COMMUNICATIONS
STATEMENTS
Statement on Efforts to Vaccinate Younger Students

By

Ray Hart, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

As the United States continues to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of the nation’s largest urban school systems, recognizes that students are still vulnerable and that the safety of our students, as well as school staff and families has always been the Council’s top priority.

To date, urban schools have made tremendous progress providing COVID-19 vaccinations and testing to students as well as employees in their respective communities. Both vaccinations and testing are important tools that protect the health and safety of our students, staff, and entire communities and contain the spread of the virus.

Once the COVID-19 vaccine is approved for children ages 5 to 11, the Council and its 74 member school districts will continue its ongoing efforts to get children vaccinated. These efforts include launching campaigns, partnering with local health agencies to provide mobile and pop up clinics and implementing extensive outreach efforts to students as well as their families. We also look forward to continuing our efforts to partner with pharmacies in the federal retail pharmacy program that will provide easier access for families to get their younger students vaccinated.

Urban school districts are in a particularly unique situation to help vaccinate students and we look forward to continuing working with the U.S. Department of Education and the White House in a partnership to increase the number of vaccinated students in the nation.
PRESS RELEASES
Historian Henry Louis Gates Jr., Philanthropist Priscilla Chan, and 2021 National Teacher of Year Address Urban School Leaders

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona to Participate in a Discussion on Urban Education

WASHINGTON, Oct. 18 – Historian, author, and Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Henry Louis Gates Jr.; Priscilla Chan, co-founder & co-CEO of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative; and Juliana Urtubey, the 2021 National Teacher of the Year; will address urban educators at the Council of the Great City Schools’ virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference, Oct. 19-23.

Also addressing the nation’s urban school leaders will be U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona, who will participate in a conversation with Barbara Jenkins, superintendent of Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., and chair of the Council’s Board of Directors.

A national town hall meeting will be held on Oct. 22 titled “Amplifying the Voice of Students: From Critical Conversations to Concrete Actions.” The town hall will be moderated by veteran journalist Ray Suarez and feature student representatives from Charlotte, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Nashville, Hawaii, and Portland, Ore., discussing how they work to bring student perspective to the board of education in their school districts.

On Oct. 21, the “Urban School Board Member of the Year” will be announced in a live ceremony. Nine school board members are finalists for the Green-Garner Award, the nation’s top award in urban-education leadership, sponsored by the Council and Scholastic.

Under the banner “Rising Up and Meeting the Challenge,” the four-day virtual conference will feature more than 100 presentations on issues related to equity, special education, addressing unfinished learning, dual language and English learners, and COVID-19.

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The Twitter hashtag for the conference is #CGCS21
Miami-Dade County School Board Member Named Top Urban Educator

WASHINGTON, Oct. 21 – School board member Marta Pérez of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools received recognition as the 2021 Urban Educator of the Year at the Council of the Great City Schools’ virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference.

Nine school board members from big-city school districts competed for the nation’s highest honor in urban education leadership, recognizing in alternating years an outstanding superintendent and school board member from 75 of the largest urban public-school systems in the nation.

Pérez was announced the winner of the prestigious Green-Garner Award at the Council’s 32nd Annual “Urban Educator of the Year” virtual award ceremony. She is the first Cuban American to win the award.

Sponsored by the Council and Scholastic, the global children’s publishing, education, and media company, the top prize is presented each year in memory of Richard R. Green, the first African American chancellor of the New York City school system, and businessman Edward Garner, who served on the Denver school board.

A member of the Miami-Dade County school board since 1998, Pérez has been an unwavering supporter of numerous initiatives, particularly in the areas of ethics and accountability, parental involvement, and wellness. She was instrumental in leading the Miami-Dade school board to adopt stronger ethics and accountability measures, including the establishment of the Inspector General position and the Ethics Advisory Commission, which resulted in the board receiving the National School Board Association Magna Award.
“Marta Pérez has shown a strong dedication to the needs of students, a profound commitment to improvement, and has exemplified significant community involvement and leadership during her 23 years of service on the school board,” said Council Executive Ray Hart. “Her passion for equity and excellence has made a profound difference in the lives of urban schoolchildren and there could be no one more deserving.”

As the recipient of the 2021 Green-Garner Award, Pérez receives a $10,000 college scholarship to present to a student in the Miami-Dade County school district.

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**About the Council of the Great City Schools**

Founded in 1956, the Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 75 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](http://www.cgcs.org)
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Council of the Great City Schools Names High School Graduate Londyn Edwards as Inaugural Recipient of $10,000 Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice Scholarship

The college scholarship, sponsored by Curriculum Associates, will support Edwards as she pursues studies at Drexel University

NORTH BILLERICA, Mass., October 25, 2021—The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) recently announced the inaugural recipient of its Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice Scholarship sponsored by Curriculum Associates. The $10,000 college scholarship was awarded to recent high school graduate Londyn Edwards of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who is using the scholarship to attend Drexel University as she looks to ultimately pursue a career in urban education.

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 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 awardee will then select the $10,000 college scholarship recipient, who this year was chosen by Casserly himself.

According to the CGCS, Casserly selected Edwards for actively serving the Philadelphia community. She is a 2021 graduate of Science Leadership High School in Philadelphia and a leader of UrbEd Inc., a nonprofit organization created and run by Philadelphia students who advocate for fully funded, safe, and healthy public schools. After college graduation, Edwards plans to work in urban education and advocate for more inclusion of the arts in classrooms.

“It is my profound pleasure to give Londyn Edwards, who is the first in her family to attend college, a scholarship named in my honor,” said Casserly. “This scholarship will help Edwards advance her education and follow her dreams to work with the next generation of urban school children. I am honored I can help such a deserving person in this worthwhile pursuit, and I thank Curriculum Associates for their generosity and support.”
The CGCS is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 75 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 sharing common problems to exchange information and collectively address new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth.

“We are proud to sponsor the Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice Scholarship and, alongside the Council, recognize a rising college student and aspiring educator who already is making positive contributions in the community,” said Woody Paik, executive vice president of Curriculum Associates. “Dr. Casserly has set a shining example throughout his decades-long career of the impact one can have in shaping education and advocating for educational justice and equity.”

To learn more about the CGCS, visit CGCS.org. To learn more about Curriculum Associates, visit CurriculumAssociates.com.

**About the Council of the Great City Schools**
It is the special mission of America’s urban public schools to educate the nation’s most diverse student body to the highest academic standards and prepare them to contribute to our democracy and global community. The Council brings together 75 of the nation’s largest urban public school systems in a coalition dedicated to the improvement of public education for our nation’s urban public school children. See CGCS.org.

**About Curriculum Associates**
Founded in 1969, Curriculum Associates, LLC designs research-based print and online instructional materials, screens and assessments, and data management tools. The company’s products and outstanding customer service provide teachers and administrators with the resources necessary for teaching diverse student populations and fostering learning for all students.

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Scholastic and the Council of the Great City Schools Announce the Inaugural Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award

As the 2021 Winner, the School District of Philadelphia will Receive an Elementary School Library “Renovation” with a Book Donation and More

New York, NY – November 3, 2021 – Today, Scholastic, the global children’s publishing, education, and media company, in collaboration with the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), a coalition of 75 of the nation’s largest urban public school systems, has announced the School District of Philadelphia in Philadelphia, PA as the inaugural winner of the Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award. Named in honor of the late Scholastic Chairman and CEO, Richard (Dick) Robinson, this annual award recognizes a CGCS member school district for demonstrated progress in advancing reading achievement.

“During his near five decades leading Scholastic, Dick Robinson was a true champion of children’s literacy and education,” said Rose Else-Mitchell, President, Scholastic Education Solutions. “He believed that the core to the work we do is reaching the hearts of children to help them discover the stories, people, and worlds that can spark confidence and curiosity, while giving them the skills and tools necessary to navigate the 21st century. We’re honored to introduce this new award in partnership with the Council of the Great City Schools to recognize Dick’s lasting legacy, and to expand opportunities for students through access to high-quality, engaging print and digital resources.”

According to findings from the Scholastic Teacher & Principal School Report, educators overwhelmingly agree (99%) that reading books for fun supports students’ academic success. As the Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award-winner, the School District of Philadelphia has selected its own General George G. Meade School to receive the grand prize, which is designed to help increase book access and create a lasting culture of literacy. The school will receive:

- A school library “renovation,” which includes a donation of over 6,000 high-quality, age-appropriate books, short reads for Guided Reading, and instructional resources from Scholastic Education Solutions.
- A one-year site license to Scholastic Literacy Pro®, an award-winning blended learning program that provides 24/7 access to more than 2,500 fiction and nonfiction ebooks for purposeful independent reading, allowing personalized student choice while providing teachers with real-time data to inform instruction.
- Lastly, elementary students will receive books to take home and add to their home libraries, encouraging independent reading beyond the classroom.

“The Council is extremely grateful to Scholastic for creating the Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award that will directly benefit an urban school,” said Council Executive Director Ray Hart. “Richard had a long and influential history with the Council and we can think of no better way to honor his contributions and his legacy than with this award that will help advance the reading achievement for our urban students. Literacy is so important to a child’s future and we are thrilled to be part of something...
which will give many future generations of bright, able, and deserving young people the skills to succeed in school and in life."

“We are honored to have General George G. Meade School selected as the first Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award from Scholastic and the Council for the Great City Schools,” said William R. Hite, Jr. Ed.D., Superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia. “This generous support will help instill a love of reading in our students by increasing access to books, something that we know has a longstanding impact on helping students succeed.”

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**About Scholastic:**
For more than 100 years, Scholastic Corporation (NASDAQ: SCHL) has been encouraging the personal and intellectual growth of all children, beginning with literacy. Having earned a reputation as a trusted partner to educators and families, Scholastic is the world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books, a leading provider of literacy curriculum, professional services, and classroom magazines, and a producer of educational and entertaining children's media. The Company creates and distributes bestselling books and e-books, print and technology-based learning programs for pre-K to grade 12, and other products and services that support children's learning and literacy, both in school and at home. With 15 international operations and exports to 165 countries, Scholastic makes quality, affordable books available to all children around the world through school-based book clubs and book fairs, classroom libraries, school and public libraries, retail, and online. Learn more at [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com).

**About the Council of the Great City Schools:**
Founded in 1956, the Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 75 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](http://www.cgcs.org).
ARTICLES- CORONAVIRUS CHALLENGES AND RESPONSE
In Seattle schools, the cost of buses climb as transportation falters. Is there another choice?

Dec. 17, 2021 at 6:00 am Updated Dec. 17, 2021 at 10:34 am

By Dahlia Bazzaz
Seattle Times staff reporter

Even before the pandemic, transporting kids to school in Seattle was an expensive affair.

As the number of kids taking a yellow bus to school fell by 11% between 2016-17 and 2018-19, the district’s spending per child on transportation increased by more than a third, to $3,306. The figure is higher than any other school district in the state, and more than three times the national average, according to a Seattle Times review of state and national data.

The increase is due to a complicated mix of forces, chief among them a yearslong national struggle to recruit and retain bus drivers. The district has spent millions of dollars on cab and van services to make up for chronically late buses, and agreed to increase payments to bus contractor First Student to help recruit and retain drivers.

Now, as the district asks for bids for its next transportation contract in 2022, some families are questioning why Seattle has continued to hire private contractors.

“What [is] the cost to families to keep using this failed model?” asked Jonathan Rosenblum, a Seattle parent who, along with his daughter, has campaigned for the district to move its bus service in-house.

Most districts across the country have seen their transportation expenses increase in recent years. State documents and information collected from a third-party auditor point to other factors that make Seattle transportation more costly, some of which the district has known about for years.

Though its riders live in the state’s densest city, the district had among the lowest ridership levels per school bus in the 2018-19 school year among larger districts: 11,437 kids distributed in groups of roughly 39 kids per bus, according to state documents. The suburban Evergreen Public Schools, just north of Portland, puts an average of twice as many kids on each bus, and it transports just 500 fewer students than Seattle, according to state data.
This disparity defies the conventional wisdom in school transportation, which finds that, generally, districts in urban centers are able to cut down their per-pupil costs because they have more students and homes are closer together.

Tim Robinson, a district spokesperson, attributed the low ridership to tightly drawn boundaries for bus service at many schools, and use of smaller buses to navigate narrow streets. The number could also be low because large numbers of middle and high schoolers in Seattle use public transportation to commute to school, said Patti Enbody, the state’s director of student transportation.

When asked about Seattle’s ridership costs last month, Enbody paused for a moment. She suspected there may have been a math error in the state’s reports because $3,306 per pupil seemed high.

“I can’t say what they’re facing, but it’s enough for me to want me to go back again, to make sure the right information is pulled,” she said.

There weren’t any errors. But the per-pupil costs, she said, don’t include the several hundred students who may have received van or cab service over the years, so it may not reflect the true cost.

“They’re an outlier"

The latest $40 million contract, which included a 5% rate increase between First Student and Seattle Public Schools, was approved last August to serve as many as 18,000 kids eligible for transportation. But because of trouble with recruiting drivers, the district suspended 142 routes soon after school began in the fall, meaning First Student isn’t receiving the full contract amount, and that it is also serving a smaller number of children.

Around 60% of school bus riders in Seattle are receiving special education services, according to Robinson, the SPS spokesperson.

A third or more of these kids attend a school outside their neighborhood to receive services, according to the district. District policy requires these rides to take no longer than 60 minutes, and “the majority of these routes have less than 10 riders.”

A 2019 review of transportation issues by the Council of Great City Schools, which was commissioned by the district, found that virtually 100% of kids with disabilities ride in compact vehicles (which seat 20 students, versus 74 on typical buses) that only transport other kids with disabilities. State law encourages, but doesn’t require, districts to integrate kids with disabilities on the standard large buses when possible — research shows that kids tend to fare better when they’re included in the general education setting.
This figure could be incomplete: the district only tracks ridership for kids with disabilities if transportation is an explicit part of their legally guaranteed services, or Individualized Education Plan. It’s possible that some kids receiving those services could be riding on the larger-capacity buses, but how many is unclear.

For many students, the smaller buses are necessary because they have wheelchair lifts and specially trained drivers. But some kids who get this service as part of their IEPs don’t necessarily need to be on the smaller bus, said Shawna Murphy, a Seattle parent of two kids with IEPs who ride the bus.


The number of buses and drivers needed — and the number of delays, by proxy — increased significantly after the district changed bell schedules in 2017 and removed a later bell time that parents said clashed with their schedules. Having three staggered start and end times gave some bus drivers enough time to run two routes in the morning and afternoon.

The newest request for transportation bids by the district indicates that there may be a change to bell times in order to cut down on buses needed.

A couple of school districts, including Tacoma, run their own fleet of special education buses but contract out for general education buses, apparently in an effort to curb costs.

Seattle has to report its costs and total ridership to the state for reimbursement. But its per-pupil spending figures aren’t used to determine funding. The dollars are typically awarded based on the number of riders, miles driven and the previous year’s expenditures.

In fact, Seattle is one of a few districts in the state that doesn’t receive an “efficiency review” — a rating that compares a district’s expenses with others of the same size. It’s a way for districts to check back and see if anything “unusual” has happened with their costs, said Enbody. The ratings also do not count toward funding.

“SPS is considered 100% efficient, they’re an outlier, there are no other districts to compare them to,” she said.

Another way to do business?

After years of some of the rockiest school-bus service that Seattle kids have ever experienced, the district is now looking at bids on a new contract for school-bus service. It has pushed the deadline for the application back three times, eventually closing it on Dec. 8.
What’s in the next agreement, and who the successful bidder will be, will be critical to future spending and the lives of thousands of families relying on the service, 40% of whom saw their service cut at one point this fall.

Contracts with outside companies for school-bus service can be more expensive than providing the service in-house, said Mark Price, a labor economist who co-authored a 2011 report on the subject by examining school districts in Pennsylvania. At the time, he was working for the Keystone Research Center, a pro-labor think tank.

In that state, school districts are given incentives to contract with outside providers in exchange for a higher transportation reimbursement. Switching to an outside provider didn’t help or hurt the district, said Price, since their costs were covered by the state, but it did cost the state more money. There is no such incentive in Washington state.

Newspaper accounts suggest that SPS never owned its own fleet of buses. The district first started offering yellow bus service, through a contractor, in the 1970s. Absent that, children walked to school or used public transit.

The idea to contract can seem attractive at first, Price said. Contractors will pitch to districts that they can take these services off the district’s hands, and cut costs — mostly by offering less in the way of benefits to workers. But at least in his study, that promise of lower costs didn’t pan out during the years studied.

“In the U.S., we use contracting a lot for construction. A school district doesn’t build a building once a year, so they use a contractor. That makes a lot of economic sense. But school transport is a bit different. It’s a core function.”

Price also believes private contracting may exacerbate the shortage of bus drivers, given the generally less generous benefits for private workers compared to those employed by school districts. In 2018, First Student’s Seattle drivers went on strike for a week for better pay and benefits.

“[The companies] are not big-hearted. They are not in this because they love driving kids. They’re in this because they want to make a return on their investment,” said Price.

It’s unclear if that disparity in costs exists in Washington state. Unlike in Pennsylvania, school-bus drivers are typically unionized here, and there hasn’t been any local analysis on whether school districts’ benefits are better.

The costs of purchasing a fleet of buses, and finding a place to park them, has kept that idea off the table for serious discussion so far. It is a possibility the district may consider in the future, said Robinson.

“I’m not sure how they would fund the purchases of new buses — that would be a challenge,” said Enbody.
But the economic costs to working families who have been stranded over the years is the most important question, said Rosenblum, who works as a community organizer for Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant. He called the continued privatization of the district’s bus service “shameful.”

Others have also spoken up about the district’s practice of contracting.

“SPS is incredibly hampered by having a third party,” especially when it comes to timely communication about buses, said Mary Ellen Russell, a parent who has been on the city’s school traffic safety committee for years.

Three years ago, Rosenblum’s 16-year-old daughter, Natalya McConnell, authored a petition with 1,000 signatures urging SPS to “Fire First Student” and bring services in-house.

McConnell, now a student at Franklin High School, had personal experience with the frenetic bus service. After researching the issue, she realized “the entire issue was caused by a profit incentive.” She and her dad shared the petition with the School Board in February 2019.

But by October 2019, the district had extended its contract with the company and settled with First Student for a fraction of the additional expenses the district could have sought for inconsistent service.
The principal is cleaning the bathroom: Schools reel with staff shortages.

By Donna St. George and Valerie Strauss

December 3, 2021

Months after the school year began, districts across the country have yet to solve crippling staff shortages that have forced a range of drastic adjustments.

In Vermont, school board members are grabbing sponges and buckets to help the short-staffed custodial crew. In Nevada, principals are covering classrooms and vacuuming hallways — one even cleaning toilets. In Massachusetts, National Guard troops have climbed behind the wheel to get kids from home to school. Around the country, teachers are missing planning periods to cover for absent colleagues, and the demand for substitutes has skyrocketed.

This was supposed to be the back-to-normal school year — students and teachers returning to classrooms five days a week in a push to make up for time lost when covid-19 threw education into a free fall.

But shortages in staff that some call unprecedented are creating chaos at a time when educators are already struggling with public health imperatives: coronavirus testing, contact tracing, quarantining, mask requirements, vaccine mandates, cleaning.

The toll is glaring. Some students with disabilities are not getting legally required services. Other students find themselves in extra-large combined classes because a teacher is out. Some can’t get to school at all. Still others can’t see school counselors because they are temporarily reassigned.

“This is not a recovery year,” said Libby Bonesteel, superintendent of Vermont’s Montpelier Roxbury Public School District. “This is a survival year.”

Acts of desperation

Classes have been canceled or temporarily switched to virtual mode this fall in school systems around the country because of staff shortages and widespread fatigue. Three schools in Ann Arbor, Mich., shifted to remote instruction for a day in October when about 20 percent of staffers were absent. Once, there was a districtwide shutdown.

Perspective: ‘Who would want to be a teacher right now?’

Many school districts are using thousands of dollars in cash bonuses or significant pay hikes as incentives to attract new staff members and retain existing ones. The Michigan Department of Education has pleaded with retired educators to return to the classroom. The Los Angeles
Unified School District is hiring students in teacher-preparation programs who will soon graduate, district officials said.

“This is my 28th year as an educator and my 14th year as superintendent, and I have never seen anything like this,” said Steve Matthews, the head of the 6,700-student Novi Community School District in Michigan, not far from Detroit.

At Huron High School in Ann Arbor, several students said that Principal Ché Carter and the staff are making the best of a difficult time, but that parents are sometimes working as substitutes, and when no substitute can be found, signs appear on classroom doors telling students to go to the cafeteria to work on assigned lessons.

The cafeteria has been filled with students — 100 to 200 — when Ridhima Kodali, 16, has been there. “It’s just a mob of people essentially,” she said. “It kind of worries me because of covid as well. It is also affecting our learning and putting us behind.”

The staff shortages are afflicting school districts large and small.

In Philadelphia, Superintendent William R. Hite Jr. told the school board recently that the district had about 1,870 vacancies, which fluctuates daily and includes teachers, nurses, special-education assistants and bus aides. Starting this week, administrative office workers were deployed to schools to help.

“We are trying to uphold this narrative that everything is fine — five-days-a-week school is back,” said Elizabeth Thiel, president of the teachers union in Portland, Ore. “But this year things are not normal, and it’s been really hard for educators to talk about how bad it is.”

**Hard to compete**

School systems nationwide are getting billions of dollars in coronavirus relief funding passed by Congress. But even that does not fix the problem. In many places, federal funds are being steered to ventilation upgrades that help combat spread of the virus, technology improvements, tutoring, summer school, virtual academies and mental health services. Some is clearly being used for hiring and bonuses, but many school systems are reluctant to raise salaries to a point they can no longer afford after the federal money is spent.

Ray Hart, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents the interests of more than 75 of the nation’s largest urban school districts, said the real challenge is filling empty positions with qualified workers.

Michigan’s small Novi school system cannot compete with larger districts or private-sector employers that have more to spend on salaries, said Matthews, the superintendent. He has lost personnel as a result.

“Bus drivers and paraprofessionals and lunchroom workers are able to get jobs at Amazon that pay $18 or $22 or $24 an hour, and we can’t pay that rate,” Matthews said. “Why would I drive a bus when I can make a similar amount or more working for Amazon?”

Some staff shortages can be traced to what many call the “Great Resignation” — when workers stepped out of the labor force amid the pandemic — but the vacancies also follow years of teacher shortages, at a time of upheaval and overload.
Daniel Domenech, executive director of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, said educators and school staff are among the millions of Americans who have been rethinking their job choices amid the pandemic.

“Higher pay would help, but it’s more the environment that teachers and others are working under in schools,” he said. “You are seeing attacks on teachers and the debate over critical race theory and other issues. It’s just unprecedented. Parents were always the biggest supporters of teachers... and all of a sudden, there is this animosity.”

*Teachers protest staffing shortages in Maryland school system*

The pandemic has also accelerated teacher retirements in some places, at a time when fewer teachers are entering the profession, said Jesse Rothstein, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley and a former chief economist at the Labor Department.

“Imagine teaching over Zoom,” he said. “It’s just not an attractive proposition.”

In Camden, N.J., parents were offered a contract for up to $1,000 to drive their own children to school for the year, said Superintendent Katrina T. McCombs, who reported nearly 700 applications.

More than 40 bus routes are currently uncovered, according to a school system spokeswoman.

As Portland Public Schools in Oregon grappled with a shortage of qualified bus drivers, it hiked pay by $3 per hour, said Teri Brady, director of student transportation. The jump in pay attracted applicants, Brady said, but some routes continue to be altered to include more students or canceled on a daily basis. Cancellations average five to 10 routes a week.

*No bus driver? Schools are paying parents to drive their own kids.*

Anna Van Valkenburgh, a mother of five in Maryland, recalls the chaos of busing issues in her family. While her son’s bus has been reliable, she said, her daughter waited “a good 40 minutes” daily for almost a month — for a bus she never boarded.

Van Valkenburgh’s complaints about the “mystery bus,” as she calls it, went nowhere in Prince George’s County, she said, so she ended up driving her daughter and a friend every day. She asked her daughter to keep trying for the bus at first, hoping it would come at some point and fearing that if no one was at the stop the driver would not come again.

It was all for naught, she said. Other parents she knows whose children were assigned to the same bus never saw it either, she said. Van Valkenburgh doesn’t try anymore. But she worries about kids without family transportation or the advantage of parents with flexible jobs.

“These kids are trying to play catch-up,” she said, “and they can’t even get to the building to learn.”

*Getting creative*
In Missouri, the Northwest School District, just outside St. Louis, was not getting enough takers for maintenance, child-care and cafeteria jobs this fall, so the chief operating officer one day posed a question: What if we let students know about the jobs?

That led to a job fair at the high school Nov. 3, which 28 teenagers attended, half of whom applied for a position. Superintendent Desi Kirchhofer said it helps fill the staffing gap, while giving kids jobs that pay $10 to $13 an hour and won’t keep them working late at night. The school system is working with students and will adjust their academic or work schedule if needed. “I think it can be managed, for sure,” Kirchhofer said. Seven students could start as soon as next week.

Similarly, school officials in Omaha hired bilingual students this fall to interpret during family conferences. And in Santa Fe, N.M., where the school board declared a staffing crisis, city officials are allowing city employees to take four hours of paid leave a month to pitch in at schools — with bus duty, food-service work, tutoring or in-class support, said Superintendent Hilario “Larry” Chavez.

In Quakertown, Pa., Superintendent Bill Harner says his school system needs aides, custodians and food-service workers. It recently decided on a new path: eliminating some part-time positions to give more hours to other employees, which provides them better benefits as another incentive to stay. Hourly pay is being increased for certain jobs, too.

“We’re treading water still,” Harner said. “The principals are playing teacher all day — not every day, but often.”

In Richmond Public Schools in Virginia, Superintendent Jason Kamras said he often had fewer than 20 vacancies before the pandemic. Now, he has 90 — bus drivers, food-service workers, teachers and custodians.

“We’ve just had to be creative,” he said.

Perspective: Today’s teacher shortages are part of a longer pattern

The district made a call-out for family and community volunteers who could serve as lunch monitors so that teachers could be relieved, Kamras said.

In Vermont, where Bonesteel is a superintendent, not only does the accounts payable manager help clean classrooms, but so do school board members and parent volunteers. As does Bonesteel, who has covered recess and classes — and run vaccination clinics.

Bonesteel’s district is plagued by staff vacancies: one-third of its custodians, one-third of food-service workers and 20 percent of paraeducators.

“When you’re down people in a small district, it really matters,” she said. “Every school district in Vermont is not fully staffed. All of us are feeling it.”

One day in October, Bonesteel pushed a lawn mower across the grass outside Montpelier High School. She knew the assigned custodial worker had already put in many hours of overtime and still had work to do at another school.

“If it gives our guys an hour here or there, then we’re going to do it,” she said. “It’s totally all hands on deck right now.”
'A breaking point'
For many teachers, the problem is more than vacancies. Absences related to the pandemic, for illness or quarantine, also leave critical jobs uncovered. In many areas, teachers are asked to use planning periods or lunch breaks to fill in for a colleague who is out.

Some say they don’t have time to go to the bathroom.

In North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District, a wave of teacher resignations and retirements — and a severe lack of substitutes — led to “the unprecedented step” of paying teachers $35 for each class they cover during a planning period, teacher Justin Parmenter said. Still, it doesn’t solve everything.

“It’s an approach that is helping to put a temporary teacher in the classroom, but it’s not an ideal solution because it means the teacher then loses valuable time they need to plan, grade, and communicate,” he said.

In Portland, between Sept. 1 and Oct. 5, there were 1,326 unfilled requests for substitutes, said Thiel, the teachers union president. During the same period two years earlier, there were 164.

Teachers protest staff shortages in Maryland school system
In Maryland, teachers in Montgomery County rallied outside school system headquarters in late October to protest shortages. Nearly 50 percent of substitute requests went unfilled in the first two months of the school year, officials said.

“Turning out because we’re burning out,” one teacher’s sign said.

Among changes that teachers in the state’s largest school system have called for: a pause on new initiatives this school year, an increase in pay for substitute teachers and a bump in pay for educators who cover a colleague’s class during a planning period. Now, they get $15.

“People are exhausted and at a breaking point,” said Danillya Wilson, a first-grade teacher.

Principals are overloaded, too. At Woolley Elementary School in Las Vegas, Joseph J. Uy has filled in for missing staff members by cleaning restroom toilets, working in the cafeteria, vacuuming hallways and teaching classes.

He understands the stakes of the pandemic. Early this year, Uy landed in the hospital with covid-19. He was treated there for 10 days. But when he was finally sent home, his mother was admitted with an infection.

She did not survive.

“My staff was there to cover for me,” Uy said, “and now I am here to support them as much as possible.
Downsize Schools? Keep Them Open & Hope Students Come Back? With Enrollment Down, Minneapolis & St. Paul Split on How to Spend COVID Relief Funds

November 29, 2021

This year, count day — the time when schools take their snapshot of student enrollment — was especially painful in the Twin Cities. Both the Minneapolis and St. Paul districts have been losing students for years, but the decline during the pandemic has been steep indeed. State officials are still tabulating this year’s count. But preliminary numbers suggest that since the start of the 2019-20 academic year, Minneapolis Public Schools has lost more than 12 percent of its students, while St. Paul has lost almost 10 percent.

Like most states, Minnesota funds schools primarily according to enrollment. A loss of even 3 percent of a district’s student body — the nationwide average last year — can be destabilizing financially. Double-digit losses? There’s no playbook for that.

Both districts have yawning racial and socioeconomic student achievement gaps. In Minneapolis, 74 percent of white students passed last year’s state reading test, compared with 24 percent of children of color and Indigenous students. In St. Paul, 67 percent of white students read at grade level, versus 23 percent of students of color. Similar disparities are seen in math. Each is also slated to receive more than a quarter-billion dollars in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund aid to help their school systems and students recover from the pandemic. But here, the two cities’ tales diverge.

St. Paul is proposing to close five schools and consolidate 10 more over the next two years, to reflect the current, reduced student head count. Minneapolis plans to use nearly half of its stimulus funds to plug an ongoing budget gap in hopes enrollment will rebound. It is an approach that experts warn will likely create a fiscal cliff that the district will have to deal with
when stimulus funds run out.

St. Paul’s reconfiguration plan does not specifically target chronically underperforming schools, but rather buildings the district says don’t enroll enough students to offer all the academics and enrichment classes called for under state standards. The goal is for every school to have at least 350 students, which district leaders say would allow for instruction in music, art and science, as well as support staff such as nurses, counselors and librarians. It’s a controversial plan, slated to be taken up by the school board Dec. 1. But because the vote is being held before four newly elected members are sworn in, it may provide some political insulation for officials willing to say yes.

By contrast, Minneapolis is succumbing to the temptation to spend stimulus funds — more than $108 million — on existing budget deficits. The Council of the Great City Schools, for one, has cautioned its member districts about using the money to hire staff they won’t be able to continue to pay or ink contracts that lead to more inequitable teacher employment. Districts should recall, the group says, that when federal aid from the Great Recession ran out in 2011, tens of thousands of educators were laid off — a disproportionate share of them teachers of color.

“There is a broad appetite across districts to not make too many big cuts right now,” says Marguerite Roza, director of Georgetown University’s Edunomics Lab. “The thinking is, ‘We’re in this chaotic moment, we should protect what we have.’ Of course, if you do that, it’s hard to invest in getting students back on track.” To be most effective, she says, the stimulus dollars need to be targeted as closely as possible to the needs of specific groups of students. Keeping underenrolled schools open and teachers employed does not necessarily mean a district will have the right staff to meet students’ needs.

‘Making some progress right now … is the better play’

Arriving in two allotments to be spent before fall 2024, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding will pump more than half a billion dollars into the Twin Cities’ core
school systems. St. Paul Public Schools is slated to receive $299 million, while Minneapolis is in line for $234 million.

Both districts — still reeling from the racial upheaval that followed the murder of a Black man, George Floyd, by a white police officer — have made addressing historic inequities centerpieces of their strategic plans. Both say making sure long-neglected schools get their share of resources is a priority.

Both have also seen dramatic enrollment declines since the 1990s, when the student population totaled 91,000, distributed virtually equally between St. Paul and Minneapolis. Birth rates have declined, and families have increasingly chosen charter schools or taken advantage of open enrollment to send their children to suburban districts. In Minneapolis, the exodus has been most pronounced among Black students. In St. Paul, Southeast Asian students have left in large numbers. Both districts now serve slightly less than two-thirds of the school-aged children who live within their city limits.

Between its larger slice of American Rescue Plan dollars and its decision to deal separately with the challenges posed by decades of falling enrollment, St. Paul has far more money — some $297 million — to spend helping students recover from the trauma and losses of the pandemic. St. Paul, Roza says, stands out nationally for separating its pandemic recovery efforts from its plan to deal with long-term demographic changes: “Making some progress right now while we’re in chaos — and COVID is chaos — and people are understanding of it is the better play.” The district’s stimulus spending plan includes $90 million for academics, including $24.5 million to be sent directly to schools to be spent on their most pressing needs, $23 million to place additional teachers in schools to support reading and math efforts, and funds for more instructional time.

Some $11.5 million will support students with specialized needs, such as Indigenous pupils and children with disabilities, and almost $10 million will support a racial equity plan that includes recruiting and retaining diverse teachers. As that proposal was being created, the administrator
responsible for each initiative had to specify what would happen when the federal dollars ran out.

Still, efforts to “right-size” the schools have met with stiff political opposition. Some of the buildings that would be reconfigured under St. Paul’s consolidation plan had been slated for closure or reorganization in 2016. A teacher union-led campaign to organize parents around several flashpoints that year resulted in the election of a school board that fired the superintendent and scrapped the effort.

One of the programs targeted for closure in 2017, Galtier Community School, had 156 students at the time, according to state data. Last year, it enrolled 157, despite district hopes that a renovation would make it more attractive. Now, district leaders want to merge it with nearby Hamline Elementary, which last year enrolled 236 students. Slated for closure are four other elementary schools, Highwood Hills, John A. Johnson Achievement Plus, Jackson and Wellstone, as well as LEAP, a program for high school students who are new to the country that went from 341 students in 2013 to 133 today, according to state enrollment data. Other changes are designed to respond to families’ preferences, such as replacing a Montessori middle school with a Hmong dual-language immersion, a kind of program popular with many Southeast Asian families who have removed their children from district schools over the last decade.

Confronted with its own under enrolled schools, Minneapolis has repeatedly drawn down reserves and asked voters to approve referenda to deal with budget deficits that by 2018 had mushroomed to $33 million. The district’s chief financial officer has warned that even if enrollment begins to rebound, structural changes are needed. Several years ago, Minneapolis leaders started talking to families, about 80 percent of them of color, about why they pulled their children out of district schools. The top three answers were a lack of academic rigor, safety concerns and lack of a welcoming feeling, according to Eric Moore, senior accountability, research and equity officer.
Shortly before the pandemic began, Minneapolis launched a redesign that is moving magnet programs, language immersion schools and other popular options into parts of the city that are home to predominantly people of color. These new school attendance boundaries are also geared toward shifting students to the smallest schools and cutting transportation expenses. District leaders say they expected the shift to be a factor in several more years of enrollment drops before beginning to draw families back around the 2025-26 school year. Though this year’s decline was bigger than anticipated by more than 1,600 students, the plan has reduced the number of schools that are hypersegregated from 21 to 12 and the number of underenrolled schools — which Minneapolis defines as having 250 students or fewer — from five to three. “It’s a social justice plan, aimed at deconstructing our system of white supremacy that has contributed to years and years of underachievement of students of color, special education students and students in our [English learner] programs,” says Moore. “It’s reinvesting in what our families are saying they want.”

‘This is what it looks like when it gets put off for a long time.’

Because of different ways of calculating enrollment, state and district data differ on the exact size of the student body in any given year. The state has yet to post its 2021-22 tallies, but district leaders say this year Minneapolis has 29,120 students, down from 31,254 last year, 33,202 students for the 2019-20 year and 34,088 in 2018-19. Reach back two more years to 2015-16, and enrollment has dropped 18 percent.

In addition to the unknowns of the pandemic, Moore says, Minneapolis’ larger-than-normal enrollment decline may reflect the racial unrest that has swept the city, either because of white flight or other displacement.

Before the federal stimulus funds were announced, Minneapolis officials had predicted the district would be insolvent by fiscal year 2024. Using recovery funds to make up shortfalls will push that out until 2027, though the district would need “constant enrollment growth” and substantially reduced expenses to avoid completely depleting its funds, according to a recent presentation to the school board’s finance committee. Current enrollment projections show that
by that year, the district will need 220 fewer licensed teachers.

Officials say they do not yet have a budget for the stimulus funds that will support “continuity of services, staffing and programs” beyond the $108 million. Of the remaining $126 million, Minneapolis is budgeting $41.3 million for “impacts to learning.”

At the board meeting, Superintendent Ed Graff defended the decision. “Enrollment has declined over the years, and the number of schools that we have does not align with the number of students we have,” he said. “While that is an accurate observation, it’s also an observation that we had never spent the level of investment or the adjustments of our resource allocations in an equitable manner.”

Roza is skeptical. Even if Minneapolis succeeds in drawing back some families, she says, it will have spent funds that could be used to retrain educators and otherwise ensure that any school that grows is appropriately staffed for its students. And if the district has bet wrong, and ends up with a budget in the red, it could land in receivership.

“What usually happens is the state steps in and says, ‘You’re going to become insolvent’ — and then there’s going to be really large pain,” she says. “This is what it looks like when it gets put off for a long time.”
DISTRICT LEADERSHIP
CHARLESTON COUNTY, S.C. (WCBD) – The Charleston County School District on Monday publicly announced who will serve as interim superintendent.

It comes just days after Dr. Gerrita Postlewait resigned as the district’s leader.

While Postlewait’s resignation officially goes into effect at the end of the school year, the district said Donald R. Kennedy will begin his role as interim superintendent beginning January 3, 2022.

According to CCSD, Kennedy has served as the district’s Chief Financial and Administrative Officer from July 2004 to September 2007, and again from January 2018 to December 2021.

“Throughout his career in public service, Kennedy has supported urban education throughout the country as the chief financial officer (CFO) for Baltimore City Public Schools, CFO for Boston Public Schools, Chief Operations Officer (COO) for Bridgeport Public Schools in Connecticut, and Chief Financial and Operations Officer for Seattle Public Schools,” the district said in its announcement Monday.

Kennedy also serves as a volunteer peer review consultant for the Council of the Great City Schools.
Graduation rates have jumped double digits over Mark Bedell’s five years from 68% to 78.

When Mark Bedell was looking for a job, he stood behind a podium in the auditorium at Kansas City’s Paseo Academy of Fine and Performing Arts and made a promise to the packed house that January evening and to the city: If he were hired to serve as the Kansas City Public Schools superintendent, he would stay until the job is done. “If we are constantly changing superintendents every three years, how do we make progress?” Bedell asked five years ago. He’s still here, and the district has come a long way since Bedell was handed the reins in 2016.

But the job is a long way from done. And Bedell said Friday he has no plans to leave Kansas City any time soon. That’s good news because the district, which has shown improvement, needs someone staying the course even while a pandemic and politics hamper progress. The job has been a heap greater than what Bedell thought it would be when he signed that first three-year, $225,000-a-year contract.

Bedell, who had never led a district before arriving in Kansas City, is about to start a sixth year, which would make him the district’s longest-serving superintendent in more than 50 years. In the preceding time, KCPS had seen 28 interim or permanent superintendents come with fanfare, start some half-baked initiative, then exit after two or three years.

Remember the middle school plans? In the two years that Anthony Amato led the district, he closed middle schools and created K-8 elementary schools. John Covington came in and moved middle schoolers into high schools. Two years later, Steven Green reopened middle schools. Instability in leadership was one of the reasons the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education cited for stripping the district of its accreditation in 2011.

KCPS has yet to get it back. The district needed someone to reverse enrollment decline, improve academic performance and graduation rates, hire the best teachers and get them in the right classrooms, raise the course rigor, provide more early childhood opportunities, assure equity in education and in extra curricular offerings and more. In short, change the narrative and reality of KCPS to one of a system that is thriving.

Bedell took the job. For now, enrollment looks stable at around 14,000 students. He’s also addressing equity, closing some schools because there are too many facilities, not enough kids and some high schools don’t have enough students to support athletics, debate and music programs while others do. Graduation rates jumped double digits over his five years from 68% to 78%. Schools have more advanced placement course offerings than ever, and international baccalaureate scores are up too.
“My goal has always been to try and be the superintendent that gave hope when there was no hope,” Bedell said. Hope was sorely needed when 2020 came with COVID-19 in tow. KCPS, like districts across the country, struggled to educate students during a global health emergency that exacerbated inequities in technology, food and housing. School shutdowns left many students behind. Bedell, who has had the support of a stable school board during his tenure, put health and safety ahead of political pressures and refused to reopen schools or drop mask mandates too soon.

Bedell wasn’t prepared to see political decisions such as state bills supporting school choice, City Council-approved tax incentives, and the impact of eviction rates on schools. But he’s learned countermoves.

In 2019, the district won national recognition for providing legal aid to families facing eviction and other problems that affect student attendance. Students are showing up, learning and graduating. According to a recent report from St. Louis University, KCPS is quantifiably moving the needle forward. And Bedell is pushing the state for more credit on how far students climb from the academic depths — holes dug by poverty and social disenfranchisement — where many start out. The report shows 11 Kansas City elementary schools, among 28, noted as “beating the odds,” in rapidly advancing learning in English language arts for a high concentration of students from low-income households. Another 11 district schools are advancing similarly in math. That kind of momentum also shows up in the 2019 state annual progress report. We applaud that. But it must be maintained.

The Council of the Great City Schools has said that under Bedell, “KCPS has made substantial progress,” and is “worthy of a fully accredited district.” Bedell is checking gains off the to-do list he promised to clear when he took the job. He wants to leave a legacy behind. More than ever, he needs strong support from city leaders, local businesses and the community. And of course, that’s what we should do. Every success for the district is a victory for Kansas City.
Opinion: D.C. schools improved under mayoral control. Why do some council members want to undermine that success?

Since 2007, when the D.C. Council voted to give the mayor control over the public school system, there have been periodic attempts to claw back the historic reform. Past efforts have failed, but those who want to undermine mayoral control have been nothing if not persistent, and there is a new push to undermine mayoral control that unfortunately seems to be gaining some traction. D.C. Council members need to be reminded of the impressive academic progress that District schools have made in the 15 years since mayoral control. That they are even considering a change in school governance that would threaten the progress is troubling.

The council last week held hearings on two bills that would lessen the mayor’s authority over education by removing the Office of the State Superintendent of Education from the mayor’s control. One bill would allow the mayor to appoint the superintendent with council confirmation, but the office would become an independent agency. The other measure is even more ill-advised; it would make the office subordinate to the State Board of Education. The office oversees federal funding, sets education standards, administers the statewide student achievement exam and has responsibilities over prekindergarten programs and transportation for students with special needs.

Critics of mayoral control argue that there is currently inadequate public oversight of education and a need for more accountability. Last time we checked, responsibility for education oversight is vested by law with the D.C. Council. If indeed there are problems, shouldn’t the council look to itself? Why, for example, does the council not have a committee dedicated to education but instead considers school issues as a Committee of the Whole? As for accountability, any move to lessen the mayor’s authority actually would dilute accountability because it would be easier for officials to evade responsibility and blame others, which for those with short memories happened all the time under the old dysfunctional school board. Under the current system, the buck stops with the mayor; if voters don’t like the results, they can always vote her or him out of office.
There is still so much more work to be done in improving public education in D.C. Even before the pandemic posed unprecedented challenges, too many students weren’t proficient in reading and math, and minority students still lagged far behind their White peers. But playing musical chairs with who is in charge is not the solution but will only upend a system that has proved to be successful. During the past decade, D.C. students have posted outsize gains on the National Assessment of Education Progress. A report this year by the Council of the Great City Schools spotlighted D.C. as the fastest-improving of all large urban school districts, outperforming expectations. And a study from Mathematica confirming the gains in student achievement made a causal connection to the city’s policy decisions, including mayoral control.

D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D) needs to put a stop to this nonsense. He should not bring the bills to a vote.
COUNCIL REPORTS AND REVIEWS
A.J. Crabill has called the current state of Black and brown children in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools deplorable. He has scolded local elected officials for “choosing ego over results.” And he’s getting paid to do it.

For the past eight months, Crabill has been leading the CMS board in a quest to change their own behavior in hopes of overcoming racial disparities and pandemic setbacks for students. He’s a former Kansas City school board president and Texas deputy education commissioner who works with the Council of the Great City Schools.

As the year comes to an end, the first phase of his work with CMS is ending. The school board has laid out goals under Crabill's direction, promised to hold Superintendent Earnest Winston accountable for meeting them and restructured meetings to focus on monitoring academic data.

“This year was the training and the planning,” board Chair Elyse Dashew said recently. “Next year’s when we actually do it.”

As Crabill prepares for that phase, he spoke with WFAE about what he sees CMS leaders doing well and where they’re falling short.

For instance, there’s the way the school board oversees Winston.

“The decisions about staff should not be a personality contest, and conversations to date have sounded more like middle school engagement in selecting class president rather than professional leadership around ‘How do we hold senior executives accountable?’ It should not matter whether you like the superintendent or not,” Crabill said.

Instead, he says, the board must relentlessly focus on how students fare on measures of reading, math and college-career preparedness. And the district must be willing to change tactics — and even leaders — if results don’t materialize.
So how did the CMS board end up working with someone who pushes them to confront embarrassing data and make tough choices?

**Crabill has faced challenges**

Crabill has been in the hot seat himself. He says he was involved in tech startups, then education and neighborhood activism, before being elected to the school board in his hometown of Kansas City, Missouri, in 2008. He spent eight years on the board, much of it as president. It was a stretch that saw him blamed for a superintendent’s abrupt departure, although that superintendent later told The Kansas City Star that was incorrect. The newspaper also reported that “the board, which had developed a reputation for dissonance, operated in relative harmony during his time on the governing body.”

At the time Crabill was known as Airick Leonard West. He changed his name in 2016 as he moved to a new job as deputy education commissioner in Texas, taking the name of a family that fostered him as a child. Crabill’s biography says he moved in and out of foster care throughout his childhood, attending 11 schools.

**Results in Dallas**

In Texas, Crabill worked with the Dallas Independent School District on strategies to focus on their most urgent academic needs. The district created an “Accelerating Campus Excellence” program to provide tutoring, extra class time and strong teachers and principals in the lowest-performing schools. According to news reports, it was costly but brought dramatic gains.

Crabill’s work became part of a statewide Lone Star Governance program. He currently lives in Houston and is the state-appointed conservator to help the DeSoto (Texas) Independent School District reorganize its staff and budget.

Dashew says she and CMS board Vice Chair Thelma Byers-Bailey learned about his work through training offered by the Council of the Great City Schools in January. The CMS board signed Crabill on to work with them, starting with a board retreat in late spring.

“I really think based on the districts that have done this, particularly in Texas, it really works. So I hope we see that,” she said.

The contract calls for CMS to pay $10,000 plus Crabill’s travel expenses — but that’s only if they meet the timetable they agreed on. If they fall short, they’ll pay up to $75,000, based on his hourly work.

That’s not a huge sum for a district with a $2 billion operating budget, but Dashew says it has provided motivation. “There’s a history of boards that take on a project and then kind of get distracted and let it drop when it gets hard,” she said.
A rocky start in Charlotte

Crabill says CMS “started a step ahead of the game” because they had created a strategic plan with their former superintendent, Clayton Wilcox. But that didn’t mean they were successfully executing it.

“Everybody has ideas, but few people will have the discipline necessary to execute those ideas,” he said.

Soon after the spring retreat, the traditional budget-season sparring between the school board and Mecklenburg County commissioners escalated. The majority of commissioners voiced dissatisfaction with the school board’s plans for improving low-performing schools and addressing racial disparities in test scores. They voted to withhold $56 million until they got a satisfactory plan, and commissioners’ Chair George Dunlap publicly questioned Winston’s qualifications for the task.

The CMS board prevailed in legally-mandated mediation, walking away with an extra $11 million. And they continued working with Crabill on changing the way they govern — work that struck some members of the public as tedious and unfocused. The board moved the governance work sessions to the start of meetings, earning jeers from some audience members who had to wait longer for public comment sessions.

Acknowledging the worst

When the board finally unveiled goals, they highlighted shockingly low test scores for students who were struggling before the pandemic and fell further behind during a year spent largely in remote classes.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board and Mecklenburg County commissioners met Dec. 6 to talk about overcoming differences.

Crabill had insisted that they narrow their focus to a few of the most dire needs, such as the students taking Math I in high school. Only 19% of them passed the state exam in 2021. But the CMS goal focused on an even lower number: Only 4.5% cleared the higher bar that’s considered to put them on track for college and careers.

Dashew and Crabill explained that strategy to county commissioners in a joint meeting Dec. 6, which Crabill led.

“We saw some glaring, glaring challenges, and that’s why we decided to lean into this goal,” Dashew said. “We took the one with the worst news we could find and made a goal of it.”

“And that’s what effective leadership looks like,” Crabill said. “You don’t try to craft goals that make you look good. You craft goals that tell the truth about where we are and what’s not working. And that’s exactly what this is.”
What it means for the superintendent

Crabill has also pushed the board to make sure there are data points they can check throughout the year. He has repeatedly told the board that if Winston and his staff don’t show significant progress, they need to talk about whether Winston continues in the job.

In an interview, Crabill declined to talk about Winston’s performance.

“Fortunately, it’s not my responsibility to evaluate employees,” he said. “So while I can’t opine on the superintendent or staff’s capability, I can opine on the process which school boards should use to make that assertion themselves. And that involves being very clear about what are the outcomes for our students.”

“To the extent that we don’t see those, even if we absolutely love the superintendent and feel wonderful and fuzzy about them, that’s not evidence that we should retain them,” Crabill said.

Guns and COVID-19 compete for time

Crabill’s work with CMS has come at a time when the district continues to struggle with strategies for educating students during a pandemic, and as a surge of guns and violence at schools creates calls for new safety measures.

Those items aren’t part of the academic goals, but Crabill says safety is an essential part of the work.

“As a parent, I’d tell you that the first thing you need to do to make sure that my student is actually in a position to learn is to make sure that they’re in a position to be safe,” Crabill said. “And so to the extent that there are safety issues, whether they be of the pandemic nature or the violence nature, school systems have to take appropriate steps to calibrate for that.”

Crabill frequently talks about moving the focus from adult issues to children’s needs, but he says parents demanding changes aren’t out of line.

“Parents should not be expected to be entirely patient with safety and security issues,” he said. “They should expect that those are addressed in a very rapid and very effective manner.”

Up next for 2022

At the Dec. 6 joint meeting, Crabill tried to get county commissioners and school board members to lay groundwork for a more student-focused partnership. He voiced dismay when they couldn’t agree on such things as avoiding social media attacks or refraining from impugning individuals.
“The collective insistence you have on having conversations about the adults does not inspire performance,” he told the two bodies. “So obviously you have the right to do it. You're elected officials. But to the extent that’s what you choose, you are choosing ego over results.”

Crabill says he’s continuing to meet with members of both boards and will return in January with suggestions for talks that focus on student data.

“If both sides honor that, it would be a step in the right direction for students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg,” he said.

And the ultimate test will be whether CMS strategies bring change.

“When you see improvement in student outcomes as emphatic as they have been in Dallas, that is almost impossible to come about without adults being willing to make hard choices,” he said. “We've seen that in Dallas, and children in Dallas have been blessed by that. As we see that happen in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the children here will be blessed by that as well.”
Scholastic, Council of the Great City Schools announces inaugural literacy champion award

Scholastic, the global children’s publishing, education, and media company, in collaboration with the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), a coalition of 75 of the nation’s largest urban public school systems, recently announced the School District of as the inaugural winner of the Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award.

Named in honor of the late Scholastic Chairman and CEO, Richard (Dick) Robinson, the annual award recognizes a CGCS member school district for demonstrated progress in advancing reading achievement.

“During his near five decades leading Scholastic, Dick Robinson was a true champion of children’s literacy and education,” said president of the Scholastic Education Solutions Rose Else-Mitchell in a statement.

“He believed that the core to the work we do is reaching the hearts of children to help them discover the stories, people, and worlds that can spark confidence and curiosity, while giving them the skills and tools necessary to navigate the 21st century,” she said.

“We’re honored to introduce this new award in partnership with the Council of the Great City Schools to recognize Dick’s lasting legacy, and to expand opportunities for students through access to high-quality, engaging print and digital resources,” she added.

As the Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award-winner, the school district has selected the General George G. Meade School to receive the grand prize, which is designed to help increase book access and create a lasting culture of literacy.
Meade will receive a school library “renovation,” which includes a donation of over 6,000 high-quality, age-appropriate books, short reads for Guided Reading, and instructional resources from Scholastic Education Solutions.

The school will also receive a one-year site license to Scholastic Literacy Pro, an award-winning blended learning program that provides 24/7 access to more than 2,500 fiction and nonfiction e-books for purposeful independent reading, allowing personalized student choice while providing teachers with real-time data to inform instruction.

Elementary students will receive books to take home and add to their home libraries, encouraging independent reading beyond the classroom.

“We are honored to have General George G. Meade School selected as the first Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award from Scholastic and the Council for the Great City Schools,” said superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia William Hite in a statement.

“This generous support will help instill a love of reading in our students by increasing access to books, something that we know has a longstanding impact on helping students succeed.”
Miami’s Community News

MARTA PÉREZ WINS HIGHEST HONOR IN EDUCATION TOP EDUCATOR- 2021 ANNUAL GREEN-GARNER AWARD FIRST HISPANIC BOARD MEMBER & FIRST CUBAN-AMERICAN TO WIN

By Community Press Releases

October 26, 2021

The Council of the Great City Schools selected Dr. Marta Pérez, the Miami-Dade School Board Member as the 2021 Green-Garner Award winner, the highest, most prestigious award in urban education in the U.S. This award recognizes the best urban school leaders who make a positive difference in educating today’s children and incorporates some of the most important aspects of urban leadership: compassion, empathy, access, opportunities, performance mastery, inclusivity, integrity and ethical decision-making.

Dr. Pérez is the first Hispanic to win as Board Member and first Cuban American to receive this distinction.

Urban school leaders applauded Dr. Pérez during the Council’s 32nd Annual “Urban Educator of the Year” virtual award ceremony, where she received the prestigious Green-Garner Award by her peers.

Dr. Pérez has served on the Miami-Dade County school board since 1998. Dr. Pérez has been an unwavering supporter of countless initiatives, particularly in the areas of ethics and accountability, parental involvement, wellness and student achievement. She was instrumental in leading the Miami-Dade School Board to adopt stronger ethics and accountability measures including the establishment of the Inspector General position and the Ethics Advisory Commission, which resulted in the Board’s receiving the National School Board
Association Magna Award. In 2012, the Miami-Dade County school district was the winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education awarded to urban school districts that have shown the strongest improvement in closing the achievement gap.

“Dr. Pérez has shown a strong dedication to the needs of students, a profound commitment to improvement, and has exemplified significant community involvement and leadership,” wrote Council Executive Director Ray Hart.

“This is an honor,” said Dr. Pérez. “The Council of Great City Schools is at the forefront of our efforts to pursue the highest standards in academic achievement and organizational performance.”

As the recipient of the 2021 Green-Garner Award, Dr. Pérez receives a $10,000 college scholarship to present to a student in the Miami-Dade County school district.
SOCIAL MEDIA
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS:
Monthly Update: October 2021

**KEY MESSAGES**

» Virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference
» Green Garner Award
» #StudentsSpeak2021

**MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA POST:**

Congrats to the 2021 Green Garner Award Finalists. The winner will be announced at the Virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference. [https://cvent.me/n9Wbeq](https://cvent.me/n9Wbeq)

**SOCIAL MEDIA STATS**

» 93.3 K Impressions
» 8,665 Profile Visits
» 241 Mentions
» 4 Link Clicks per day
» 56 Retweets
» 295 Likes
» 54 New Followers

**ANALYSIS:**

In October, we held our Virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference with over 30 breakout sessions and keynote speakers, including Priscilla Chan, Co-Founder and CEO of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Juliana Urtubey, 2021 National Teacher of the Year, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Emmy Award-Winning Filmmaker, Cultural Critic, and Journalist. The conference also featured a National Town Hall meeting with an all-student panel moderated by journalist Ray Suarez.
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS: Monthly Update: October 2021

BROADCAST AND PRINT MEDIA

2 Press Releases

» Historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Philanthropist Priscilla Chan, and 2021 National Teacher of the Year Address Urban School Leaders

» Miami-Dade County School Board Member Named Top Urban Educator

3 Media Mentions

» The Washington Post - Opinion: D.C. schools improved under mayoral control. Why do some council members want to undermine that success?

» Miami’s Community News - Marta Perez Wins Highest Honor in Education Top Educator - 2021 Annual Green-Garner Award First Hispanic Board Member & First Cuban-American to Win

» PR NewsWire - Council of the Great City Schools Names High School Graduate Londyn Edwards as Inaugural Recipient of $10,000 Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice Scholarship

URBAN EDUCATOR HEADLINES

» Nine Finalists Named for Top Award in Urban Education Leadership

» Journalist Ray Suarez to Moderate Town Hall Featuring Student School Board Leaders

» Portland Superintendent Receives National Recognition, Philly Leader to Step Down

» Buffalo Partnership Seeks to Aid Victims of Gun Violence

» Dallas Ends Suspensions for Middle and High School Students

» Philadelphia Student Receives Scholarship Named after Michael Casserly

» Legislative Column: Navigating National Gridlock

» 2021 Blue Ribbon Schools Named

» Austin, Other Districts Welcome Refugees

TOP DIGITAL MEDIA POSTS

» Congrats to the 2021 Green Garner Award Finalists. The winner will be announced at the Virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference. https://cvent.me/n9Wbeg; 36,914 impressions, 38 likes

» Congratulations to the 2021 Green-Garner award winner Marta Perez, School Board Member of @MDCPS! #CGCS2; 14,085 impressions, 33 likes

» “ I wanted to become a teacher because I wanted to be the teacher that I needed growing up.” @JulianaUrtubey3 #CGCS21 #NTOY21; 11,780 impressions, 77 likes

» Congrats to @SCSK12Unified Board of Education Chair, Miska Clay Bibbs for being selected as a finalist for the Green-Garner Award.; 6,194 impressions, 19 likes
Congratulations to the 2021 Green-Garner award winner Marta Perez, School Board Member of @MDCPS! #CGCS21

"I wanted to become a teacher because I wanted to be the teacher that I needed growing up." @JulianaUrtubey3 #CGCS21 #NTOY21

In our #StudentsSpeak2021 Townhall meeting, students expressed tackling issues such as mental health, student experiences, equity & access, and integrating student voice in their districts. #CGCS21

Our Virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference is underway with welcome remarks from the CGCS Executive Director, Ray Hart. #CGCS21

"...then the right adults are listening, you never know what can happen!"

onden Edwards, a 2021 graduate of Science Leadership High School in @PHLSchools, is the first recipient of a college scholarship named after the Council's former Executive Director Michael Casserly. #CGCS21

Congrats to @SCSK12Unified Board of Education Chair, Miska Clay Bibbs for being selected as a finalist for the Green-Garner Award.
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS:
Monthly Update: November/December 2021

KEY MESSAGES

» #CGCS21 Recap
» School Districts Vaccinate Younger Students
» Council Year in Review

MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA POST:

Sleeves Up! Urban School Districts begin to Vaccinate Younger Students. COVID-19 vaccination clinics are opening this week in some school districts. Some clinics in @FortWorthISD.

SOCIAL MEDIA STATS (combined)

» 12.3 K Impressions
» 5,483 Profile Visits
» 198 Mentions
» 6 Link Clicks per day
» 15 Retweets
» 35 Likes
» 45 New Followers (~8,593 followers total)

ANALYSIS:

In November, we highlighted districts that began vaccinating their younger students. We did a recap video of the fall conference, highlighting the keynote speakers, conference sessions, award winners, and an all-student panel town hall meeting. In December, as we reached the end of the year, we highlighted the Council’s accomplishments for 2021.
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS:
Monthly Update: November/December 2021

BROADCAST AND PRINT MEDIA

1 Press Releases

» Scholastic and the Council of the Great City Schools Announce the Inaugural Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award

6 Media Mentions

» Philadelphia Tribune - Scholastic, Council of the Great City Schools announces inaugural literacy champion award

» eSchoolNews - Scholastic And The Council Of The Great City Schools Announce The Inaugural Richard M. Robinson Literacy Champion Award

» the 74 - Minneapolis & St. Paul Split on How to Spend COVID Relief Funds

» The Washington Post - The principal is cleaning the bathroom: Schools reel with staff shortages.

» WFAE 90.7 - With blunt talk and discipline, Texas consultant tries to focus CMS school board on kids

» The Kansas City Star - KC public schools superintendent, longest serving in 5 decades, has a promise to keep

URBAN EDUCATOR HEADLINES

» Urban School Districts Host Vaccination Clinics for Ages 5-11


» Historian, Philanthropist and 2021 National Teacher of Year Address Council

» Student School Board Members Aim to be Heard at Town Hall

» Miami School Board Member Named Top Educator

» Voters Decide on Education Ballot Issues

» Legislative Column: No Christmas Miracle for Improving School Facilities

» Former Dayton Schools Superintendent; Fort Worth and Denver Board Members Remembered

» Baltimore Launches Student Learning Plans

TOP DIGITAL MEDIA POSTS

» Sleeves Up! Urban School Districts begin to Vaccinate Younger Students. COVID-19 vaccination clinics are opening this week in some school districts. Some clinics in @FortWorthISD, @SLPS_info, and @pbcisd have already started getting students vaccinated.; 1,241 impressions, 3 likes

» Today we celebrate, remember, and honor those who have fought for our country. Thank you, veterans! We appreciate your valiant service to our country. #VeteransDay2021; 719 impressions, 3 likes

» The elements of “3Ls” lessons help #ELLs to acquire learning, language, and literacy through grade-level text, talk, and tasks; active engagement; and explicit attention to academic language development.; 706 impressions, 4 likes
COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS:
Monthly Update: November/December 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

Read the November/December Edition of our Urban Educator. Stories featuring: Urban School Districts Host Vaccination Clinics for Ages 5-11; Changes at the Helm: @NYCSchools, @LASchools, and @ELPASO_ISD. To read the current issue of the UE conta.cc/3yUuA2

Look how excited Tiffany Cox of @pbcisd is as she holds her plaque for winning the Queen Smith Award at the Council’s Virtual 65th Fall Conference.

cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC0000...

The elements of “3Ls” lessons help #ELLS to acquire learning, language, and literacy through grade-level text, talk, and tasks; active engagement; and explicit attention to academic language development.

Today we celebrate, remember, and honor those who have fought for our country. Thank you, veterans! We appreciate your valiant service to our country.
#VeteransDay2021

Here’s a recap from our 2021 CGCS Virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference. See you next year in Orlando, October 19-23, 2022!
Nine Finalists Named for Top Award in Urban Education Leadership

Nine school board members will be announced on Oct. 21 as finalists for the nation’s top award in urban-education leadership, the Green-Garner Award.

Read More

Journalist Ray Suarez to Moderate Town Hall Featuring Student School Board Leaders

Urban students who serve on school boards will take center stage at the Council of the Great City Schools’ national town hall meeting, scheduled Oct. 22.

Read More
Portland Superintendent Receives National Recognition, Philly Leader to Step Down

Guadalupe Guerrero, the superintendent of Oregon’s Portland Public Schools, was recently named the Superintendent of the Year by the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS).

Read More

Buffalo Partnership Seeks to Aid Teen Victims of Gun Violence

New York’s Buffalo Public Schools is partnering with law agencies to form a high-risk youth team that will establish intervention programs for teens impacted by gun violence.

Read More

Dallas Ends Suspensions for Middle and High School Students

Trustees of the Dallas Independent School District recently approved a new student code of conduct that removes both in-school and out-of-school suspensions for most offenses.

Read More

Philadelphia Student Receives Scholarship Named after Michael Casserly

Londyn Edwards, a 2021 graduate of Science Leadership High School in Philadelphia, is the first recipient of a college scholarship named after Michael Casserly, the former executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.
Legislative Column

Navigating National Gridlock

The short-term extension of federal agency funding and federal borrowing authority into early December merely allows for the continuation of the legislative gridlock plaguing the federal government.

Upcoming Events

Virtual 65th Annual Fall Conference

The Council of the Great City Schools is holding its 65th Annual Fall Conference virtually.

When:
October 19 - October 23, 2021

Read More Stories Here

2021 Blue Ribbon Schools Named | Austin, Other Districts Welcome Refugees | Former St. Paul Superintendent Remembered
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title/Contact</th>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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<td>Chair</td>
<td>Barbara Jenkins</td>
<td>Superintendent, Orange County</td>
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<td>Chair-elect</td>
<td>Kelly Gonez</td>
<td>Board Member, Los Angeles</td>
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<td>Secretary-Treasurer</td>
<td>William Hite</td>
<td>Superintendent, Philadelphia</td>
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A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 75 of the nation’s largest urban public school districts. [Click here](#) to learn more. All news items should be submitted to Tonya Harris (tharris@cgcs.org).
Urban School Districts Host Vaccination Clinics for Ages 5-11

Wearing a Superman face mask to get his first shot against the coronavirus, 9-year-old Bryce Malone drew an audible, deep breath and squeezed his eyes closed tight – but just for a second. Then it was over.

Read More


New York City Mayor-Elect Eric Adams has named David Banks, the founder of a
network of public all-boys schools, as the next chancellor of the nation’s largest school district with 1.1 million students in more than 1,800 schools.

Read More

Historian, Philanthropist and 2021 National Teacher of Year Address Council

Henry Louis Gates Jr., the director of the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University, had a clear message for his audience of big-city school leaders: “respond responsibly” to critics and defend high school coursework in African-American history, Latino history, and ethnic studies.

Read More

Student School Board Members Aim to be Heard at Town Hall

Student representatives to urban school boards offered insights into that experience as participants in the virtual Town Hall at the Council of the Great City Schools’ 65th Fall Conference.

Read More

Miami School Board Member Named Top Educator

Marta Pérez has served on the Miami-Dade County school board since 1998 and has been an unwavering supporter of countless initiatives, particularly in the areas of ethics and accountability, parental involvement,
Legislative Column

No Christmas Miracle for Improving School Facilities

President Barack Obama proclaimed a “Christmas Miracle” six years ago in the bipartisan agreement on the “Every Student Success Act” (ESSA).

Read More

Read More Stories Here

Voters Decide on Ballot Issues | Former Dayton Schools Superintendent; Fort Wort and Denver Board Members Remembered | Baltimore Launches Student Learning Plans

Upcoming Events

Chief Information Officers Meeting

This year’s meeting of Chief Information Officers and their Senior Staff will focus on Managing the Complexities of 21st Century Enterprise Information Technology Operations in America’s Large Urban School Districts.

When:
February 15 - February 18, 2022

Where:
Hyatt Regency Atlanta
265 Peachtree Street, Northeast
Atlanta, GA 30303

Register
A newsletter published by the Council of the Great City Schools, representing 75 of the nation’s largest urban public school districts. Click here to learn more. All news items should be submitted to Tonya Harris (tharris@cgcs.org).
SAVE the Date

21st Annual Public Relations Executive Meeting

July 14-16, 2022
Chicago, IL
Sheraton Grand Chicago Hotel