

1956 - 2016



CELEBRATING 60 YEARS  
OF SERVICE TO AMERICA'S  
URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# 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 70 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.

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Michael Casserly

# **60 Years of Service to America's Urban Public Schools: 1956 to 2016**





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# A Look Back:

## The Beginning of a National Urban School Coalition

Few periods in modern American history have been as consequential to the school systems of the nation's big cities as the years between 1954 and 1957—the period in which the Council of the Great City Schools was founded.

It was during this period that the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *de jure* segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

A year after that ground-breaking decision, in 1955, Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi, accelerating the great migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus in December of that year. Levittown-type housing in the nation's suburbs represented 75 percent of all new housing starts in 1955, marking the point when the majority of the nation's largest cities began losing population. The AFL also merged with the CIO that year to form the nation's largest and most powerful labor union. Richard Daley was first elected mayor of Chicago that year and Martin Luther King was getting his start in Montgomery. And 1955 was the year conservative economist Milton Friedman initially proposed the idea of private school vouchers.

In 1956, President Eisenhower signed the Interstate Highway Act, providing a ready exit from cities that many African-Americans were flocking to for opportunities and jobs, and over 100 members of Congress signed the Southern Manifesto, opposing the *Brown* decision.

A year later, in 1957, a reluctant President Eisenhower called the Army's 101 Airborne division into Little Rock to protect nine black high school students, who would form the vanguard of efforts to make the promise of Brown real. That year also saw the launch of Sputnik, a wake-up call that America needed to reform and improve its educational system, particularly in the areas of math and science.

These watershed years between 1954 and 1957 put into stark relief many of the challenges urban public schools would for decades to come: race and desegregation, muscular unionism, mayoral control of schools, suburbanization,



Ben Willis

school choice, and the need for reform.

In the middle of this incredible period, in the fall of 1956, Chicago School Superintendent Ben Willis convened a meeting attended by leaders of 12 of the nation's largest city public school systems to discuss the future of vocational education. This meeting would mark the beginning of the Council of the Great City Schools.

It is lost to history how significantly the tumultuous social and political events of the period shaped the thinking of the Chicago superintendent and provided the impetus for forming an urban school coalition.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the coalescing of big city school leaders that year would lay the groundwork for an organization that would eventually devote itself to the issues of educational equity and excellence.

In 1956, offering vocational education in urban high schools was viewed as a critical strategy for providing America's pre-Sputnik-era workforce with talent, particularly in the major metropolitan manufacturing areas of the Northeast and Midwest. Willis had previously served as school superintendent in Buffalo, then an industrial powerhouse. He had a special interest, as did many of his urban school colleagues, in ensuring that big city vocational programs were compatible with the needs of an ever-changing workforce and could bolster the economic fortunes of their cities.

Sargent Shriver, who was serving in 1956 as president of the Chicago Board of Education, delivered the keynote address at that initial meeting of big city school leaders. At the time, Shriver, John F. Kennedy's brother-in-law, was managing Kennedy family business interests in the area. Later, of course, his brother-in-law would become President of the United States and Shriver, himself, would become nationally known for his guiding role in developing the Peace Corps and serving as its first director. In his speech to the gathered urban school leaders, Shriver emphasized the importance of standardizing vocational terms, boosting the quality of urban vocational education programs, and eliminating the dichotomy between regular and vocational education tracks.



Sargent Shriver

<sup>1</sup> Many who remember the period, however, assert that urban school leaders at the time were mostly cognizant of the changing demographics of their schools and the eroding economic base of their cities.



That initial meeting was a success, as evidenced by the fact that the participants planned another session in 1957 to which only top-level representatives of school systems from cities with populations over 600,000 were invited. These representatives included the superintendent, school board president, and head of vocational education in each of the participating school districts. As an outgrowth of this meeting, the group launched a multicity vocational education project, which was supported by the Chicago-based Sears-Roebuck Foundation. The fledgling group went on to publish a number of well-regarded reports on vocational education and the “world of work” under the auspices of the Great City Schools Improvement Studies—reports that would later help to undergird the rationale for the federal Vocational Education Act of 1963.

After a number of years, it became apparent to the *ad hoc* coalition of urban school leaders that a more formal organization would be needed to enable city school systems to address the broader educational, social, and economic issues that were becoming increasingly evident to urban educators. The Council evolved, then, from a series of periodic meetings driven by a single district and leader (Chicago and Superintendent Willis) on a single issue (vocational education) into an influential national organization focused on raising urban student achievement, improving school leadership and management, and boosting public confidence in big city public schools.

As early as 1956, the *ad hoc* coalition took the steps necessary to ensure its sustainability. It formed an executive committee to plan future activities, created bylaws, and offered membership to school systems in cities with populations of 600,000 and above. The group also stipulated that each city would be represented on the board of directors by either the superintendent or a school board member—making the governance structure unique in including both board members and administrators under the same roof.

In January 1959, the group identified a broad range of issues on which its leadership would focus, including demographic changes, fiscal constraints, curriculum needs, teacher recruitment, aging physical facilities, and urban economic development. That year, the group adopted the Great Cities Program for School Improvement as its official name.

The new entity’s emergence was enhanced by a series of grants that the Ford Foundation made to 11 cities in the late 1950s and early 1960s to help educate disadvantaged urban children. This initiative was part of the

Gray Area Projects and helped make the unique educational problems of the large cities more visible nationally. The projects were not coordinated centrally by the budding organization, but representatives of the participating cities frequently met at Council gatherings. This coming together under a single umbrella helped to solidify the new group's unique role in providing opportunities for educational leaders from the nation's largest school districts to share information and discuss issues of common concern.

The organization was formally incorporated in 1961 as the Research Council of the Great Cities Program for School Improvement. The inclusion of the term "research" in the new name reportedly arose out of the organization's interest in research as a critical tool for school improvement, but it also reflected a practical response to a Pennsylvania regulation that prohibited school systems from joining organizations other than for research purposes. The 14 charter members of the Research Council were Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

The primary purposes of the organization, as articulated in the articles of incorporation, were "to study the unique problems" faced by the Great Cities in their efforts to meet the comprehensive public school needs of urban citizens and to coordinate projects designed



**First Council Executive Director Fred Bertolaet and Council staff member Michael Usdan in 1964.**

"to provide solutions to these problems." In addition, the bylaws of the new group contained a provision (which was to remain a unique feature of the organization) that its leadership would be constituted of both school board members and superintendents. Once the organization was incorporated, it leased space for its offices in

the headquarters of the Chicago Board of Education and hired full-time staff. In 1962, Fred Bertolaet became the first executive director of the newly chartered Council.

Four critical areas of interest emerged for the organization immediately following incorporation: (1) the special needs of the "educationally and socially disadvantaged," (2) vocational education, (3) fiscal policies, and (4) teacher education. The Council developed activities around each of these areas, enabling the organization to assist its member districts in identifying

common problems, pooling resources, and taking collective action designed specifically on behalf of students in the nation's largest cities.

In these early days, the Council gained national visibility by writing papers and reports— particularly on vocational education, school financing and facilities, and teacher preparation—and serving as the voice of big city schools. The new visibility began to reach maturity in 1962 when President Kennedy appointed Council President Ben Willis to chair the national Panel of Consultants on Vocational Education.<sup>2</sup> The panel's recommendations were influential in shaping the Vocational Education Act the next year.

The Council went on to launch initiatives throughout the 1960s dealing with educational television, veterans in public services, textbook publishers, and instructional materials, and convened an extensive series of national and regional conferences and seminars on a wide range of issues touching on urban schools.

As the 1960s evolved and the civil rights movement developed greater momentum, the Council responded, sometimes in ways that pleased the civil rights community and sometimes not. The group's destiny, however, was to be intertwined with the civil rights issues of the day, as its member districts became the epicenter of volatile school desegregation struggles in the courtrooms and on the streets. Accordingly, the Council's agenda broadened beyond vocational education. The organization's reports, testimony, and meetings on the special needs of disadvantaged urban students helped to shape the rationale for creating the Office of Civil Rights and the Office of Economic Opportunity, as well as the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This work also helped pave the way for the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965.

The ESEA, in particular, broke new ground, as the federal government embarked on its most significant involvement in public education up until that time. Dozens of Council board members and superintendents testified at congressional hearings and helped to build the momentum for ESEA's early and decisive passage. The extensive testimony by leaders of urban school districts also helped target federal Title I and Impact Aid dollars on the poorest communities, a need that the organization would continue to

<sup>2</sup> Willis would later find himself on the wrong side of history by slow-walking school desegregation in Chicago, and Shriver would join JFK in Washington and become one of America's most beloved figures.

emphasize over the years in subsequent reauthorizations of the Act, including the most recent one in 2015.

The role that the Council played in the passage of ESEA and other Great Society programs made it clear to the membership that there was strength in unity. This involvement in the most significant federal education legislation of the day and the accompanying national visibility dramatically changed the course of the Council's history. From then on, the Council's research efforts would be accompanied by public advocacy aimed at pushing for federal help in addressing the unique financial and programmatic needs of the nation's largest city school systems.

To be sure, ESEA would have passed Congress without the Council's support, but the organization played a significant role in documenting and articulating the needs of urban school students and ensuring that these needs were heard and considered. Council members and staff worked closely with key legislative leaders and the U.S. Office of Education, providing data that were unavailable elsewhere. At least part of the development of the original Title I formula, for example, was predicated on data provided by the Council on the number of children in households receiving welfare payments.

The Council's growing role in the federal legislative process in the 1960s hastened the organization's move from Chicago to Washington, D.C. That move took place in 1967. A year later, the group's executive vice president, Alva Dittrick, closed the Chicago office.

## **The Second Decade: 1966 to 1976**

The summer of 1966 marked another turning point in the Council's history as two of its founders left the group. Ben Willis, the Chicago school superintendent, and Sam Brownell, the veteran Detroit school superintendent, had served as the Council's president and vice president, respectively, since the organization's inception a decade earlier. Willis was the Council's driving force and prime mover, while the highly respected Brownell, a former U.S. Commissioner of Education, provided seasoned and thoughtful leadership. In addition, Executive Director Fred Bertolaet left the Council in the fall of 1966 to accept a professorship at the University of Michigan and was replaced by staff member Carl Thornblad. Ironically, Shriver re-

turned to the Council at its fall meeting in 1966 for another keynote speech. But with all the changes at the top, the organization's compass changed significantly and tensions in the membership became more evident.

Some school board members began to feel dominated by the superintendents on the board of directors, and pushed to assume larger leadership roles after Willis left. In response, the Council instituted annually rotating leadership and broadened its membership into different sections of the country. Periodically, racial tensions within the group also sprang up. There had been, in fact, only one African-American on the first board of directors that was established after the Council was chartered in 1961. Since there were virtually no minority superintendents in these early days, school boards were the only source of African-American or Hispanic leaders. Ultimately, the executive committee was doubled in size (with board members in the majority) to address these racial concerns. The Rev. Darneau Stewart of Detroit, the first African-American to chair the board of directors, was also the first school board member to serve in that capacity. He assumed this leadership position in 1969.

The partnership between school board members and superintendents, who chair the board in alternating years, continues to be a feature unique to the organization. No other national education group unites these two constituencies in the way that the Council has from the beginning. This arrangement remains a significant strength of the organization.

The Council's agenda continued to expand through the late 1960s as it worked to address the controversial and seemingly intractable social and economic issues that challenged its membership—collective bargaining, financial inequities, school integration, busing, aging facilities, job training, and urban poverty.

In 1970, the organization changed its name to the Council of the Great City Schools, removing “Research” from the title. The thinking at the time was that “research” conveyed too narrow a sense of the organization's multifaceted mission and role—although it never steered far from its research roots. Indeed, at a 1970 meeting of the group, the Council adopted “advocacy” as its working and operational focus. This shift in emphasis reflected a deliberate decision on the Council's part to project the special needs of urban



schools on a national scale and enhance the group's capacity to exchange information between and among member districts.

This reassessment of goals and priorities led to a reorganization of the Council's staff to reflect three major objectives: (1) information exchange, (2) staff services to members, and (3) the communication and advocacy of policies that could benefit urban students. In 1971, Sam Husk was hired from the Office of Economic Opportunity to push the public advocacy agenda of the Council and Jack Hornback, former superintendent of the San Diego public school system, was appointed the group's executive vice president, replacing Alvin Skelly. (A list of former Council chief executives can be found in the appendix.)

The Council also changed the requirements for membership in the early 1970s. Under the original requirements, each city had to have an overall population of 600,000 or a student enrollment of 90,000. The result was that membership was limited to school systems in 20 cities. The new requirements opened up the organization to a greater range of communities. Now, communities of at least 300,000 people and with a student enrollment of at least 70,000 were eligible for membership.

By the early 1970s, some members raised concerns that the Council had become too dependent on "soft money" and was too project-oriented. As more emphasis was put on advocacy, communications between member districts, and data collection, foundation funding dried up, forcing reductions in staff. Conflicts also emerged about the optimum size of the organization, an issue that persists to this day. Most representatives of member districts believed that the Council would be stronger and more cohesive if membership was limited. The consensus was that a smaller entity would facilitate closer relationships and retain a common focus on urban schools. Virtually no one wanted the Council to emulate the much larger national educational organizations of superintendents and board members that lacked an urban orientation.

During this period, the Council moved to more systematically collect data from its member districts. It also established consultative services and study teams to enhance communications and information sharing. And, increasingly, the organization became a resource to its members in areas such as curriculum and instruction, administration and personnel, facilities, school-community relations, special education, finance, and legislative re-

lations.

The evolving and proactive nature of the Council was illustrated in 1972 when the organization mobilized its legislative liaison network and threatened to file suit unless the federal government used 1970 census data in determining eligibility for federal education funds. In 1972, the Council also joined court cases that sought to reform and equalize school finance formulas, and it advocated for more urban involvement in the National Institute of Education and other federal research and demonstration programs.

In 1973, the Council conducted a needs-assessment among the member districts and identified student achievement and the financing of urban school districts as top priorities. The organization also set up task forces in finance and early childhood education and launched projects in teacher education, student involvement, reading, and vocational education. At the same time, the Council's board urged its staff to strengthen the organization's financial position and legislative thrust.

In 1974, Jack Hornback left the Council and Samuel Husk was elevated to executive vice president. Milton Bins, a former official with Harcourt-Brace, was brought on as a senior associate and Kristi Hanson as legislative specialist. The organization



**Sam Husk, Detroit Superintendent Art Jefferson, and New York City Chancellor Richard R. Green.**

had 24 member districts that year, but it continued to struggle financially as foundation and government projects evaporated and its legislative agenda took on a higher priority.

With a staff of sometimes no more than four or five people throughout the decade and a budget that was a constant source of angst to the organization's fiscal stewards, the Council remained involved in conferences and projects that dealt with an array of major education issues. These issues included school desegregation, declining enrollments, school violence, the education of disabled students, school finance, declining test scores, and youth employment. Despite this involvement and the continuing relevance of the Council's mission, the end of the Council's second decade found the organization struggling and in financial difficulty.



## The Next Fifteen Years: 1977 through 1991

In the 1970s, the Council of the Great City Schools had limited staff capacity, a weak financial outlook, and uncertain prospects. Membership had stagnated at 24 districts and morale problems began to beset the organization. It was not always clear that the group could meet payroll, and lines of credit or loans from foundations and banks were sometimes necessary to keep the organization afloat. One veteran staff member characterized the period as “living in poverty.” Indeed, fiscal issues plagued the Council throughout the 1980s as well.

Nonetheless, the organization made some notable staff changes in the late 1970s. Michael Casserly was hired in 1977 as a research assistant after having consulted for the organization in the area of school crime. He was soon moved to the legislative affairs unit, when Hanson left the Council to join the office of Senator Jacob Javits, but he retained his research responsibilities. Casserly had no legislative experience, but within weeks of being brought onboard he successfully handled a pressing Title I formula problem that had arisen as part of the 1977-78 ESEA reauthorization.



Michael Casserly

In 1979, Congress approved the creation of the cabinet-level U.S. Department of Education at the behest of President Jimmy Carter. The views of Council members, who were almost equally split between those having American Federation of Teachers (AFT)-affiliated unions (which opposed the creation of the department) and those with National Education Association (NEA)-affiliated unions (which favored the creation of the department), were divided. Some members feared greater federal intrusion in local school affairs; others welcomed it. The Council tilted against creating the department, but did not play a proactive role in the policy debates.

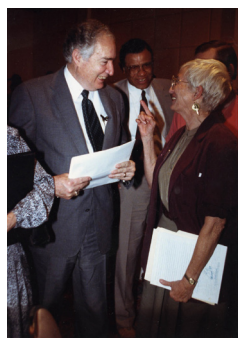
The organization was also involved at the time in various youth employment projects that were funded by the Department of Labor, and played a role in support of the youth employment legislation developed by the office of Vice President Walter Mondale, who headed the initiative.

As the organization entered the 1980s, it continued to be involved in a variety of small-scale projects, operating at a less visible and intense level



than it had in its early days. The Council focused on international student exchanges, special education, single parents, dropout prevention, computer technology, economic and human capital development, health care, and the need for standardized data.

However, the early to mid-1980s were also marked by a string of legislative successes spearheaded by the Council. Between 1981 and 1984, the organization was instrumental in blocking President Reagan's proposal to consolidate Title I and the Education of All Handicapped Act (the precursor to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA]) and change them into block grant programs. The Council tied up a House-Senate conference committee for months over the funding of Title I concentration grants. The Council also played a central and strategic role in delaying the President's tuition tax credit bill in the Senate Finance Committee, and then helping to defeat it on the Senate floor. In addition, the Council led a bipartisan coalition to write and approve the Magnet Schools of America Act, and it spearheaded an effort to target aid from the federal Vocational Education Act into urban schools. The next year, 1985, the Council and the Chicago schools, led by their lobbyist Jeff Simering, would team up to write and spur passage of the federal Dropout Prevention Demonstration Act. Years later, Casserly would hire Simering to replace him as legislative director of the Council.



**U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos at Council meeting in Miami in 1989.**

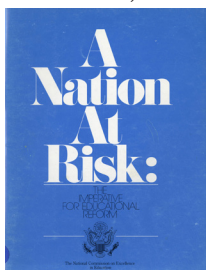
These successes paved the way for the Council to take a strong role in targeting federal aid under the new Drug Free Schools Act and the Math and Science Education Act, and to initiate such legislative packages as the Teacher Professional Development Act, Smart Start, and the Urban Schools of America (USA) Act in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the outcome of these efforts was mixed at best, the Council saw its role increasingly as initiating federal legislation rather than simply reacting to the proposals of others. It marked the beginning of a new assertiveness on the part of the organization.

The increasingly visible legislative activities also spurred a gain in the organization's membership, which jumped to 32 member districts in 1983 and

to 44 member districts by 1988. Membership increases were also spurred in 1983 when the Council amended its eligibility rules to allow school districts in cities with populations of at least 250,000 or enrollments of 35,000 students to join the organization—criteria that remain today.

In 1982, the Council made another important hire in Teri ValeCruz, who would eventually lead an administrative team including Terry Tabor and Alisa Adams that would help the organization strengthen its finances and elevate the quality of the growing number of Council meetings and conferences.

In 1983, an event occurred that presented a huge challenge to public



education, particularly in the nation's largest cities—the publication of the U.S. Department of Education's *A Nation at Risk* report. The report, which harshly criticized the quality of public education, was a landmark development in American education and it received widespread attention throughout the country. The report's powerful rhetoric suggested that the nation's faltering public schools amounted to “unilateral disarmament” in an increasingly competitive global economy.

*A Nation at Risk* ignited an education reform movement that continues in fits and starts to this day. Business groups such as the Business Roundtable, the Committee for Economic Development, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce took on the issue of public education in unprecedented ways, and major associations of political leaders such as the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures followed



President George H.W. Bush addresses historic education summit in Charlottesville, Va.

suit. The governors' report, *Time for Results*, was particularly influential, prompting the first President Bush to convene an historic education summit at the University of Virginia in 1989 at which six national education goals were formulated. The Council attended the summit and responded by releasing its own report, *Results in the Making*, describing what big city schools were doing to meet the national goals.

Educators and their organizations were clearly entering a new era of accountability, and these national developments placed new pressure on the Council and other education associations. The organization had seen periods of dissatisfaction among factions of its membership since the late 1960s, but rumbling began to reach a new level of intensity in the late-1980s. Some members of the group feared becoming little more than a “club,” whose leadership was limited to the area of legislation and could not respond to growing public pressures for better results and greater accountability. There was even discussion about whether the organization had outlived its usefulness and needed to be disbanded entirely.

These apprehensions led the Council to commission a study in 1989 by the McKenzie Group titled “A Performance and Efficiency Study of the Council of Great City Schools.” The Group was led by Floretta McKenzie, the former superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools. In a survey of the organization’s membership, which was conducted as part of the study, representatives of the Council’s member districts indicated that the value of the group rested in its ability to exercise its collective political strength. Survey respondents also viewed the Council’s work in promoting collaboration, networking, and information sharing as particularly useful.

Still, approximately one-third of the membership expressed disaffection with the Council. Critics claimed that the group was focused too narrowly on project-like work, was too inward-looking, and was too parochial to be effective, contending that the organization was not living up to its potential and was not active enough in national debates about educational reform. In other words, critics worried that the Council was too oriented toward the status quo at a time of dynamic change in public education. At the same time, members praised the Council’s lobbying and legislative efforts. Paradoxically, perhaps, they were also worried that these efforts were coming to define the organization at the expense of other needs in research, communications, conferences, and other functions. The McKenzie study set the stage for a substantial turnover of staff in 1991.

This period was capped by a 1991 National Urban School Summit in Washington, D.C., convened by the Council, organized in part by the McKenzie Group, and attended by representatives of the Council’s member districts and many of the nation’s leading education policy leaders. The sum-

mit laid out a series of National Urban Education Goals, a research agenda, and the proposed Urban Schools of America bill. Behind the scenes, the Council's executive committee voted to dismiss the group's leadership.

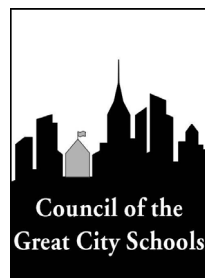
## Fifteen Years More: 1992 to 2006

The findings of the McKenzie Group's study provided support to those who advocated for major leadership changes within the Council. In 1991, both the executive director and deputy executive director left the Council after almost two decades of service. In January 1992, Philadelphia Superintendent and Council Chair Connie Clayton appointed Michael Casserly, who had served for many years as head of the group's legislative and research units, as interim executive director, and the Council launched a national search for permanent leadership. At the time, the Council had 47 members.



Connie Clayton

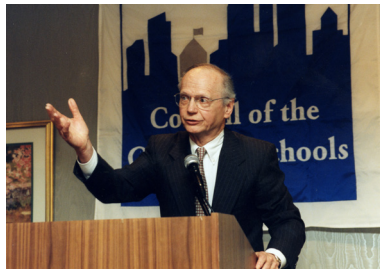
Despite the continued search for top leadership, Casserly moved quickly to resolve some of the issues at the heart of member dissatisfaction with the organization and to broaden the group's outreach with a more focused communications program. The Council initiated a newsletter called *The Urban Educator*; it changed the group's logo; and it began to produce annual reports. The Council recruited Henry Duvall from the national office of the American Red Cross to serve as Communications Director. And the Council made an explicit effort to accentuate the positive strides being made by big city schools while, at the same time, providing a more balanced and credible assessment of the serious challenges facing urban systems.



The Council's visibility continued to grow during the early 1990s. In May, 1992, the organization and the National Science Foundation convened a major conference on improving math and science instruction in the nation's urban schools. Late in 1992, the Council issued a first-ever report card, *National Urban Education Goals: Baseline Indicators 1990-91*, on the quality of urban education in member districts. This unprecedented document—the first national report to publish disaggregated test scores for in-

dividual city school districts—triggered widespread media attention, drew a favorable editorial from the *Washington Post*, and helped the organization earn plaudits for its transparency in revealing hitherto unrevealed data. Three examples of a new proactive style in Council communications included a blistering letter by Casserly to the editor of the *Chicago Sun Times* on what the Council saw as misuse of its data, an opinion piece by Casserly published by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in the aftermath of the Los Angeles race riots that called the public’s attention to the fact that none of the schools in the riot-torn area had been damaged, and a November 4, 1992, letter to President-elect Bill Clinton challenging him to begin addressing the needs of the nation’s urban schools.

In January 1993, Richard Riley, the new Secretary of Education under President Clinton, met with the Council’s executive committee in his first meeting with a national education organization. Every U.S. Secretary of Education from Shirley Hofstadter to John King, in fact, has met with the organization and its leadership.



U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley

In recognition of the Council’s bold new direction, the executive committee hired Casserly as the organization’s permanent executive director in March of 1993. That year the Council also made another important change in its membership criteria, deciding that henceforth, the largest school district in each state regardless of size would be eligible for membership. This change led to the inclusion of school districts from such cities as Providence and Des Moines and broadened the scope of the organization’s political reach in Congress.



Dan Rather moderates Council Town Hall Meeting

In October 1993, the organization convened a highly visible National Town Hall Meeting on school safety and violence moderated by CBS anchor Dan Rather. A town-hall style event has since become a feature of all annual meetings and has been moderated over the years by such news luminaries as Carole Simpson,



**U.S. Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, left with Philadelphia Superintendent Connie Clayton and Joseph Fernandez.**

Carl Rowan, Clarence Page, and Bill Moyers.

Attendance began to increase dramatically at the Council's annual meetings and legislative conferences over this period as staff sought to make these gatherings more interesting and relevant for participants. Increasingly, the Council chose speakers for these events who could provide broad perspectives on political and social issues and who could generate heightened visibility for the organization.

During this period, the organization also formed the Council of the Great City Colleges of Education to address teacher and administrator recruitment and professional development issues. Phil Rusche, Dean of the College of Education at the University of Toledo, spearheaded the effort and served as the group's chair from 1992 to 2000. Shirley Schwartz, an administrator and professor at Trinity College in Washington, D.C., was recruited in 1995 to staff this group. Deb Shanley, the Dean at Brooklyn College, would later replace Rusche.

Among other developments in 1993 and 1994, the Council experimented with having a standing president in addition to having an annually rotating chair and an executive director. The Council recruited Joseph Fernandez, (former Miami-Dade County superintendent and New York City chancellor) to serve in the role, but the position was reconsidered after two years and Fernandez returned to Florida. During his short tenure, however, Fernandez helped to raise the organization's public profile, even speaking at a luncheon at the National Press Club in 1993. It marked the first time that such an honor had been bestowed upon a Council leader and Fernandez delivered his remarks to a packed house of influential journalists and association leaders.

The period between 1993 and 1996 was marked by efforts to stabilize the organization after years of turmoil, raise the dues levels, hire new staff, and experiment with differing mixes of programs and initiatives. Portland School Board Member Forrest Rieke, Omaha superintendent Norbert Schuerman, and Pittsburgh Super-



**Portland School Board Member Forrest Rieke**



intendent Richard Wallace all played key leadership roles in the organization during this transitional period.

Late in 1993, Robert Carlson, a former official in the office of the D.C. school superintendent, was appointed as the Council's director of management services and charged with developing partnerships with the private sector and introducing relevant technologies into the organization and its member districts. The Council recruited Cecilia Ottinger to serve as director of research and, in 1994, Jeff Simering, the former Chicago school lobbyist, was appointed director of legislation.

The period was also marked by a sharp uptick in "job alike" meetings of various district administrators, once the sole province of the research directors and legislative liaisons. Eventually, the Council would hold annual meetings of member school districts' chief operating officers, chief finance officers, human resource and personnel directors, technology and management information services directors, legislative liaisons, research directors, public relations officers, chief academic officers, and other school system chiefs.

Considerable time and energy during this period was also devoted to technology and partnership efforts, as the Internet came online. In fact, the Council was one of the first national education organizations with a site on the World Wide Web in 1992. In October 1993, the organization sponsored its first satellite teleconference, which focused on management and leadership training for urban school leaders. An online partnership with United Press International followed this event. The Council also launched the National Urban Learning Network in 1995 at a Smithsonian Institution event attended by then-Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Librarian of Congress James Billington. "Technology alone cannot bring literacy or solve the nation's educational problems. But if we do not use technology to make more knowledge accessible to all Americans, we will have forfeited an enormous opportunity to move this country forward," said Billington at the event.

Subsequently, the Council began devoting a portion of its annual fall conferences to technology challenges. The efforts eventually led the organization to take a leading role in translating a small provision of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 into the e-rate program, the federal program to wire schools for Internet access, and to advocate successfully for targeting

the program's aid to the nation's poorest schools. The Council's technology manager, Mark Root, held the first meetings of Council technology directors and officials from the Federal Communications Commission, sessions that continue today under Legislative Manager Manish Naik.

The Council also worked with Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., to recruit more minority teachers into urban schools, an effort that continued with funding from the Corporation for National Service. In the summer of 1995, the Council also convened a special meeting with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to address health and nutrition issues among urban schoolchildren. And in 1996, the organization published *Becoming the Best: Standards and Assessment Development in the Great City Schools*, which outlined and affirmed efforts by the school systems in major cities to raise standards and align assessments. Urban school leaders such as Joseph Fernandez, Richard Wallace (Pittsburgh superintendent), and John Murphy (Charlotte-Mecklenburg superintendent), in fact, were early pioneers of the standards movement before the states became involved.

Legislative advocacy continued to be a strong suit of the organization during the early 1990s. The Council played a major role in the formulation and passage of the Goals 2000 Act and the Improving America's Schools Act under President Clinton. The organization also prompted Senator Carol Moseley Braun (D-Ill.) to request the General Accounting Office (GAO) to conduct a national study of repairs that needed to be made to school infrastructure. The GAO estimated that it would cost \$112 billion to make these needed repairs, and the Council strongly advocated for the funds.

In January of 1996, the Council celebrated its 40th anniversary. In that



Sen. Carol Moseley Braun at Council Legislative Conference.



Maya Angelou addresses the Annual Conference in Minneapolis in 1996.

year, the organization was composed of 50 member districts serving 5.8 million students, 42 percent of whom were African-American, 29 percent Hispanic, 23 percent white, and 6 percent Asian-American. It was also the year in which the Council revamped its fall conference to place more emphasis on student achievement, systemic reform, governance, teach-



er recruitment, and dropout prevention. The conference has grown in size since then but retains the structure developed that year.

The mid-1990s saw the emergence of two trends that would have a



**Seattle Superintendent John Stanford unveils the Marshall Plan at a press conference.**

g impact on the nation's urban school systems. One was the rise of big city mayoral interest in education, as Chicago Mayor Richard Daley—the son of the Chicago mayor who was first elected around the time of the Council's founding—took control of his city's schools. The second trend was the appointment of nontraditional superintendents such as John Stanford

(Seattle) and Peter Hutchison (Minneapolis) to take the helm of big city school systems.

Another turning point for the Council came in 1997. Three critical events occurred that year that solidified the organization's standing as an independent and emerging leader in education reform. In March, the group called for an urban school "Marshall Plan" (named for Thurgood Marshall rather than George Marshall) to address funding inequities, building-modernization needs, and greater federal investment in long-deferred urban school programs. The Council had no way to fund the plan on its own, of course, but the call served as a rallying point for the cities and a reminder to the country of unmet urban needs.

The second initiative that year was the Council's vigorous endorsement of President Clinton's proposal to institute Voluntary National Tests. The organiza-

**Seattle Superintendent John Stanford un-**



**President Clinton meets Council staff at Voluntary National Test event.**

tion saw the proposed reading and math tests as a way of demonstrating its commitment to a skeptical public that urban schools were thoroughly committed to high standards and were willing to be assessed on these standards. Fifteen Council member districts stood with the President at a White House event and volunteered to take the test. Eventually, legislation to authorize the tests was defeated in the House of Representatives. Nonetheless,



**Council Chair and Toledo board member Wilma Brown opens summit.**

the act of supporting the proposal marked a singular point of pride for the organization and reflected a desire for greater transparency, accountability, and academic results. In introducing President Clinton that day in 1997, Stan Paz (El Paso superintendent) said, “Let the thought that urban children cannot achieve die with our presence here today.” A crowd

of school principals that day roared their approval.

The third seminal event for the organization that year involved its partnership with the U.S. Conference of Mayors in convening the nation’s first summit of big city mayors and school superintendents. The meeting attracted mayors from Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, the host city of Detroit, and many other cities, and drew favorable news coverage, including an opinion piece written by nationally syndicated columnist David Broder, who praised the session as a turning point in big city political cooperation. “What started here can only bring hope to a generation of youngsters—and to the cities where they live,” said Broder in his column. The year ended with the recruitment of Sharon Lewis from the Detroit Public Schools to serve as the Council’s research director.

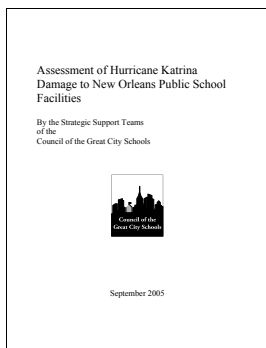
In 1998, Waldemar “Bill” Rojas, San Francisco’s superintendent of schools, became the first Hispanic chair of the Council. That year the Council also saw the first gains in student achievement since the dawn of the standards movement, and the organization began to talk about these gains publicly as signs of progress in the work it was doing.

It was at this point that the Council developed its first technical assistance teams, later called Strategic Support Teams. The effort began with a request for assistance from then-superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools, Arlene Ackerman, who later served as superintendent of the San Francisco schools and



**San Francisco Superintendent “Bill” Rojas**

chair of the Council. She was joined in the request by the newly appointed federal control board that had taken control of the city. The Council responded by marshalling senior managers from member districts to review the D.C. school system's personnel, finance, special education, facilities, communications, legal, and management information services. Thus was born a service that would evolve into one of the Council's most widely heralded and successful programs. Indeed, by 2016, the Council had provided some 300 technical assistance teams to over 50 member districts under the banner of "Cities Building Cities." Robert Carlson leads the management and operations teams as part of this initiative and Ricki Price-Baugh, hired in 2005 as the Council's first director of academic achievement, leads many of the instructional teams.



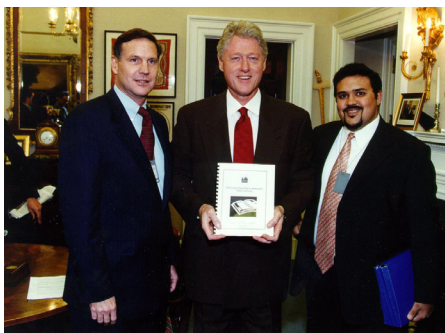
Over the years these operational teams have been mobilized to answer requests for assistance in almost every area of academics, operations, and management, but perhaps none so unusual as in the fall of 2005, when the Council at the state of Louisiana's request led a group of member district facilities experts into New Orleans days after Hurricane Katrina to assess the damage to the city's school buildings and determine where best to begin the city's rebuilding.

The 1998-1999 period also saw the Council initiate a series of task forces to address issues in bilingual education and school finance, followed up by the creation of task forces on student achievement and achievement gaps, leadership and governance, and professional development. The task forces came to define the organization's priorities and functions.



Rev. Jesse Jackson holds a press conference with urban school leaders during the Fall Conference in Dayton in 1999.

The Council continued to produce new and innovative reports during the period, including analyses of school funding adequacy in New York



**Michael Casserly, left, and Manish Naik, manager of legislative services, flank President Clinton at the White House before the President releases the Council report on class size reduction.**

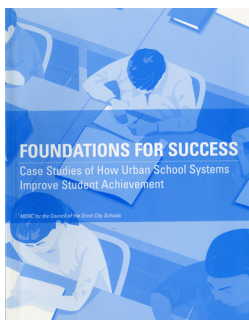
City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. These analyses formed the basis for the Council's participation in subsequent legal suits that pressed for more adequate funding of urban schools.

The Council also prepared two reports on class-size reduction in the Great City Schools that caught the attention of President Bill Clinton. Both reports were released by the President in separate

events at the White House in 1999 and 2000. "The report is more unequivocal proof that cutting class size and investing in teacher quality does produce results, whether the schools are urban or rural, large or small," said Clinton at a Rose Garden press event in 2000.

The dawn of the new century also saw the Council take the lead in writing guides on managing the Y2K problem that the U.S. Department of Education published and circulated to school personnel nationwide. In 2000, the organization also forged a research partnership with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and wrote a joint report to encourage more NBPTS teachers in urban schools. And the Council sponsored joint conferences with the U.S. Department of Education on high school reform, student achievement, and ending social promotions.

These conferences set the stage for a new period in the Council's history,



one focused on helping the organization's member districts raise student achievement. That focus continues to be central to the Council's work today. The organization sought initial support from the Ford Foundation to determine why and how some city school districts were making faster academic progress than others. The study that grew out of this investigation, *Foundations for Success*,<sup>4</sup> would

<sup>4</sup> Undertaken in partnership with the research firm MDRC, *Foundations for Success* was released in 2002.

eventually become one of the Council's best-known and most influential reports up to that date. After the publication of *Foundations for Success*, the Council began translating the study's findings into a framework that the organization's Strategic Support Teams would use to help member districts raise student achievement.

In 2000, the Council took three other steps to further build its reputation as a proponent of reform and an advocate on behalf of urban schools. It prepared a letter to the "next president" calling on the winner of the election to embrace a series of reforms to assist urban schools in raising student achievement. The letter was signed by Rod Paige, among others, who was serving as the Council's secretary/treasurer at the time and would be named later that year as U.S. Secretary of Education. The Council held a reception at its Washington offices over inaugural weekend in January 2001 to introduce Paige to many of the nation's education leaders.



**U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige addresses Council recognition on inaugural weekend in 2001.**

Late in 2000, the Council also approached the National Assessment Governing Board with an unusual proposal to permit city school systems to be oversampled on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) on a voluntary basis to allow education leaders and the public to get comparable city-by-city achievement data. Six city school districts participated in the first round of what came to be known as the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA), and the first results were released in 2002.

Also in 2000, the Council began collecting state assessment data on its member school districts. In 2001, the Council published a compilation of these test score data for the first time in a report entitled *Beating the Odds*, and has continued to release this report annually since. *Beating the Odds* shows steady gains in student achievement across



**U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**

member districts, and these results have been corroborated by results from the NAEP assessments as well. Indeed, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings described the progress as an "educational rebirth" in the cities.

The publication of state and national data on urban school achievement demonstrated the commitment of big city school systems to high standards, higher student achievement, and greater transparency. It also allowed the organization to call attention to urban school progress on benchmarks the nation was now using to measure gains.

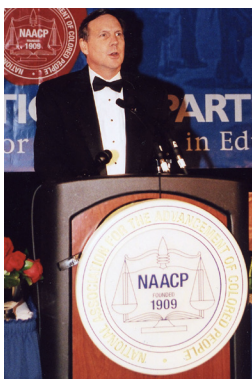
The following year, 2001, the Council stepped in to assist the New York City Schools on the heels of the 9/11 terrorist attacks with technical assistance, brokering resources from the U.S. Department of Education and expertise from other cities that had experience with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In 2001, the Council took the unusual step of giving its qualified support to President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind* legislation, the only national education association to give the law any measure of support. The law represented a substantial shift in federal education policy toward accountability for student achievement gains, reductions in achievement gaps, and student choice. The Council faced an important choice as NCLB headed to the floors of the House and Senate: it could support the legislation because of its emphasis on raising student achievement or it could oppose the bill because its technical provisions were poorly calibrated and probably wouldn't work. The Council chose student achievement—a position that was consistent with the organization's commitment to high standards and expectations for urban children, even when the organization later became critical of the way that the Bush administration was implementing the law.

The Council's support for the law also helped the organization broadcast to the American public the achievement gains that urban schools were making. "In the first year under No Child Left Behind, students in large urban schools made strong advancements in reading and math. The Council of the Great City Schools found that 47 percent of fourth graders scored at or above proficient in reading, a gain of almost five points from 2002. More than 50 percent of the students tested scored at or above proficient in math—a seven-point gain," said First Lady Laura Bush in a speech.

This combination of steps—*Beating the Odds*, *Foundations for Success*, the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment, *No Child Left Behind*, and the group's Strategic Support Teams—put the Council of the Great City Schools in the vanguard of national education organizations supporting





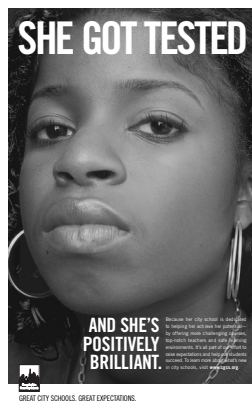
**Michael Casserly accepts the Daisy Bates Award from the NAACP on behalf of the Council.**

greater accountability and student achievement. And many across the country took note.

In 2002, the Council received the NAACP's Daisy Bates Award for its professional advocacy on behalf of urban children. The award was named for the civil rights leader who led the Little Rock Nine in their efforts to desegregate that city's schools in 1957. The Council was coming full circle.

By 2004, the Council saw its membership grow to 66 districts, attendance at its meetings and conferences reached record levels, and staff members increased to 20. Large numbers of smaller cities were also seeking membership, prompting the organization's executive committee to revisit membership criteria, ultimately deciding to leave them unchanged. The organization also held a national summit that year in Chicago on urban high school transformation.

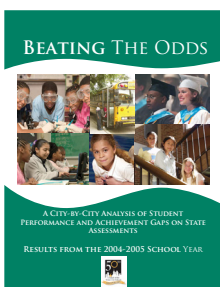
In 2004 the Council also began to accelerate its efforts to tell the public about the progress that many urban school systems were making. Under the direction of communications staffers Henry Duvall and Tonya Harris, the Council launched a series of television and radio public service announcements (PSAs) designed to highlight achievement gains and shatter public stereotypes about urban schools and urban schoolchildren. The three ads developed by the Council—"Thank You," "Tested," and "Pop Quiz"—were seen more than 250 million times by 2006, giving the organization unprecedented national visibility and putting its PSAs in the top 16 percent of all such ads in the country.



Research again played a major role in determining the Council's priorities in 2006. The Council's senior staff met with the Board for Education Sciences, the policymaking body for the recently created Institute for Education Sciences (IES). The purpose of the meetings was to articulate a bold new federal and national research strategy to help urban schools improve student achievement. The Council also hired Jason

Snipes as research director, replacing the retiring Sharon Lewis. Snipes had been the lead author on the *Foundations for Success* study.

Around this time, the Council and its chief operating and financial officers, led by Los Angeles staff member Michael Eugene, launched an effort to develop indicators to measure operational practices in its member



districts. The group also filed an *amicus* brief in the U.S. Supreme Court—with Legislative Counsel Julie Wright Halbert—on behalf of two of its member districts, Louisville and Seattle, which were making limited use of race to ensure school desegregation. And it negotiated with the U.S. Department of Education to secure a set of NCLB waivers for several districts, allowing them to provide their own supplemental services. Finally, in 2006, the Council released the sixth

edition of its *Beating the Odds* series, which for the first time showed significant gains in reading and math performance by students in its member districts on both state assessments and the National Assessment of Education Progress.



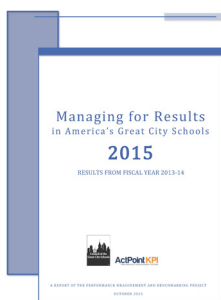
## The Last Decade: 2006 to 2016

The period between 2006 and 2016 saw no slowing in the Council's momentum. If anything, the pace of the Council's work quickened. The organization filed two more *amicus* briefs before the U.S. Supreme Court, one involving limits to litigation under the Individuals with Disabilities Act and the other involving private placements in New York City.

The organization also wrote a commentary for *Education Week* in 2007 calling for national education standards. The position was largely prompted by Congressional inability under NCLB to authorize national standards, but the organization also understood that there were important equity gains to be made if the same expectations were held for all children, no matter where they lived. The Council actively participated in strategy sessions with interested groups and individuals that led to the development of what became the Common Core State Standards in 2010. At one point, the Council even volunteered to develop the standards itself if the states did not take the lead. As the new benchmarks were being finalized, the Council took the unusual step of having its member city school superintendents sign a joint letter supporting the standards, a letter that garnered substantial national and press attention. Since then, the Council has actively worked to provide support, guidance, and resources to help its member districts implement the standards.

Also in 2007, the Council publicly opposed the takeover of the District of Columbia Public Schools by the city's mayor. After the mayor took over the system anyway, the Council switched gears and actively supported the district's new governance structure and the newly-appointed leadership team of Michelle Rhee and Kaya Henderson. That same year, the head of the Council was named to chair the Urban Education Research Task Force of the Institute for Education Sciences. Casserly marked his 15th year as executive director and 30th year at the Council at the 2007 fall conference in Nashville.

Finally, the Council published its first full *Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools* report after several years of development work by the Council's chief operating officers, chief financial officers, and organization



staff. (A pilot report had been published the year before.) Since its inception, the key performance indicators incorporated in the system have been responsible for saving member districts millions of dollars and improving operational efficiency. The unique work has been presented at numerous national forums and described at length in various articles—even serving as the subject of a chapter in a book released by Harvard Education Press.

As 2008 rolled around, the Council’s reputation for excellence and in-novation was becoming well known. The group often took positions and ad-dressed issues that other national education organizations shied away from. At the end of that year, the Council worked with President-elect Obama’s transition team on its new education agenda and stimulus plans alongside Arne Duncan, the former Chicago school superintendent who had—like Sid Marland, Sam Brownell, and Rod Paige—previously served on the Council’s executive committee.

Early in 2009, the Council pulled together a high-level meeting at the White House with its superintendents and school board members along



Senior presidential advisor Valerie Jarrett addresses urban school leaders at a White House meeting as Council Executive Director Michael Casserly and Education Secretary Arne Duncan look on.

with Secretary of Education Duncan and presidential advisor Valerie Jarrett. The meeting laid the groundwork for collaboration on a number of important policy issues over the ensuing eight years. As part of its work together on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Council was able to secure \$22 billion in school construction

bonding authority, 40 percent of which was set-aside for the nation’s 100 largest and poorest school districts.

The organization also filed two more amicus briefs that year—one before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of the *Forest Grove School District*, and another in the U.S. Court of Appeals in the Jamie S case. Moreover, it se-

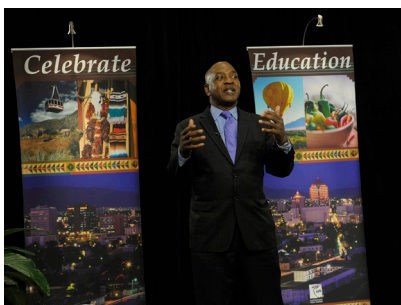
cured new appropriations to support technical assistance for school desegregation; published a major report on urban school district work with federal School Improvement Grants; and successfully advocated for all school districts to become their own supplemental education service providers under NCLB. During that period, the Council worked closely with Secretary Duncan on the waivers to NCLB, whose reauthorization was at this point overdue.

2010 became another blockbuster year for the Council when it published its seminal report, *Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*. The report, drafted by Sharon Lewis (who had returned to the

Council as director of research) received major national press attention and served as the subject of the organization's annual town hall meeting that year in Tampa, moderated by 60 Minutes correspondent Byron Pitts. The findings prompted a congressional hearing and triggered numerous efforts across the country to address black male achievement. Less than two years later in 2012 the Council hosted a major summit with White House officials and others at the U.S. Department of Education on the issues of minority male achievement. The presentations were

compiled into a book, and contributed to President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative. In 2014, the Council would double down on the priority by asking its members to sign a ten-point pledge to improve outcomes for males of color. The pledge was signed by nearly every Council member district—62 cities in total—and was announced by President Obama at a District of Columbia school. Since that time, the Council has continued to collect district action plans for implementing the pledge, and has launched a dedicated Council website and performance indicators for gauging district progress in improving black male achievement.





Harvard Law Professor Charles Ogletree asks a question as moderator of the Council's Town Hall Meeting.

The Council would follow the *Call for Change* report with another on Hispanic students in urban schools: *Today's Promise, Tomorrow's Future*, and would publish its much heralded *Succeeding with English Language Learners* study, conducted by Director of ELL Policy and Research Gabriela Uro.

Between 2010 and 2016, the Council would place renewed emphasis on issues of race, language, and culture in its reports, town hall meetings, and public statements. An example was the town hall meeting in Albuquerque in 2013 moderated by Harvard professor Charles Ogletree that was subsequently broadcast on local PBS.

Also in 2010, the Council initiated a series of forums with *USA Today* that brought together urban superintendents, board members, and business leaders from across the country to discuss issues around the improvement of public education in big city school systems. Later that year, the executive director of the Council was named by Secretary Duncan to the federal Equity and Excellence Commission.

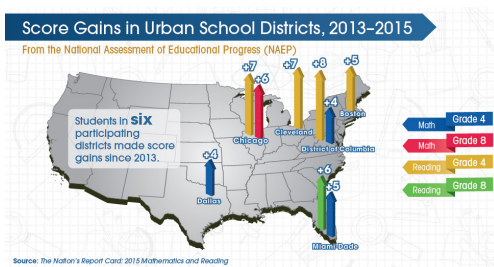
In 2011 and 2012, the Council would analyze and publish new data on the factors driving urban school improvement, this time using the very NAEP data that the organization had initiated with the National Assessment Governing Board back in 2000. The report, *Pieces of the Puzzle*, was one of the most detailed studies of its type on the characteristics of urban school districts that were achieving the greatest gains in student performance. During this period the organization would also publish a major study with the American Institutes for Research on data use and its effects on student achievement, and would release the final report and summary of its Senior Urban Education Research Fellowships, a three-year research partnership program undertaken with support from IES and overseen by staff member Amanda Corcoran.

During this time, the Council also embarked on a major project, support-ed in part by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to advance implemen-tation of new college- and career-readiness standards. As part of this effort, the organization convened numerous professional develop-

ment conferences and workshops for district academic leaders and staff, and developed a series of implementation tools including grade-by-grade parent roadmaps to the standards, professional development videos, a guide on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, a communications guide, a cross-functional implementation calendar, and textbook alignment guides. These would eventually be followed by a host of other specialized resources, including grade-by-grade textbook selection criteria and guidance on how member districts and others across the nation could prepare for the new standards-aligned assessment systems. In addition, the Council also released a second set of Public Service Announcements to broaden parent and community support for the new standards. These PSAs were seen over 450 million times between 2014 and 2016, and earned the Council seven Telly Awards.

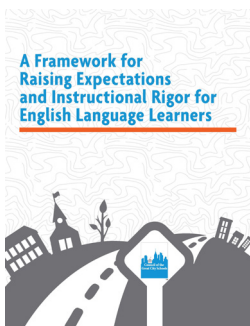
In addition to its work to advance academic outcomes and standards, the Council took several important steps to support school leadership and management. It launched an Award for Excellence in Finance Management and initiated its Urban School Executives Program, under the leadership of Robert Carlson, to strengthen the membership pipeline of non-instructional chiefs. The *Managing for Results* series continued to expand, and case studies were conducted on why some districts showed consistently better results than others.

By 2013, large city school districts had been participating in NAEP's Trial Urban District Assessments for 10 years, and the results began to reflect the massive efforts that the Council, its members, and others had poured into the improvement of urban public education. The data on "The Nation's Report Card" showed that not only had urban schools improved steadily between 2003 and 2013, but that the improvements in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and mathematics were significantly larger than the nation at large. The progress was the subject of enormous national press attention and provided a much-needed boost for big city school systems, which continued to face enormous pressure to improve.



During this period Congress continued its struggle to reauthorize *No Child Left Behind*. And with those efforts came renewed assaults on the funding formulas that the Council had so carefully targeted on urban areas since the 1960s. The U.S. Senate wasn't able to move a reauthorization bill beyond the committee level in 2013, but the House brought its bill out of committee and onto the floor. As it passed through the Rules Committee, the Council was pivotal in defeating an amendment to the Title I formula that would have stripped the nation's urban schools of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal aid. The issue did not end there, however. Similar amendments were back on the table when the reauthorization began again in 2014 and 2015. The Council's legislative mettle was tested as never before, and ultimately its expertise proved invaluable in defeating the formula changes and preserving targeted assistance for urban schools. During the same period, the Council was able to prevail on the Federal Communications Commission to retain targeting of the E-rate program that the Council had helped start in 1996.

The organization also worked during 2013 and 2014 with the U.S. Department of Justice and the Office of Civil Rights on issues impacting English Language Learners, providing support to member districts as funding and programming challenges arose. And the Council provided key support to its districts in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security as parents applied for eligibility for the President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.



Around this time, the Council received another important grant from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to develop criteria for selecting ELL-appropriate materials compatible with new college- and career-ready standards. The initiative sprang from surveys the organization did with its members showing the dearth of materials that are

available for this growing population. The first round of work resulted in the publication of a cutting-edge framework for selecting high quality ELA materials and raising educational expectations and instructional rigor for ELLs. This was followed by companion criteria in the area of mathematics,



as well as a fledgling effort to harness the membership's joint purchasing power to incent publishers to produce better materials.

As 2014 faded into 2015, the Council would see another momentous year. The Council would publish a major new study under the guidance of new Research Director Ray Hart on the effects of the federal School Improvement Grants on the turnaround of chronically low-performing urban schools. The study received substantial praise from the Department of Education for its detail and specificity, even if it was not pleased with the findings.

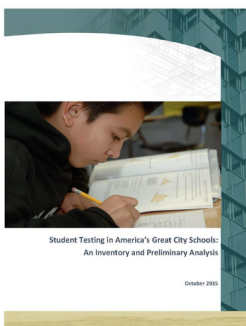
The Council's executive committee met that spring with President Obama in the White House to discuss a range of issues from the federal budget to males of color, from standards implementation to immigration and urban school progress. Delegations from the Council have



Urban school leaders pose with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office after their meeting. Official White House Photo by Pete Souza

met with various presidents over the years, but the 2015 meeting was one of the largest and most important.

2015 also saw the Council successfully pushing alongside the Obama administration for the expansion of federal appropriations for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The new funds allowed the organization, in tandem with the National Assessment Governing Board, to increase the number of city school systems participating in TUDA from 21 to 27 districts. The new districts will be tested for the first time in 2017. Interestingly, all fifteen districts that had volunteered in 1997 to participate in President Clinton's Voluntary National Tests will be included in the 2017 NAEP testing. That year the Council's legislative staff also secured an additional \$14 million to support unaccompanied minors who were pouring across the border into urban schools nationwide, and they launched a new legal webinar series to keep the membership up to date on issues arising



from the courts.

As 2015 came to a close, the Council published a ground-breaking study on the testing being conducted in the nation's schools. A similar study had been published by the organization in the 1960s, but the 2015 study—*Student Testing in America's Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis*—was more detailed and was released at a time when the controversy surrounding the issue of testing had reached a fever pitch. Advocates

on both sides of this very public debate were arguing about whether or not there was too much testing—without any clear evidence either way. The Council report provided this much-needed hard data, which triggered significant policy changes by the administration, prompted an Oval Office meeting with President Obama, and galvanized changes in testing all over the country at both state and local levels.

Council membership reached 70 major urban school systems as 2015 concluded.

The 60th anniversary year of the Council, 2016, has not seen any slow-down. There has been a major uptick in demand for the Council's Strategic Support Teams in both academic and operational areas. The group also launched new technical assistance for school boards and superintendents late in 2015, and this work has continued throughout 2016. And the regulations-writing process on the Every Student Succeeds Act, the replacement to NCLB, has proven to be as difficult and contentious as the legislative process itself.

The organization has also produced new work on risk management, guidance on working with the Office of Civil Rights, supporting English Language Learners, and effective implementation of the common core standards. Much of this work is designed to further equip the membership with the tools and resources it needs to improve student outcomes, governance, and operational effectiveness. For instance, the Council is working





on new criteria for selecting high-quality math materials for ELLs, indicators for assessing district implementation of college- and career-readiness standards, a curriculum framework for ensuring the alignment of materials, instruction, and standards, and a new version of its long-standing Managing for Results series. After 23 years the group also moved its headquarters to 1331 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC.

Possibly most notable among its achievements in 2016 has been the initial publication of the organization's new academic key performance indicators (KPIs). After the success of its operational indicators, the membership pushed for similar benchmarks for assessing instructional practices and investments. In response, Council staff brought together instructional, finance, research, special education, and ELL staff from member districts to develop, pilot test, and refine an initial set of indicators. After almost three years, the effort to collect and analyze data on these academic performance indicators is finally underway. It remains to be seen whether the academic performance management system will prove as powerful as the operational one, but the next decade will surely tell.

Over the course of the last 60 years, the Council and its membership have faced enormous challenges. The economic, social, and political upheavals that have shaped the nation over these pivotal past six decades have also shaped the needs and priorities of our urban education coalition. Questions of race and language, governance, school choice, academic performance, and mobility remain on the Council's agenda, as they are expected to remain for many years to come. But the Council and its membership have built a strong enough foundation over the years that together we should be able to move forward with a greater sense of confidence that public schooling in the nation's major urban areas will not only survive but thrive.



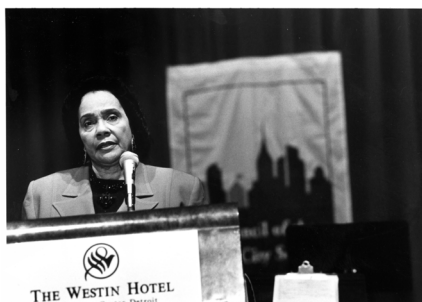
## A Look Ahead:

As the Council's history shows, this organization is one that can rise to the occasion and take on the toughest challenges of the day. The Council has increased its influence over the years, although sometimes unevenly, and now plays a leading role in the reform and improvement of urban education nationally. The Council is widely regarded as the premier voice for the unique

needs of large urban school districts and the children they serve. The organization also provides opportunities for leaders of these districts to discuss their common challenges candidly, allowing them to learn from each other.

The Council has also developed a number of unique strengths that will serve it well in the future. Unlike larger national education groups, the Council's relatively small size constitutes one of the organization's greatest strengths. It allows the group the flexibility to respond to challenges and situations quickly. It also prevents the group from trying to be all things to all people, giving it a laser-like focus that is missing in bigger groups. This focus on common issues of race, resources, and academic and operational excellence give the group a well-defined purpose, direction, and mission. Its size also allows the organization to create a culture of support for its members, and to boost its expertise on the difficult issues that its members face.

Without question, another strength of the Council is its governance structure, in which school board members and superintendents participate on equal footing. Council meetings provide a special and unique venue in which board members and superintendents can network and share perspectives on neutral ground, away from the limelight. This informal interaction provides a valuable and unique opportunity for urban school leaders



Coretta Scott King speaking at the Fall Conference in Detroit 1997.

to socialize informally in an “off-the-record” setting, a different environment than the larger associations can provide. The rotation of the Council’s leadership between superintendents and school board members reinforces this unique organizational asset.

The quality of the Council’s staff is also a major strength. Their extensive knowledge and

passionate commitment to the organization’s core values, beliefs, and mission are enormous assets. Indeed, many people often wonder how such a small organization can make such a big impact. The answer is found in the expertise, relentlessness, and aggressiveness of its staff and the collaboration of its members around shared priorities.

Another advantage of the Council in recent years has been its ability to change with the times without compromising its underlying commitments to excellence and equity. Few things exemplify that ability better than the Council’s support for the standards movement and its accountability, assessment, and transparency components—elements that have emerged as critical components of national educational reform. The Council has shown its willingness to challenge its membership and lead urban schools into the risky (if not treacherous) territory of educational reform. This commitment has earned the organization great respect among the nation’s most influential political and business leaders who have been in the forefront of the national education reform and accountability movements.

In recent years, the Council’s strategic support teams have also emerged as a particularly popular and potent resource for the membership. Member districts view the services provided by these teams as some of the Council’s most important activities. These peer reviews have provided assistance to member districts in such areas as finance, information technology, curriculum and instruction, human resources, special education, bilingual education, and food and transportation services. Moreover, the reviews have demonstrated to the outside world that the Council is able to provide first-class—and sometimes brutally honest—assessments of urban school prac-



**Boston school committee chair Michael O'Neill and Boston School Superintendent Tommy Chang attend the Council's legislative conference.**

tices, even if they don't always result in positive headlines.

The Council's public visibility is also much greater than it was in the past, clearly another plus for the organization. The national news media frequently quotes the Council's staff on urban education issues, and the group's public service announcements have burnished the Council's image nationally. The Council has used this visibility and credibility to help mitigate the widespread negative views of urban schools by projecting the progress that has been made by its member districts, while acknowledging that serious problems persist.

Another notable feature of the Council's work has been its use of rigorous data and solid research as it takes positions on behalf of the nation's urban school systems and helps its membership improve. Much of the organization's research over the decades has propelled the group forward and shed light on important trends, developments, and challenges facing urban public education. It also serves as the foundation and impetus for the Council's legislative, academic, management, and communications services.

The organization's membership support has also enhanced the Council's reputation. Leaders and staff alike in member districts are able to call the Council offices for data, information, and advice on urban issues that they cannot get elsewhere. Staff from member districts acknowledge that sometimes these requests appear to overwhelm the Council's relatively small staff, but they also know that the requested information will always be forthcoming.

Finally, the Council's historic and continuing forte has been its effectiveness in legislative advocacy. This strength merits elaboration, for it elicits universal praise and has for many years. The Council's executive director, director of legislation, and legislative manager have decades of legislative experience, unquestioned passion for addressing urban issues, considerable expertise in the legislative process and federal programming, and substantial political savvy. The trio's strong, longstanding relationships with members of Congress and



**Rep. Marcia Fudge, a member of the House of Representatives' Education and the Workforce Committee, addresses conferees at the Legislative Conference.**

their staff members have helped to build trust and credibility that has benefited the organization, even when the Council's positions are not congruent with either Congress or the Executive Branch.

In general, the Council has been effective legislatively, leaving its "fingerprints" nearly everywhere in the legislative process, because it recognizes that it is legitimate to disagree, keep options open, and know when and how to compromise without sacrificing core values and beliefs. The Council has also often been able to maintain an admirably bipartisan stance despite the fact that the majority of its members are philosophically progressive. The Council, in fact, has evolved to a place where its support cannot be taken for granted by either major political party. The Council's willingness to support or oppose legislation on its merits and with a consistent set of stances has given the organization credibility and special access to both the Republican- and Democratic-controlled executive and legislative branches.



Rep. William Goodling, former chairman of the House or Representatives' Education and Workforce Committee, is honored by the Council at a Capitol Hill reception.



Sen. Hillary Clinton addressed the Legislative Conference in 2001.

and expertise. The staff's internal capacity, however, extends well beyond its directors, who have mentored and supported a growing number of junior staff over the years. The practice has given the organization a "bench" from which to pull talent to sustain and accelerate its work for many years. Still, the group's executive committee and board of directors will need to orches-

As the Council and its membership look to the future, our main challenge will be to sustain and expand the organization's assets in ways that further strengthen urban public education nationally. First and foremost, succession planning will be needed as the organization's senior staff retire and the group works to retain its agenda, focus,



**Maya Angelou addresses the Annual Fall Conference in Minneapolis in 1996.**

trate this transition carefully to make sure that there no gaps in the Council's work.

In addition, the Council faces the challenge of a growing number of niche organizations that are largely funded by various philanthropies but have no constituency per se. These smaller groups are looking to offer urban school systems many of the same kinds of services the Council provides its own

membership, but on a contractual basis. Some of these groups also aspire to play larger roles in the policy and legislative arenas, despite their dearth of practical expertise in how urban schools operate.

Another future challenge may come from one of the organizations key strengths: our narrow urban focus. Many suburban districts, particularly large inner-ring suburbs, and small but very poor cities now look to the Council for guidance on how to handle critical urban issues. Arrangements that would allow these or similar districts to participate in the organization in at least some capacity have been rejected repeatedly by the Council's executive committee, but the pressure to serve these districts in some way, shape, or form will continue to mount. Already, the Council's executive committee rejects three to four membership applications nearly every time it meets—something that almost no other membership group does. At some point, if these districts are left without the resources and support they need they very well may band together outside of the Council's aegis in ways that might work to the organization's detriment.

A great need also exists for the Council to help stabilize the leadership of its urban member districts. High leadership turnover in many cities can be traced directly to the contentious relationship that exists between school



**CNN host Fareed Zakaria addresses conferees at the Fall Conference in Long Beach in 2015.**



boards and district superintendents, and this poisonous dynamic threatens the ability of urban school districts to continue making progress for students. The Council has initiated efforts in the last year or so to promote communication and collaboration, and to focus the work of both school boards and superintendents more clearly around student achievement, but the pressure to improve and expand those services will certainly test the capacity of the Council in the coming years.

These and other challenges are manageable, of course, for an organization that has grown and flourished over the course of 60 turbulent and defining years. Indeed, the Council has built an impressive launching pad for the future. For a small organization with a small staff, it has had great impact.

Over the years, the Council has helped to boost the performance of many urban school districts and create measurable improvements in student achievement. The organization can take great pride in its efforts to make urban educational issues more visible and, more importantly, to show that poor city youngsters can achieve and their schools can improve.

But there is little reason or time for complacency. The youngsters it serves have a long way to go to compete with their more advantaged suburban and exurban counterparts. Children of color still lag disproportionately behind white children when it comes to academic performance, and gaps in economic and social opportunity remain unresolved.

Central to the organization's success in tackling these issues will be a continuing focus on improving the academic performance of students, strengthening governance and management, and bolstering the public's confidence—the three pillars of the Council's work over at least the last two decades. The organization will also need to be more aggressive in making the case for the enduring importance of public schools in a rapidly changing world



**Council participates in 1992 March on Washington to support federal investment in America's cities and children.**

To its credit, the Council of the Great City Schools has evolved well beyond what was a single meeting in 1956 of a handful of Midwest cities. It is now an established national organization with membership from coast to coast. It has a reputation for excellence, a talented staff, and committed membership. And it has a mission that is among the most important in the nation—the improvement of public education in America’s urban communities. The future of the Council of the Great City Schools is bright, and its vitality and energy are needed now more than ever.



# Appendix

## A Timeline in Brief: 1956 to 2016

Year	Event
1954	U.S. Supreme Court acts in the case of <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>
1955	Emmitt Till is murdered, accelerating the northern migration of African Americans.
	Rosa Parks remains in her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus.
	Milton Friedman proposes private school vouchers.
	The rise of Levittown and the year in which more people live in suburbs than cities.
	Richard Daley first elected mayor of Chicago.
	The CIO merges with the AFL.
	Martin Luther King founds the Montgomery Improvement Association.
1956	Organization founded informally as the Great Cities Program for School Improvement in Chicago by Sargent Shriver and Ben Willis as a coalition of 12 of the nation's largest urban school systems.
	Former U.S. Commissioner of Education under President Eisenhower and a founding member of the Council, Sam Brownell, named superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools and was. His brother, Herbert Brownell, was Eisenhower's Attorney General who enforced the Little Rock desegregation order. Both Brownells urged support of the Brown decision.
	President Eisenhower calls the 101st Airborne into Little Rock's Central High School.
	The Great City Schools launch the first of a long series of studies and papers around the financial needs, policies, cost-drivers, and challenges of urban schools.
1961	Organization was incorporated as the Research Council of the Great Cities Program for School Improvement and located in Chicago. First executive director, Fred Bertolaet was hired.
1962	Council launches a series of studies on teacher pre-service education, recruitment, and retention in urban schools, the Teacher Education Project.
1963	President Kennedy names Chicago superintendent and Council co-founder Ben Willis to head the federal Vocational Education Study Group.
	Council research—Vocational Education: The World of Work—forms the backdrop for the authorization of the federal Vocational Education Act
1964	Council establishes a joint Great Cities-American Textbook Publishers Liaison Committee to work on improving instructional materials that led to the publication of <i>Instructional Materials to Meet the Needs of Urban Youth</i> in 1965.
	Council teams with the Educational Facilities Laboratories to conduct a major inventory of urban school buildings, their ages, and repair and renovation needs; and sponsors an architectural design study as part of the New Life for Old Schools project.
1965	Numerous big city school superintendents testify before Congress, making the case for the targeting of federal Title I and Impact Aid funds on urban schools.
	President Johnson signs the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into law.

Year	Event
1966	Council convenes a series of research and development conferences around the Changing World of Work to better prepare urban graduates for careers.
	Council collaborates with Stanford Professor Tom James on Determinants of Educational Expenditures in Large Cities of the United States.
	Carl Thornblad named Executive Director, replacing Fred Bertolaet.
1967	Council publishes Data Processing in the Great Cities that lays out the state of computer use in the nation's urban school districts.
	Council publishes a series of studies on educational television, its effects, facility needs, production, personnel, and uses.
	Council conducts a major survey on the use of nationally standardized tests in urban schools.
	Sidney Marland, superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, chairs the Council. He later chairs the College Board and became U.S. Commissioner of Education under President Nixon.
	Alva Dittrick named Executive Director, replacing Carl Thornblad.
	Council sets up the Veterans in Public Service program in cooperation with the National Teacher Corps to provide returning Vietnam veterans with para-professional jobs in education.
	Council sets up its Racial Equality Committee to study and address racial inequities in its schools.
	Council superintendents and board members testify before both Democratic and Republican presidential platform committees and propose a Federal Foundation for Equal Educational Opportunity.
1969	Council provides a critical endorsement for the U.S. Commissioner of Education's Right to Read program.
	Council receives a major grant from the U.S. Office of Education to provide technical assistance to its members in support of school desegregation, and helps write desegregation plans for a number of cities.
	Council along with other major national education groups found the Emergency Committee for Full Funding of Educational Programs to boost federal financial support of public education.
	Darneau Stewart, school board member from Detroit, becomes first school board member and first African American to chair the Council.
	Alvin Skelly named Executive Director, replacing Alva Dittrick.
1970	Council membership increases to 21 large urban school districts.
	Council receives support from the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundations to work on increasing the number of administrators of colors in urban school systems.
1971	U.S. Supreme Court hands down decision on Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, the court's first major ruling in school busing.

Year	Event
1972	Jack Hornback named Executive Director, replacing Alvin Skelly.
1973	U.S. Supreme Court hands down decision in San Antonio Independent School District vs. Rodriguez school finance case.
1974	U.S. Supreme Court hands down Lau v. Nichols decision from original San Francisco bilingual accommodations case.
	U.S. Supreme Court hands down decision in case of Milliken v. Bradley, involving school desegregation and mandatory busing in Detroit and surrounding suburbs.
	Sam Husk named Executive Director, replacing Jack Hornback.
1976	President Gerald Ford signs into law the Education of All Handicapped Act.
	Michael Casserly joins the staff of the Council. Membership is 25 cities. First responsibility is to increase the count of AFDC children in the Title I formula to prevent funding losses to urban schools.
1979	President Carter signs the U.S. Department of Education into law.
1981	Council is instrumental in preventing a proposal by President Ronald Reagan to consolidate Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Education of All Handicapped Act into a single block grant.
	Council moves to 1413 K Street, NW in Washington, DC.
1982	Council publishes major study of Minimum Competency Testing in the Great City Schools.
1983	A Nation at Risk is published.
	Council study of the effects of private school tuition tax credits is instrumental in defeating the proposal on the U.S. Senate floor.
	Council publishes The Maintenance Gap: Deferred Repair and Renovation in the Nation's Elementary and Secondary Schools.
1984	Council takes the lead in advocating for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program in order to replace part of the repealed Emergency School Aid Act.
	Council takes the lead in successfully advocating that federal Vocational Education Act include a poverty-based local funding formula.
1985	Council membership surges to 35 city school systems.
1987	Council releases Challenges to Urban Education: Results in the Making describing initiatives by urban school leaders to improve student outcomes, career-readiness, parent involvement, and building conditions.
1988	Council is successful in developing a new version of the Title I concentration grants as part of the 1988 reauthorization of ESEA and getting Congress to approve it. Also successfully advocates the targeting of Title II aid.
1989	The McKenzie Group report, A Performance and Efficiency Study of the Council of Great City Schools, is released, triggering a major organizational and staffing overhaul in 1991.

Year	Event
1989	President George H.W. Bush hosts National Education Summit in Charlottesville and names series of six national education goals. Council attends.
	Council files amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell on the criteria for unitary status under a desegregation order.
1990	Council delegation of superintendents meets with President George H. W. Bush at White House.
	Council proposes the Urban Schools of America (USA) Act that was cosponsored by Congressman Augustus Hawkins (D-CA) and Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA). Bill garners 90 House co-sponsors, 23 Senate co-sponsors, and support of 58 national organizations.
1991	Council convenes a national urban education summit in Washington, DC and sets National Urban Education Goals for 2000.
	Council intervenes on behalf of plaintiffs in City of New York v. U.S. Department of Commerce to require statistical adjustments in 1990 Census.
1992	Michael Casserly named Interim Executive Director, replacing Sam Husk. Membership is 44 city school systems.
1982	Council releases the first of a series of studies on urban school progress on the nation urban education goals.
	Council fall conference in Milwaukee convenes the organization's first national town hall meeting, moderated by Charlene Hunter-Gault on the issue of private school vouchers.
	Council launches the Urban Teacher Collaborative with Recruiting New Teachers.
1993	Council moves to 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC
	Council files amicus brief in the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of United States v. Lopez to defend the federal Gun Free Schools law.
	Council files amicus brief in the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of Romer v. Evans supporting the rights of gay and lesbian students.
1996	Council helps the US Department of Education and the FCC create the E-Rate program out of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and target aid on urban schools to help narrow the digital divide.
1997	President Clinton announces participation of 15 Council-member districts in the Voluntary National Tests (VNT), paving the way for the Council's initiation of the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) in 2000.
	Council testifies on national Ebonics controversy before a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee.
	Council convenes the first national summit of big city mayors and urban school superintendents in Detroit.
	Council lays out long-term vision for improving and strengthening urban education.

Year	Event
1997	Council proposes an Urban School Marshal Plan.
	Council files amicus brief with U.S. Supreme Court in the case of <i>DeRolph v. State of Ohio</i> in support of adequate funding of public schools in the state.
1998	Council launches its first technical assistance teams to help the District of Columbia Financial Control Board assess the city's public schools. (As of 2016, the Council has now provided some 300 Strategic Support Teams to help its members improve instructionally and operationally.)
	Council helps secure poverty-based targeting of federal class-size reduction appropriations at \$1.21 billion.
	Council releases a report examining the costs and impact of California's Proposition 227, a referendum banning bilingual education.
1999	U.S. Department of Education releases Council's Y2K guide— <i>Squashing the Millennium Bug</i> —to help school districts nationwide prepare for year 2000 software transitions.
	Council successfully fights back a White House proposal to limit bilingual education to three years.
	President Clinton releases Council report on class-size reduction report in the White House Garden.
	Council membership reaches 55 big city school districts.
2000	Council proposes to the National Assessment Governing Board that big city schools systems be allowed to be oversampled on state NAEP to yield district scores.
2001	Rod Paige, superintendent of the Houston Independent School District and former member of the Council's Executive Committee is named U.S. Secretary of Education by President George W. Bush.
	Council supports NCLB as it moves to House and Senate floors—the only national education organization to do so.
	Council publishes the first edition of <i>Beating the Odds</i> to track state reading and math test scores in urban school systems.
2002	No Child Left Behind Act signed into law by President George W. Bush. Bill emphasizes standards, subgroup accountability, additional targeting of Title I and leads to major increased appropriations.
	Council co-convenes major meeting with the Department of Education and chairs of the House and Senate authorizing committees on implementation of NCLB.
	Council releases <i>Foundations for Success</i> , the nation's first empirical study of why some major urban school systems improve faster than others.
	Council is awarded the Daisy Bates Award for advocacy by the NAACP.
	First TUDA results released on NAEP reading performance. Data are troubling.
2003	Council filed an amicus brief before U.S. Supreme Court in <i>Gratz vs. Bollinger</i> arguing for the use of race by the University of Michigan in admission policies



Year	Event
2004	Council's COOs and CFOs launch a nationwide urban school performance management system that would eventually provide some 500 key performance indicators by which districts could assess and compare operational and financial performance.
	Council files an amicus brief before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of <i>Weast v. Shaffer</i> on burden of proof issues under IDEA.
2005	Council arranges a pilot program with the Department of Education to waive NCLB supplemental service provisions for some cities.
	Council pulls emergency facilities team into New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to identify school buildings around which to rebuild the city.
2006	Council concludes three Public Service Announcements ("Thank You", "Tested", and "Pop Quiz") that were viewed some 190 million times over two years. PSAs addressed public perceptions of urban schools. Pop Quiz wins two Telly Awards.
	Council writes opinion piece for Education Week calling for national standards in education.
	Council files amicus brief with U.S. Supreme Court in the cases of <i>Parents Involved v. Seattle School District</i> and <i>Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education</i> arguing in favor of the use of race in student assignments.
	Council launches the Senior Urban Education Research Fellowships with funding from IES to match major researchers with urban school needs. (A series of reports would be published over the next 6 years.)
	Council celebrates its 50th Anniversary at the fall conference in San Diego.
2007	Council testifies at rare joint House-Senate hearing on the reauthorization of ESEA.
	Council files amicus brief in the case of <i>Board of Education of the City School District of the City of New York v. Tom F</i> on tuition reimbursements for students with disabilities in private settings.
2008	Council calls for the development of national education standards, giving a major boost to what would become the Common Core State Standards.
2009	Arne Duncan, superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools and former member of the Council's Executive Committee is named U.S. Secretary of Education by President Barack Obama. Council delegation meets with Duncan and Valerie Jarrett at White House.
	Council publishes <i>Succeeding with English Language Learners: Lessons Learned from the Great City Schools</i> , the first major study of why some school systems make more progress with ELLs than other systems.
	Council launches Bernard Harris Scholarships for Great City School graduates of color who are pursuing STEM fields in college.
	Council successfully advocates for federal school repair and renovation program that was part of the Obama stimulus package that reserved 40 percent of funds for the 100 largest and poorest school systems -- a proposal the Council first made during the Clinton administration, which was advocated by Senator Carol Moseley-Braun.

Year	Event
2010	Council and its superintendents sign joint letter supporting the Common Core State Standards becoming the first national educational membership group to do so.
	Council launches a suite of new tools and Public Service Announcements to support implementation of the Common Core State Standards.
	Council releases Call for Change on the conditions of African American males in urban schools and testifies on it at Senate hearing.
	Council works with the Department of Education to ensure that NCLB waivers include supplemental educational services.
2011	Council delivers a State of Urban Education address at USA Today forum.
2012	Council convenes African American Male Summit at U.S. Department of Education.
	Council releases Pieces of the Puzzle, a major study of why some urban school districts improve faster on NAEP than other districts so.
2013	Council publishes a book on strategies to improve academic outcomes for males of color in urban schools.
	Council celebrates the 10th anniversary of TUDA and sees substantial improvement among large city schools in reading and math performance over the decade.
	Council advocates successfully to ensure that urban school districts will benefit fully in the FCC's expansion of the E-rate program.
	Council publishes report, <i>Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors</i> with support from the Wallace Foundation
	Council leads a delegation of its superintendents to China.
2014	President Obama announces the Council's Pledge on Males of Color.
	Council's Public Service Announcement ("Staircase") supporting the common core standards concludes after an 18-month run with some 250 million views. Spot earns two more Telly Awards.
2015	Council fends off proposed changes to the Title I formula during ESSA authorization that would have substantially lowered federal aid to urban schools.
	Council executive committee meets with President Obama at White House.
	Council helps expand TUDA to 27 participating cities.
	Council signs onto amicus brief before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of United States vs. State of Texas arguing for the implementation of DAPA and expanded DACA programs.
	Council releases major study of urban school system implementation of School Improvement Grants on turn-around schools in urban districts.
	Council releases major study of urban school system implementation of School Improvement Grants on turn-around schools in urban districts.
	Council membership hits 70 major city school districts.

Year	Event
2016	Council moves to 1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW in Washington, DC
	Council's second Public Service Announcements ("Conversations") supporting the common core state standards concludes after 18 months with some 230 million views. PSAs earn three more Telly Awards.
	Council launches its Academic KPIs to accompany its nearly 500 non-instructional performance indicators
	Council to hold its 60th annual fall conference in Miami.

## Sites of Fall Conferences

Host City	Year
Miami	2016
Long Beach	2015
Milwaukee	2014
Albuquerque	2013
Indianapolis	2012
Boston	2011
Tampa	2010
Portland	2009
Houston	2008
Nashville	2007
San Diego	2006
Atlanta	2005
Clark County	2004
Chicago	2003
Broward County	2002
Norfolk	2001
Los Angeles	2000
Dayton	1999
San Francisco	1998
Detroit	1997
Minneapolis	1996
Oklahoma City	1995
Seattle	1994
Houston	1993
Milwaukee	1992
Columbus	1991
Boston	1990

Miami-Dade County	1989
Toledo	1988
Seattle	1987
New York City	1986
Pittsburgh	1985
Albuquerque	1984
San Francisco	1983
Buffalo	1982
Memphis	1981
Norfolk	1980
New York City	1979
San Francisco	1978
Dallas	1977
Chicago	1976
Cleveland	1975
Denver	1974
St. Louis	1973
Houston	1972
Minneapolis	1971
Dallas	1970
Washington, D.C.	1969
Philadelphia	1968
Cleveland	1967
Milwaukee	1966
Los Angeles	1965

## Chairs of the Council of the Great City Schools

Past Chairs	Position	City	Year
Felton Williams	Board Member	Long Beach	2015-16
Richard Carranza	Superintendent	San Francisco	2015-15
Jerome Hinton Hodge	Board Member	Oakland	2014-15
Valeria Silva	Superintendent	St. Paul	2013-14
Candy Olson	Board Member	Hillsborough	2012-13
Winston Brooks	Superintendent	Albuquerque	2011-12
Dilafruz Williams	Board Member	Portland	2010-11
Carol Johnson	Superintendent	Boston	2009-10
Bill Isler	School Board	Pittsburgh	2008-09
Carol Comeau	Superintendent	Anchorage	2007-08
George Thompson III	School Board	Nashville	2006-07
Arlene Ackerman	Superintendent	San Francisco	2005-06
Judy Farmer	School Board	Minneapolis	2004-05
Carlos Garcia	Superintendent	Clark County	2003-04
Anna Dodson	School Board	Norfolk	2002-03
Manuel Nunez	School Board	Fresno	2001-02
Cliff Janey	Superintendent	Rochester	2000-01
Becky Montgomery	School Board	St. Paul	1999-00
Waldemar Rojas	Superintendent	San Francisco	1998-99
Wilma Brown	School Board	Toledo	1997-98
Franklin Smith	Superintendent	Washington	1996-97
Ellen Roe	School Board	Seattle	1995-96
Norbert Schuerman	Superintendent	Omaha	1994-95
Loretta Heard	School Board	Columbus	1993-94
Forrest Rieke	School Board	Portland	1992-93
Connie Clayton	Superintendent	Philadelphia	1991-92
Holmes Braddock	School Board	Miami-Dade Cty	1990-91
Larry Zenke	Superintendent	Tulsa	1989-90
Florence Baugh	School Board	Buffalo	1988-89
Richard Green	Superintendent	New York City	1987-88

Myra Kopf	School Board	San Francisco	1986-87
Charles Frazier	Superintendent	Nashville	1985-86
Betty Benjamin	School Board	Washington	1984-85
Arthur Jefferson	Superintendent	Detroit	1983-84
Omar Blair	School Board	Denver	1982-83
Lee McMurrin	Superintendent	Milwaukee	1981-82
Arthur Thomas	School Board	Philadelphia	1980-81
Alonzo Crim	Superintendent	Atlanta	1979-80
Louise Malis	School Board	Chicago	1977-78
Nolan Estes	Superintendent	Dallas	1977-78
Paul Tierney	School Board	Boston	1976-77
Paul Briggs	Superintendent	Cleveland	1975-76
Cornelius Golightly	School Board	Detroit	1974-75
Richard Gousha	Superintendent	Milwaukee	1973-74
George Smith	School Board	San Diego	1972-73
Joseph Manch	Superintendent	Buffalo	1971-72
Joseph Manch	Superintendent	Buffalo	1970-71
Darneau Stewart	School Board	Detroit	1969-70
Bernard Donovan	Superintendent	New York City	1968-69
Sidney Marland	Superintendent	Pittsburgh	1967-68
Harold Vincent	Superintendent	Milwaukee	1966-67
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1965-66
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1964-65
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1963-64
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1962-63
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1961-62
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1960-61
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1959-60
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1958-59
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1957-58
Benjamin Willis	Superintendent	Chicago	1956-57



## Executive Directors<sup>1</sup>

<b>Name</b>	<b>Year</b>
Michael Casserly	1992-present
Sam Husk	1974-1991
Jack Hornback	1972-1974
Alvin Skelly	1969-1972
Alva Dittrick	1967-1969
Carl Thornblad	1966-1967
Fred Bertolaet	1961-1966

<sup>1</sup> Council Executive Directors were known as Executive Vice Presidents or Executive Secretaries up through the tenure of Sam Husk.

# Executive Committee

## Chair

Felton Williams, Long Beach School Board

## Chair-elect

Darienne Driver, Milwaukee Superintendent

## Secretary/Treasurer

Larry Feldman, Miami-Dade County School Board

## Immediate Past Chair

Richard Carranza, Houston Superintendent

## Members

Tom Ahart, Des Moines Superintendent

Jose Banda, Sacramento Superintendent

JoAnn Brannon, Nashville School Board

Juan Cabrera, El Paso Superintendent

Marnell Cooper, Baltimore City School Board

Paul Cruz, Austin Superintendent

Doretha Edgecomb, Hillsborough County School Board

Eric Gordon, Cleveland CEO

Cedrick Gray, Jackson Superintendent

Michael Hanson, Fresno Superintendent

Happy Haynes, Denver School Board

Michael Hinojosa, Dallas Superintendent

Barbara Jenkins, Orange County Superintendent

Pam Knowles, Portland School Board

Ronald Lee, Dayton School Board

Aurora Lora, Oklahoma City Superintendent

Michael O'Neill, Boston School Committee

Ashley Paz, Fort Worth School Board

Paula Wright, Duval County School Board

Vacant

# Council Staff

Michael Casserly, Executive Director  
Teri Trinidad, Director of Finance, Administration, and Conferences  
Alisa Adams, Manager of Finances  
Terry Tabor, Manager of Conferences and Sponsorships  
Angel Gooch, Conference Specialist  
Shirley Lathern, Specialist for Administration and Technology  
Marilyn Banks, Receptionist  
Jeff Simering, Director of Legislation  
Manish Naik, Manager of Legislation  
Julie Wright Halbert, Legislative Counsel  
Gabriela Uro, Director of Language Policy and Legislation  
Debra Hopkins, Manager of Language Projects  
David Lai, Manager of Language Policy  
Robert Carlson, Director of Management Services  
Jon Lachlan Hache, Manager of Management Projects  
Ricki Price Baugh, Director of Academic Achievement  
Robin Hall, Director of English Language Arts  
Denise Walston, Director of Mathematics  
Ray Hart, Director of Research  
Renata Uzzell, Manager of Research  
Moses Palacios, Manager of Research  
Ashley Lyons, Research Specialist  
Henry Duvall, Director of Communications  
Tonya Harris, Manager of Communications  
Darrell Robinson, Communications Specialist  
Amanda Corcoran, Manager of Special Projects  
Michell Yorkman, Manager of Special Projects







Albuquerque  
Anchorage  
Arlington, TX  
Atlanta  
Austin  
Baltimore  
Birmingham  
Boston  
Broward County  
Buffalo  
Charleston  
Charlotte  
Chicago  
Cincinnati  
Clark County  
Cleveland  
Columbus  
Dallas  
Dayton  
Denver  
Des Moines  
Detroit  
El Paso

Fort Worth  
Fresno  
Greensboro  
Hawaii  
Houston  
Indianapolis  
Jackson  
Jacksonville  
Kansas City  
Long Beach  
Los Angeles  
Louisville  
Miami-Dade County  
Milwaukee  
Minneapolis  
Nashville  
New Orleans  
New York City  
Newark  
Norfolk  
Oakland  
Oklahoma City  
Omaha

Orange County  
Palm Beach  
Philadelphia  
Pinellas County  
Pittsburgh  
Portland  
Providence  
Richmond  
Rochester  
Sacramento  
San Antonio  
San Diego  
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Santa Ana  
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Shelby County  
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Wichita

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