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Acting Education Secretary to Address Urban Educators

Acting U.S. Secretary of Education John King will address urban education leaders March 20 at the Council of the Great City Schools Annual Legislative/Policy Conference, March 19-22, at the historic Mayflower Hotel in Washington.



John King

He officially became acting secretary in January, succeeding Arne Duncan, who stepped down in December after seven years of leading education policy in America.

Education Secretary *continued on page 3*

Council Unveils Males of Color Website

The Council of the Great City Schools has launched a new website to help urban school districts across the nation improve the academic outcomes of males of color.

The site, www.malesofcolor.org, offers an array of materials, reports, data analysis, promising practices and other resources to support the work big-city school districts, administrators, teachers and the community are doing to help males of color succeed.

In July 2014, 60 of the largest urban school districts in the nation signed a public pledge to improve the educational

Males of Color *continued on page 6*



Council Reaches 60-Year Mark

A new study recently released by the Council of the Great City Schools provides hard data on the extent of mandatory testing in the nation's schools, evoking President Obama's attention and a meeting with the commander in chief.

Last March, the nation's primary coalition of large urban public schools led a delegation of big-city school leaders to the White House to discuss legislation, reforms, progress and challenges with the president, aimed at improving urban public education.

And in the fall of 2014, President Obama recognized and announced a Council-initiated pledge by more than 60 urban school districts to recommit to helping African American and Latino males succeed.

These and many other developments contribute to and mark 60 years of service to America's large urban public schools by the Council of the Great City Schools.

Co-founded in 1956 by R. Sargent Shriver, well-known father of the Peace Corps, the Council began as an ad hoc group of superintendents representing the

nation's 12 largest school districts. Shriver was president of the Chicago school board at the time.

The coalition has grown from a networking and study group into a national education policy and research organization in Washington, D.C., with a membership today of 68 big-city school districts, serving more than 7.2 million culturally diverse students.

"The Council of the Great City Schools is not here to reflect or perpetuate the inequities under which too many of our urban students suffer, but to overcome them," says Executive Director Michael Casserly. "As we celebrate 60 years as the voice of urban education, our next 20 years will be devoted to making sure that all our children have the academic tools for success."

On behalf of urban schools, the Council helps shape legislation, conducts city-by-city research, supports instructional and operational reforms and serves as a clearinghouse for information to the news media and others inquiring about urban

60-Year Mark *continued on page 4*

Acting Education Secretary Kicks Off Tour in El Paso

The nation will look to the El Paso Independent School District in Texas for guidance as more states begin to see the number of Latino students in public schools soar, Acting U.S. Secretary of Education John King said recently during a visit to the district's Bowie High School.

"El Paso represents the future ... the model for the diverse, multi-lingual communities most of America will experience soon," King said. "El Paso is also a community that values education and we know we can learn a lot from their experience."

King was in El Paso on Jan.14 to launch

his "Opportunity Across America" tour to highlight good work under way in schools and hear stories and experiences about what is working in successful classrooms. El Paso was his first stop in a five-city journey, which included visits to Houston and Philadelphia schools.

During his visit, King joined El Paso Independent School District Superintendent Juan Cabrera and Rep. Beto O'Rourke, D-Tex., to tour the gardens of Bowie High School and lead a round-table discussion with local education, civic and business leaders.

Conversations revolved around the recently adopted Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act that was adopted in 2001 and relied heavily on standardized testing.

Cabrera told King that the El Paso district has shifted its focus in the classroom away from standardized testing preparation, and toward active learning strategies that are more aligned with quality teaching and learning in today's classrooms.

El Paso continued on page 5



El Paso Schools Superintendent Juan Cabrera, right, welcomes Acting U.S. Secretary of Education John King and Congressman Beto O'Rourke, center, to Bowie High School.



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Felton Williams
Board Member, Long Beach

Secretary-Treasurer

Kaya Henderson
Chancellor, District of Columbia

Executive Director
Michael Casserly
mcasserly@cgcs.org

Editor
Henry Duvall
hduvall@cgcs.org

Associate Editor
Tonya Harris
tharris@cgcs.org

Staff Writer
Danyell Taylor
dtaylor@cgcs.org

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Find the Council on:



L.A. Names New Superintendent; Philly Leader's Tenure Extended; Denver Appoints Acting Chief; Guilford Co. Names Co-Interim Supts.



Michelle King

Michelle King has deep roots in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest school system.

A graduate of the district, she began her teaching career as a science and math teacher at a Los Angeles middle school. She has held a variety of positions in the district: high school principal, assistant superintendent in health and human services, chief instructional officer for high schools and senior regional administrator. In addition, King served in the No. 2 position in the district under the last two superintendents, John Deasy and Ramon Cortines.

And now King will take the reins herself, having recently been selected as the superintendent, becoming the first woman in more than 80 years and the first African-American woman to lead the 643,493-student school system.

During her tenure as an administrator, King led instructional reform plans to address graduation requirements and was a strong proponent of the district's restorative justice initiative, which district officials credit with reducing student suspensions and expulsions.

In a press release, board member Mónica Ratliff said that King's selection was a historical moment for the district. "It is an honor to be able to share in the announcement that this smart, thorough, transparent, organized, firm, diligent and compassionate woman is our new superintendent," said Ratliff. "I look forward to continuing to support her as she leads this district to even greater success."

Philly Stays the Course

When William Hite was selected as superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia in 2012, the school district



William Hite

faced a budget deficit of approximately \$720 million. To close the deficit, he had to make some tough decisions, including closing 31 schools and reducing the workforce.

Despite the financial challenges, Hite has encouraged innovation and equity, opening three new high schools and launching a redesign initiative, in which educators, community organizations and universities are invited to submit a proposal to redesign a school.

As a result, he was recently given a contract extension to lead the district for five more years through August 2022.

Members of the School Reform Commission (SRC), which governs the school district, voted to extend Hite's contract to ensure leadership continuity in the school system.

"Dr. Hite has demonstrated strong leadership through an extraordinarily difficult time, provided sound fiscal oversight and implemented a vision that builds on our school system's strengths with a focus on equity and high expectations," said SRC Chair Marjorie Neff.

Districts Select Acting Leaders

Susana Cordova is a product of Denver Public Schools and a first-generation college graduate who has served in several positions in the school district, including teacher, principal, chief academic officer and chief schools officer.

She will now add one more position to the list: acting superintendent. Cordova was recently appointed the district's acting superintendent, while Superintendent Tom Boasberg takes six months of unpaid family leave to travel and live abroad with his family and learn Spanish. Boasberg has led the school district since 2009.

And Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, N.C., has named two co-interim superintendents to lead the 72,000-student school district when Superintendent Maurice Green leaves this spring.

Nora Carr, chief of staff, and Terrence Young, chief information officer, will split the superintendent responsibilities until a new leader is selected, which the district hopes to have in place before the start of the 2016-17 school year.

Green is leaving the district he has led since 2008 to lead a private foundation in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Under his leadership, high school graduation rates have increased to an all-time high of 89.3 percent, with graduation rates for African American students and Latinos also increasing. In addition, students have improved their performance on the ACT college entrance exams and the district has received national awards for its character education program.



Education Secretary *continued from page 1*

"In 2016, I hope you'll join me as I recommit myself to ensuring that every child in America – regardless of background or circumstance – has access to an excellent education," said King, the former New York State education commissioner.

The Council conference will focus on the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), explaining the recently adopted federal law and how to transition to and implement the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that replaces the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Funding increases for education in the Fiscal Year 2016 Omnibus bill will also be discussed at the conference, along with other actions in the 114th Congress.

Conference highlights are on page 9, and registration information can be accessed at www.cgcs.org.

60-Year Mark *continued from page 1*

schools nationally. The organization also provides a network for school districts sharing common challenges to exchange information and address issues.

The Early Years

The urban-schools coalition began as the Research Council for the Great City Schools Improvement, with then-superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools as its first president. The ad hoc group became incorporated in 1961.

But it was in 1969 that the group broadened its focus to include education policy, and adopted its present-day name. And to help improve the quality of urban education in America, the coalition included school board members from its districts to join superintendents in its leadership ranks.

With the swirl of congressional activity flourishing in the nation's capital at the time, the Council moved its headquarters to Washington, D.C., from Chicago. It began legislative work on Capitol Hill and its membership had grown to about 20 urban school districts.

War on Poverty

During the era of the 1960s, legislation brought increased federal government involvement in education. The first Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted in 1965. President Lyndon Johnson had launched the "War on Poverty," and there was a major influx of minorities migrating to the big cities from the rural South.

The first formulas to target federal money toward cities occurred in the '60s and '70s. The Council had played a major role in pushing through or amending legislation in favor of urban schools. The Council's emphasis on targeting federal aid remains to this day.

Initiating Legislation

During the 1980s, the Council began initiating legislation. It was successful in spearheading the federal Magnet School

Assistance Act, Dropout Prevention Demonstration Act, Teacher Professional Development Act, Urban Schools of America (USA) Act and Smart Start, while leading reforms in Chapter 1, Vocational Education and the Drug Free School Act.

In 1982, the Council's membership skyrocketed, growing to 37 districts almost overnight. President Ronald Reagan was in office and during his administration federal support for urban education was in serious question.



Accountability

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education's "Nation at Risk" report brought the issue of accountability to the forefront. The report, and the National Governors Association's 1986 "Time for Results" report, were wake-up calls to Americans about the need to improve public education.

The Council's member school districts went through what executive director Casserly calls "a period of self-examination" from the late '80s to 1991.

Urban School Goals

To respond to the growing concerns about American education, President George Bush in 1989 and the National Governors Association formulated six national education goals. The Council also sprang into action to develop a parallel set of goals to reflect the specific needs of urban schools and students. Then in 1991, it held an urban education summit, which officially adopted the goals.

A year later, the coalition released its first-ever "report card" on the state of urban education in America, which gave indicators of urban school progress toward

achieving the National Urban Education Goals.

New Leadership

Leadership of the Council changed in 1992, when Casserly took the helm after the long-time tenure of Samuel Husk, who had been executive director for 17 years.

Today, Casserly is believed to be the longest-serving chief among the major national education membership organizations, beginning his 24th year at the helm. Previously, he had served as the Council's director of legislation and research for 15 years.

Under Casserly, the Council has unified urban schools nationwide around a vision of reform and improvement. National task forces have been launched to focus on achievement gaps, leadership and governance, finance, professional development and bilingual education.

Milestones

In 1997, the Council convened what news reports called a "landmark" meeting between big-city mayors and urban school superintendents. The historic summit resulted in a pledge of cooperation and a call for further dialogue between schools and government.

A few years later in 2000, the Council approached the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) to request a trial National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for big-city school systems that wanted to volunteer for the rigorous national test.

"The Council and its member districts are fully committed to the standards movement, yet we have no way to determine our status or our progress on the standards," argued Casserly before the governing board.

"This is a courageous act by the urban schools. It's a sea change," said then-NAGB chairman Mark Musick in *Education Week*. NAGB supported the idea, and subsequently the urban NAEP was launched.

60-Year Mark *continued on page 5*

60-Year Mark *continued from page 4*

Major Research

In 2001, the Council released the first compilation of how the nation's large city school systems are performing on the academic goals and standards set by the individual states for their children. It launched the annual [*Beating the Odds: A City-by-City Analysis of Reading and Math Performance and Achievement Gaps on State Assessments*](#).

A year later, the Council released a first-of-its-kind study with research group MDRC called [*Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*](#), which looked at the similarities among urban school systems that were boosting performance city-wide and contrasted their practices with systems that had not seen major gains.

Today's Council

The Council has a special mission to educate the nation's most culturally diverse student body to the highest academic standards. Consequently, it was the first national education membership organization to call for what became the Common Core State Standards, and is now actively working to support their implementation in urban school systems nationwide.

The Council has also launched a series of efforts to improve academic outcomes for its members' burgeoning English language learner populations.

To back up its academic priorities at the ground level, the Council initiated technical assistance teams that are invited by urban school districts to help improve instruction, special and bilingual education, budget and finance operations, food services, transportation and other services.

Moreover, the Council has taken policy and legislative positions that consistently

reflect bipartisan urban school priorities for high standards, academic results, accountability and equity.

In addition to spearheading academic reforms, the coalition has worked to improve management operations in urban school systems. It initiated and developed the first nationwide educational performance-management system with comparable data on non-instructional key performance indicators. Results have saved urban school districts millions of dollars in non-instructional costs and improved efficiencies.

The Council has also worked to improve public confidence of urban schools. It has produced award-winning videos and public service announcements, staged national town hall meetings on issues of the day in urban education, and has held forums at *USA TODAY* headquarters to bring urban educators, business leaders and news executives together to improve education in America.

Since issuing its widely publicized report in 2010 titled [*A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing*](#)



Council Executive Director Michael Casserly meets President Obama before White House meeting with urban-school leaders last March. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

[*to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*](#),

the Council has worked to identify solutions and spearhead systemic change in urban school districts to help male students of color succeed.

And following the release in

October of its comprehensive study of student testing in the nation's big-city schools, the Council will soon launch a commission to evaluate and improve the quality and quantity of student assessments in public schools nationwide.

As the Council begins its 60th year of service to urban schools, Executive Director Casserly stresses, "The Council will continue to tackle the challenges we face and trumpet the victories we've made."

El Paso *continued from page 2*

"Our schools are changing to meet the fast-paced needs of the 21st century," Cabrera said. "I hope the secretary took with him the knowledge that El Paso ISD is at the forefront of classroom innovation, and that despite what some would see as challenges in our student populations, we are making the commitment to provide high-quality, forward-thinking instruction to everyone enrolled in our schools."

The new strategies, he said, include things like critical thinking, hands-on learning and bi-literacy.

King pointed to the growing dual-language program throughout the El Paso school system, as well as the new Mesita Early Childhood Development Center, as examples of innovative programs that could make a difference in the lives of students.

The visit by the secretary allowed several students the opportunity to interact with one of the highest members of the federal government.

"It was important that he came to Bowie. I'm happy he was here," senior Cynthia Gomez said. "He got to see the challenges and advantages of being in a school that looks like Bowie ... which has a large Hispanic population."

Coronado High School junior Diego de la Torre sat at the roundtable discussion as an invited guest of the district and Congressman O'Rourke.

He was able to discuss testing fatigue with King and other education leaders gathered at Bowie.

"It was a little intimidating being at the table with the adults, but I was also very excited to share my perspective with Secretary King," he said. "I told him students like me are tired of standardized tests and that there needs to be a better way to assess the work that we are doing as students, and our teachers are doing as well."



Males of Color continued from page 1

outcomes for boys and young men of color by implementing a set of evidence-based strategies that range from early childhood through graduation.

Building upon the pledge, the Council has worked alongside district leadership to develop implementation plans based on actionable steps and measurable goals to raise the standard for young boys and men of color.

Several of these implementation plans from Council member districts are featured on the Males of Color website and docu-

ment a number of important steps districts are taking, ranging from developing strategic plans and hosting city-wide summits of education and community leaders, to expanding access to pre-K and reducing counterproductive suspension policies.

The website also includes success stories as well as news articles about promising initiatives to help young men and boys of color reach their full potential.

“This new Males of Color website is part of the continuing effort by the nation’s largest urban school systems to improve outcomes for our students,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly.

School Superintendents In Broward County And Jackson, Mississippi, Honored



Robert Runcie

Superintendent Robert Runcie of Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., was recently honored as the state’s 2016 Superintendent of the Year by the Florida Association of District Schools Superintendents.

Appointed superintendent in October 2011, Runcie has implemented several important education initiatives while leading the sixth largest public school system in the nation.

Under his leadership, Runcie garnered community support for the passage of an \$800-million bond to renovate and improve the safety of schools. In addition, the school system has become a national model for reassessing school discipline.

Runcie is now eligible to become a finalist for the 2016 National Superintendent of



Cedrick Gray

the Year presented by the American Association of School Administrators.

And Runcie is not the only big-city superintendent to receive top honors for his leadership. Superintendent Cedrick Gray of Mississippi’s Jackson Public Schools was the recent recipient of the 2015 Joseph E. Hill Superintendent of the Year Award presented by the National Alliance of Black School Educators. The award is given to current superintendents who have demonstrated a quality of leadership that has resulted in significant, positive outcomes for students of African descent.

Since being named superintendent in 2012, the district’s state and national accreditation has been restored, while graduation rates have increased and dropout rates have decreased.

D.C. Creates School As Part of its Males Of Color Initiative



District of Columbia Public Schools is slated to open Washington’s first all-male college preparatory public high school for the 2016-2017 school year.

The new school is part of a \$20 million “Empowering Males of Color” initiative aimed at improving the educational outcomes of young men of color. Although the single-gender school is designed to aid minority students, it is open to all young men regardless of race.

“While some of our male students in DCPS have seen improvements in their academic performance,” says D.C. Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson in a press release, “too many African American and Latino males continue to lag far behind their white counterparts. This is not acceptable. Research shows, and I am convinced, this new school model will help to improve academic, social and emotional outcomes for young men...”

The campus, which has not been officially named, will open with 150 ninth-grade students in the inaugural class and build each year until it reaches grades 9-12 in 2020. The academic program will focus on reading, writing and languages such as Spanish and Latin. Also, emphasis will be placed on math and technology proficiency along with college and career readiness.

The district recently announced that first-time principal Benjamin Williams will lead the campus. Equipped with three degrees from the University of Virginia, his doctoral dissertation focused on the underrepresentation of African Americans in advanced placement courses. Williams began his professional career as a high school social studies teacher in Charlottesville, Va.

Cleveland Academy Prepares Educators to Become Principals

The Cleveland Metropolitan School District trains and tests some of its prospective principals for a year before giving them a chance to run a school building of their own.

Vetting occurs through the Aspiring Principals Academy, which is in its second school year. The district developed the program with guidance from the NYC Leadership Academy, which was founded 13 years ago in New York City and now works with clients in 26 states.

The Cleveland district accepts 10 candidates annually from a nationwide pool of applicants and assigns each to serve alongside a mentor principal.

The residents take on all the challenges of the job and could assume primary responsibility in various areas of school leadership. They are paid \$75,000 a year plus benefits, but must agree to stay with the district for five years.

The academy's objective is twofold: groom new principals for the rugged challenges of school-turnaround work and land leaders who are passionate and committed to the cause.

"The best training comes with real-world, hands-on learning experiences," said Heather Grant, who is in charge of new-principal support for the district. "Reading relevant texts, having group discussions and completing real, school-based projects are valuable, and we do that as well. But it's coupled with a yearlong, hands-on paid residency with weekly professional development. I don't know what's better than that."

Cleveland's academy begins with a five-week boot camp, or "summer intensive," and those who have gone through the experience say intensive is an apt description. The aspiring principals face simulated situations in a fictional school based on the academic and demographic makeup of a real Cleveland school building.



Aspiring principal Caitlin Kilbane chats with students during a classroom observation at Cleveland's Nathan Hale School.

Boot Camp Experience

Twyla West, who previously worked as a special-education teacher in northern Virginia, is spending her residency at Patrick Henry, an East Side elementary school targeted for turnaround support under *The Cleveland Plan*, the city's state-approved blueprint for education reform.

She and the other residents were just settling in at the boot camp when volunteers posing as frustrated parents suddenly confronted them. The exchange let her know quickly that it can be tough at the top.

"I always had someone who had my back as a teacher," she said. "In this situation, I was on my own."

Kathryn Francis, who was in the first cohort, advanced so quickly that midway through her residency she was appointed assistant principal at Orchard School of Science, a school for preschool through eighth grade on Cleveland's West Side.

She continued to join the class at weekly meetings. There the group reflected on principal practice, conducted teacher observations and learned how to navigate a school system of nearly 39,000 students and 100 schools.

Feedback came relentlessly – from Grant, from Francis' mentor, from her

peers, and from NYCLA representatives.

Francis, who is now principal at Orchard, said constantly hearing about "what didn't work" was draining but worth every minute. She stepped into the job ready to draft a budget, make a schedule and handle any number of other tasks.

"Looking back, it was the best decision I have made in my career," she said. "Everything was a very real and authentic learning experience that I could transfer into this job."

The program is aligned to 12 clearly articulated leadership standards. Grant, the mentors and others evaluate the residents for personal behavior, resilience, communication, problem solving, accountability and other attributes.

Serving the residency does not guarantee a job -- the residents must interview for open positions.

But the odds are good – six of the first class's 10 members are now principals and two are assistant principals. Two others didn't finish.

Seven women and three men were chosen for the academy this year. Three candidates already worked for the Cleveland school system, while the others came from the outside, including applicants from Arizona, California, Illinois, South Carolina and Virginia.

District Chief Executive Officer Eric Gordon gave them a warm welcome as the boot camp geared up in June. Yet, he made it clear that expectations run high in a district that believes school reform begins with building principals.

"You have got to be great for my kids," he said.

Applications are being accepted until April 8 for the 2016-17 Aspiring Principals Academy. For more information or to apply, click here <http://clevelandmetroschools.org/Page/3293>.



Departing Honor

Michael Casserly, left, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, honors U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in December before he stepped down from his post of seven years. Looking on are Council Chair Richard Carranza, superintendent of San Francisco public schools, and Secretary-Treasurer Kaya Henderson, chancellor of District of Columbia Public Schools, at Duncan's office.

College Board Names School Districts To Advanced Placement Honor Roll

In the last decade, Denver Public Schools has more than tripled the number of students getting passing scores of three or higher on Advanced Placement (AP) exams, with the number increasing from 853 in 2005 to 3,025 students in 2015. And in Alaska's Anchorage School District, from 2013 to 2015, there has been a 27.3 percent increase in the number of AP exams taken by students and a 28.6 percent increase in the number of AP exams taken where a score of 3 or higher is achieved.

Because of these achievements, these two urban school districts are among the 425 school districts in the United States and Canada that have been honored by the College Board with placement on the 6th Annual AP District Honor Roll. Districts

made the honor roll for increasing access to AP coursework while simultaneously maintaining or increasing the percentage of students earning passing scores of three or higher on AP exams.

In addition to Denver and Anchorage, big-city school districts represented by the Council of the Great City Schools that made the honor roll were California's Fresno Unified School District, Miami-Dade County Schools, Chicago Public Schools, Minneapolis Public Schools and Nevada's Clark County School District in Las Vegas.

Denver, Miami-Dade, Chicago and Clark County were also recognized for making the honor roll for multiple years.

Des Moines, Baltimore Districts Partner With Universities

Two big-city school districts are joining forces with local universities to give their students a leg up and improve their science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills.

Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools has partnered with Iowa State University in a program aimed to better equip elementary students for STEM instruction.

The Trinet pilot project brings 10 teams of ISU student teachers and graduate engineering students into elementary school classrooms, where they work with teachers in providing more meaningful engineering lessons. The program is funded by a \$4.5-million, five-year National Science Foundation grant.

At Des Moines' Downtown School, a Ph.D. student in mechanical engineering visits a classroom once a week, working alongside an elementary education student and a 4th-5th grade teacher. The Trinet project has been working with students during the fall semester to enhance their understanding of the engineering design process with a focus on the scientific concepts of magnetism and electricity.

Jennifer Mann, a 17-year veteran teacher at the Downtown School, believes she has been challenged and enriched by her participation with Trinet. "I feel like I've grown more this semester than ever before," said Mann in a Des Moines district blog. "Jordan, our grad engineering student, has been wonderful in showing [student teacher] Mathew and I how to make complex design principles teachable to 9-10 year-olds and the kids are loving this instruction."

Baltimore City Public Schools is also partnering with a local university, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), as well as with the Northrop Grumman Foundation, to boost science, technology, engineering, arts and math

Partnerships *continued on page 12*



Council of the Great City Schools

ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE/POLICY CONFERENCE

March 19-22, 2016

The Mayflower Hotel • Washington, DC



Saturday, March 19

- Conference Registration
- Fall Conference Planning Meeting
- Blue Ribbon Corporate Advisory Group Meeting
- Discussion on State Policy Issues
- The "ABC's" of Federal Education Policy
- Meeting of Legislative & Federal Program Liaisons
- Executive Committee Meeting
- Task Force Meetings
- New Members & New Attendees Orientation
- Welcome Reception at National Geographic Museum

Sunday, March 20

- Conference Registration
- Breakfast Buffet
- Board of Directors Meeting
- Great City Colleges of Education Meeting
- Luncheon with Speaker: **Acting Education Secretary John King**
- Legislative Briefings
- "Taste of Miami" 60th Anniversary Reception

Monday, March 21

- Breakfast with Speaker
- Legislative Briefings
- Luncheon with Speaker
- Capitol Hill Visits
- Reception at The Mayflower Hotel

Tuesday, March 22

- Breakfast and Briefing
- Adjourn

Congress Approves Funding to Expand National Test For Urban Schools

Congress recently increased appropriations for the National Assessment Government Board (NAGB) to expand the number of urban school districts that want to volunteer for the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA).

Six urban districts would have the opportunity to join 21 big-city school systems that already have their students taking the



rigorous federal test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), con-

sidered *The Nation's Report Card*.

The new districts, which have not been determined yet, would participate in the 2017 Trial Urban District Assessment in reading and mathematics at grades 4 and 8.

"Urban school districts that volunteer to take the test demonstrate their continuing commitment to the nation's highest academic standards and reaffirm their determination to raise student performance," says Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.

The idea for a trial urban NAEP originated in 2000, when the Council requested that the National Assessment Governing Board conduct a trial NAEP assessment for large urban school districts that wanted to participate. Congress first funded TUDA in 2002.

With the increase in congressional funding, the TUDA program will expand to 27 urban school districts. Six big-city school systems – Atlanta, Chicago, District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles and New York City – volunteered for the first-ever TUDA, participating in the 2002 NAEP in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and writing.

Every Student Succeeds Act - A Look at the Details

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

After intense negotiations between the leadership of the House and Senate education committees, a bipartisan agreement on reauthorizing the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was adopted by a joint conference committee just before Thanksgiving; passed by both houses of Congress; and was signed into law by President Obama on December 10 as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA).



Over the past month, local school officials and state agencies have been pouring over the details of the thousand-plus page text, and they are finding that claims of increased flexibility and reduced federal intrusiveness are sometimes dubious. In fact, readers of the new law will find that ESSA is even more prescriptive than *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in some places. Conversely, they are also finding that some new requirements are not as over-reaching as under NCLB or even under NCLB with waivers. The long and short of it is that while some of the interventions are not as prescriptive as NCLB, states and local school districts must still develop new program plans, design activities, and provide more detailed data under ESSA than currently required.

Under the ESSA banner, these new requirements are described as “federal parameters” or “federal guardrails,” yet they are no less mandatory. The expeditious passage of the new Act and its broad-based support overshadowed the problems that state and local officials are likely to face implementing the statute. School administrators are just beginning to understand the multiple responsibilities and actions required by the new legislation, including:

- More state and local plan requirements
- More federally-required accountability indicators
- More disaggregation of data on more student subgroups
- More rigid statewide English proficiency timelines and English learner entry and exit procedures
- Multiple categories of schools identified for school improvement plans and interventions
- More schools identified as under-performing than under current NCLB waivers
- Newly required school improvement plans for certain non-Title I schools without being able to use any of the local Title I formula allocation for these improvement activities
- More severe interventions over time for schools failing to “exit” their identified improvement category

ESSA’s multiple levels of identification and intervention in low-performing schools are reminiscent of the NCLB accountability system, and include an LEA (local educational agency) improvement category as well. How the new state accountability systems are designed; how state goals and interim measures are structured; what multiple indicators are introduced; and how the mandated school improvement categories are defined by the state will determine whether the new Act is more or less workable than the previous ESEA with waivers. Unfortunately, state departments of education could easily replace the federal government as the prime culprit in over-regulating the new Act -- a prospect that demands vigilance by local school officials.

To be sure, the House-Senate conference committee’s decision not to make radical changes in the financial architecture of ESEA—such as adopting the Title I portability proposal or altering the Title I formula—obscured other provisions that will redirect federal ESEA funding towards private school services and charter schools. Some of these provisions were mitigated during the legislative process, but the end result under ESSA will be a greater share of federal funding spent on these schools.

In addition, the new law expands the state set-aside of funds under Title I and Title II in a way that may leave some school districts with reduced federal formula funding. The local hold-harmless protection under the current Title I law has also been deleted for school year 2017-2018 in order to allow states to maximize the benefit of the increased state Title I set-aside—despite the prospect of lower school district allocations. While most (95 percent) of the state school-improvement set-aside will be awarded ultimately for local comprehensive or targeted improvement projects, the state will decide which school districts receive these funds and which do not—and in what amounts.

Moreover, ESEA program administrators will have to navigate dozens of references to “evidence-based” activities across the various titles of ESSA. The new definition of this term requires certain activities with ESSA funds to be justified based on various levels of evidence from experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational studies, research-based rationales, and program-evaluation results. Some ESSA activities require a higher standard of evidence than others, while some activities

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allow states to determine whether the evidence is reasonably available at the school level. School district research directors anticipate that this legislatively brokered definition may create a flurry of unproductive compliance efforts with minimal academic benefits.

So how did a bill designed to increase flexibility result in over one thousand pages of legislation? Like any federal legislation, the real constituency needed to pass a bill is a majority of the 535 senators and representatives comprising the United States Congress. Piecing together that majority often requires inserting specific programs, authorities, prohibitions, requirements, definitions, exclusions, and innumerable other provisions sought by various members of Congress in order to get their votes. Whether those provisions make operational sense for state and local school officials is less important than securing the support for passage.

Why, then, did the Council of the Great City Schools support--albeit with reservations--passage of ESSA -- a bill that is not as flexible or as unobtrusive as advertised? Primarily, the bill maintains the traditional focus of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act on closing achievement gaps and improving academic achievement of low-income, minority, and English learner students. And pragmatically, ESSA represents the most practical opportunity to replace the unworkable provisions of NCLB and the endless system of short-term NCLB waivers. Now it is in everyone's best interest to use the upcoming transition year to plan for the efficient implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act in school year 2017-2018.

Sacramento District Launches Internet And Social Media Safety Program

In an effort to help students address challenges of the digital age, California's Sacramento City Unified School District is partnering with the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office and several law enforcement agencies to launch a new program.

The Internet, Social Media Awareness, Resources and Training (#iSMART) program educates youth about the dangers, risks and threats students may face through the Internet and social media.

#iSMART is an interactive presentation designed for children to be active participants in the learning process. A prosecutor and law enforcement officer will use visual storyboards depicting several scenarios, including cyberbullying, sexting, online strangers and stalkers and

gang activity online. Throughout the presentation, students are asked questions to get them thinking and talking about the consequences of what they post online and Internet dangers.

The program is aimed to help middle and high school students, with a parent component to educate and provide parents with tools and resources to help them protect their children.

"Kids are getting smart phones, iPads and social media accounts at younger and younger ages," said Jessica Wharton, Sacramento Schools bullying prevention specialist. "They are growing up online. But at the same time, many remain unaware of the dangers and risks of inappropriate or careless Internet use."

The first #iSmart presentations will be held in schools beginning in January.

Students in Greensboro, N.C., School Build 'Tiny' Houses for Possible Homeless Use

At Weaver Academy for Performing and Visual Arts and Advanced Technology in North Carolina's Guilford County Schools, students have combined carpentry with compassion to address homelessness in their area.

Building-trade students in teacher Tom Bader's carpentry class are applying their math skills to have a big impact with their first tiny house construction project. If the project stays on schedule, within two years this tiny house will become someone's home.

Bader, a teacher at Weaver Academy for 13 years, said he was introduced to the tiny-house concept through a local organization that is embracing tiny houses as a possible solution to homelessness.

"I thought that was a terrific idea," said Bader, in an article published in the *Greensboro News & Record*. "Building a tiny house would take less than half as much time as a full-size one. It also would require fewer materials."

Tiny houses can be as small as 100 square feet, but generally are considered to be smaller than 400 square feet. Bader estimates the tiny house will cost approximately \$10,000 compared to the minimum price for a full size house which is \$39,000.

Until now, students at Weaver Academy have constructed full-size homes, which take approximately four years to build. Students have built 11 houses through the district's academic program.



Greensboro building-trade students build a tiny house.



Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 702
Washington DC 20004

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2016 Council Conference Schedule

Chief Human Resources Officers Meeting	February 10-12, 2016	Las Vegas, NV
Legislative/Policy Conference	March 19-22, 2016	Washington, DC
Chief Operating Officers Conference	April 12-15, 2016	Charlotte, NC
Bilingual Directors Meeting	May 10-14, 2016	Anchorage, AK
Chief Information Officers, Curriculum & Research Directors' Joint Meeting	July 11-14, 2016	Palm Beach, FL
Public Relations Executives Meeting	July 15-17, 2016	Chicago, IL
Annual Fall Conference	October 19-23, 2016	Miami, FL
Chief Financial Officers Conference	November 2016	TBD

Partnerships *continued from page 8*

(STEAM) education at three schools.

The \$1.6-million partnership will fund the development of a state-of-the-art STEAM Center at Lakeland Elementary and Middle School.

The center will feature science labs, a digital video and sound studio, computer lab, parent resource room and community meeting space.

In addition, teachers will use the center to undergo professional development on topics such as project-based learning and integrating the arts.

The new initiative will also help expand UMBC's Choice Program to serve students at the Benjamin Franklin High School and Francis M. Wood Excel Academy, who are facing challenges at school and at home. The program's 24/7 wraparound services include monitoring and ensuring school attendance; providing transportation to and from school, home visits and family support services; classroom coaching and afterschool activities.

According to district and university officials, the Choice program has served more than 20,000 youth and their families.