

# Good News

*About Urban Public Schools*





# **GOOD NEWS ABOUT URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



OCTOBER 2014



# ABOUT THE COUNCIL

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 67 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research, technical assistance and media relations. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information, and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth.

## **Chair of the Board**

Jumoke Hinton Hodge, Board Member  
Oakland Unified School District

## **Chair-Elect:**

Richard Carranza, Superintendent  
San Francisco Unified School District

## **Secretary-Treasurer:**

Felton Williams, Board Member  
Long Beach Unified School District

## **Immediate Past-Chair:**

Valeria Silva, Superintendent  
St. Paul Public Schools

## **Executive Director:**

Michael Casserly  
Council of the Great City Schools

## **Embracing Challenge, Producing Results: Stories of Success**

For more than a century, urban public schools have provided economic opportunities through education to some of the nation's largest, most diverse, and neediest populations. By embracing these challenges, our nation's urban schools have provided the know-how and backbone upon which our cities have grown and thrived.

Today, as that legacy continues to unfold, the challenges facing urban schools are no less significant, and the successes no less impressive. Unfortunately, too many of these success stories go unheralded or do not receive the attention they deserve.

That is why the Council of the Great City Schools is sharing the stories that we have included here. We believe these examples of accomplishment represent the progress and good work that is going on in our urban schools. We hope these stories inspire similar successes in other cities. We also hope they create an image of urban public education that more completely and accurately reflects the hard-won successes of our city schools.

### **URBAN TRUTHS**

The nation's big-city school districts educate about one third of all students of color in the nation, and the percentage of limited English-proficient students educated in urban schools is twice that of other schools nationwide. Moreover, these same schools educate about one-third of all poor students. There is a far higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in urban school districts than nationwide.

Yet, urban schools are often seen only through the lens of these challenges, and not for what they accomplish in spite of these challenges. For example, a number of big-city school systems have shown impressive and promising results in reading and mathematics on one of the nation's most rigorous and respected tests, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The schools and districts whose accomplishments are celebrated here, however, have gone well beyond these trends. Some of the schools and districts that are featured are rated among the best in the nation at what they do. And some are providing leadership to suburban school systems in how to educate poor and minority students. Still, other urban public schools are being recognized for their national prominence in science or in the arts.

As impressive as these accomplishments are -- particularly in light of the hurdles they face, such as low funding, aged facilities, and divided communities -- we are not that surprised by the progress.

Urban school leaders have led the national movement toward greater academic accountability in public schools. They believe that setting high standards is the best approach to raising student achievement. They are also realistic, and recognize that the public and policymakers will support and invest in urban schools when they show results. The stories we are presenting here reflect those high expectations, and the results that come with them.

The schools and districts whose works we are celebrating also represent some of the best kept secrets in our nation's public school system: urban school systems are succeeding. While these stories single out specific schools and districts, they are not alone in their accomplishments. Countless success stories are written each day in our urban schools by visionary leaders, committed teachers, and hard-working students. Still, these examples stand out. Not only do they lead the pack locally, but many of them have risen to the top of the class nationally.

We think that is a story worth telling.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Academic Progress.....	1
Public Confidence.....	2
District Achievement.....	3
School Achievement.....	6
Student Achievement.....	11
Leadership and Accountability.....	16
Teaching.....	21
Innovation.....	23
Great City Grads.....	30
Conclusion.....	32



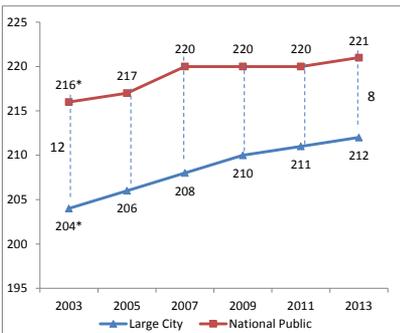
# ACADEMIC PROGRESS

## *The Nation's Report Card*

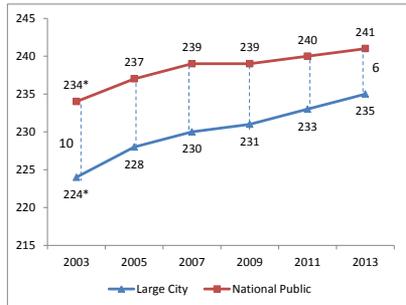
For the past 10 years, public school students in the nation's large cities have seen a steady upward trend in the average reading and mathematics scores in grades 4 and 8 on the rigorous federal test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), according to the *Nation's Report Card: 2013 Mathematics and Reading Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA)*.

Academic achievement in large city schools over the past 10 years has outpaced public-school performance in the nation with gains significantly larger than increases nationally. Between 2003 and 2013, TUDA results show major gains in fourth- and eighth-grade **reading** scores on the NAEP— and the achievement gap with the nation beginning to narrow. And **mathematics** data show that average scores among students in the large cities improved significantly in grades 4 and 8 since 2003, narrowing the achievement gap with the nation's public schools.

4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Average Scale Scores

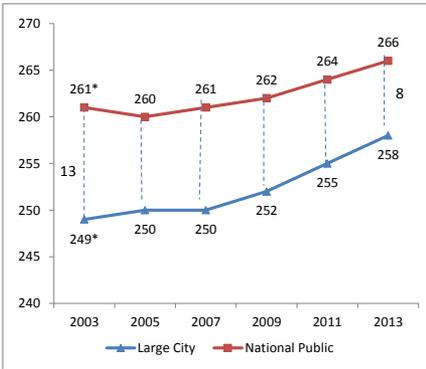


4<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics Average Scale Scores

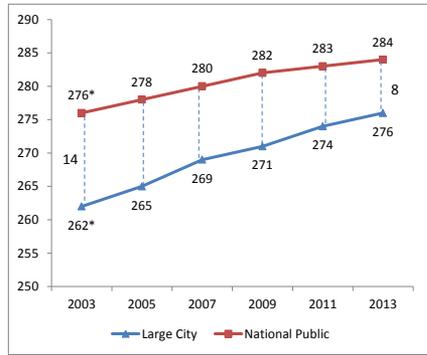


NAEP reading and math scale ranges from 0 to 500; \*Statistically significant difference from 2013; Differences are not exact due to rounding; SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics; National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Average Scale Scores



8<sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics Average Scale Scores



## PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

Some 81 percent of parents with children in urban public schools report being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of their children’s schooling experience in the 2013-14 school year, according to recent polling commissioned by the Council of the Great City Schools.

And some 50 percent of all urban-school parents believe that the quality of classroom instruction has gotten a little or a lot better in the past school year.

## DISTRICT ACHIEVEMENT

### *Top Prize for Urban Education*

Florida's **Orange County Public Schools** in Orlando is the co-winner of the 2014 Broad Prize for Urban Education, which recognizes an urban school district for making the greatest progress in student achievement. **The Houston Independent School District** won the prestigious award in 2013.



Employees of Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., celebrate at district headquarters upon the announcement that the district is selected as a co-winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education. They viewed a live webcast of the victory.



Posing at the 2014 Broad Prize event in New York City are, left to right, past superintendent of Orange County Schools Ronald Blocker, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Edythe and Eli Broad, Orange County Schools Superintendent Barbara Jenkins, Orange County Public Schools Board Chairman William Sublette and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

## *Graduation Rates Rise*

The four-year graduation rate reached a new high of 88.5 percent with the Class of 2014 in **North Carolina's Guilford County Schools** in Greensboro, exceeding the 2014 state average of 83.8 percent. The district's graduation rate is also higher than the nation's high-school graduation rate of 80 percent, the highest in America's history. Graduation rates for students in **Albuquerque Public Schools** rose to 73.3 percent in 2013, a 16 percent increase from 2008, and the third consecutive year the district has seen a rise in its four-year graduation rate. Other big-city school districts also show a rise in graduation rates, including **Denver, Minneapolis, Providence, R.I., Boston** and **Saint Paul, Minn.**

## *AP Honor Roll*

Six urban school districts -- **Cincinnati Public Schools, California's Santa Ana Unified School District, Chicago Public Schools, Denver Public Schools, Charleston County School District** and **Miami-Dade County Public Schools** -- were named to the College Board's 4th Annual AP Honor Roll, which recognized 477 school districts in the United States and Canada that improved access to AP coursework while also increasing the percentage of students earning scores of 3 or higher (out of 5) on AP exams.

## *Best in Music*

Several urban school districts were among the 376 school districts across the country designated as one of the Best Communities for Music Education in 2014 by the National Association of Music Merchants. The districts were **Fort Worth Independent School District, Austin Independent School District, Las Vegas' Clark County School District, Tampa's Hillsborough County Public Schools, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, San Diego Unified School District, Memphis' Shelby County Schools** and **Kansas' Wichita Public Schools.**

## *Green Ribbon Schools*

Two urban school districts were among the nine school districts recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as 2014 Green Ribbon Schools and District Sustainability awardees for exemplary efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs. The districts were Florida's **Broward County Public Schools** and Nebraska's **Omaha Public Schools**. Also, 48 individual schools received Green Ribbon honors, including the nation's oldest public school, **Boston Latin**, founded in 1635. The other urban school systems that have 2014 Green Ribbon Schools include Connecticut's **Bridgeport Public Schools** and California's **Long Beach Unified School District**.

## *Transportation Systems Recognized*

The **Houston Independent School District** and Florida's **Orange County Public Schools** in Orlando are the only two big-city school systems named in "The 100 Best Fleets" in North America rankings. The 100 Best Fleets program rewards peak-performing fleet operations, ranking the best of some 38,000 fleets across the nation. The Houston school system, ranked No. 39, transports more than 30,000 students to school every day, and the Orange County Public Schools, ranked No. 76, transports nearly 70,000 students daily with a fleet of 900 buses.



The Houston district's general manager of transportation, Nathan Graf, center, holds the plaque the Council of the Great City Schools presented to the Houston Schools transportation department for exemplary service. Graf is flanked by the department's employees and Houston district Chief Operating Officer Leo Bobadilla, right.

## *Major Accreditation*

**Miami-Dade County Public Schools** is expected to be the largest district in the nation to achieve AdvancEd/SACS CASI accreditation for the next five years. The nation's fourth largest school system scored 298.73, an above average score as compared to the average global score 282.45, in a review process that analyzes the Index of Education Quality for a district. The score is based on three different categories: teaching and learning impact, leadership capacity and resource utilization. AdvancEd provides its accreditation services to more than 32,000 institutions worldwide.

## SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

### *“Washington Post” Top High Schools*

*The Washington Post* ranks the **Oakland Unified School District's** American Indian Public Charter School as the top public high school in the nation. Eleven big-city schools ranked in the top 20 of the *Washington Post's* 2014 “America's Most Challenging High Schools” listing of more than 1,900 public high schools. In addition to the Oakland school ranking No. 1, two schools in the **Dallas Independent School District**, Talented and Gifted and Science/Engineering Magnet, ranked No. 4 and No. 5, respectively. Also on the list were Stanton College Prep in Jacksonville, Fla., ranked No. 7, followed by Suncoast Community in the **Palm Beach County** school system (No. 8); and Young Women's Prep in **Miami** (No. 9).

## *U.S. Academic Decathlon*

El Camino Real Charter High School in the **Los Angeles Unified School District** won the 2014 U.S. Academic Decathlon, while another school from Los Angeles, Granada Hills Charter High School, placed second in the competition. The title has gone to either one of the two high schools for the past five competitions. This year's national Academic Decathlon® was held in Honolulu, with nearly 470 students from 52 high schools competing.



The El Camino Real Charter High School Academic Decathlon team from Los Angeles holds the winning trophy after being named the 2014 U.S. Academic Decathlon® champion.

## *“U.S. News” Best High Schools*

The School for the Talented and Gifted in **Dallas** ranked No. 1 in *U.S. News & World Report’s* “Best High Schools” rankings for 2014. The school bested more than 19,400 public high schools in 50 states and the District of Columbia that were awarded gold, silver or bronze medals of some 31,200 schools analyzed. Seven big-city schools ranked in the top 25 of the “Best High Schools” list, including the School of Science and Engineering Magnet in **Dallas** at No. 8; Stanton College Preparatory School in **Jacksonville, Fla.**, at No. 12; and Academic Magnet High School in **North Charleston, S.C.**, at No. 16.

### *Five-Time Winner*

**Lincoln High School** in Portland, Ore., was the winner of this year’s “*We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*” competition. It was the high school’s fifth win, making it the only school in the nation to win the national title five times.

### *Top Magnet Schools*

Several urban school districts have the top magnet schools in the nation and were designated as 2014 Magnet Schools of Excellence, the highest honor given to magnet schools by the Magnet Schools of America organization. **Miami-Dade County Public Schools** had the most schools being designated as Magnet Schools of Excellence, with 12, while eight schools in Nevada’s **Clark County School District** in Las Vegas; seven in North Carolina’s **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools**; five in Tampa’s **Hillsborough County Public Schools**; three in **Indianapolis Public Schools** and two in Louisiana’s **East Baton Rouge Parish School System** received awards.

## *Blue Ribbon Schools*

Many urban public schools were among the 286 public and private schools in the nation to receive a 2014 national Blue Ribbon Award by the U.S. Department of Education based on overall academic excellence or for success in closing achievement gaps among disadvantaged



**Fifth-grade students from Cielo Vista Elementary School in El Paso, Texas, celebrate after learning their school was selected as a 2014 Blue Ribbon School. Photo credit: El Paso Independent School District**

and minority students. Blue Ribbon Schools were named in San Francisco, Miami, Honolulu, Chicago, Indianapolis, Baton Rouge, Louisville, New York City, Philadelphia, Nashville, Fort Worth, El Paso, Dallas as well as schools in the Los Angeles district, Clark County (Las Vegas), and Florida's Palm Beach County and Hillsborough County (Tampa) districts.

## *Grammy Award*

The Las Vegas Academy of the Arts in Nevada's **Clark County School District** was selected as a 2014 GRAMMY Signature School for its outstanding commitment to music education. Awarded a cash prize of \$5,000 to improve its music department, Las Vegas Academy was one of 12 schools across the nation selected as a 2014 GRAMMY Signature School.

### *EPA Winner*

Claiborne Elementary School in **Baton Rouge, La.**, beat out teams from more than 3,000 buildings across the nation to win the Environmental Protection Agency's annual Energy Star National Building Competition: *Battle of the Buildings*. The school won for cutting its energy use nearly in half.

### *Top Middle Schools*

Several urban middle schools have been named in the 50 Best Middle Schools in the United States by [thebestschools.org](http://thebestschools.org), a site that helps parents make informed decisions about education through rankings and other resources. Urban schools in **Jackson, Miss., Dallas, St. Louis, Miami-Dade County, New York City, Charleston, S.C., Honolulu** and **Clark County** in Las Vegas ranked in the top 50.

## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

### *Journey to Ivy League*



Travis Reginal

Two graduates of Mississippi's **Jackson Public Schools** documented their journey on the road to Ivy League schools in essays that were featured in the *New York Times*. Travis Reginal and Justin Porter wrote about their experiences as black males adjusting to life as students of Harvard and Yale, respectively.



Justin Porter

### *Genius Grants*



Karen Russell

Writers Karen Russell and Tarell McCraney, 1999 graduates of **Miami-Dade County Public Schools**, were among the 24 recipients of a 2013 MacArthur Fellowship. Known as “Genius Grants,” the fellowship comes with a \$625,000 grant given over five years to individuals who are exceptionally creative with a track record of achievement and the potential for even more significant contributions in the future.



Tarell McCraney

## *Student Writes Op-ed*

Benjamin Tonelli, a senior at Garfield High School in **Seattle**, wrote an op-ed about the high cost of taking Advanced Placement and SAT tests that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*.

## *Documentary Winners*

Three students from Poly High School in **Long Beach, Calif.**, won a \$5,000 grand prize from C-SPAN for their documentary, “Earth First, Fracking Second.” Since 2006, C-SPAN has invited middle and high school students to produce short documentaries on an issue of national importance. Michaela Capps, Sarah Highducheck and Emma Larson competed against 4,800 students nationwide who submitted 2,355 documentaries for the grand prize win.



**Michaela Capps, Sarah Highducheck and Emma Larson from Long Beach, Calif., are winners of a national C-SPAN contest.**

## *Ivy-League Bound*

Avery Coffey, a 17-year-old senior at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School in **Washington, D.C.**, was accepted to five Ivy League colleges: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown and the University of Pennsylvania. Coffey, who maintained a 4.3 grade-point-average, chose to attend Harvard University. Also, making headlines for his academic achievement was 17-year-old Akintunde Ahmad, a senior at Oakland Technical High School in **Oakland, Calif.**, who maintained a 5.0 GPA, and was accepted into some of the top universities in the nation, including Yale, Brown, Columbia and UCLA, eventually choosing to attend Yale.



**Avery Coffey**



**Akintunde Ahmad**

## *Presidential Scholars*

Fourteen big-city public school students were selected by the U.S. Department of Education as 2014 Presidential Scholars among 141 high school seniors selected nationwide for demonstrating leadership, scholarship, and contributing to their school and communities. Urban students in **Anchorage, Dallas, Palm Beach, Miami, Hillsborough (Fla.), Las Vegas, New York, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Memphis and Portland (Ore.)** received the highest honor for high school students.

## *West Point Acceptance*



Austin Updegraff displays his acceptance certificate to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

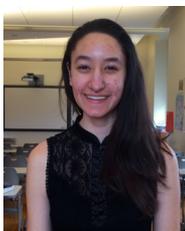
Austin Updegraff, a student at West Campus Senior High School in **Sacramento, Calif.**, was one of only 1,200 students in the nation accepted to the United States Military Academy at West Point in New York in 2014. Approximately, 15,000 students applied to the academy, which was founded in 1802 and is the oldest of the five United States service academies. Upon graduation, all candidates receive a Bachelor of Science degree and are commissioned as second lieutenants in the United States Army.

## *STEM Scholarship Winners*

Four 2014 high-school graduates, Deandra Chetram from **Broward County Public Schools**; Bridgette LaFaye from **District of Columbia Public Schools**; Leonardo Sanchez-Noya from **Miami-Dade County Public Schools**; and Ezra Zerihun from **Guilford County Public Schools**, were winners of the 2014 ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarship, sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools and ExxonMobil. Named for former astronaut and physician Dr. Bernard Harris Jr., the first African American to walk in space, the \$5,000 scholarship is given annually to two African-American and two Hispanic seniors from high schools in the 67 urban school districts represented by the Council to help underrepresented students pursue science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies and to increase diversity in the STEM workforce.



Deandra Chetram



Bridgette LaFaye



Leonardo Sanchez-Noya



Ezra Zerihun

## *Atlanta Valedictorians*

Two black male students in **Atlanta Public Schools** were not only selected as valedictorians of their graduating class but were also named to the Class of 2014 Gates Millennium Scholars. Valedictorian Sharod McClendon of The Business, Engineering, Science and Technology (B.E.S.T.) Academy High School and Valedictorian Kingsley Iyawe of Atlanta's New Schools at Carver were two of 1,000 students from across the country chosen as Gates Scholars to receive a good-through-graduation scholarship to use at any college or university of their choice.

## *Accepted to 24 Universities*

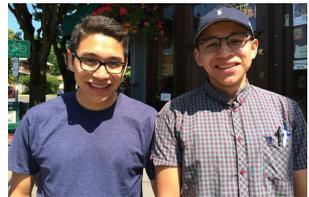
Akosua Bekoe, a 2014 graduate of the Early College at Guilford in **Greensboro, N.C.**, was accepted to 24 universities--including six of the eight Ivy League schools--and received 22 scholarships totaling \$4.4 million. Bekoe, who received more scholarship money than any other student in Guilford County Schools' Class of 2014, chose to attend Columbia University in New York City, where she plans to study economics.



Akosua Bekoe receives a high school diploma at her graduation ceremony from Greensboro's Early College in North Carolina.

## *Portland Twin Valedictorians*

Twins Brandon and Brian Orozco were valedictorians of the 2014 graduating class at Cleveland High School in **Portland, Ore.** Brandon is the recipient of a Gates Millennium Scholarship, which will pay for all his expenses at Harvey Mudd College in California, while Brian received a scholarship to attend Yale University in Connecticut.



Twins Brandon and Brian Orozco. Photo credit: Nicole Dungca /*The Oregonian*

## Cleveland Scholarship Winner



Cleveland student Yu Zhang, second from left, holds his \$10,000 oversized check and is congratulated by, left to right, his mom, school board chair Denise Link and principal Irene Javier.

Yu Zhang, a senior at Lincoln-West High School in **Cleveland**, was the recipient of \$10,000 Green-Garner college scholarship presented to him by Denise Link, chair of Cleveland Metropolitan School District's school board. Zhang was one of 30 students to compete for the scholarship, which Link received in 2013 to give to a student after winning the nation's top urban education leadership award—the Green-Garner Award—at the Council of the Great

City Schools' 57th Annual Fall Conference in Albuquerque.

## LEADERSHIP & ACCOUNTABILITY

### Urban Educator of the Year

Denise Link, the board chair for the **Cleveland Metropolitan School District**, was the recipient of the 2013 Green-Garner Award, the nation's highest honor for urban education leadership. Five school board members from urban school districts across the nation competed for the prize, which awards the winner a \$10,000 college scholarship to present to a student.



Denise Link (center) holds her \$10,000 oversized check and is congratulated by Voyager Learning/Sopris' Carolyn Gettridge, ARAMARK's Dennis Maple and Council Executive Michael Casserly as her son looks on.

## *Miami Leader Recognized*



Alberto Carvalho

Superintendent Alberto Carvalho of **Miami-Dade County Public Schools** was named the 2014 National Superintendent of the Year by AASA, The School Superintendents Association. He was recognized for his leadership expertise in Florida's Superintendent of the Year by the Florida Association of District School Superintendents. He has led the district for five years, and under his leadership the district won the 2012 Broad Prize for Urban Education and has seen substantial improvement in student outcomes.

## *Top Boston Official Honored*

The *Boston Business Journal* in 2013 named **Boston Public Schools** Superintendent John McDonough "CFO of the Year" in the nonprofit sector for his achievements as the school system's chief financial officer before he took the helm of the school district in the summer of 2013. He was honored for multiple accomplishments during his 17 years as CFO of the Boston school district.

## *Shift Campaign Launched*



Minneapolis Schools Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson announces the district's *Shift* campaign to boost student achievement.

In an effort to close the achievement gap and raise achievement, **Minneapolis Public Schools'** Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson launched the *Shift* campaign. The initiative calls for a shift in culture, behavior, attitude and service at all levels of the school district to positively impact organizational change. As part of the *Shift* campaign, a partnership zone will be established in which 20-30 percent of schools will have performance contracts with the school district based on partnership, achievement, autonomy and accountability.

## *Miami Leader Honored*

Superintendent Alberto Carvalho of **Miami-Dade County Public Schools** was the recipient of the 26th annual Hispanic Heritage Awards created to commemorate Hispanic Heritage Month. He received the Education Award for his contributions to Hispanic cultural pride and accomplishments in the classroom and community.

## *Teacher Preparation*



Lori Ward

Lori Ward, superintendent of Ohio's **Dayton Public Schools**, and Candy Olson, a member of Florida's **Hillsborough County** school board, participated in the adoption of the next generation of accreditation standards for educator preparation. They are on the Board of Directors of the Council for the Accreditation Educator Preparation, which announced new accreditation standards to ensure quality educator preparation in producing highly effective teachers.



Candy Olson

## *Distinguished Principals*

Four principals from urban school districts were among 61 elementary and middle school principals inducted into the 2013 Class of National Distinguished Principals by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Recognized for exceptional leadership were Sharon McNary in **Memphis**, Janet Knott in **Jacksonville, Fla.**, Karen Barnes in **Baltimore** and Kelly Aramaki in **Seattle**.

## *Principal Transforms School*



Las Vegas Principal Kathleen Decker, right, receives the Terrel H. Bell Award for School Leadership.

Kathleen Decker, principal of Walter Bracken STEAM in Las Vegas' **Clark County School District**, was one of seven principals to receive the Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding Leadership. The award recognizes National Blue Ribbon School principals who have transformed their schools.

## *Services-Learning Award*

Brenda Elliott, executive director of student services and character development for North Carolina's **Guilford County Schools** in Greensboro, received the 2014 G. Bernard Gill Urban Services-Learning Leadership award from the National Youth Leadership Council for her service-learning leadership.

## *Executive Honored*

John Ford, the director of operations for the **Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools**, received a certificate of achievement from the Council of the Great City Schools' Urban School Executives Program designed for mid-level managers who meet the highest professional standards and have the attributes to become senior executives in urban school districts.

### *L.A. CIO Honored*



Ronald Chandler

Ronald Chandler, chief information officer for the **Los Angeles Unified School District**, was named among the top 100 communications technology professionals in the nation by *ComputerWorld* magazine. He was the only person hailing from a school district to be named a Premier 100 Information Technology Leader.

### *Houston COO Wins*

Leo Bobadilla, the chief operations officer for the **Houston Independent School District**, received the 2014 Distinguished Service Award at the Council of the Great City Schools' Chief Operating Officers Meeting in New Orleans. Sponsored by Chartwells School Dining Services/Thompson Hospitality, the award recognizes business officials who exemplify leadership, innovation, commitment and professionalism in urban education.

### *Miami Principal*

Adrienne Leal, principal of Coral Reef Senior High School in **Miami**, was named the 2014 National Principal of the Year by the Magnet Schools of America organization. The selection was based on demonstrated excellence in such areas as promoting equity and diversity among students and staff.

## TEACHING

### *Presidential Awards*

Several urban schoolteachers were among the 102 mathematics and science teachers named as recipients of the 2014 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Urban teachers from **Anchorage, Boston, Des Moines, Denver, Minneapolis, New York City** and **Bridgeport, Conn.**, were among this year's recipients. The **District of Columbia Public Schools** and Florida's **School District of Palm Beach County** also had two teachers receive the award. Administered by the National Science Foundation, the award is the nation's highest recognition in math and science for elementary and secondary school teachers.

### *"People" Honors Teachers*

Brenda Martinez, Radarmes Galarza and Elissa Guarnero, teachers and founders of ALBA elementary in **Milwaukee**, were the first teaching team selected to receive *People* magazine's teacher-of-the-year award. The award was presented to six teachers across the nation who are helping students succeed.

### *Oscars of Teaching*

Seven urban educators were among the 35 teachers, principals and specialists across the nation who received the \$25,000 Milken Educator Awards, known as the "Oscars of Teaching." The 2014 awards were presented to big-city educators in **Honolulu, Milwaukee, Albuquerque, Baltimore, Portland, Jackson** and **Broward County**.



Teacher Michelle Kay in Honolulu is congratulated by her students for winning the \$25,000 Milken Educator Award.

## *North Carolina Teacher of the Year*



James Ford

James Ford, a 9th grade world history teacher at Garinger High School in **Charlotte**, N.C., was named the 2014 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year. Ford is the first Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools educator in four decades to win the award. He will spend the school year traveling the state as an ambassador for more than 95,000 teachers in the state.

## *\$25,000 Prize*

Kelly Zunkiewicz, a teacher in Florida's **Hillsborough County Public Schools** in Tampa, won the \$25,000 Fishman Prize for Superlative Classroom Practice, an award for exceptionally effective teachers working in high-poverty public schools. Zunkiewicz, who teaches high-school AP calculus and pre-calculus honors and serves as a math coach, was one of four educators to receive the prize among 820 teachers from around the nation.



Hillsborough teacher Kelly Zunkiewicz is congratulated by her students for winning a \$25,000 teaching prize.

## *“Jeopardy” Contestant*

Mary Beth Hammerstrom, a teacher in **Anchorage**, placed second in the *Jeopardy! Tournament of Teachers* game show and won \$50,000. She was one of 15 educators nationwide to compete.

## INNOVATION

### *Green School Makeover*

**Boston** Latin School bested more than 450 public, private and charter schools across the nation to win the Global Green USA's second annual Green School Makeover Competition. Schools were required to submit a student-created outline of green initiatives and achievements, which was reviewed by a panel of environmental judges. As the winner of the contest, the Boston school received a \$75,000 grant to be used to create a sustainable school garden and reduce energy usage.

### *Measuring Teacher Attitudes*

**Cleveland Metropolitan School District** required applicants for teaching positions in the 2013-2014 school year to undergo an online test to determine if they were up for the challenge of working with the district's students. The test was designed to measure their attitudes on working with urban schoolchildren as well as other factors such as the applicant's attitudes toward parents and working in a big-city school district.

### *Web Award*

**Broward County Public Schools** in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., received the 2013 Best of the Web Award from the Center for Digital Education for its Defining the Core web site, which provides parents, teachers, staff and other school district stakeholders with important about the Common Core State Standards being implemented in the district.

## *Safer Schools*

**Miami-Dade County Public Schools** developed a plan to increase school safety in which the district's police department will build relationships with students and parents and conduct awareness campaigns through law-related education and student presentations. The plan also calls for additional school resource officers at secondary schools and working with local, state, and federal agencies to prevent weapons and drugs from getting onto school sites.

## *Ending Zero Tolerance*



Broward County Schools Superintendent Robert Runcie signs a Collaborative Agreement on School Discipline as school board members, students and community partners look on.

The **Broward County Public Schools** signed an agreement with local community organizations, such as the NAACP, to establish guidelines for handling non-violent offenses on school campuses and end zero tolerance discipline measures. Other big-city districts reforming their zero tolerance disciplinary polices include **Wichita, Columbus, and Birmingham.**

## *Welcoming Refugees*

Ohio's **Dayton Public Schools** used a Refugee School Impact Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to create a mentoring program for refugee high school students who have been in the nation three years or less. The program provides a student with a mentor who visits the participant's home once a week and not only works with students on academics, but also on everyday cultural issues.

## *Reducing Discipline Disparities*

Four urban school districts are participating in PASSAGE (Positive and Safe Schools Advancing Greater Equity), an initiative aimed at reducing racial disparities in school discipline supported by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. School systems in **Nashville, New York City, Los Angeles** and **Chicago** will take part in the program and share best practices on how they can move away from punitive, exclusionary approaches in disciplining students.

## *New in Houston*

**Houston Independent School District** is implementing a number of initiatives, including a program called Home-Field Advantage that targets areas that have high mobility rates and offers transportation to students. The district is also launching 14 new Spanish dual-language programs and a program aimed to help school administrators and central-office staff understand the benefits of diversity for the school system.

## *Free ACT Camp*

For the first time ever, all high school juniors in Alabama are required to take the ACT college-entrance exam, so **Birmingham City Schools** has teamed up with a local nonprofit organization to offer students free classes to prepare for the ACT.

## *Three New Schools*

The **School District of Philadelphia** opened three new schools for the 2014-2015 school year that offer a personalized and high-quality learning environment with community support where students must achieve proficiency to satisfy specific goals to advance. The new schools include The LINC school, which will focus on global leadership, inquiry-based learning and community engagement.

## *Firefighter Program*

North Carolina's **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools** has created a pilot firefighter technology program at two high schools designed to introduce students to the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to become a firefighter. Upon completion, students can apply to be members of the local fire department after graduation.



**Kelvin Brim, a captain with the Charlotte Fire Department, helps a student in the pilot firefighter technology program the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has launched at two high schools.**

## *Partnership in Cincinnati*

**Cincinnati Public Schools** teamed with the City of Cincinnati to improve the district's schools as well as the local community. The Alliance for Community and Educational Success will involve the district and city working together to address five key areas: population growth, workforce development, safe and livable neighborhoods, wellness and access to technology.

## *Pre-Kindergarten Expanded*

**Cleveland Metropolitan School District** partnered with the mayor and other city officials to expand high-quality pre-kindergarten in an initiative called PRE4CLE, aimed at increasing pre-school seats for 4-year-olds for the 2014-2015 school year. Under the plan, 2,000 additional 4-year-olds are expected to be enrolled in high-quality pre-K by 2016. The first-year of the plan is estimated to cost \$15 million and will be paid for with public and private funds.

## *Honored for Energy Use*

**Des Moines Public Schools** received the ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year Award by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy, presented to 127 organizations for their commitment to protecting the environment through superior energy efficiency. The school district was also selected as one of 10 Climate Communications winners that have created communications and raised awareness about the impact of climate change.

## *Schools/University Partnership*

The Elmer A. Henderson: A Johns Hopkins Partnership School in **Baltimore, Md.**, opened in January 2014 and is operated by the Johns Hopkins University School of Education in collaboration with Morgan State University's School of Education. Henderson-Hopkins is officially a contract school of the Baltimore City Public Schools, but is owned by the nonprofit East Baltimore Development Inc., in an effort to create a high-performing school as well as revitalize the surrounding neighborhood. The \$53-million, 90,000-square-foot-facility serves 720 students from grades K-8 on a seven-acre campus.

## *Pre-Engineering Course*

In an effort to prepare high school students for college-level work, the **Providence Public School District** in Rhode Island is offering the state's first high school pre-engineering course. The course was developed by a professor of engineering at the University of Rhode Island, who retooled his online course in practical engineering so it was suitable for high school students. The course is part of a plan by district officials to implement a career pathways initiative this fall, including the opportunity for middle school students to earn credit for out-of-school work.

## *L.A. Summer Program*

The **Los Angeles Unified School District** partnered with Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti to launch the Los Angeles Summer of Learning program, a citywide initiative to keep youth engaged in learning throughout the summer. The Summer of Learning program, targeted to young people ages 3-24, provided access to 100 learning opportunities at city parks and libraries, schools, museums and cultural institutions and offered learning options in science, technology, engineering, arts and math.

## *Teacher Evaluation Programs*

The **District of Columbia Public Schools** has delayed evaluating teachers by student test scores for one year to help educators better grasp the shifts entailed in the district's exams based on the Common Core State Standards. **Dallas Independent School District** has created a new teacher evaluation system that rewards teachers based on their performance in the classroom and the **Oakland Unified School District** is expanding a teacher evaluation pilot program that provides teachers with opportunities to receive objective feedback.

## *Long Beach Promise*



Long Beach student Cleavona Jackson was joined by her father during a recent panel discussion celebrating the sixth anniversary of the Long Beach College Promise program. Jackson was one of 25 eighth-graders who received scholarships to Long Beach City College as part of the Promise program.

increase in the number of Long Beach students who have enrolled at CSULB.

California's **Long Beach Unified School District** celebrated the sixth anniversary of the Long Beach College Promise program, which provides graduating seniors in the school district a free semester of tuition to Long Beach City College (LBCC) as well as guaranteed admission to California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) for students who qualify. Since the program's inception in 2008, more than 5,600 high school graduates have benefited from free enrollment at LBCC and there has been a 43 percent

## *Online Finance Course*

**Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools** offered students this summer a personal finance course online through the district's Virtual School. The personal finance class instructs students on how to make both short- and long-term financial goals. Students must weigh the options of higher education and career choices, looking into student loans and potential earnings from a variety of careers.

## *Denver Teacher Residency*

**Denver Public Schools** partnered with two local universities to create the Denver Student Teacher Residency, an effort to provide an intensive residency experience for college seniors working toward a bachelor's degree and teaching license. The program aims to aid in the transition from college student to becoming a first-year teacher by giving students the opportunity to become teacher residents in the Denver school district for a full year under the mentorship of a master teacher.



# GREAT CITY GRADS



**Founder of Amazon.com  
Jeffrey Bezos**

1982 graduate  
(Valedictorian)

Miami-Dade County  
Public School



**Past New York City  
Department of  
Education Chancellor  
Dennis Walcott**

1969 graduate

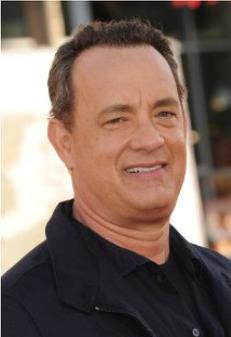
New York Public Schools



**U.S. Senator, South Carolina  
Tim Scott**

1983 graduate

Charleston County School  
District Schools



**Oscar-Winning Actor  
Tom Hanks**

1974 graduate

Oakland Unified School  
District



**Molecular Geneticist  
Wendy Chung**

1986 graduate

Miami-Dade County  
Public School



**Mayor, City of Providence  
Angel Taveras**

1988 graduate

Providence Public School  
District



**Mayor of San Francisco  
Edwin Lee**

1970 graduate

Seattle Public Schools



**President & Chief Executive  
Officer of Merck & Co.  
Kenneth Frazier**

1973 graduate

School District of Philadelphia



**Mayor of Baltimore  
Stephanie Rawlings-  
Blake**

1988 graduate

Baltimore City  
Public Schools



**Orange County Public  
Schools (Orlando)  
Superintendent  
Barbara Jenkins**

1979 graduate

Orange County Public Schools

## CONCLUSION

The stories highlighted in this report are just a small sample of the good news emanating from the nation's urban public schools despite the many challenges they face. Urban schools are delivering results -- and succeeding. They still have a long way to go to advance to higher levels of achievement, but they are poised to do so.

But urban schools need assistance. They need people who will be part of the solution in helping to improve the nation's inner-city schools. Urban schools need:

- More research about what works in urban schools, especially focusing on systemic reforms;
- Technical assistance from universities, and state education departments;
- Resources to help in teacher training, curriculum development and other instructional needs to improve teaching and learning in urban classrooms;
- Preschool programs to better prepare students, especially from low-income families, for grade school; and
- Support of school district leadership, encouraging patience for reform efforts.

And for urban school districts to climb to higher levels of achievement, they need enough financial support to improve facilities and instruction.

As the success stories in this report demonstrate, America's urban public schools can achieve -- embracing challenge, producing results.



Albuquerque	East Baton Rouge	Oklahoma City
Anchorage	El Paso	Omaha
Atlanta	Fort Worth	Orange County
Austin	Fresno	Palm Beach
Baltimore	Guilford County	Philadelphia
Birmingham	Honolulu	Pittsburgh
Boston	Houston	Portland
Bridgeport	Indianapolis	Providence
Broward County	Jackson	Richmond
Buffalo	Jacksonville	Rochester
Charleston	Kansas City	Sacramento
Charlotte	Long Beach	San Diego
Chicago	Los Angeles	San Francisco
Cincinnati	Louisville	Santa Ana
Clark County	Miami-Dade	Seattle
Cleveland	Milwaukee	Shelby County
Columbus	Minneapolis	St. Louis
Dallas	Nashville	St. Paul
Dayton	Newark	Tampa
Denver	New Orleans	Toledo
Des Moines	New York City	Washington, DC
Detroit	Norfolk	Wichita
	Oakland	

