

A Year Like
NO OTHER



**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2020-2021

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Message FROM THE CHAIR

“

I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Casserly for his 44 years of service with the Council. His contributions have led to some of the most significant legislative actions and best practices in urban public schools.

”

MICHAEL O'NEILL

June 30, 2021

This past year, unlike any other year we have all experienced personally or professionally, the Council of the Great City Schools, the only organization in the nation exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools, lived up to the challenge of keeping its member districts interests first and foremost.

Like our member districts, the Council reinvented itself while helping urban school systems deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Importantly, the Council has hosted weekly Zoom calls with job-alike groups from districts across the country, ranging from superintendents to school board members, from CIO's to research directors. This real-time exchange of ideas on issues faced, what works (and doesn't) and even shared support has become a key part of a leader's week. The Council also released *Returning to School*, a series of reports providing recommendations for reopening planning, as well as more specialized reports called *Spotlight* dealing with Covid-19 issues. Additionally, our Fall and Spring conferences continued conducted on-line, even as we plan for a return to in-person in Philadelphia in October.

With the American Rescue Plan providing unprecedented levels of federal funding, the Council formed a Federal Funds Optimization Task Force of 20 superintendents, school board members, chief academic officers and other experts from the nation's largest big-city systems. The culmination of that effort was the recently released toolkit, *Investing American Rescue Plan Funds Strategically and Effectively*, Guidance for School Districts, which offers guidance for and aid to urban school systems across the country in the planning and use of federal funds to effectively build the long-term capacity they need to continue their improvement. The Council is also working closely with the Biden Administration on a number of matters impacting our members.

On the legislative front, the Council notched several victories for urban schools, including filing an amicus brief to successfully stop the prior Department of Education's plan to divert hundreds of millions of dollars to private schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as substantially impacting the debate on funding in each relief bill. We also continued to be a leader on social justice issues, releasing a statement of support on the George Floyd verdict and holding a Town Hall meeting at this year's virtual Fall Conference featuring urban student leaders from across the nation

discussing issues of race and equity.

As Chair, I joined my fellow Board Officers and several other Executive Committee Members on a search committee to select a new executive director to replace Dr. Michael Casserly, who is stepping down from the position after serving for more than 30 years. After an exhaustive national search, we were pleased in March to name Dr. Ray Hart, the Council's former director of research, as the new Executive Director. We know that Dr. Hart is the best next leader of Council and will continue to add value to our collective work of improving educational opportunity and equity for all of our youth.

As the Council reinvented itself in real-time during the pandemic and adjusted to the new leadership soon to be in place, I must share my deep-felt appreciation for the Council staff, who advocate on behalf of our member districts, researching best practices and helping all of us to improve. Their collective tireless work on our behalf is so appreciated. A true family effort.

Lastly, I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Casserly for his 44 years of service with the Council. His contributions have led to some of the most significant legislative actions and best practices in urban public school. I thank Dr. Casserly for his passion, dedication and commitment to our youth and our member districts. His career has made a major difference in the lives of millions of urban children and it is truly fitting that he was the recipient at the March Legislative Conference of the first annual Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice, an award which honors the key attributes we all attribute to Dr. Casserly.

As a school board member of an urban school district and as a graduate of a Great City School system, including the nation's oldest public school, it has been my true honor to have served as this year's Chair. The value of a membership in the Council has become clearer than ever. The Council, like our country and our member districts, has adapted, evolved and reimagined its future, and we are well positioned to be the top urban education organization for many years to come.

Michael O'Neill
Vice Chair - Boston School Committee
Chair of the Board, 2020-21

Message FROM THE DIRECTOR



June 30, 2021

I am proud to present this, my final, annual report to the membership on the work of the Council of the Great City Schools during the 2020-21 program year. It has been an extraordinary year, and the Council of the Great City Schools did everything we could think of to help you meet the unprecedented challenges you faced because of the global pandemic. On top of everything else, the organization's entire body of work—like yours—was done on-line, making this year singular in every respect.

First and foremost, we pivoted this year to focus primarily on the COVID-19 crisis by producing a dozen guidance documents on everything from unfinished learning to air quality, from special education to transportation, and almost everything in between to give you the best advice we could muster. We also conducted over 700 ZOOM calls with our superintendents, school board members, and line officers of every stripe to share lessons learned, to strategize, and support each other personally and professionally. We tracked our status and fielded hundreds of press interviews, and we launched efforts to vaccinate our staff and students. And we ended the year by naming a task force that produced guidance on how best to use the unprecedented levels of federal support that was coming our way.

While this was going on, we successfully challenged in federal court the Secretary DeVos-led Department of Education and its attempts to steer federal aid away from our students to private schools. The victory saved our districts hundreds of millions of dollars in badly needed assistance. We also helped back off a class action lawsuit involving the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Moreover, the Council was unflinching on Capitol Hill in advocating for substantial federal assistance and vigilant in ensuring the funds were well-targeted on our urban school districts. We were also successful in making sure that we could provisionally identify English learners who we could not assess in person. In addition, we provided the Biden Education Transition Team a detailed set of recommendations, and we established a solid relationship with the new Administration going forward.

At the same time, we successfully argued before the National Assessment Governing Board for a one-year delay in NAEP, and we made a substantial proposal for modifying NAEP's reading framework. We also spoke out forcefully on the killing of George Floyd; provided professional development and coaching to over 35 of our Great City School boards; continued our Strategic Support Teams; and launched a major effort to improve our technology interoperability and security.

If that were not enough, the Council released several new reports this year, including a professional development framework to complement the curriculum work we have done over the last several years, and a report analyzing the academic effect urban schools were having in overcoming the effects of poverty and other barriers faced by our students. We also continued publishing our annual academic and operational key performance indicator reports and our monthly newsletter, *The Urban Educator*.

While all-virtual, we didn't miss a beat in holding our annual conferences. Our fall conference featured Ibram X. Kendi, Thomas Friedman, Julián Castro, and Laura Bush along with an all-student national town hall; and our spring conference included Education and Labor Committee Chair Congressman Bobby Scott, Ways and Means Committee Chair Congressman Richard Neal, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, U.S. Secretary of Labor-nominee Marty Walsh, officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and noted *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward.

All of this was done while the organization conducted a nationwide search for its new executive director.

I thank Michael O'Neill, Vice-Chair of the Boston School Committee, for his terrific leadership this year. We could not have gotten through the year without his stalwart presence and innovative thinking. And I thank the amazing Council staff for the dedication and expertise they put into their work on behalf of urban schools and our children every day. Thank you and farewell.

Michael Casserly
Executive Director

“

I am proud to present this, my final, annual report to the membership on the work of the Council of the Great City Schools during the 2020-21 program year. ”

MICHAEL CASSERLY



THE COUNCIL



The Council of the Great City Schools brings together the nation's largest urban public school systems in a coalition dedicated to the improvement of education for children in the inner cities. The Council and its member school districts work to help our schoolchildren meet the highest standards and become successful and productive members of society.

The Council keeps the nation's lawmakers, the media, and the public informed about the progress and problems in big-city schools. The organization does this through legislation, communications, research, and technical assistance.

The organization also helps to build capacity in urban education with programs to boost academic performance and narrow achievement gaps; improve professional development; and strengthen leadership, governance, and management.

The Council of the Great City Schools accomplishes its mission by connecting urban school district personnel from coast to coast who work under similar conditions. Staff with responsibilities for curricula, research and testing, finance, operations, personnel, technology, legislation, communications, and other areas confer regularly under the Council's auspices to share concerns and solutions and discuss what works in boosting achievement and managing operations.

In addition, joint efforts with other national organizations, corporations, and government policymakers extend the Council's influence and effectiveness outside member school districts to the larger, interdependent world that will ultimately benefit from the contributions of today's urban students.

Since the organization's founding in 1956, geographic, ethnic, language, and cultural diversity has typified the Council's membership. That diversity propels the coalition forward to see that all citizens receive an education that will equip them with the skills and knowledge to compete successfully in the world marketplace and to enhance the quality of their lives in a society changing with phenomenal speed. The wellspring of accomplishments and innovations rising from our inner cities testifies to the resounding benefits of investment in the nation's urban centers and in their public schools.



Former First Lady Laura Bush shared her thoughts on the challenges facing public education with Dallas Schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa in an interview conducted at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum in Dallas and shared virtually at the 64th Annual Fall Conference.



U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona discussed the importance of reopening schools during his address to urban educators at the virtual Legislative/Policy Conference.



Vision

Urban public schools exist to teach students to the highest standards of educational excellence. As the primary American institution responsible for weaving the strands of our society into a cohesive fabric, we—the leaders of America’s Great City Schools—see a future where the nation cares for all children, expects their best, appreciates their diversity, invests in their futures, and welcomes their participation in the American dream.

The Great City Schools are places where this vision becomes tangible and those ideals are put to the test. We pledge to commit ourselves to the work of advancing empathy, equity, justice, and tolerance, and we vow to

do everything we can to vigorously resist the forces of ignorance, fear, and prejudice, as we teach and guide our students. We will keep our commitments, and as we do and as society supports our endeavors, cities will become the centers of a strong and equitable nation, with urban public schools successfully teaching our children and building our communities.

Our Mission

It is the special mission of America’s urban public schools to educate the nation’s most diverse student body to the highest academic standards and prepare them to contribute

to our democracy and the global community.

Our Goals

- To educate all urban school students to the highest academic standards.
- To lead, govern and manage our urban public schools in ways that advance the education of our children and inspire the public’s confidence.
- To build a confident, committed and supportive urban community for raising the achievement of urban public schoolchildren



Author and columnist Thomas Friedman, bottom right, participated in a session on the “Future of Education” at the Annual Fall Conference moderated by Council executive director Michael Casserly, top left, and featuring big-city superintendents. Clockwise right to left, Baltimore Schools CEO Sonja Brookins Santelises; Cleveland Schools CEO Eric Gordon; Boston Schools Superintendent Brenda Cassellius; and Tulsa Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist.



Massachusetts Congressman Richard Neal, top left, discussed his support for school infrastructure at the Legislative/Policy Conference. The session was moderated by Council Chair Michael O’Neill and Guilford County Schools Superintendent Sharon Contreras.

Organizational STRUCTURE

School districts located in cities with populations over 250,000 and student enrollments over 35,000 are eligible for membership in the Council of the Great City Schools. Membership is also open to those districts serving a state's largest city, depending on its urban characteristics.

The **Board of Directors** is composed of the superintendent and one board of education member from each member district, making the Council the only national educational organization so constituted and the only one whose purpose and membership is solely urban. The board meets twice a year to determine and adopt policies. It elects a 24-member executive committee, which exercises governing authority when the board is not in session.

The board of directors has established five special task forces to address major issues facing the membership. These include an **English Language Learners and Bilingual Education Task Force** to focus on issues around the education of English language learners.

A **Task Force on Achievement and Professional Development** was established to eliminate gaps in the academic achievement of students by race. A **Task Force on Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance** addresses concerns about issues surrounding urban school leadership and management. **Black and Latino Young Men and Boys Task Force** works to implement the pledge the membership took to improve conditions and outcomes for these students. And the organization has recently initiated a **Black and Latina Young Women and Girls Task Force** to strengthen its commitment to equity.

Three subcommittees of the executive committee provide support in financial and organizational areas:

By-Laws: Defines the Council's mission, responsibilities, and composition within the framework of applicable laws and regulations.

Audit: Reviews and studies budgetary matters and ensures that revenues are properly managed.

Membership: Determines eligible cities for membership and recruits, screens, and recommends new members.

In addition to these governing bodies, a network of deans of the **Great City Colleges of Education** and staff liaisons from various school district departments encourage information exchange with counterparts in other cities. Common concerns in areas such as student achievement, public relations, technology, human resources, finance, research, legislation, special education, and curriculum connect urban education personnel from member cities to share the ideas and experiences of the larger group.





Characteristics & Conferences

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS

TOTAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT



8.2M



FREE/REDUCED PRICE LUNCH ELIGIBILITY



71%

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS



13,772

16%

English Language Learners

TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS



470,756

STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO



17:1

14%

Students With Individualized Education Plan (IEP's)

CONFERENCES

Virtual 64th Annual Fall Conference
October 13-17, 2020

Virtual Bilingual, Immigrant, and
Refugee Education Meeting
November 3,4,10,13,20 & 21, 2020

HRD/Personnel Directors
Virtual Meeting
February 16-19, 2021

Legislative/Policy Virtual
Conference
March 20-22, 2021

Chief Operating Officers
Virtual Conference
April 13-15, 2021

Annual Fall CONFERENCE

“ Our schools, our school systems, our teachers, our pedagogy – are either raising and educating the students in our classes to be racist or to be antiracist. ”

IBRAM X. KENDI



Julián Castro

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council of the Great City Schools held its 64th Annual Fall Conference virtually, October 13-17, with the theme “Championing Urban Education.”

In a town hall moderated by AJ Crabill, the Council’s director of governance, student leaders from several urban school districts stressed the importance of telling the full, unvarnished history of the United States. “I want us to rewrite the textbooks,” said Carmella Thomas, a student in Oregon’s Portland Public Schools. “Let’s not give only one narrative. We need to open more perspectives to kids – and at a younger age.”

In his keynote address, author and historian Ibram X. Kendi said educators face a profound either/or situation. “Fundamentally, we as educators – our schools, our school systems, our teachers, our pedagogy – are either raising and educating the students in our classes to be racist or to be antiracist,” said Kendi.

Conferees also heard from former First Lady Lara Bush, who recounted her own memories of educators who had a lasting impact on her life with Dallas Schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa during a discussion held at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum in Dallas. Public education is “so important,” said Bush. “We’re so fortunate in our country to have great public schools everywhere that welcome every student.”

Former secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Julián Castro was interviewed by San Antonio Schools Superintendent Pedro Martinez. A graduate of the San Antonio Independent School District, Castro is a strong advocate for education equity in the nation’s public schools. “Whether the digital divide or the need to invest fully in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) so students of every ability are fully able to learn, it’s clear we need to focus now and in the years to come on investing in equity,” said Castro.

Author and columnist Thomas Friedman participated in a session called “The Future of Education,” alongside big-city superintendents. He said that massive, simultaneous accelerations in technology, climate change and globalization are reshaping the world and K-12 education has to be about inspiring, mentoring, fostering, nurturing and creating lifelong learners.



Ibram X. Kendi



Portland Student Carmella Thomas



Bob Woodward

Legislative and Policy CONFERENCE

“Take the money, use it well, and show us the good job you did so that we will be empowered to make the argument that the money made a difference.”

REP. ROBERT SCOTT



Greta Massetti

The Council of the Great City Schools' Legislative/Policy Conference was hosted virtually from March 20 – 22 and featured an address from the nation's 12th U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona.

A former teacher and education commissioner in Connecticut, Cardona promised educators that his primary focus will be the reopening of the nation's schools as quickly and as safely as possible. “To me that is the greatest equity lever I can pull right now,” said Cardona. “There is no substitute for in-person learning, so getting our students in school safely is goal number one.”

Conferees heard from Rep. Robert “Bobby” Scott (D-Va.), who urged leaders of the nation's largest public school districts to spend the money they will receive from the American Rescue Plan wisely. “Take the money, use it well, and show us the good job you did so that we will be empowered to make the argument that the money made a difference,” said Scott.

The issue of school infrastructure was discussed by Rep. Richard Neal (D-Mass), chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. Neal believes that as the nation looks to reopen schools, post-pandemic, the need for updated infrastructure for schools is more pertinent than ever and a national infrastructure plan will be especially essential for big cities, which have the oldest and most overcrowded school buildings in the country.

Greta Massetti, chief of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Field Epidemiology and Prevention Branch, noted that there has been a tremendous uptake of vaccination among educators and she encouraged school leaders to reach out to public health partners and identify ways to offer vaccination clinics at a district site.

Conferees also heard from author and *Washington Post* journalist Bob Woodward, who said that educators need to teach children to be lifelong learners, a trait that he said has served him well over his long career. When asked how schools can help students consume media more critically and become better informed citizens, Woodward said that if he were a third-grade teacher, he would help students learn about reputable news organizations and also about sites that grade/assess the credibility of the information being published.

As the conference came to a close, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly was honored at a video ceremony where he received the first-ever Dr. Michael Casserly Legacy Award for Educational Courage and Justice from former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The award came with a \$10,000 scholarship, sponsored by Curriculum Associates, and will be presented to a graduate from one of the Council's member school districts.



Bobby Scott



North High School in Des Moines held a vaccination clinic where hundreds of students received the first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

Highlights of COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

COMMUNICATIONS

The Council of the Great City Schools works to give the public and the press a balanced and accurate view of the challenges, developments, and successes of urban public schools. In 2020-21 the Council—

- Convened over 700 ZOOM calls with member school boards, superintendents, and senior staff, including regular calls with member communications directors, to share best practices, discuss strategies, and provide personal and professional support to the membership during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Launched a reopening schools tracker with *Education Week* to provide up-to-date information on the operating status of the nation's largest school districts.
- Held an introductory conference call with communication directors from urban school districts and the new communications team from the U.S. Department of Education.
- Fielded scores of inquiries from national and regional media outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Education Week*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Associated Press*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.
- Emailed eight issues of the Council's award-winning digital newsletter, the *Urban Educator*.
- Created the *Communications Toolkit for Reopening Schools after COVID-19* to provide district leaders and communications staff in urban school districts with recommendations for effective messaging during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Hosted the organization's 64th Annual Fall Conference featuring Laura Bush, Ibram X. Kendi, Julian Castro, Tom Friedman, an all-student panel discussing issues of race and equity, and dozens of best practices panels with member districts.
- Published the organization's Annual Report.
- Issued more than a dozen press releases on Council activities.
- Issued statements on the killing of George Floyd and the storming of the U.S. Capitol.
- Managed the CGCS-Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholarships Program.
- Participated in the Education Writers Association Conference.
- Managed the organization's Blue Ribbon Corporate Advisory Group.

LEGISLATION

In voicing its proposals and ideas to Congress and other federal policymakers, the Council helps shape legislation to strengthen the quality of schooling for the nation's urban children. In 2020-21, the Council—

- Successfully advocated for the use of the Title I formula to distribute Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, including \$54 billion under the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act* and \$122 billion under the *American Rescue Plan*, resulting in more than \$50 billion in funding for Council member school districts.
- Coordinated Council districts' participation in three state lawsuits and filed supporting Amicus briefs opposing the Education Department's Interim Final Rule on Equitable Services that would have diverted an additional \$300 million in COVID-19 relief funding from Council members to private schools beyond the amount required in the *CARES Act*.
- Conducted regular ZOOM calls of member legislative liaisons, federal program directors, general counsels, special education directors, and others during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Sent detailed policy recommendations to President-Elect Biden and the incoming administration's Education Transition Team, focusing on substantial financial shortfalls in school districts, the safety and health of students and staff due to the pandemic, and racial and ethnic equity and justice.
- Circulated detailed summaries of the six enacted pandemic relief and recovery bills including education funding, health related funding, tax credits, and employment and benefit provisions, as well as similar summaries of the various major interim proposals.
- Provided hundreds of briefings to CGCS school boards, superintendents, chief financial officers, general counsels, and other senior district officials on the status of federal COVID-19 funding, including congressional proposals, enacted legislation, and agency regulations and waivers.
- Hosted the 2021 Annual Legislative/Policy Conference virtually, with remarks from the new Secretary of Education, the Chairs of the House Committees on Education & Labor and Ways & Means, and the Labor Secretary-Designate, as well as Q&A sessions with staff from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Education, and Congress.
- Supported proposals from the Biden Administration and continued to advocate for \$100 billion in school infrastructure support through the American Jobs Plan, over \$200 billion in universal pre-school and child-care grants under the American Families Plan, and doubling annual Title I funding in the FY 2022 Budget Proposal.
- Submitted regulatory comments to the Education Department on the interim final requirements for the Elementary and Secondary

Highlights of Council Activities

Schools Emergency Relief fund (ESSER) and provided testimony on Title IX regulatory revisions to the Office of Civil Rights.

- Encouraged the U.S. Department of Education to enforce strict compliance with the State Maintenance of Effort provisions for ESSER funds under the *American Rescue Plan* to ensure federal stimulus funds are not offset by reductions in state aid.
- Supported the \$1 billion Emergency Operations relief for school meal programs in the December 2020 Consolidated Appropriations bill.
- Submitted comments to the U.S. Department of Agriculture supporting additional regulatory simplification and streamlining in the regular school meal and summer food programs, and successfully promoted the extension of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) COVID-19 waivers for school meals to continue to allow districts to provide free meals to all students through pick-up, drop-off, and other delivery methods.
- Briefed the White House multiple times on Council members' efforts to vaccinate citizens, staff, and students at school sites.
- Filed multiple comments with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure that \$10 billion in COVID-19 funding for emergency broadband connectivity and remote learning was targeted to poverty, required minimal application burden for school districts, and protected student and family privacy.
- Filed recommendations with the Federal Communications Commission supporting the permanent use of the E-Rate program for off-campus student internet access and petitioned the agency to make school district cybersecurity costs eligible for reimbursement.
- Hosted a series of legal webinars with Husch Blackwell on issues affecting urban school districts, including COVID-19 testing and vaccination requirements; LGBTQ+ issues; legal and policy priorities of the Biden Administration; and First Amendment and hate speech issues.
- Coordinated efforts among member legal counsels to oppose an IDEA-related national class-action lawsuit.
- Opposed the Trump Administration's Education Freedom Scholarship proposal, which would provide \$5 billion in federal tax credits for donations that could be used for private school tuition.
- Fielded scores of legislative and regulatory questions and interceded for member school districts to resolve problems with federal agencies.

RESEARCH

Timely data collection and analysis allow the Council to prepare comprehensive reports, predict trends, and assess the effects of various policies, reforms, and practices on student performance. In 2020-21, the Council—

- Coordinated bi-weekly COVID-19 ZOOM calls with research, evaluation, and assessment leaders and staff in member districts to discuss district needs and plans for responding to the pandemic.
- Conducted bi-weekly COVID-19 mental health and social/emotional learning meetings with member districts to discuss district needs and plans for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Wrote report, *Ensuring a Data-Driven Approach to Reopening Schools After COVID-19: Recommendations for Research and Assessment*, to clarify the role of research departments in school districts' responses to the pandemic.
- Relaunched www.edwires.org to coordinate document and information sharing among district leaders across member districts and expanded its capacity to host discussions among Council role-alike staff.
- Analyzed NAEP and Academic KPI data to assess the progress of young men and women of color across Council member districts and presented it at the Council's Black and Latino Young Men and Boys Task Force and Black and Latina Young Women and Girls Task Force meetings.
- Provided data analysis on disproportionality for young men and women of color to support district efforts to improve student achievement and social/emotional outcomes for students.
- Completed three national surveys in collaboration with the RAND Corporation as part of the American School District Panel on district plans and progress related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Collected, analyzed, and reported on the Council's Academic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on student achievement levels, attendance, suspensions, course participation, AP attainment, graduation rates, special education trends, and principal and teacher demographic data.
- Expanded the Council's Academic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to include annual data collection on the performance of English Language Learners in member districts.
- Enhanced the Council's online data dashboard of Academic KPIs to include longitudinal data.
- Served as the lead evaluator on a Kellogg Foundation grant to improve early literacy achievement in the San Antonio Independent School District.
- Conducted data analysis to support the Council's reviews of district academic and operational functions.
- Conducted research on urban school progress on the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Highlights of Council Activities

- Testified before the National Assessment Governing Board arguing for a delay in 2021 NAEP testing until 2022. Request was granted.
- Finalized and published *Mirrors or Windows: How Well Do Large City Public Schools Overcome the Effects of Poverty and Other Barriers?*
- Provided technical support to districts on NAEP and other National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) results during U. S. Department of Education Workshops.
- Convened two meetings of the Trial Urban District Assessment Task Force to advise the National Assessment Governing Board and the National Center for Education Statistics.
- Represented urban school district interests at meetings of the National Assessment Governing Board; National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine; American Educational Research Association; Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium; National Center for Education Statistics; National Association for the Education of Young Children; National Network of Education Research –Practice Partnerships; Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents; National Association of Assessment Directors; Directors of Research and Evaluation; Council of Chief State School Officers; Council of Large Public Housing Authorities; and the Educational Testing Service.
- Responded to numerous member requests for statistical information and research assistance.
- Provided technical assistance to member districts on setting up or enhancing programs for males of color.
- Arranged through the Wallace Foundation to provide technical assistance to member districts on strategically and effectively using federal American Rescue Plan Funds.
- Collaborated with IES to co-host a Reading Summit using NAEP data on addressing the declines in reading proficiency across grades four, eight, and 12, featuring panels of national reading experts and representatives from member districts.
- Collaborated with Student Achievement Partners, the Kellogg Foundation, and the San Antonio Independent School District to implement an early reading accelerators pilot project to improve early literacy skills. Lessons learned were shared with other CGCS member districts in multiple ways.
- Provided Strategic Support Teams to review the special education programs in Omaha and Norfolk.
- Published a series of three Spotlight reports on best practices among the member districts in social/emotional learning and mental health.
- Collaborated with Student Achievement Partners to facilitate three webinars about the early reading accelerators pilot project in fall 2020. Each webinar featured expert speakers and one or more member districts who shared their current implementation status as well as lessons learned.
- Worked with Student Achievement Partners to review and provide feedback on their *Priority Instructional Content in English Language Arts and Mathematics* and revisions to their *Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool* publications intended to support standards-based instruction in member districts.

ACHIEVEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Improving the performance of all students and closing achievement gaps is one of the Council's most important priorities. In 2020-21, the Council—

- Convened weekly ZOOM calls with chief academic officers and instructional leaders across member districts so they could confer on rapidly evolving issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Convened a committee composed of chief academic officers, experts in the field, and researchers to develop and release detailed guidance about high-quality professional development, including exemplars from member districts illustrating key principles, *Advancing Instruction and Leadership in the Nation's Great City Schools: A Framework for Developing, Implementing, and Sustaining High-Quality Professional Development*.
- Worked with expert consultants and curriculum staff and leaders to develop and release a document guiding planning and responses to accelerate student learning, *Addressing Unfinished Learning After Covid-19 School Closures*.
- Collaborated with members of the Council's Federal Funds Optimization Task Force to develop guidance for the nation's large city school systems on using new federal dollars, *Investing American Rescue Plan Funds Strategically and Effectively: Guidance for School Districts*.



Highlights of Council Activities

- Planned and facilitated three webinars on addressing unfinished learning and defining models for accelerated instruction when schools reopened in the fall of 2020.
- Provided virtual support to districts on ways to apply the principles of unfinished learning to their summer programming and curriculum guidance for the upcoming school year.
- Facilitated district networking to share approaches, successes, and lessons learned in developing quality curriculum guidance in reading, English language arts, and mathematics.
- Enabled and facilitated district collaboration on problems of practice in a range of areas, including scheduling, instructional technology, learning management systems, and professional learning.
- Continued to elevate and leverage the work of member districts that have shown substantial gains on NAEP among disadvantaged students and students of color to share characteristics, strategies, and lessons learned in publications and presentations.
- Convened the Achievement and Professional Development Task Force virtually at the Annual Fall Conference in October 2020 and the Legislative Conference in March 2021 to update district leaders on newly-released publications and trends in district data.
- Participated on NAEP's Visioning Panels for Reading to update the assessment's Reading Frameworks, and briefed member CAOs, ELL Directors, ELA Directors, and Task Forces. Wrote two letters to NAGB arguing for a more equitable framework.
- Collaborated with strategic partners in supporting urban districts with standards implementation and school turnaround initiatives.
- Provided virtual support to districts on their curriculum initiatives using the Council's resource *Supporting Excellence: A Framework for Developing, Implementing, and Sustaining a High-Quality District Curriculum* and its accompanying rubric.
- Connected the work of the Council to work done by leading mathematics and literacy organizations to keep the membership informed and to help shape the work of those organizations in addressing urban education.
- Convened working groups of ELL program directors and staff from across the membership on *Assessing & Addressing Unfinished Learning, Family Engagement/Communication & Translation and Interpretation, EL Student Engagement, and Technology and Opportunities to Practice Listening and Speaking to develop the Supporting English Learners in the COVID-19 Crisis* guide.
- Successfully lobbied the U.S. Department of Education to include provisionally identified ELLs in the official ELL count for purposes of Title III funding and to include additional flexibility in the administration of the annual English Language Proficiency Assessment.
- Hosted a two-part webinar series on ELD standards to support ELL access to grade-level content.
- Collaborated with Student Achievement Partners (SAP) and the Council's academics team to plan and host *Early Reading Accelerators*, a three-part webinar series on instructional practices to support early readers.
- Co-planned and participated in two joint task force meetings on Achievement & Professional Development and ELL & Bilingual Education.
- Responded to numerous information requests on issues and policies related to serving ELLs and immigrant children and youth in Council-member districts, especially on pandemic-related virtual instruction.
- Enrolled and supported over 10 member districts implementing professional development on supporting struggling students with the Council's Professional Learning Platform (PLP) courses.
- Held a four-part series for the new PLP subscribers to train facilitators on the 3Ls™ courses.
- Hosted virtual sessions on a range of topics including the use of technology to support virtual instructional delivery, meeting unique needs of newcomers, and addressing foundational skills within the context of English language acquisition.
- Assisted several districts in planning the rollout of the Council's professional development courses on Complex Thinking and Communication in addition to providing technical support to previously subscribed districts.
- Supported Baltimore City Schools with their development of a strategic plan for ELLs as part of the EL Plan Guiding Coalition.
- Held the first ever virtual Bilingual, Immigrant, and Refugee Education (BIRE) Meeting over three weeks in November 2020.
- Participated in the National English Learner Roundtable meeting with Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona.
- Presented the *Educator's Toolkit on Preventing Female Genital Mutilation*, a resource jointly developed by the Council and the Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation, during a webinar for attendees from across the globe, including Australia and the United Kingdom.
- Began designing writing courses for ELLs in partnership with the Pathway to Academic Success project of the University

BILINGUAL, IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE EDUCATION

America's urban schools serve more than 26 percent of the nation's English language learners. In 2020-21, the Council—

- Convened 22 weekly and bi-weekly ZOOM calls with ELL program directors and staff to share information and provide mutual assistance to address ELL needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Developed and published *Sample Questionnaires for Provisional Screening of ELLs* with input from experts and ELL program directors to facilitate remote English language proficiency screening while in-person screening was not possible during the pandemic.

of California Irvine's National Writing Project, funded by an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) expansion grant.

- Included Los Angeles Unified School District in the Pathway to Academic Success Education Innovation and Research (EIR) expansion grant project, providing over three years of quality professional development.

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND SCHOOL FINANCE

The Task Forces on Leadership, Governance, and Management, and School Finance address the quality and tenure of leadership and management in and funding of urban schools. In 2017-18, the Council—

- Conducted some 250 ZOOM calls with member Chief Financial Officers, Chief Operating Officers, Chief Information Officers, Human Resource Directors, Directors of Transportation, Food Service Directors, Chiefs of Police and Directors of Safety and Security, Directors of Facilities and Plant Operations, Internal Auditors, Risk Managers, Purchasing Directors, Emergency Managers, and Directors of Athletics.
- Designed and organized a professional development program for member school boards and superintendents with the Harvard Business School, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.
- Provided on-site technical assistance, coaching, and professional development on effective governance to some 35 member boards of education and superintendents.
- Published guidance document during the pandemic on finances and budgets, operations (food service, security, transportation, and facilities), technology, air quality, and water safety.
- Conducted a Strategic Support Team review of the finances of the Hillsborough County schools.
- Convened the Annual Meetings of the Human Resources Directors and the Chief Operating Officers, including the Directors of Transportation, Food Services, Facilities, and Safety and Security to discuss COVID-19-related issues.
- Convened meetings of the Council's Governance, Management and Finance Task Force at the Annual Fall Conference and March Legislative Conference.
- Published *Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools* with an expanded set of operational key performance indicators.
- Recommended numerous people for key administrative positions in the member districts and responded to member requests for management and operational information and services.
- Coordinated an effort to provide technical assistance to 20 Council-member districts to help them strengthen their technology interoperability.

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The Council works to manage its resources and ensure the integrity of its programs. In 2020-21, the Council—

- Conducted an all-virtual external audit of the organization's 2019-20 spending and received unqualified audit results for FY2019-20.
- Coordinated travel to 12 districts for School Board Retreats
- Managed financials for Board Retreats and Strategic Support Teams, 15 grant projects, 12 programs, and 5 virtual conferences.
- Due to the pandemic, in-person meetings were not held. Hosted an all virtual 2020 Annual Fall Conference and 2021 Legislative/Policy Conference as well as multiple meetings and forums throughout the year.
- Maintained online conference registration for all virtual meetings.
- Maintained work-from-home technology for staff during pandemic lockdown.
- Replaced all computers/laptops at the start of the fiscal year.
- Replaced copier at the beginning of the calendar year.
- Continued implementation of the alternative to payables processing during lockdown.
- Reviewed options for renewal of medical/dental/life/disability insurances.

Award PROGRAMS

“A big thanks to Team Dallas—we have tremendous talent in Dallas—and especially my central team that helps me on a daily basis. It makes me very proud to have grown up in this city, to be an immigrant, to be the leader of this district.”

MICHAEL HINOJOSA

GREEN-GARNER AWARD

During the Annual Fall Conference, the Council bestows the Green-Garner Award upon a past or present member district superintendent or board of education member in recognition of exceptional contributions to urban schools and students. As the nation's highest urban education honor, the award pays tribute to the memory of Richard R. Green, former Minneapolis superintendent and New York City Public Schools chancellor, and Edward Garner, a businessman and former school board president of the Denver Public Schools.

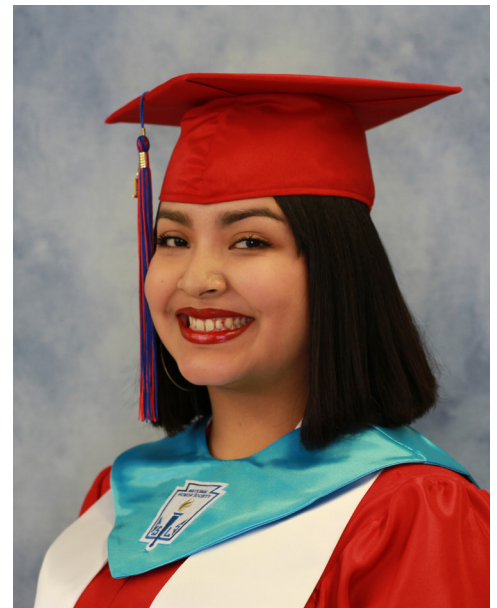
The award, sponsored by Cenergistic, Curriculum Associates and K-12 Insight, includes a \$10,000 college scholarship to be presented to a senior in the winner's school system. Michael Hinojosa, the superintendent of the Dallas Independent School District, was presented with the award at the 2020 virtual Fall Conference. A graduate of Dallas ISD, Hinojosa served six years at the helm of the nation's 14th largest school system before leaving in 2011. He returned for a second term as superintendent in 2015 and helped persuade voters to approve a \$1.6 billion bond program, the district's largest in history.

Under his leadership, the Dallas school system has seen a steady rise in student achievement over the last three years. Hinojosa has also spearheaded an effort to increase internet access and connectivity, and worked to boost the number of people of color and women in the district's leadership ranks.



Kamila Vargas, a senior at Thomas Jefferson High School in Dallas, second to left, was presented with a Green-Garner \$10,000 college scholarship at a school board meeting. She is congratulated by, left to right, school board trustee Edwin Flores, Dallas Schools Superintendent Michael Hinojosa and Thomas Jefferson principal Sandi Massey.

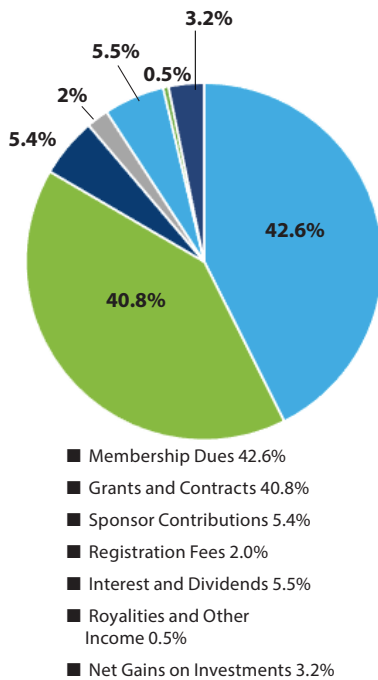
Kamila Vargas will attend Dallas College at Brookhaven and then the University of Texas at Austin, majoring in radio and television. She wants to help transform the way Latinos are portrayed in popular media.



Green-Garner Award Winners

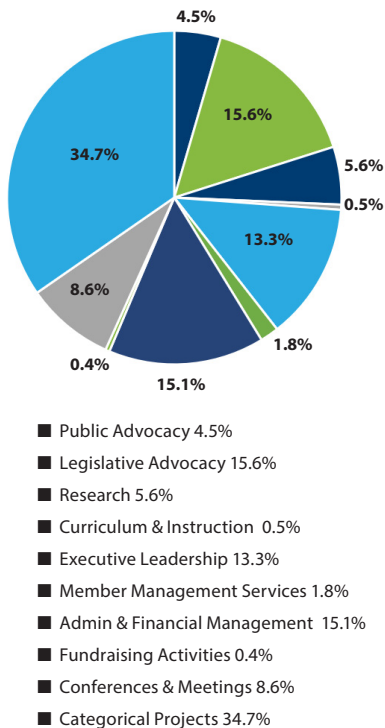
1990	James Griffin, Retired Member Timothy Dyer, Former Superintendent	St. Paul School Board Phoenix Union High School District
1991	Paul Houston, Former Superintendent	Tucson Public Schools
1992	Richard Wallace Jr., Superintendent Emeritus	Pittsburgh Public Schools
1993	Constance Clayton, Superintendent	School District of Philadelphia
1994	Holmes Braddock, Board Member	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
1995	Curman Gaines, Superintendent	St. Paul Public Schools
1996	James Williams, Superintendent	Dayton Public Schools
1997	Maxine Smith, Retired Board Member	Memphis City School Board
1998	Gerry House, Superintendent	Memphis City Public Schools
1999	Rod Paige, Superintendent Judy Farmer, Board Member	Houston Independent School District Minneapolis Public Schools
2000	Eric Smith, Superintendent	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
2001	Barbara Byrd-Bennett, Superintendent	Cleveland Municipal School District
2002	John Simpson, Superintendent	Norfolk Public Schools
2003	Arthur Griffin, Board Member Franklin Till, Superintendent	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Broward County Public Schools
2004	Tom Payzant, Superintendent	Boston Public Schools
2005	Anna Dodson, Board Member	Norfolk Public Schools
2006	Beverly Hall, Superintendent	Atlanta Public Schools
2007	Elizabeth Reilinger, Board Member	Boston Public Schools
2008	Pascal Forgione, Superintendent	Austin Independent School District
2009	Emmett Johnson, Board Member	Atlanta Public Schools
2010	Arlene Ackerman, Superintendent	The School District of Philadelphia
2011	Candy Olson, Board Member	Hillsborough County Public Schools
2012	Carol Johnson, Superintendent	Boston Public Schools
2013	Denise Link, Board Member	Cleveland Metropolitan School District
2014	Terry Grier, Superintendent	Houston Independent School District
2015	Bill Isler, Board Member	Pittsburgh Public Schools
2016	Eric Gordon, Chief Executive Officer	Cleveland Metropolitan School District
2017	Felton Williams, Board Member	Long Beach Unified School District
2018	Alberto Carvalho, Superintendent	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
2019	Lawrence Feldman, Board Member	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
2020	Michael Hinojosa, Superintendent	Dallas Independent School District

Financial REPORT



REVENUE

	AUDITED REPORT FY 19-20	ESTIMATE FY 20-21
Membership Dues	\$3,209,032	\$3,213,129
Grants & Contracts	1,955,392	3,082,094
Sponsor Contributions	796,200	411,100
Registration Fees	322,068	150,115
Interest and Dividends	444,707	413,248
Royalties and Other Income	146,334	38,562
Net Gain on Investments	141,889	242,739
Total Revenue	\$6,731,844	\$7,550,987



EXPENSES

	AUDITED REPORT FY 19-20	ESTIMATE FY 20-21
Public Advocacy	\$265,087	\$262,425
Legislative Advocacy	957,542	913,731
Research	359,402	328,622
Curriculum & Instruction	21,910	29,129
Executive Leadership	682,582	781,374
Member Management Services	181,236	108,007
Admin & Financial Management	675,792	884,115
Fundraising Activities	27,903	21,519
Conferences & Meetings	1,273,698	502,214
Categorical Projects	2,509,529	2,034,390
Total Expenses	\$6,954,681	\$5,865,526

Change in Net Assets	\$222,837	\$1,685,462
Net Assets, Beginning	\$9,585,345	\$9,362,508
Net Assets, Ending	\$9,362,508	\$11,047,970

SPONSORS

THE COUNCIL THANKS THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN 2020-2021

Blue Ribbon Corporate Advisory Group

Amplify Education	Cenergistic	McGraw Hill Education
Apple	Curriculum Associates	Savvas Learning Company
Blackboard	The Harris Institute/ Foundation	Wilson Language Training

2020 Virtual Annual Fall Conference

Advocacy &
Communication
Solutions, LLC
Allovue
Amplify
Apple
bulb Digital Portfolios
Cambridge Assessment
International Education
Centegix
ClassLink
CT3
Curriculum Associates
Discovery Education
ENA
Enome, Inc.(Goalbook)
Frontline Education
Great Minds
hand2mind
Hayes Software Systems
Imagine Learning
Infosys
JW Affinity IT
K-12 by Elicor
Kinolved
LearnPlatform
LEGO Education
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Otus
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Raptor Technologies
Renaissance
Revolution Foods
Savvas Learning
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School Safety Giant
SchoolMint
Sodexo
TCG
The Princeton Review/
Tutor.com
Twig Education
Whetstone Education
Wilson Language
Training
XanEdu Publishing
Xello

2020 Virtual Bilingual, Immigrant & Refugee Education Directors Meeting

Benchmark Education
Blue Canoe Learning
Curriculum Associates
Data Recognition
Corporation
Imagine Learning
McGraw Hill

Education
Savvas Learning
Company
SchoolCNXT
WIDA at the
Wisconsin Center
for Education
Research

2021 Virtual HRD/ Personnel Directors Meeting

CherryRoad
Technologies
Curriculum Associates
ESS
Innive, Inc.
K12 Insight
Nimble
Ultimate Kronos Group
Upbeat

2021 Virtual Legislative/Policy Conference

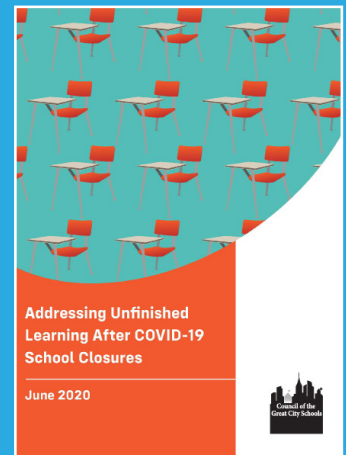
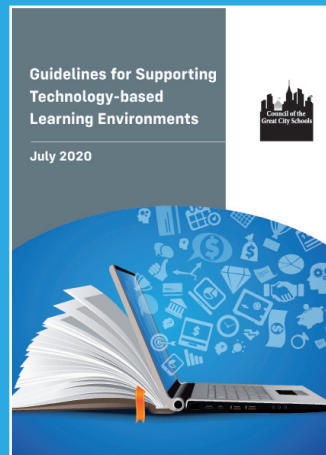
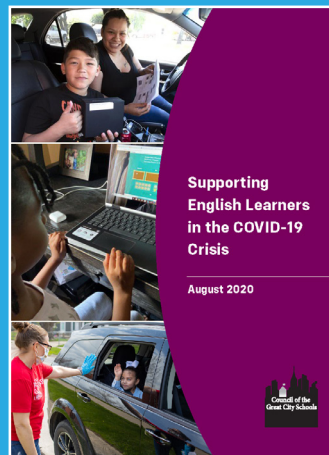
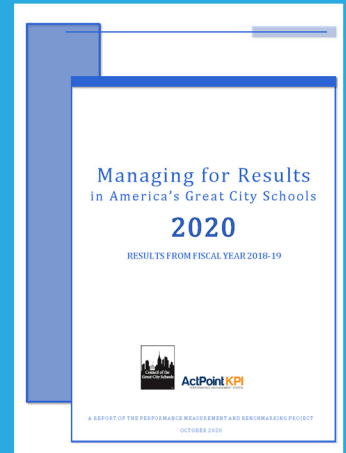
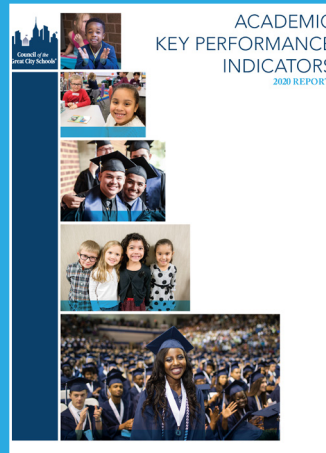
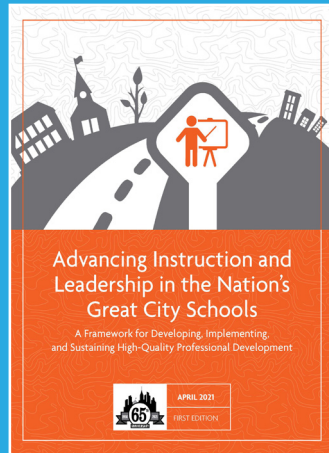
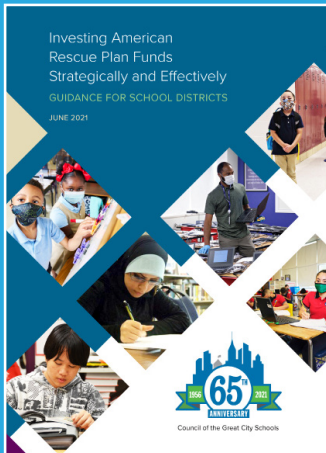
Advocacy &
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ClassLink

Curriculum Associates
Infosys
K-12 by Elicor
Lightspeed Systems
NWEA
Raptor Technologies
Reading Plus
SchoolMint
Wilson Language
Training

2021 Virtual Chief Operating Officers Conference

ALC Schools
Audio Enhancement
BlueBird
Cenergistic
ClassLink
Intrado
K12 Insight
McKinstry
National Schools Safety
and Security Services
ProTeam Foodservice
Advisors
Public Consulting
Group
Raptor Technologies
Revolution Foods
Sodexo
Zonar

Publications



Investing American Rescue Plan Funds Strategically and Effectively, Guidance for School Districts

June 2021

The purpose of this document is to lay out a framework for the nation's large city school systems to spend new Covid-19 federal dollars strategically and effectively.

Advancing Instruction and Leadership in the Nation's Great City Schools: A Framework for Developing, Implementing, and Sustaining High-Quality Professional Development

April 2021

This guide aims to present district instructional leaders and staff with a core set of criteria for what high-quality professional development entails.

Academic Key Performance Indicators, 2020 Report

October 2020

The refined set of Academic Key Performance Indicators are designed to measure the progress among the Council's membership toward improving the academic outcomes for students.

Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools 2020, Results from Fiscal Year 2018-19

October 2020

In 2002, the Council of the Great City Schools and its members set out to develop performance measures that could be used to improve business operations in urban public school districts.

Communications Toolkit for Reopening Schools after COVID-19, Recommendations for Communication Departments

September 2020

This document offers a checklist of considerations, sample communication materials drawn from urban school districts across the country, and recommendations for effective messaging during the COVID-19 crisis.

Supporting English Learners in the COVID-19 Crisis

August 2020

This guide is the ninth in a series developed by the Council of the Great City Schools to help districts as they prepare to reopen schools—whatever that may look like—in the 2020-21 school year.

Guidelines for Supporting Technology-based Learning Environments

July 2020

The document identifies the challenges and accompanying recommendations in the areas of organizational structure; systems; instruction; and technology infrastructure.

Addressing Unfinished Learning After COVID-19 School Closures

June 2020

This guide presents district curriculum leaders and staff with an instructional framework for addressing unfinished learning and learning losses.



Council Staff

ADMINISTRATION

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 Teri Trinidad, Director of Administration,
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 Marilyn Banks, Administrative Assistant

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 Denise Walston, Director of Mathematics

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 Gabriela Uro, Director of ELL Policy and Research
 Julie Wright Halbert, Legislative Counsel
 David Lai, Special Projects Manager

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 Renata Lyons, Research Manager
 Moses Palacios, Legislative and Research Manager
 Eric Vignola, Programmer/Technology Specialist

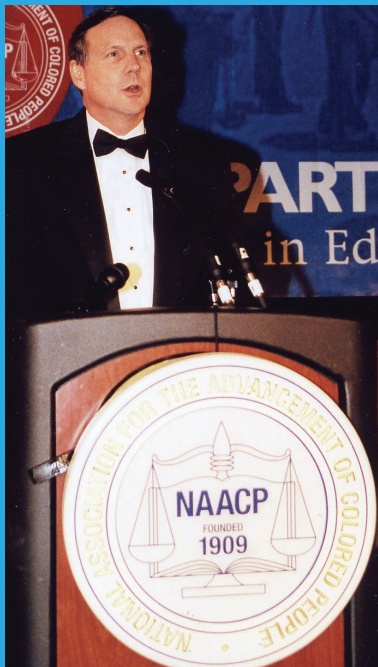
SPECIAL PROJECTS

Amanda Rose Corcoran, Special Projects Manager

Thank You

MICHAEL CASSERLY

After more than 30 years as executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, Michael Casserly will step aside in June 2021 and remain as a Strategic Adviser. The Council thanks Casserly for his leadership, vision, drive, work ethic and most of all, his deep and abiding belief in the potential of all eight million youth in America's largest cities.





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2020–2021

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Boston School Committee

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2020–2021

Council Board of Directors and Member Districts

(AS OF MARCH 2021)

SCHOOL DISTRICT	SUPERINTENDENT	BOARD MEMBER
Albuquerque	Scott Elder	David Percy
Anchorage	Deena Bishop	Elisa Vakalis
Arlington	Marcelo Cavazos	Kecia Mays
Atlanta	Lisa Herring	Leslie Grant
Aurora	Rico Munn	Kyla Armstrong-Romero
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Bridgeport	Michael Testani	Joseph Sokolovic
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Buffalo	Kriner Cash	Sharon Belton-Cottman
Charleston County	Gerrita Postlewait	Eric Mack
Charlotte-Mecklenberg	Earnest Winston	Elyse Dashew
Chicago	Janice Jackson	Sendhil Revuluri
Cincinnati	Laura Mitchell	Mike Moroski
Clark County	Jesus Jara	Lola Brooks
Cleveland	Eric Gordon	Denise Link
Columbus	Talisa Dixon	Jennifer Adair
Dallas	Michael Hinojosa	Justin Henry
Dayton	Elizabeth Lolli	William Smith
Denver	Dwight Jones (Interim)	Carrie Olson
Des Moines	Thomas Ahart	Kyrstin Delagardelle
Detroit	Nikolai Vitti	Angelique Peterson-Mayberry
District of Columbia	Lewis Ferebee	N/A
Duval County	Diana Greene	Charlotte Joyce
East Baton Rouge	Sito Narcisse	David Tatman
El Paso	Vince Sheffield	Bob Geske
Fort Worth	Kent Scribner	Ashley Paz
Fresno	Robert Nelson	Valerie Davis
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Hawaii	Christina Kishimoto	Catherine Payne
Hillsborough County	Addison Davis	Nadia Combs
Houston	Grenita Lathan	Sue Deigaard
Indianapolis	Aleesia Johnson	Diane Arnold
Jackson	Errick Greene	Barbara Hilliard
Jefferson County	Marty Pollio	Diane Porter

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Long Beach	Jill Baker	Megan Kerr
Los Angeles	Austin Beutner	Kelly Gonez
Miami-Dade County	Alberto Carvalho	Marta Perez
Milwaukee	Keith Posley	Larry Miller
Minneapolis	Ed Graff	Siad Ali
Nashville	Adrienne Battle	Rachael Anne Elrod
Newark	Roger Leon	Josephine Garcia
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Puerto Rico	Eligio Hernández Pérez	N/A
Richmond	Jason Kamras	Cheryl Burke
Rochester	Lesli Myers-Small	Van Henri White
Sacramento	Jorge A. Aguilar	Darrel Woo
St. Louis	Kelvin Adams	Joyce Roberts
St. Paul	Joe Gothard	Jeanelle Foster
San Antonio	Pedro Martinez	Patti Radle
San Diego	Lamont Jackson (Interim)	Richard Barrera
San Francisco	Vincent Matthews	Mark Sanchez
Santa Ana	Jerry Almendarez	Valerie Amezcu
Seattle	Denise Juneau	Chandra Hampson
Shelby County	Joris Ray	Kevin Woods
Toledo	Romules Durant	Robert Vasquez
Toronto	Karen Falconer (Interim)	N/A
Tulsa	Deborah Gist	Stacey Woolley
Washoe County	Kristen McNeill	Angela Taylor
Wichita	Alicia Thompson	Ron Rosales

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