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Council of the Great City Schools

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Ten Educators Selected for Michael Casserly Urban Executive Leadership Institute

WASHINGTON, Nov. 19 – The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) has chosen ten senior-level education administrators to participate in the fifth cohort of the Michael Casserly Urban Executive Leadership Institute for Superintendents.

Named after the Council's longtime former executive director, the program is designed to help current and aspiring superintendents develop the skills they need to successfully lead a large urban school system.

Cohort participants will engage in sessions and case studies covering topics such as school board relations, academic performance, media relations, operations, finances, and labor relations.

One of the most valuable features of the program is the opportunity for cohort participants to connect with current and former CGCS member superintendents, who will offer advice, guidance, and opportunities for shadowing. The program also allows cohort members to network with one another and build relationships with peers facing similar challenges.

"Leading a large urban school district is a difficult job, and the Michael Casserly Urban Executive Leadership Institute for Superintendents is designed to help cohort members navigate the complexities of this position," said Council Executive Director Ray Hart. "This program provides leaders with the opportunity to learn from successful urban superintendents and to build a network of colleagues they can rely on long after the program ends."

The Institute was established in 2023. Since then, 11 of its 37 graduates have held positions as superintendent, acting superintendent, or interim superintendent in major urban school systems.

"Superintendent turnover is a significant challenge for big-city school districts across the country due to the demanding nature of the role," said Michael Hinojosa, the Council's

Superintendent-in-Residence who oversees the program. “This initiative aims to reduce superintendent turnover by effectively preparing the next generation of urban school leaders.”

The members of the fifth cohort are:

- Dr. Mason Bellamy, Deputy Superintendent, Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Dr. Nancy Bernardino, Regional Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District
- La Kesha Drinks, Chief of Staff, Austin Independent School District
- Lisa Farmer Cole, Chief External Affairs Officer, Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- Kristina Howard, Senior Chief of Academics, Portland Public Schools
- Cancy McArn, Superintendent, Sacramento City Unified School District
- Dr. William Merritt, Deputy Superintendent, Jackson Public Schools
- Dr. Stacy Tosé, Chief of Schools, Baltimore City Public Schools
- Dr. Margarita Tovar, Deputy Commissioner of Policy and Talent, Colorado Department of Education
- Jamie Wilson, Chief of Staff, Rochester City School District

Programming for the 2027 cohort will begin in February with monthly sessions held through October 2027.

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About the Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools. Composed of 81 large city school districts, its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research, and media relations. For more information, visit www.cgcs.org