BOARD OF DIRECTORS
COUNCIL OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS MINUTES
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
March 21, 2021

Michael O’Neill, Chair of the Board of Directors, called the virtual meeting to order at 11:00 am ET. A quorum of the Board was established later in the meeting.

Minutes

Michael O’Neill presented the minutes of the October 17, 2020 virtual meeting of the Board of Directors and January 22-23, 2021 virtual meeting of the Executive Committee.

A motion to approve the minutes passed without dissent by virtual vote.

Executive Directors Report

Michael Casserly reported that there is an extraordinary amount of new federal funding coming, so the Council was going to convene a set of working groups to help identify the most effective uses for these resources. He indicated that districts will likely be the target of criticism if the funds aren’t carefully spent, so we want to put together recommendations for using the aid strategically.

Casserly reported that over the past year, the Council held regular weekly calls with staff and leaders across districts. We received feedback that these calls provided not only technical and strategic guidance, but they were a forum for connecting with peers. The Council has also published a series of guides and publications, held hundreds of press interviews, and set up a tracking system to track reopenings across districts (eventually partnering with Education Week to support the work).

He also reported that the group had lobbied for relief funds over the months and worked to protect the targeted Title I formula for allocate the aid. In addition, the Council challenged regulations passed by the former education secretary on private schools, filed recommendations with the Biden transition team, and conducted outreach to the new education secretary, agency leaders, and staff. Moving forward, Casserly reported that the Council should be in good stead with the new administration, Congressional committees, and agencies.

On the research side, Casserly reported that the group had nearly finished its special NAEP analysis, revised our professional development framework, maintained the collection and reporting of KPIs, and submitted comments to NAGB on the new reading frameworks.

Finally, the Council has helped support vaccination efforts and shared information on evolving CDC guidance. So, the group has tried to provide support where it was needed in this very unusual year.

Board members then discussed the value of the ZOOM calls over the past year, as well as the need and urgency for guidance in spending education funds.
Coronavirus Resources
This section of the materials provided an updated list of ZOOM calls, a screenshot of the Council’s coronavirus resource web page, copies of the resources released over the past year, a joint letter regarding the loosening of guidelines, and other correspondence.

Appointments and Nominations
The Chair of the Board presented the following nominations.

Officers
1) Barbara Jenkins (Orange County Superintendent) to serve as Chair of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

2) Kelly Gonez (Los Angeles School Board) to serve as Chair-Elect of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

3) Bill Hite (Philadelphia Superintendent) to serve as Secretary/Treasurer of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

4) Michael O’Neill (Boston School Committee) to serve as Immediate Past Chair of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

Extend Terms/Confirm Appointments
1) Robert Runcie (Broward Superintendent) to serve a first three-year term from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

2) Elisa Vakalis (Anchorage School Board) to serve a second three-year term from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

3) Marcelo Cavazos (Arlington Superintendent) to serve the unexpired term of Juan Cabrera whose term expires on June 30, 2023.

4) Diane Porter (Jefferson County School Board) to fill the vacancy created by Kelly Gonez (Los Angeles School Board), whose term was set to expire June 30, 2022.

5) Joe Gothard (St. Paul Superintendent) to fill the vacancy created by new Secretary/Treasurer, Bill Hite (Philadelphia Superintendent, whose term was set to expire June 30, 2023.

There were also two new vacancies on the Executive Committee. The officers have nominated Jesus Jara (Clark County Superintendent) to serve the unexpired term of Linda Cavazos (Clark County School Board), and Shavonna Holman (Omaha School Board) to serve the unexpired term of Susana Cordova (Denver Superintendent). Both terms were set to expire on June 30, 2023.

Michael O’Neil then encouraged members to ensure that their district board representatives—particularly LatinX board members—attend these Board of Directors meetings and participate actively in the task forces and other Council work. The officers
want to ensure that the Council has a balanced and representative Board of Directors, as well as a deep and diverse bench for future Executive Committee appointments.

A motion to approve the nominations passed without dissent by virtual vote.

Conferences and Meetings

The Annual Fall Conference will be held in person October 20-24, 2021 in Philadelphia. The group will revisit this decision for an in-person conference if there are still health or safety concerns.

The fall conference in 2022 will be held in Orlando, the 2023 conference will be held in San Diego, the 2024 conference will now be held in Dallas (postponed from 2020), and the 2025 conference will be held in Boston.

Communications

Michael Casserly, Executive Director, gave the report on the Council’s communications activities. This section includes information from a February Zoom call held with communication officials from the U.S. Department of Education.

Briefing materials includes sample articles that feature quotes from Council staff or highlight Council activities and resources, press releases, statements, the latest Urban Educator (which is now all digital), the organization’s monthly social media report, and application guidelines for the Bernard Harris scholarship program.

Legislation

Legislative materials were included in the conference legislative briefing book. The group will have an extensive briefing on legislation and policy starting this afternoon after hearing from Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward.

Achievement and Professional Development Task Force/Task Force on English Language Learners and Bilingual Education

Deb Shanley gave the report of the Achievement and Professional Development Task Force. Yesterday’s discussion started out with Ray Hart presenting an overview of the NAEP special analysis report, and how to interpret and access the data. This will be discussed further in the research section.

Shanley called the group’s attention to a few additional materials and activities discussed during the task force meeting, including—

- The launch of the special education KPI dashboard.
- A near-final draft of the Professional Development Framework. This resource includes a review of research and lessons from the field, a discussion of preconditions and design principles of effective professional development, and a set of exemplars from districts across the country.
• An overview of issues being discussed during regularly scheduled CAO ZOOM calls.
• Information on early reading and the work the Council is doing in partnership with SAP, including a series of webinars on unfinished learning.
• The NAEP reading framework.
• A review of Omaha’s special education services and programming.

The materials also included an overview of the priorities and activities of the academic team, and a catalogue of resources and tools.

Gabriela Uro, the Council’s Director of Language Policy, then gave an overview of the Council’s work around English Language Learner education. An overview of materials and other Council ELL activities was provided in the Board of Directors briefing book. There was also information on a four-part training series as part of the Professional Development Platform (PLP), a listing of supports we provide individually to districts on a case-by-case basis, updates on the materials procurement project, and a new writing project that is underway.

Task Force on Black and Latina Young Women and Girls/Task Force on Black and Latino Young Men and Boys

Sharon Contreras, Task Force Co-chair, gave the report of the Task Force on Black and Latina Young Women and Girls. She reviewed revised goals, heard from Janice Jackson in Chicago about their SWAG program, as well as from co-chair Kelly Ginez on what they are doing in LAUSD. Both discussed where there were programmatic weaknesses and where stronger partnerships were needed. Bringing in student voices was a theme throughout the discussion. The Task Force’s next step will be to address safety and policing in schools. Also discussed was the possibility of bringing together a panel of female students of color for the fall conference. The Chairs agree that they needed to address how to work on males of color issues without detracting from the support and work we need to do to support females of color.

Bill Hite, Task Force Co-chair, acknowledged the great work of the females of color chairs and task force. Hite indicated that they were reviewing the males of color task force goals considering the work and direction the female task force was doing. Disproportionality is an issue that applies to both groups. Hite said the task force was thinking through how to look at data around males of color without under-emphasizing the work that needs to be done around females of color. He agreed that recognizing the importance of incorporating student voice and tapping into their perspectives for potential future directions was critical.

In terms of future work, the task forces discussed research focused on tracking disproportionality across Council member districts. We would also like to identify who is doing good work on this front and figure out how we could highlight it and take it to scale.

Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance
Barbara Jenkins, Task Force Co-chair, gave the report of the Task Force on Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance.

This section of the materials started with information on the Harvard school board/superintendent governance program. Dr. Jenkins described the Harvard’s case study approach as unparalleled. Michael O’Neill and Michael Casserly have had the opportunity to sit in on a virtual case study and were impressed with the depth and quality of the coursework.

The Institute will be held virtually July 19-23, 2021. Presently, 12 districts will be participating.

There were also materials in the briefing book describing the governance and technical assistance work of the Council. AJ Crabill continues to provide hands-on support to districts across the country to help build board governance and leadership through coaching. In addition, the Council is growing out a series of coach-training sessions to augment the work and further build district capacity.

During the discussion, Bob Carlson, the Council’s Director Management Services, updated the Task Force on the Council’s continuing strategic support reviews over the past year.

Task Force materials also presented information on a project being launched to address issues of Technology Interoperability.

The group then discussed the Council’s governance reviews. These are hard hitting reviews, and members should be prepared if they ask for a visit.

Research

Ray Hart, the Council’s Director of Research, gave the report on the Council’s research activities.

The research materials included information on the TUDA task force and the Council’s work with NAGB, including our comments on the NAEP reading frameworks.

The research section also provided copies of two surveys that have been released, as well as a report on Kansas City in support of their bid to become fully accredited.

Finally, members found the latest draft of the NAEP district effects report in the briefing book. Hart walked members through the research questions, methodology, and main findings. This report is currently being reviewed by NCES, and will then be released, most likely in the next month or two. Hart also called the group’s attention to the technology functionality in the Council’s KPI system. Users will be able to look at the data in several ways. He then shared login information and guidance for EdWires, the Council’s fileshare platform for sharing materials across districts.

By-Laws
No report.

Membership

East Baton Rouge, a former Council member, has reapplied for membership. Casserly indicated that the district meets all membership criteria (data are provided in the membership section of the materials).

A motion to approve the membership application of East Baton Rouge passed without dissent by virtual vote.

Audit

Casserly gave the report on the Audit subcommittee. Members found the results of the Council’s external audit for last fiscal year presented in the Board of Directors materials. The audit was completely clean, with no material findings or weaknesses. He thanked Teri Trinidad and Alisa Adams for their work and oversight.

The audit report included details on overall assets and liabilities, restricted and unrestricted revenues and expenses, a statement of functional expenditures, a report on the organization’s cash flow and accounting policies, various contract receivables, investment types, etc. The external audit report also included the value of property and equipment, revenues from sponsorships, dues, contracts, etc. Notably, despite various hotel cancellations, the Council has not incurred any penalties (thanks to Teri Trinidad and Peter Green’s exemplary work).

In 2020 the organization also received a PPP loan, which has not been counted as revenue yet as the Council waits to hear if this loan will be forgiven. There was also data on grant funds received, information on retirement plans, categorical revenues and expenses, and a letter from the auditors stating there were no disagreements or issues in conducting the audit.

Following the audit, Casserly reviewed materials on the 2019-20 budget numbers, which were the same as those contained in the audit. This included combined general operating and categorical budgets, as well as the status of last year’s dues.

Casserly then reviewed the 2020-21 budget, reported through December 31, 2020, and the status of dues payments. He invited members to ensure that they had paid. For the current program year, Casserly reported that the group had received 97% of expected revenues for the year, and about 40% of anticipated expenditures had been incurred in the first six months. In addition, the organization’s carryover amount had increased to $12.7 million because of fund raising efforts over the last six months of 2020. We expect this number to go down as we spend down these grants.

In terms of the investment data provided in the materials, Casserly pointed out that the Council maintained a conservative investment approach.
Finally, the last section of the Audit materials provided a proposed budget for 2021-22, including a new dues structure, operating budget, and projected expenses. This was expected to be a balanced budget as well.

Kelly Gonez applauded the Council staff for their prudent stewardship of the organization’s finances.

A motion to accept the audit report passed without dissent by a virtual vote.

**Strategic plan**

The materials included the organization’s strategic plan, and an update on its status.

**Wrap up**

Michael O’Neill then thanked Michael Casserly for his exemplary leadership, noting this was his final Board of Directors meeting as Executive Director, and presented him with a plaque. It was also Michael O’Neill’s final meeting as Board Chair, and Casserly presented him with a crystal gavel.

**Executive Session**

The Board then went into Executive Session at 1:45pm (ET).

Respectfully submitted:

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
COUNCIL OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS  
MINUTES  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING  
July 9 & 10, 2021  

Present:  

Officers:  
Barbara Jenkins, Chair, Orange County Superintendent  
Kelly Gonez, Chair-Elect, Los Angeles School Board  
Michael O’Neill, Immediate Past Chair, Boston School Committee  

Members:  
Tom Ahart, Des Moines Superintendent  
Marcia Andrews, Palm Beach County School Board  
Sharon Contreras, Guilford County Superintendent  
Talisa Dixon, Columbus Superintendent  
Joe Gothard, St. Paul Superintendent  
Leslie Grant, Atlanta School Board  
Guadalupe Guerrero, Portland Superintendent  
Michael Hinojosa, Dallas Superintendent  
Shavonna Hollman, Omaha School Board  
Jesus Jara, Clark County Superintendent  
Megan Kerr, Long Beach School Board  
Diane Porter, Jefferson County School Board  
Darrel Woo, Sacramento School Board  
Deborah Shanley, Brooklyn College, CUNY Dean  

Absent:  
Siad Ali, Minneapolis School Board  
Marcelo Cavazos, Arlington Superintendent  
Valerie Davis, Fresno School Board  
William Hite, Philadelphia Superintendent  
Sonja Santelises, Baltimore CEO  
Van Henri White, Rochester School Board  
Sylvia Wilson, Pittsburgh School Board  

Barbara Jenkins, Chair of the Board of Directors, called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm. 
A quorum was established. Members then introduced themselves and gave a short update on events in their districts.
Appointments and Nominations

The Chair of the Board introduced the following nominations to fill vacancies on the Executive Committee.

1) Talisa Dixon (Columbus Superintendent) to serve the unexpired term of Richard Carranza (New York City Chancellor), whose term expires June 30, 2022.

2) Pedro Martinez (San Antonio Superintendent) to serve the unexpired term of Robert Runcie (Broward County Superintendent), whose term expires June 30, 2024.

3) Megan Kerr (Long Beach School Board) to serve the unexpired term of Elisa Vakalis (Anchorage School Board), whose term expires on June 30, 2024.

Talisa Dixon and Megan Kerr stepped out of the room. A motion to approve all nominations passed without dissent by voice vote.

The Chair then introduced appointments to Task Forces and Subcommittees. A motion to approve all appointments passed without dissent by voice vote.

Minutes

Barbara Jenkins presented the minutes of the March 2021 virtual meetings of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors.

A motion to approve the minutes passed without dissent by voice vote.

Membership

Sharon Contreras gave the report of the Membership Subcommittee. DeKalb County has applied for membership. While this district meets many of the criteria of membership, they do not represent a large enough city. Data on the district is provided in the membership section of the materials. The recommendation of the Membership Subcommittee is to deny this membership request.

The committee then discussed the idea of associate membership as a way of addressing the needs of districts such as DeKalb County that face many of the same challenges as our larger urban members and are often isolated within their states. This idea has been discussed in the past. The conversation then focused on what services/access we might be able to offer, without watering down the focus of the organization or taxing the capacity of the Council staff. Members agreed that districts that don’t qualify for membership should be informed of the resources they have access to and meetings they can attend. The By-Laws Subcommittee agreed to review the by-laws to see what updates might be made.

A motion to deny the membership application of DeKalb County passed by voice vote. One member, Leslie Grant abstained from voting.
By-Laws

Darrel Woo gave the report of the By-Laws Subcommittee. During a May call of the By-Laws Subcommittee, there was a recommendation to specifically add HBCU’s as ex officio representatives of colleges of education to the language in the by-laws concerning membership (article IV). However, since the language in the by-laws does not include a specific number, there is nothing in the by-laws that prevents additional colleges/universities from serving as ex officio representatives.

Therefore, the question to the By-laws Subcommittee was: Do we amend the language to include specific reference to HBCU’s/MSI’s or do we advise that there is nothing in the by-laws that prevents additional representation?

The bylaws sub-committee is recommending adding language specific to HBCU’s/MSI’s

The original text is as follows:

Section 4.04 Colleges of Education. Colleges of Education located in or serving cities that are members of the Council of the Great City Schools may be represented ex officio on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors and may meet and confer with the Council on issues of joint concern as necessary.

And the recommended revision would be as follows:

Section 4.04 Colleges of Education. Colleges of Education, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and/or Minority Serving Institutions, located in or serving cities that are members of the Council of the Great City Schools, may be represented on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors by a maximum of two ex officio members, who may meet and confer with the Council on issues of joint concern as necessary.

Deb Shanley offered her support for this change, pointing out the enormous benefit of including these voices. For new members, she gave a brief summary of the history/work of the urban colleges of education deans group.

A motion to approve the update to the membership language of the by-laws passed without dissent by voice vote. This will now go to the Board of Directors in October.

Audit

Kelly Gonce, the previous chair of the Audit Subcommittee, presented the audit report. The Council is in strong fiscal health, and she applauded Council staff. The materials provide the 2020-21 budget report, along with asset allocations, and the budget for 2021-22. This was the same report the Committee reviewed in detail in January. This has updated membership dues status, as well as a copy of the dues letter. There are no audits in this report—those are done twice a year, with the last one approved back in March.
Ray Hart then reviewed the overall structure of the Council’s revenues and expenditures. Roughly 40 to 41 percent of our budget is based on dues, 31 percent is funding from foundations, and about 27 percent comes from sponsorships, fees for SSTs, and royalties. A small portion of our staff budget is therefore offset by foundation funding.

A few updates on our current Foundation funding. Our grant from the Shusterman Foundation has officially ended, although we have received a no-cost extension to redeploy nearly $420K that we didn’t spend. Also, we have received a grant from the Wallace Foundation for about $400K to support consultants working with member districts to help them with their ARP spending plans/strategies.

We also have two additional grants from the Gates Foundation. One involves working with CCSSO and Chiefs for Change (we received $1.4 for our part). The second grant is for $1.75 million. We still need to meet with the Gates Foundation and as a team to develop the scope and agreement, but the money has been allocated. These grants are in addition to what you see in the budget.

The materials lay out asset allocations. One thing to note is that these are within tactical range. We continuously monitor our investments to ensure this.

There are two things to note concerning the status of dues payments, also provided in the materials. The school districts of Manchester and Stockton have dropped out. Bridgeport is also behind in their dues, so Ray will be working with them closely to make sure they aren’t removed as members. According to the by-laws, membership would be revoked if they missed another year of dues. It might not be good to lose them, given the fact that the new secretary of education is from Connecticut.

The budget projections actually include an estimate of eight districts not paying their dues. So although we only have two districts behind on dues at this time, this is built in.

Members then discussed the reasons driving members to leave or to not pay. Stockton and Manchester were both accepted as members based on leaders with a strong interest in the Council, who then left the district. It is therefore important to build more lasting, broad-based engagement in the Council’s work. Michael O’Neill offered to help with outreach to Bridgeport, and Kelly Gonez offered to help with outreach to Stockton.

A motion to accept the Audit Subcommittee report passed without dissent by voice vote.

Annual Report

Ray Hart presented the annual report. The committee materials also provide a sample individual member services report. Members received advance copies of this report for their respective districts, as well as hard copies of the annual report.

Michael O’Neill then spoke about some of the highlights from 2020-21, and Michael Casserly reviewed in detail the work and accomplishments of the Council staff over the past year.
A motion to approve the annual report passed without dissent by voice vote.

**Conferences and Meetings**

Ray Hart reviewed the lineup of meetings for the remainder of 2021 and 2022. As of the current date, the Council is still planning to hold the fall conference in Philadelphia and all subsequent conferences in person. Juliana Urtubey (2021 National Teacher of the Year) and filmmaker, cultural critic, and journalist Henry Louis Gates Junior are both confirmed as speakers. There will also be an annual town hall, again featuring students and their perspective on the past year and moving forward. One unique feature of the conference will take place on Friday morning, when we will be holding separate sessions for board members and for superintendents and their cabinets. These sessions will be dedicated to discussing the planning process for ARP spending, providing a time to check in and hear from peers across the country.

We will be in Orange County, FL for the annual conference in 2022, San Diego in 2023, and Dallas in 2024 (rescheduled from 2020). Our winter Executive Committee meeting will be held in Palm Beach on January 21 & 22, 2022, and we are now considering invitations to host the summer Executive Committee meeting in July 2022.

Kelly Gornez extended an invitation to hold this summer session in Los Angeles, and the Committee agreed on July 22 and 23, 2022.

Finally, one Committee member requested a list of scheduled calls for job-alike groups, and another member suggested starting a job-alike group for board services managers.

**Awards**

Ray Hart proposed combining the various Council awards into one awards ceremony at the annual conference, rather than scattering them throughout the agenda. This would include the Green Garner award (which will go to a board member this year), the Shirley Schwartz award, and the Queen Smith award. We would still highlight the nominees and winner of the Green Garner award as the marquis award of the evening (although we would only highlight the finalists, not all the nominees). Members overwhelmingly supported the idea of the new, combined event.

**Saturday, July 10, 2021**

**Coronavirus Relief and Recovery**

This section is unique to this year. We plan on keeping it in the materials for a bit longer, to continue to track our collective relief and recovery efforts. The section starts with information on vaccination efforts, and the role of school districts. Ray Hart applauded member districts for their extraordinary work to help move the vaccination campaign forward, and the model they have provided for others. There is also information on the $400K Wallace grant to provide consultation to help districts spend relief funding wisely.
The last item in this section is a guide we released on ARP spending. We hope this has provided useful support and guidance, and will continue to be useful as you sustain and recalibrate your spending and programming moving forward. Hart thanked the districts that served on the advisory committee for this resource. Broadly, all of the following topical areas we will cover this morning and afternoon—legislation, research, communications, etc.—connect back to these recovery efforts.

Members then discussed their current work and additional support they could use.

Legislation

Jeff Simering and Manish Naik gave the Committee a brief legislative update. New federal guidance has highlighted layered mitigation strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Yet while the federal government is not yet fully open, it is encouraging schools to open.

It is useful to note that the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding was only possible with the new administration and the makeup of Congress. There was a move to abandon Title I as a distribution formula for these funds—a move pushed by organizations such as AASA. So it is clear that our interests are not always aligned. The budget reconciliation process will move forward into the fall, and will depend on Democrats holding together their majority. Over the next month, as Congress considers how to move forward on infrastructure legislation, we will need help from our districts to ensure that K12 funding remains a priority. Specifically, we will need information on how you are using your current ARP recovery funds, and we will need to draw a distinction between that and school infrastructure needs moving forward. Currently school infrastructure is not included in the White House bipartisan infrastructure agreement, which is concerning. White House staff have reconfirmed that they are committed to including school infrastructure in the larger reconciliation bill.

Simering then walked members through the budget reconciliation process, moving forward this summer and into the fall. This is their administration’s main opportunity to enact the Biden agenda before the 2022 midterm elections. What we are seeing is that nearly everything they are doing is within the context of building support for the American Jobs Plan, holding democrats together, and shoring up a majority for the 2022 elections. So any new guidance or regulations from the U.S. Department of Education needs to be viewed in this context. The Secretary of Education and Deputy Secretary are grounded in the pragmatic nuts and bolts of school operations, although this is not true of other political appointments at the Department. But we are in a much better place than we were last year.

Ray Hart then highlighted two things from this overview. The latest CDC guidance provides additional clarity around mask wearing, as well as other issues related to social distancing in schools. Some elements address unvaccinated students aged two and above, who are still encouraged to wear masks. Second, we will need to reach out to you about your plans on using ARP funds—specifically regarding costs for facilities. The existence
of ARP funding for school districts has been used to argue against inclusion of schools in the infrastructure bill. We will need to make the argument that the ARP expenditures on facilities and ventilation are separate from the overwhelming infrastructure needs of schools. Meeting these general facility needs with ARP funds alone would consume all of those funds. So it is important to document this. (For example, ESSER dollars wouldn’t cover the cost of Clark County fixing its HVAC system)

Finally, the Biden administration’s Title I proposal includes a new formula. They started off with a framework of proposing increases in U.S. Department of Education funding and Title 1 funding, but once details were released, the Title I increase was actually a new equity grant program intended to leverage/incentivize a different distribution of state aid. No details have been provided, but we know this involves a new formula for distribution. Jeff Simering feels this is dangerously naïve, and there is a great deal of antipathy to this proposal from lower level appointees among the committees. This may end up providing an opportunity to water down Title 1 distribution and to start another formula fight that ends up eroding our position. So we are against this, and trying to undercut it.

Communications

The Committee materials include a sample of recent press releases, statements, op-eds, and news articles. There is also information on the Bernard Harris scholarship program, and an update on the Council’s social media presence. This is an area we are working on boosting—particularly how we are supporting effective district messaging and communications around the use of ARP dollars on behalf of students. One important element has been customizing a new Council website.

Members then applauded Mike Casserly for the Council’s latest statement on critical race theory.

Research

Ray Hart announced the arrival of Akisha Sarfo, the Council’s new Research Director.

There are a few things to note about the materials in this section. First, for NAEP, testing has shifted to even-year sampling as a result of the pandemic (i.e., because testing in 2021 was suspended). The law requires testing every two years, so it will restart in 2022.

In addition, the materials include a summary of a Rand survey we are conducting to track district use of ESSER funds. There is also a copy of a resolution entered into public records honoring Mike Casserly for his work with NAGB and his role in establishing TUDA.

Finally, we have released the NAEP district effects study. This has been a multi-year effort to analyze student-level data, to identify predicted outcomes based on demographic data, and then provide a measure of how well urban districts are helping to overcome the impact of poverty and inequity—i.e., to boost performance beyond these predicted levels. We refer
to this as educational “torque.” Having controlled for demographic data, we found that our “torque” is consistently higher than schools across the nation.

**Task Force on Achievement and Professional Development**

Deb Shanley gave the report on the Task Force on Achievement and Professional Development. The materials in this section start with a department overview. The materials also include:

- Information on a recent Reading Summit, including an agenda and a letter from Mike. The Council team joined district staff to participate in panel discussions on reading.
- A copy of a special education review conducted for Norfolk (Shanley walked the group through highlights from this report.)
- The Council’s Professional Development framework. This resource was created in consultation with an advisory committee of district staff, who lent their considerable experience and insight. It was also a team effort among Council staff, including academics, the ELL department, and others.
- A letter regarding the NAEP reading framework. Just last night, we submitted a new round of comments on more recent changes. We are pushing NAEP to use the release of the new framework as an opportunity to address research and better meet diverse student needs.

**Task Force on Black and Latino Young Men and Boys**

The co-chairs have met and agree that the task force requires a refresh. We have engaged in a lot of activities, devoid of results. We need to renew our focus on the issue of proportionality. Members also discussed the need to address the mental health issues and needs facing young men of color, and how to collect data on this front to try to quantify the magnitude of the issue and build strategies for support. There is also a need for greater community engagement, and the need to address issues related to technical education and programming.

Members praised the list of potential issues provided in the materials, but suggested narrowing it down to a key set of priorities.

**Task Force on Black and Latina Young Women and Girls**

The last meeting of the task force featured a great, robust conversation on a variety of topics. There was a presentation on work being done in Chicago, and some discussions around preliminary data. The next step will be to collect information on a broader range of issues facing our females of color. On this front the task force chairs asked for a meeting with the Council research team around data collection. We will then share the updated goals/priorities.
The task force chairs are currently thinking about how to raise up student voice to help drive the work. These voices have traditionally been overlooked, and they potentially have much to add, particularly in the current context and conversations around racial justice and gender equality.

Some of the work of this task force will also be devoted to helping districts form good partnerships and helping district leaders and staff think about what they should be asking for from these partnerships, and what they need to accomplish their goals. The task force has also identified the goals of addressing economic insecurity, sexual violence, mental health, and a host of other issues.

**Task Force on Bilingual Education**

Jesus Jara gave the report on the Task Force on Bilingual Education. He praised the regular Zoom calls, webinars, and publications that have been released by the Council throughout the pandemic. He also pointed out a member district survey provided in the materials.

Ray Hart then called the group’s attention to a document on provisional identification. In working with your English learner departments, we heard that there were challenges in this area. So Council staff worked with the Department of Education to ensure that districts were able to employ provisional identification in order to identify students for EL services and programming during pandemic.

Finally, Ray Hart highlighted a consistent focus in the materials on the importance of strong Tier 1 instruction, and ensuring access to grade level content and rigor for ELs as well as special education students. We are going to be building this emphasis into our program of work funded by the Gates Foundation.

Members requested an updated list of EL contacts to ensure that their districts are remaining involved and engaged in the work.

**Task Force on Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance**

Michael O’Neill gave the report of the Task Force on Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance. The materials in this section start with information on the Harvard Program. Michael O’Neill and Mike Casserly worked closely with university officials to launch this program, and then to incorporate feedback from the inaugural year into the planning of this year’s institute. This included sitting in on a virtual class and experiencing the case study approach first-hand, which they were very impressed by.

Some of the updates to the program included substituting specific case studies and adjustments to the group reflection sessions. Next year we will return to in-person instruction. There is a preliminary list of districts who have expressed interest. This is one piece of a multi-layered strategy for helping boards improve. This work also includes the hands-on technical assistance provided to struggling boards by Ray Hart, Mike Casserly, and AJ Crabill, as well as cohort training provided by AJ. We are trying to implement a
train-the-trainer model, with a specific focus on support for onboarding and support for new board members.

Members then discussed the ongoing challenges of supporting and focusing the work of school boards, and the value of the Council’s work in this area. Members requested additional materials the Council could develop and provide that could be used in the onboarding of school board members.

The second main item for discussion is the issue of interoperability. The Council is currently working with CCSSO, who has fielded a self-assessment survey for districts on interoperability. We will have additional updates on this work moving forward.

Finally, a history of the Council’s strategic support team reviews is provided in the materials. During the pandemic the Council’s Director of Management Services Bob Carlson wrapped up a number of projects that were already underway, and we are now ready to start a new round of reviews. There are currently four requests for reviews, including requests from East Baton Rouge and Houston.

Strategic Plan

The current strategic plan goes from 2019 to 2024. The materials include a copy of this plan, as well as a status update. The work that has been done over the past year has aligned closely with the priorities and goals set out in the strategic plan. This includes educating urban students to the highest academic standards, which is the guiding principle behind supporting districts in using ESSER dollars to mitigate the impacts of school closures and ensure continuing academic growth. Advancing effective leadership, governance, and management is another priority that is reflected in our activities and efforts to support and equip district staff, leaders, and school boards with the resources and technical assistance they need. And finally, in service of Goal 3 (bolstering public confidence), communicating how districts are working to address unfinished learning will be key over the next year, as will be the research and data collected on student progress and recovery efforts.

The Chair applauded the Council for remaining focused on our strategic priorities and direction even over the past year. Within the construct of this strategic plan, she then invited Committee members to provide input or suggestions for big bets or tactical approaches that they feel the Council team should be focused on over the coming year. Topics of interest included—

- Providing an inventory or selected examples of coalitions/collaborations focused on building diversity in our urban teaching corps and school leadership.
- Taking a closer look at digital learning—i.e., what opportunities has the past year opened up, and are we taking advantage of them? For example, why would we ever suspend a student again?
- Making mental health a more explicit focus of our work. Members suggested that this currently is not addressed comprehensively in the document, and needs to be a specific priority in light of the past year
• Supporting newer superintendents, particularly those who have just come in over the past year
• Establishing a superintendents’ academy. The group discussed the fact that while other such training programs exist, they do not know us or our challenges. We could potentially grow out the Casserly Institute, which is currently focused on preparing the next level down— CFOs, CAOs, etc.
• Polling (Perhaps we should think about pursuing a relationship with Pew around this?)
• Providing guidance or best practice around working with unions
• Bolstering the amount of time and effort spent on the third main goal— communicating with parents, the public, boosting the profile and broad-based support for public schools. In particular, over the coming years this should focus on highlighting effective district use of relief aid.

The group then discussed the growing issue of the media turning to sources other than public education for data on public education. There is a growing need to get ahead of this, and to proactively provide information.

Personnel

The Committee went into executive session at 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Ray Hart
Executive Director