Council of the Great City Schools
Urban Educator

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SPECIAL EDITION
Legislative Conference



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Education Secretary Addresses Council

In 2009, Arne Duncan was named the nation's ninth U.S. secretary of education and recalls that the last two years have been fascinating as the Education Department has pushed an aggressive agenda and dramatic reform in an effort to improve the nation's schools.

But there is still one statistic that haunts him at night and that is the nation's 25 percent dropout rate.

"In a generation, we have gone from first in the world in terms of college graduates to ninth," Duncan told big-city school leaders, board members, senior administrators and deans from colleges of education who converged in Washington, D.C., recently to attend the Council of the Great City Schools' Annual Legislative/Policy Conference.



Education Secretary Arne Duncan

According to Duncan, millions of jobs go unfilled because the nation's schools are not producing workers with enough knowledge.

"We're just not collectively producing the workers the new economy needs," said Duncan. "Despite tough budget times, we have to get better."

The secretary said that the nation can lead the world in college graduates by the year 2020, and one way to accomplish that is by investing at every level, beginning with early childhood.

Duncan, who served as the chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools for almost six years, said he doesn't need a study extolling the benefits of early childhood because he has seen it firsthand. He said this is why the Education Department has put millions into the Early Learning Challenge Fund, an initiative to raise the quality of programs for young children.

"We have to get out of the catch up business in education," Duncan stressed.

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Districts Prepare For Common Core Standards

The Council of the Great City Schools recently convened a meeting among urban-school districts piloting the Common Core State Standards to support their implementation of the new standards designed to prepare students for success in college and careers.

The pilot districts -- Albuquerque, Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, New York City, Philadelphia, St. Paul, Minn., and Washington, D.C. -- sent teams of instruction, research and implementation leaders to the nation's capital for the daylong meeting prior to the start of the Council's annual Legislative/Policy Conference.

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Council Executive Director Michael Casserly delivers a State of Urban Education address at *USA TODAY*.

What's the State Of Urban Education?

Urban school districts are being challenged to improve student achievement to levels that America has never asked of its schools, yet big-city school systems are rising to the occasion and getting the job done.

This was the message Michael Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, recently delivered to a group of education, business and news leaders assembled at the first-ever *Unite to Make a Difference* Education Forum at *USA TODAY* headquarters in McLean, Va.

Sponsored by the Council and *USA TODAY*, the forum provided an opportunity for urban school superintendents to address several topics on education alongside some of the nation's top business executives.

In his address on the state of urban education, Casserly emphasized that the num-

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President Obama Visits Boston and Miami Schools

President Obama recently visited two urban public schools -- a high-tech school in Boston and a turnaround school in Miami.

Boston Mayor Thomas Menino joined the nation's chief executive officer and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at TechBoston Academy to discuss the shared responsibility that government, businesses, philanthropists and communities have to promote innovative education strategies to prepare students to compete in the 21st century global economy.

At TechBoston, where nine out of 10 students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, every student gets a laptop. The school has a wireless data infrastructure provided by Cisco Systems, and Google has named the school a pilot site for student application development. Further, partnerships with the University of Massachusetts-Boston and Harvard University provide teachers with extra training in learning how to use data to improve student achievement.



President Obama meets Boston Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson during a visit to TechBoston Academy.

"This is the future of education," said Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson. "We don't just hand students a laptop -- we work with them to build websites, create videos, sift through science and realize the power of their own curiosity."

In a recent visit to Miami Central Senior High School, President Obama was accompanied by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush and Secretary Duncan to acknowledge the school's performance in improving student academic achievement.

Miami Central had been labeled an "F" school, with the state threatening to take it over. But the school managed to improve its grade to a "C" this year.

President Obama *continued on page 3*

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New York Names New Leader and Interim Chief Takes Helm in Newark; Memphis Supt. to Stay; Broward Co., and Providence Leaders to Depart



Dennis Walcott

Dennis Walcott is a graduate of New York City public schools and was a kindergarten teacher. He will now lead the school system with his recent appointment by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg as chancellor.

Walcott takes the reins of the nation's largest school system following the resignation of Cathleen Black, who led the district for only three months after serving as the chairwoman of Hearst Magazines.

Since 2002, Walcott has been the city's deputy mayor, responsible for educational and youth policy. In this position, he helped end the policy of social promotion, developed the district's capital program, oversaw the opening of 474 new schools and supported establishing 109 charter schools.

President Obama *continued from page 2*

"Everyone, including our parents and community supporters, has worked incredibly hard," said Principal Rennina Turner. "We've always known that our students have the capacity to achieve academically, and now they've proved it."

Miami Central has been able to turn around through funds from the U.S. Department of Education's Title I School Improvement Grant and Miami-Dade County Public Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho's choice to implement a rehabilitative model for the school that included appointing a new principal.

"Miami-Dade County takes very seriously the task of implementing changes that help students excel academically," Carvalho stressed.

"I want to thank Mayor Bloomberg for this opportunity to serve New York City's 1.1 million schoolchildren," said Walcott in a news statement. "With my children and grandson, my family now represents four generations of New York City public schoolchildren, and I am determined to ensure that we deliver what our parents expect and deserve—a high quality education."

And just across the Hudson River, New Jersey's Newark Public Schools recently named Deborah Terrell, a regional superintendent and former principal, as its interim superintendent.

Terrell replaces Clifford Janey, who recently resigned from the district after serving at the helm since 2008.

Contract Extension



Kriner Cash

Kriner Cash was selected superintendent of Memphis City Schools in 2008 and under his leadership, the school district was awarded a $90- million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to improve teacher effectiveness.

The school board recently expressed confidence in Cash by extending his contract for an additional 14 months to August 2013.

Voters in Memphis recently chose to merge the 105,000-student Memphis City Schools with the smaller 48,000-student Shelby County Schools.

According to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, Cash will work through the two-and-a-half year planning period for the merger.

Leaders Step Down

James Notter, the superintendent of Florida's Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, recently announced his decision to retire from the district he has led since 2007.

He will leave the nation's sixth largest school system on June 30, three years before his contract expires.

Notter joined the district in 1986 as a supervisor at a job-training program and held various positions including chief of staff and interim superintendent.

And after three years, Thomas Brady, superintendent of Rhode Island's Providence Public Schools, announced he will leave the school district he has led since 2008.

A retired colonel in the U.S. Army, Brady took the reins of the 23,000-student school district after serving as the interim superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia.

According to the *Providence Journal*, under Brady's leadership the district developed its first-ever unified curriculum aligned with state standards and the school system is in the process of developing a new teacher-evaluation system.

Buffalo District Wins Decision in High Court

The Buffalo Public School District recently won a New York Court of Appeals ruling in a major case involving an employee wage freeze from 2004 to 2007.

As a result of the decision by the state's highest court, the district will not have to pay salary step increases that employees lost during the wage freeze imposed by a control board.

Buffalo Schools Superintendent James Williams called the ruling "a victory," although cautioning that the plaintiffs may still try to pursue other legal channels.

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ber of urban students demonstrating reading and math proficiency on state tests has increased substantially over the last several years.

In addition, urban-student performance on the rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), commonly known as "The Nation's Report Card," has also improved significantly since 2002.

"We have narrowed the academic gaps between our schools and the nation by a third in math and 20 percent in reading in less than a decade," said Casserly.

He noted that seven out of 10 of the nation's highest ranked public schools are located in urban centers in citing *Newsweek* magazine. And Great City Schools have more Blue Ribbon schools than anywhere in the nation, as well as the country's largest concentrations of both Nationally Board Certified instructors and Teach for America graduates.

"What this means is that we have many of the country's best trained and most energetic classroom teachers," said Casserly.

But he also pointed out that while urban schools are making substantial progress, the academic performance of too many of its students is still too low, dropout rates are too high and the achievement gap, while narrowing, is still too wide.

As a result, he announced three new initiatives the Council will develop in an effort to fix the problems that plague urban schools.

The first calls for the organization to increase its efforts to implement the new common core standards, where they have been adopted, and to place a special emphasis on boosting adolescent literacy and turning around the lowest-performing schools.

A recent report by the National Assessment Governing Board found that 44 percent of 4th graders in big cities and 56 percent of 8th graders scored below basic levels of attainment in science. As a result, the second initiative the Council will develop is a new program to boost science performance in the Great City Schools.

And the third initiative calls for the Council to appoint a new group focused on improving achievement among big-city African American and Hispanic males.

As the executive director of a coalition composed of 65 large city school districts, Casserly said he is often asked about whether he is optimistic about urban education.

His answer to that question is yes. "And the chief reason I'm hopeful is not because we are making progress-- although we are-- but because we are figuring out why and what it will take to go further," said Casserly.

He believes that throughout the years educators have learned a great deal about how to make urban schools better from the experiences of faster-improving urban school districts themselves. These districts include Atlanta and Boston, which have made gains on NAEP reading and math exams over the last decade as a result of strong instructional reforms. And they also include Miami-Dade County, which doubled the state gain in math, and New York City, Denver, the District of Columbia and Florida's Hillsborough County, which are developing new ways of evaluating teachers and administrators to hold everyone accountable.

According to Casserly, one can see the results in urban kids such as Natalia, who moved from the Dominican Republic to Anchorage, knowing no English, but who immersed herself in her school, graduated in the top 10 percent of her class at age 16 and went on to college and graduate school.

Kids like Natalia "find in the Great City Schools the sanctuary, the helping hand and the intellectual stimulation they need to take their first steps toward the American dream," said Casserly.

America's Promise

The keynote speaker at the forum was Alma Powell, the chair of America's Promise Alliance, which is leading a ten-year campaign called Grad Nation to mobilize America to end the dropout crisis.

"Our goal is to raise high school graduation rates to 90 percent by 2020," said Powell, the wife of former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. "It is a goal we can reach."

Powell believes that the nation is facing another "Sputnik" moment and that the crisis in graduation rates, not only in high school, but also at the college level, puts the nation's future at risk.

"This recognition is good news, because awareness begets action," said Powell, who was appointed by President Barack Obama in 2010 to be a member of the President's Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.



Alma Powell

She said that part of the action that is needed involves improving education in the nation's urban school systems because that is where the dropout crisis hits hardest and where the achievement gap between urban and suburban students is widest.

Powell cited the need for rigorous academic standards, including common core standards, and holding states, districts and schools accountable for graduating all students from high school and preparing them for college and a career.

But she also noted that there is a difference between holding educators accountable for results and blaming them for failures that belong to society as a whole.

She said that schools need to be strengthened but that there is a role for businesses to play and recalled that the Grad Nation campaign was launched at the headquarters of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Powell pointed out that cities making the greatest progress in graduation rates, such as Boston, Charlotte and Tampa, also happen to be those where community col-

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Charlotte Schools Superintendent Peter Gorman, San Francisco Schools Superintendent Carlos Garcia and Philadelphia Schools Superintendent Arlene Ackerman participate in a panel discussion moderated by John Hillkirk, the editor of *USA TODAY.*

laboration, especially with the business community, is strong.

"We have seen what works. We know where to focus," said Powell. "Becoming a Grad Nation is less about finding a way than summoning the will."

Panel Discussions

Urban school superintendents along with business leaders took center stage as they participated in three panel discussions at the daylong forum at *USA TODAY*.

In the first panel, entitled "What are public education's greatest challenges and how do we address these key issues?" the economic crisis plaguing school districts was at the forefront of education leaders concerns.

Carol Johnson, the superintendent of Boston Public Schools, said the tough financial constraints have forced the district to take a hard look at focusing on things that produce the most results and to prioritize what's most important.

Arlene Ackerman, CEO and superintendent of The School District of Philadelphia, said despite tough financial times the district will keep the core programs that work such as early childhood reading and all-day summer school for children. "We looked at the results and research, and kids who went to the [summer] program were much better off," said Ackerman.

Carlos Garcia, the superintendent of San Francisco Unified School District, said the lack of money has led to the district increasing class size, eliminating summer school and shortening the school year by four days, but pointed out that the district is running out of things to cut. "The impact is tremendous," said Garcia. "We are shortchanging the future of America."

Also discussed was the issue of teacher quality.

Gerard Robinson, Virginia secretary of education, noted that in other countries top college graduates become teachers but in this country they are encouraged to enter other fields. "We have to make teaching the equivalent to engineering [and other professions]," said Robinson.



Anchorage Schools Superintendent Carol Comeau listens to panel moderator Stephen Jordan, senior vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

A second panel featured education and business leaders discussing ways the business community can support students.

James Williams, the superintendent of New York's Buffalo Public Schools, said that during the summer teachers should be able to enter the workplace and learn skills that they could then teach to their students in the classroom.

"Bring us into your world," he urged business executives.

Robin Thurman of Bechtel Corporation, the largest engineering company in the world, said that a large percentage of engineers are retiring and there is an urgent need to increase the number of students interested in math and science.

She believes it is important for the business community to sit side-by-side with educators and form a true partnership.

"We want to sit at the table with you, and not just give money, but share best practices," said Thurman.

The third panel addressed the question of how can education and business work together to meet goals and how can the media help.

Eugene White, superintendent of Indianapolis Public Schools, said it helps if the media understand the problems big-city school districts face, and described how he allowed a reporter from the *Indiananapolis Star* newspaper to enter the classroom to chronicle the life of a kindergarten student.

"They illustrated the challenge involved in educating children of poverty," said White.

Alberto Carvalho, superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, believes the national media coverage of education is often disconnected from reality. He said the media can help by refocusing media coverage on public education, holding educators feet to the fire and demanding and supporting peer- reviewed, research-based reform.

"Too many times the media does a terrible job of accepting bad practices," said Carvalho.



David Hunke, left, president and publisher of *USA TODAY,* listens as Miami Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho lists ways the national media can help education.

Education Secretary *continued from page 1*

Doing More With Less

The secretary noted that there has been massive changes in education in the last two years and told big-city educators that their leadership has been integral.

He believes that 42 states adopting the common core standards is a game changer and that having states such as Massachusetts and Mississippi now being measured by the same standards is a change in the right direction.

Duncan said there is also a massive effort to increase access to higher education and his department is partnering with the IRS to increase the number of students filling out federal student aid forms.

The Education Department has also implemented an income-based repayment plan for young people who go into the public sector after college. Under the plan, students in public sector jobs after 10 years will have all their student debt erased.

"We need help getting the word out," said Duncan, noting that so many people want to go to college but cannot afford it.

The nation's top education official praised the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 for saving more than 300,000 education jobs, but acknowledged that the money is no longer available to help school districts.

He said that educators need to find a way to keep reform moving forward and that they have to challenge themselves to think about how to do more with less. "Our children can't wait," said Duncan. "How in tough budget times are we investing wisely and cutting where we need to?"

He said that it is vital that school districts use technology to get better results and become more efficient.

"We have to move from print to digital as fast as we can," said Duncan, "and need to continue to innovate."

He said that despite the tough economic times, the Education Department will continue to advocate turning around the nation's lowest performing schools and noted that for the first time there are now 1,000 turnaround schools in the country.

Duncan recalled a visit he recently made to a school in Miami that is in the midst of a turnaround. He was told that incidents of suspensions and discipline have decreased by 60 percent and that student attendance has increased.

The secretary said that the Education Department is working very hard to increase investment in education and that President Obama would veto any budget that doesn't support education. According to Duncan, the Obama Administration is asking for additional dollars in education and noted that the money is an investment, not an expense.

"We are investing not in the status quo, but a vision of reform," Duncan emphasized.

NCLB

According to Duncan, fixing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is at the top of the president's agenda and that the law has to continue to be the one piece of legislation that Congress works on in a bipartisan fashion.

He said NCLB should be fixed in a common sense way by providing more flexibility and focusing more on student growth and gains than absolute test scores, but still hold schools accountable.

Duncan said that as he looks across the globe, he sees countries that have tremendous diversity, yet there are no variations in academic achievement between their schools.

He recalls that while he was chief executive officer in Chicago he had some of the best schools in the nation and some of the worst.

"In other countries, that is not the case," said Duncan. "Their children are performing far better than our children here."

But the nation's top education official told urban education leaders that the country still has a chance to provide a quality education for all of its children.

"We owe it to our children and the nation to do that," said Duncan, "And I look forward to working with you to do that."



Roberto Rodriguez, special assistant to the president for education, and Steve Robinson, special assistant, Domestic Policy Council, discuss education issues.

Strengthening Education

Also addressing the conference were Roberto Rodriguez, special assistant to the president for education, and Steve Robinson, special assistant, Domestic Policy Council.

Rodriguez said education is one of the four pillars of the president's goal to "Win the Future" and that the Administration is working to strengthen and upgrade the public education system.

He said the Obama Administration is working to ensure that schools have effective teachers in every classroom by strengthening school leadership across the country through programs such as the Teacher Incentive Fund, which supports efforts to develop and implement performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools.

"We believe investments in education are more important than ever," said Rodriguez. "We want to make sure we keep k-12 education on sound footing."

Robinson said the president is focused on improving science, technology, engineering and math education (STEM) and has announced an initiative to not only hire 100,000 new STEM teachers, but to prepare them to effectively teach.

He said the Obama Administration is working to develop a program with the National Science Foundation as well as other federal agencies. "We are looking at partners in the community as well as business partners on how they could offer us their expertise in science," said Robinson.

Nation's Top Magnet Schools Named

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system in North Carolina offers a variety of magnet programs at 37 schools and was recently recognized for having more top magnet schools than any other district in the nation.

Seven schools in the district received the Magnet 2011 School of Excellence Award, which was presented to the best magnet schools in the country. Sponsored by Magnet Schools of America, the award honors 57 magnet schools that show a commitment to high academic standards, curriculum innovation, successful desegregation/diversity efforts and the consistent delivery of a high-quality education to students.

Jeff Linker, director of Charlotte's magnet programs, said the award "reflects the continuing commitment of the district to provide high-quality magnet program options for families, which encourage students to achieve to their highest potential."

The Charlotte school district was not the only urban school system with schools recognized. Indianapolis Public Schools and Florida's Hillsborough County School District and Miami-Dade County Schools had four schools on the list; followed by East Baton Rouge Parish School System (3); the School District of Palm Beach County (2); and Omaha Public Schools (2). In addition, Florida's Broward County Public Schools, Las Vegas' Clark County School District and New Jersey's Newark Public Schools had one school on the list.

Sweet 16 Surprise

Celebrating their 16th birthdays, Iman Cook and Nadia Winfield, students at Northern High School in Greensboro, N.C., recently asked friends and family to give money as gifts for a homeless youth facility. They reportedly raised about $400.

Minneapolis Kindergartners Get Boost

When Bernadeia Johnson became superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools in July 2010, she made a commitment to the incoming kindergarten class of 3,100 students and their families that they will be reading by the end of the first semester and will be college-bound when they graduate from high school in 2022.

Johnson is making good on that commitment, when she recently announced that more than 60 percent of kindergarten students achieved or exceeded reading at a level "B" or higher.

In addition, one-third of students reached a level "C," the end-of-the-year reading goal the district set for kindergartners.

"Some people believed that my goal was too aggressive and unrealistic for kindergarten students," said Johnson. "This is a 'no excuses' goal that empowers us to believe that it can be done and we will do it here in Minneapolis. I will not expect anything less of our students, teachers and parents in making this goal a reality."

According to the *MinnPost*, Johnson attributes the progress kindergartners have made in reading on differentiation, the practice of breaking classes into groups according to ability so that each student receives appropriate instruction. Students also participated in reading groups and did more writing.



Minneapolis Schools Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson greets two kindergarten students at the Northrop Urban Environmental Learning Center.

"Next year, the goal will move to first grade," said Johnson.

Common Core *continued from page 1*

More than 50 of the nation's urban school leaders last summer endorsed the Common Core Standards, believing that the new kindergarten to 12th-grade standards in English-language arts and mathematics would help them advance reform efforts in their school districts.

At the March 18 meeting, David Coleman, a lead writer of the Common Core State Standards, and Michael Cohen, president of the non-profit education reform group Achieve, addressed the gathering about priority standards in reading, writing and mathematics and the next generation of assessments, respectively.

Discussion groups focused on implementation issues the districts are facing, such as the planning process itself, curriculum and assessment for all students, professional development and the use of technology.

"Since all of the districts are working toward common learning expectations for students, all agreed that they wanted to build collaboration across districts and that they would like the Council to create ways for this to happen," says Ricki Price Baugh, the Council's director of academic achievement.

Representatives from the eight pilot districts will meet again in Memphis just before the Council's annual Curriculum and Research Directors Symposium, July 13-16.

Tampa, Chicago Districts Earn 'AP District of the Year' Honors

Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa has the largest increase in the number of students achieving success (a score of 3 or higher) in Advanced Placement (AP) courses of any school system in the nation, while Chicago Public Schools tops the nation among large school districts in expanding access to AP courses and improving scores.

For their efforts, the two districts were recently honored with 2011 AP District of the Year awards. Sponsored by the College Board, the awards recognize four school districts across the nation for increasing the number of students who pursue college-level courses while still in high school.

Hillsborough AP Success

From 2008 to 2010, Hillsborough County Public Schools achieved the largest increase in the number of students earning AP scores of 3 or better of any school district in the nation, an increase of 1,814 students. At the same time, the district also saw an increase in student participation in AP courses and exams by an annual rate of 19 percent.

As a result, the school system will receive the Beacon Award For Outstanding Achievement for its success in using AP to create a culture focused on college readiness.

"Superintendent MaryEllen Elia is a visionary leader who has taken one of the largest districts in the nation and achieved real transformation in a relatively short period of time," said Eric Cantor, College Board senior vice president.

Chicago Initiative

From 2008-2010, Chicago Public Schools has increased student participation in AP from 10,994 to 13,252 students, a 10 percent increase. In addition, the percentage of traditionally underserved minority AP students earning scores of 3 or higher increased from 16 percent to 19 percent.

The Chicago school system has implemented the Advanced Placement initiative, which aims to increase the number of students from economically disadvantaged families who enroll in AP courses and achieve college credit on AP exams. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the initiative has expanded and enhanced AP courses in several high-poverty schools.

AP Achievement List

In addition, the College Board compiled an AP Achievement List of 388 public school districts that have simultaneously achieved increases in access to AP courses for a broader number of students and also maintained or improved the rate at which their AP students earned scores of 3 or higher on an AP exam.

Big-city school districts who made the list are Florida's Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Saint Paul Public Schools, three districts in New York City, Oklahoma City Public Schools, Dallas Independent School District, Seattle Public Schools and New Jersey's Newark Public Schools.

Six Urban Teachers Receive Kennedy Awards for Inspirational Teaching



Bridget Lambright

Bridget Lambright, an English teacher at the Jane Addams Business Career Center in Cleveland, has a reputation for being strict, which Chardonay Brown quickly found out when she became a student in her class in 2006.

Brown recalled one assignment in which she submitted 300 notecards that she worked on for weeks, but Lambright refused to accept them because they didn't adhere to her submission guidelines.

"She was teaching that if a task is done right the first time, then disappointments can be avoided," Brown wrote in an essay about Lambright, who is one of the winners of the first Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Award.

The awards were recently presented to 10 teachers across the nation for their exceptional influence on their students. Award recipients receive $10,000 and must be nominated for the award by a former student.

Lambright was surprised she received the award, because she is not the most popular teacher with students or parents who don't understand why she is so tough. "I hold the bar high and look at the big picture," said Lambright in an interview with the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*. "Holding them to the highest expectations pays off for these young people, many of whom are now honor students in college."

Lambright was not the only inspirational big-city teacher. Also receiving an award was Rafe Esquith, a teacher in Los Angeles; two teachers in New York City, Rembert Herbert and Tom Porton; and two teachers from Miami, Melanie Mann and Evelys Ubiera.

Created in honor of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Stephen Sondheim, who attributes his success to the teachers in his life, the awards will be presented each year to teachers, kindergarten through college, who are nominated via the Kennedy Center web site.

In addition to a $10,000 award, winning teachers, along with the students they have inspired, will be featured on the Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards web site at http://kennedy-center.org/programs/awards/sondheim.

Future Educator Group's President, a Newark Student, Visits Council

"It is my goal to give back to Newark one day, by returning as a history teacher who will touch the lives of urban students."

This is the message that Leilani Bell, a 12th-grader at Science Park High School in Newark, N.J., delivered in a campaign speech to become the first international president of the Future Educators Association (FEA), an organization preparing students for careers in education and sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) International.

For the first time ever, FEA recently held an international election for student officers. Bell was among three candidates for the top post.

It's believed that her speech, emphasizing that prospective educators should consider teaching in urban areas, addressing the achievement gap and encouraging minority students to pursue a teaching career, led to her election as president.

"We as future teachers must prepare to address the high rate of students who drop out of high schools, particularly in our cities," she stressed. "... We must find ways to care about and connect with these students and instill in them confidence and affirmation about staying in school."



Council of the Great City Schools' Executive Director Michael Casserly greets students from the Future Educators Association, left to right, Leilani Bell, Chloe Johnson and Spencer Williams.

Bell and FEA's other two 2011-2012 international student officers in early April visited the Council of the Great City Schools and other national education organizations in Washington, D.C. Escorted by PDK International officials, Bell was accompanied by student vice presidents Chloe Johnson of Little Silver, N.J., and Spencer Williams of Bellefontaine, Ohio.

In addition to being FEA international president, Bell is the president of the FEA chapter at her Newark high school, where she is also involved with Peer Leaders, the swim team as well as various community service projects.

What made Leilani Bell choose teaching as a profession? "My passion for teaching was inspired by my first and second grade teacher...," she noted in her campaign speech.

School District In Orlando Receives Award

The Orange County Public Schools in Orlando recently received the 2011 Florida Association of Public Procurement Officials Award of Excellence in Public Procurement, which recognizes agencies for meeting or exceeding benchmarks and best practices in the procurement profession.

The school district's chief operations officer, Michael Eugene, specifically recognized the leadership of Kay Syed, senior director in the Contract Administration and Procurement Services Department.

The Orange County school system has raised the bar for fiscal management as an urban district utilizing key performance indicators, produced by the Council of the Great City Schools, to maximize efficiencies and save taxpayer dollars in business operations.

Four Urban Districts Receive Breakfast In the Classroom Grants

Students at four big-city school districts will no longer have to leave the classroom to eat breakfast.

They can now eat at their desks, as a result of a new $3-million initiative designed to reduce hunger and improve academic achievement.

Funded by the Walmart Foundation, the *Breakfast in the Classroom* program will provide free breakfasts in the classroom to students in Dallas Independent School District, Arkansas' Little Rock School District, Memphis City Schools, and Florida's Orange County Public Schools as well as Maryland's Prince George's County Public Schools. The districts were selected to participate in the program because they demonstrated exceptional need and potential for success.

Breakfast in the Classroom is a partnership among the Food Research and Action Center, National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation, National

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Education Budget Cuts in the 2011 Continuing Resolution

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*



At literally the 11th hour before the midnight shutdown of the federal government, an agreement on funding levels for FY 2011 was completed. The FY11 Continuing Resolution cuts some $38 billion in federal spending and is the first battle in Congress' war on the federal budget deficit. Subsequent battles will include the FY 2012 Congressional Budget Resolution setting spending ceilings for next fiscal year and the Federal Debt Ceiling bill allowing the federal government to borrow money to cover the $14 trillion federal debt.

So who won the first budget battle of 2011? President Obama and the House leadership claim to have accomplished their goals. Unfortunately, the President's statement on March 14th at the Kenmore Middle School that "We cannot cut education" could not be sustained. In fact, over $2 billion in cuts to the Education Department's FY2010 discretionary program levels were made. Providing nearly $700 million for Race-To-The-Top and $150 million for Investing in Innovation (I3) in new funding did little to counterbalance the other $2 billion in funding cuts. And, only minor consolation can be found in sparing Title I programs for disadvantaged students and IDEA programs for students with disabilities from all but the two-tenths of one percent cut that was applied to all domestic discretionary programs as part of the continuing resolution.

Title I Grants to LEAs were subject to the 0.2 percent across-the-board cut ($29 million), while Title I School Improvement grants were reduced by $11 million. The IDEA formula grants were also cut by 0.2 percent ($23 million). Title II Teacher Quality formula grants, however, were cut by $480 million. Title III grants for English language learners were cut by $16 million. Title IV National Safe and Drug Free Schools grants were cut by $97 million. Over 20 categorical school programs funded at more than $800 million were eliminated, including Title II-D Education Technology ($100 million), Striving Readers ($200 million), Perkins Tech-Prep ($102 million), Smaller Learning Communities ($88 million), and Even Start ($66 million). Since the Education Department is charged with submitting a detailed spending plan to Congress by mid-May, these figures should be treated as estimates until the spending plan is submitted.

The new $700 million appropriation for the Administration's signature Race-To-The-Top (RTTT) program will apparently be awarded only to State grant applicants. Despite frequent pledges to provide school district grants under RTTT, the final funding agreement includes no new authority for direct district-level grants. Districts, therefore, remain dependent on State participation in this $700 million competitive grant program.

Before adjourning for its spring recess, the House also passed the FY2012 Budget Resolution (H.Con.Res. 34) setting spending ceilings with sizeable reductions in entitlement programs and more cuts in domestic discretionary programs. While not cutting any specific programs, the Budget Resolution places procedural limits on overall funding levels that both appropriations and authorizing committees must follow. The Senate has yet to act on its version of the Budget Resolution, and may ultimately be unable to reach an agreement on FY2012 budget levels with the House. The likely stalemate over the congressional budget resolution has led "deficit-reduction hawks" to use the upcoming "must-pass" Federal Debt Ceiling legislation as an opportunity to force further reductions in federal spending. More to come.

Four School Systems Named Finalists for Urban Education Prize

North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and two districts in Florida—Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale and Miami-Dade County Public Schools—are among the four school systems recently selected as finalists for the 2011 Broad Prize for Urban Education.

Sponsored annually by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, the award honors the nation's urban school systems that have made significant progress in raising student achievement. The winner of the Broad Prize, to be announced Sept. 20, will receive $550,000 in college scholarships for high school seniors who will graduate in 2012, while each of the three finalist school districts will receive $150,000 in scholarships.

All three school districts have been in the running for the prize before. Miami was selected as a finalist three times previously while Broward and Charlotte are two-time finalists.

The four 2011 finalist districts, which also includes Texas' Ysleta Independent School District, were selected by a review board of 21 education researchers, policymakers and executives from universities, national education associations, think tanks and foundations.

This year, 75 of the nation's largest school districts were eligible for the award.

Pictorial of 2011 Legislative Conference



Education Secretary Arne Duncan poses with the Council's leadership, left to right, Secretary-Treasurer Candy Olson, Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, Chair Dilafruz Williams, Chair-elect Michael Hinojosa and past Council Chair Carol Johnson.



San Francisco school board members Jill Wynns and Norman Yee listen intently during a conference session.



San Diego Schools Superintendent Bill Kowba grasps information at a legislative briefing.



Richmond Schools Superintendent Yvonne Brandon concentrates on conference session.



Kansas City Missouri Schools Superintendent John Covington observes a legislative briefing.

Photos by Alex Jones

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Only in Alaska

Anchorage School District Superintendent Carol Comeau and musher Justin Savidis kick off the Iditarod, Alaska's 1,150-mile dog sled race from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska, on the western Bering Sea coast. This was the ceremonial start of the 2011 "Last Great Race on Earth," as the Iditarod is called. (Photo by Andre Camara)

Albuquerque District Gets Good Grades In Parent Survey

Parents of children who attend New Mexico's Albuquerque Public Schools are very satisfied with the education their children are receiving, according to a recent survey.

Schools received the highest marks for reading and writing instruction, with 93 percent of parents responding that they either "agree" or "strongly agree" that "staff at their school do a good job teaching my child to read and write."

The 15-question survey also found that approximately 92 percent of parents believe that their child's teacher provides their child with sufficient and appropriate information regarding their academic progress.

According to district officials, the survey results indicate that more parents are satisfied with their children's schools than any time in the past seven years.

The survey also revealed that 91 percent of parents believe their child's school is safe, 85 percent believe their child's school has high academic expectations and 87 percent think that school staff want their participation in their child's education.

The survey was sent home in English and Spanish and about 42 percent of the district's 72,000 families responded, an increase of about 28 percent from the previous year.

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Education Association Health Information Network and School Nutrition Foundation. The organizations hope that by moving breakfast from the cafeteria to the classroom, the number of students participating in federal School Breakfast Programs will increase.

Studies have shown that eating breakfast at school improves math and reading achievement, reduces absenteeism and school nurse visits, reduces obesity, leads to improved eating habits, improves behavior, and decreases tardiness.