strategic, and actually... fun, despite chaotic moments that can ensue when reimagining your website. This session is built for school PR pros who want to lead with confidence when the next big tech change hits. From managing internal breakdowns to getting your whole district in sync, we'll share the real talk on what works, what flops, and how to keep staff, families, and stakeholders informed— even excited—every step of the way. You'll walk away with smart frameworks, communication strategies, and rollout tips you can apply whether you're prepping for a full platform overhaul or just trying to get your schools on the same digital page.

Presenters:

Robyn Harris, Deputy Chief of Communications
Dallas Independent School District

Anastasia Reed, Executive Director, External
Communications,
Dallas Independent School District

1:45 – 2:30 p.m.

Telling the Story Your Way

Telling your story in a crowded digital and broadcast space can be difficult, especially when you're competing with coverage of more than 25 school districts in your general media market. Birmingham City Schools uses a unique blend of social media, targeted pitching and paid content in area media to share information and engage with students, parents and stakeholders. The district has experienced several weeks with earned media valued at more than \$750,000. The district has strategically placed branding ads

on network television and had three ads in the 2025 Super Bowl airing on the local FOX station.

Presenter:

Sherrel Stewart, Communications Officer, Birmingham City Schools

2:30 – 2:45 p.m.

Coffee Break

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Mastering Difficult Communications

Unlock the power of effective communication in your school with "Mastering Difficult Communications." This session delves into strategies for navigating sensitive conversations around academics, behavior, and hygiene, fostering trust and strengthening school-home partnerships. Learn how to establish genuine two-way communication, ensuring all voices are heard and valued. Develop a proactive plan for addressing challenging topics with cultural empathy and a student-centered approach, promoting understanding and collaboration. Equip yourself with the best practices for crafting a comprehensive crisis response plan to ensure safety and maintain community trust during challenging times. Leave this session ready to communicate with confidence and build a more supportive school environment.

Presenters:

Emily Worrell, Director of Communications & Marketing, Wawasee Community School Corp

Justin Robinson, Director of Communications & Community Engagement, Hickman Mills C-1

Jay Klanfer, SVP - Sales, ParentSquare

3:30– 4:15 p.m.

You're Not a Recruiter... And That's Okay: When to Call in the Pros

District communications and HR teams are being asked to run high-stakes recruitment campaigns without the time, tools, or training to do it effectively. In this session, Sacramento City Unified's Chief of Communications will share how the district approached its teacher and student recruitment challenges by bringing in external support. We'll walk through what wasn't working, what changed, and why it made a difference. The conversation will also explore common patterns across large districts and highlight what effective recruitment marketing actually looks like. Attendees will walk away with clear signals to watch for and a better sense of when it makes sense to bring in expert help.

Presenters:

Brian Heap, Chief of Communications, Sacramento City Unified

Matt Coates, Chief Evangelist, Schoolmint

4:15 p.m.

Adjourn

Attire for the Conference: Business Casual

Please **bring** a sweater, blazer, or wrap because the hotel meeting room may be chilly.